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The Southern Gentleman and the Idea of Masculinity: Figures and Aspects of the Southern Beau in the Literary Tradition of the American South

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THE SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN AND THE IDEA OF MASCULINITY:

FIGURES AND ASPECTS OF THE SOUTHERN BEAU

IN THE LITERARY TRADITION OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH

by

EMMELINE GROS

Under the Joint Direction of Thomas McHaney and Jacques Pothier

ABSTRACT

The American planter has mostly been presented as the epitome of the romantic cavalier legend that could be found in the fiction of John Pendleton Kennedy to Thomas Nelson Page: a man of chivalric manners and good breeding; a man of good social position; a man of wealth and leisure (Concise Oxford Dictionary).[1] A closer scrutiny of the cavalier and genteel ethos of the time, however, reveals the inherent ideological inconsistencies with the idea of the gentleman itself, as the ideal came to be more and more perceived as an illusion and as challenges to traditional gender stereotypes came to redefine the nature and role of the Southern Gentleman.

This study hopes to complicate the traditional delineation of hegemonic manhood with the aim to better understand how precisely the Old South's masculine ideals were constructed and maintained over time, especially in times of crisis, and how southern elite males (re)defined, enacted, and/or maintained a distinctive Southern model of masculinity while others resisted, modified, or flouted those ideals. The work undertaken by this

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[1] "Planter." Concise Oxford English Dictionary. 11th ed. 2008.

dissertation can thus be situated within the broad rubric of masculinity studies and its central axiom—the interrogation of the structures of power, domination, and hierarchy.

Enriching masculinity studies of the Old South, this critical study of Southern American fiction attempts to respond to the invitation of historians like Stephen Berry or Craig Thompson Friend in striking a commendable balance between conceptualizing larger historical questions and narrating the intimacies and complexities of Southern men's individual lives. Taken collectively, these novels continue to explore this fertile field by moving outside the "confines and confidences of elites" (Peel 1).[2]

Because it complicates any simple equation between honor, mastery, and manliness, and because it seeks to revisit traditional conceptualisations of gender, I hope that this study will open new ways of thinking about the privileges and wounds of a masculinity that has been considered by most as the normative, invisible, and unquestioned referent from which to measure marginalized others—foreigners, women, or non-whites.

INDEX WORDS: American South, Antebellum and Postbellum South, Civil War, Masculinity, Planter, Southern gentleman, Southern belle, Southern manhood, Gender studies, Gender performance, Gender resistance, Hegemonic masculinity, Southern beau, Elite boys.

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[2] Mark Peel, The Unsteady Quest for Manhood, review, Southern Masculinity, Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction, eds. Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004) H-South (January 2006): 1-2.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful family from whom I have learned the value of patience, diligence and the pursuit of academic excellence; particularly to my understanding and patient sister, Camille, who has put up with these many years of research, sharing with me every risk and sacrifice required to complete it. I must also thank the gentleman I found along the way, Guilhem, who has given me his fullest support and has been patiently bearing with my hectic schedule. Finally, I dedicate this work to my late grandfather, Lucien Pujade and my late grandmothers, Simone Pujade and Suzanne Gros, both of whom would have loved to see this dissertation accomplished.

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Far too many people and friends to mention individually have assisted in so many ways during my work at Georgia State University. They all have my sincere gratitude. In

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INTRODUCTION

The image of the Old South in the decades preceding the Civil-War is still indelibly etched in the minds of most Americans. In the distance, in some unblemished countryside, stands a large white mansion with Roman pillars. It is owned by a perfectly-attired Southern gentleman and his beautiful wife in her spotless dress. Elegantly clad slaves answer the door, drive the carriage pulled by immaculately groomed horses, and cook the meals. The fields of cotton are in bloom and the field hands sing while they work in harmony. The planter receives white visitors regardless of wealth with a grace that is unmatched anywhere in the world. He also knows each slave by Greek or Roman name and greets them by asking about their families. Sunday morning, the whole family would go to church, for solemn worship, and would afterwards have a family gathering in the dining room that would be the envy of English royalty. The children all say "Sir" or "Ma'am." The entire image is one idyllic sanctuary into which the cares of the world rarely intrude; an image of beauty, elegance, and grace. Honor, loyalty, and truth are the moral guidelines that the Old South lives by, guidelines that Yankees are unable to understand.

The same moral guidelines defined what the Southern gentleman was to be: a man of chivalric manners and good breeding; a man of good social position; a man of wealth and leisure (Concise Oxford Dictionary).[3] Aristocratic at heart, Victorian in his manners, the Southern man was characterized by autonomy, self-discipline, and integrity, combining all the elements of older chivalric codes with an acute sense of private and caste power. As Ritchie D. Watson makes clear in The Companion to Southern Literature, such "gentlemen, like their English counterparts, sought to attain qualities of fortitude, temperance, prudence, justice, liberality and courtesy" (292).[4] These values promoted a self-contained vision of masculinity

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[3] Concise Oxford English Dictionary. 11th ed. 2008.
[4] Ritchie, Watson D. "Gentleman," The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, eds. Joseph Flora M. and Lucinda Mackethan (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001) 292-293.

in the sense that manhood was predominantly based on inward strength rather than outward behaviour. The belief in an organic society in which everyone had a very distinctive role to play, the stability of rank and family traditions, and the widely accepted myth that most southern settlements had been peopled by Cavalier followers of Charles I, were ideals which promoted a notion that manhood was self-evident and innate. Southern manhood was engrained, fixed, and genetically inherited. The legend of the Southern planter was born. Daniel Singal remarks that,

> [t]hough it appeared initially in 17th Century Virginia the myth [of the Cavalier] did not really begin to flourish until the 1830s, when thousands of ambitious and sharp-dealing men, often from lowly origins, flocked to the newly opened lands of the Deep South and made swift fortunes raising cotton. Fearful of the raw and unstable state of their communities, and of the precariousness of their freshly acquired status as planters, these "Cotton Snobs" sought comfort in the belief that theirs was a relatively fixed social order presided over by a class of refined gentlemen whose perfect self-control set an example for all to follow [. . .] Thus arose the identity that Southerners would employ to define their distinctiveness well into the 20th century and to compensate for what they believed were the defects of their society. If the region was in fact impoverished, ravaged by war, plagued by illiteracy and racial conflict, and ruled all too often by corrupt demagogues or self-made New South promoters, Southerners could take refuge in their image of the South as an aristocratic society organized in quasi-feudal fashion and blessed with remarkable stability and cohesion (6).[5]

In the intensely patriarchal world of the South (that some critics have defined as an hypermasculine culture), the masculine ideal was an ideology, a "powerful statement about

the ruling class's claims to legitimacy and authority" (Mayfield, <u>Counterfeit Gentlemen</u> 6).[6]
To be "manly" asked certain questions: who should leaders be? What should be their goals?
How should they deal with others? How should others measure them and hold them
accountable? What are their characteristics? (<u>Counterfeit Gentlemen</u> 6).

For southern patriarchs, the answer was clear and simple. They had the single-minded
conviction that God had put them on earth to rule, protect the southern belle as well as the
values of the south (<u>Counterfeit Gentlemen</u> xv). Ideally, men who remained devoted to this
notion could forego the need to prove their manliness to others. But if they had to, there was
no doubt that the southerner was superior to his northern or western contemporaries. If given
the opportunity to prove his superiority, it would, he confidently believed, be a rather easy
task. Yet, when the opportunity presented itself, things did not go the way southerners had
assumed. At the close of the Civil War, 650, 000 confederate soldiers returned to their homes,
but the world they returned to was not the one they had left. The Civil War revealed that the
southerners' self-contained principles had failed. In an age that had required an elaborate
display of manliness, Southern men had been unable to prove their manliness to those who,
they believed, were their social, moral, and political inferiors. As John Mayfield explains,
"war was a forceful affirmation of manhood, and one that itself transformed and simplified
the [gentleman] ideal" (124).[7]

Of course, the close of the war did not mean that the aristocratic ideal ceased to form a
part of southern thinking, nor did it mean, once reconstruction was over, that the planter class
ceased to dominate Southern politics and economics. Quite the contrary: after the war, the
plantation legend that ironically stepped forward in the 1830s—a set of popular beliefs about

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[5] Daniel J. Singal, <u>William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist</u> (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

[6] John Mayfield, <u>Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South. New Perspectives on the History of the South</u> (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).

the Southern planter, the plantation family, and what was assumed to be the aristocratic social system that existed throughout the South—was both far from reality and ironically also far from dying away. With the rise of cotton as an industrial raw material on the world market of industrial nations, the Southern gentleman planter was given a new lease on life. In fact, Southern planters did not react to the Civil War disasters by bowing down and asking for forgiveness. The loss of the war did not eliminate the South's need to claim superiority for the Old South Myth. The loss in front of the diabolic Yankee did not eliminate the Southern Beau's claim to moral and masculine superiority. Quite to everyone's wonder and amazement, the Southern Gentleman ideal and the portrayal of the southern plantation as an idyllic sanctuary persisted as a model that has not exhausted itself. Actually, and as the historian Craig Thompson Friend explains, "[a]lthough described and analyzed by several generations of historians, the power of that hegemonic version of Southern manhood has persisted in the historiography" (viii).[8] In fact, Southern Manliness, to paraphrase Suzanne Clarke, did not go away. Manliness was put on trial (20).[9]

Masculinity, like femininity, is a fictional construction, and myths of masculinity and femininity have always been perpetuated in literature, art, and popular culture. Interestingly enough, men's studies in this Southern context appear as an extremely diverse and self-contradictory field, and research on the subject is immediately faced with challenge, for it appears that critics have preferred to reflect on southern womanhood and on what southern women writers have to say as a dominant voice in the American literature of the twentieth century. Even in a post-feminist era, the Southern Belle mythology, as a matter of fact,

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[7] John Mayfield, <u>Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South. New Perspectives on the History of the South</u> (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).

[8] Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., <u>Southern Masculinity. Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction</u> (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

[9] Suzanne Clark, <u>Cold Warriors: Manliness on Trial in the Rhetoric of the West</u> (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

remains at the centre of much controversial writing and thinking.[10] The Southern woman under scrutiny in such texts is covered by the umbrella term of the "fallen" woman under its different incarnate guises—the Jezebel, the rebel, the Madonna, the whore, the prostitute, as opposed to the idealistic young white genteel lady of the Old South as a Garden of Eden.

Belija Oklopcic explains this phenomenon on the grounds that "the figure of the Southern belle is founded on a canonized discourse, resting on a cultural and social personification—a description, a code, a stereotype—which legitimizes and authorizes the interpretation of culture and nature, masculinity and femininity, superiority and inferiority, power and subordination" (2). Not surprisingly, deviant behavioural regimes meet with condemnation, and most novels are indeed concerned with the fear that women "might escape the rule of the patriarchy [and] that the oppositions of white/black, master/slave, lady/whore,

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[10] A full list of feminist studies is utterly impossible, but we can quote, for instance, in no particular order: Betina Entzminger, The Belle Gone Bad: White Southern Women Writers and the Dark Seductress (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2002); Nina Silber, "The Crisis of Confederate Womanhood," review essay of Drew Faust, Mothers of Invention in Reviews in American History XXV (September 1997) : 422-426. Lee Ann Whites, "The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender," in Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Virginia Bernhard, ed. Hidden Histories of Women in the New South (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1994); Catherine Clinton, The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South, series on Gender and American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Jean E. Friedman, The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Jacqueline Dowd Hall, Revolt Against Chivalry: Jesse Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Margaret Jaman Hapgood, Mothers of the South: Portraiture of the White Tenant Farm Woman (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1939); Stephanie McCurry, Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations and the Political Culture of the Antebellum Southern Carolina Low Country (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Sally G. McMillen, Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); Sally McMillen, Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1992); Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970); Anastatia Sims, The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women's Organizations in North Carolina, 1883-1930 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994); Julia Spruill, Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1938); Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, The House of Percy: Honor, Melancholy, and Imagination in a Southern Family, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Kathryn Lee Seidel, The Southern Belle in the American Novel (Tampa: University Press of Florida, 1985). The best source of reference in this field can be found in Theresa McDevitt, Women and the American Civil War: An Annotated Bibliography (New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), which offers nearly 800 entries, listing both primary and secondary sources, classic and current works, and items in print and available on the Internet.

even male/female might collapse into an anarchic conflagration threatening to bring down the symbolic order" (Roberts xii).[11]

As a matter of fact—and as numerous critics have remarked—the texts of the antebellum or postbellum periods mainly depict grotesque female figures who are viewed in a caricatural way for ideological reasons and the concept of Southern femininity reads either as what is proper to the women at a given place and time, or what is socially expected from them, in a specific situation usually passing as universally and eternally valid. Yet, the corpus presents a paradoxical form of femininity peeping through. As the works of Betina Entzminger and Nina Silber have emphasized, once analyzed closely the unquestioned paradigm of femininity lends visibility to what they see as an ample evidence of "multiple" (often contradictory and subversive) versions of femininity rather than the often times ahistorical, (universal) experience of Southern women, thus presenting the argument that gender characteristics are unfixed, problematic, and mutable.[12] Echoing the work of sociologist Scott Coltrane who defines gender as "the socially constructed ideal of what it means to be a woman or man," while stating that our everyday activities provide "opportunities for expressing, confirming, and perhaps transforming the meaning of gender" (473), the theoretical basis of Entzminger's or Silber's works is founded on the relationships among gender, class, and art. The arguments being made contradict the tendency of historians and critics who usually consider the archetype or "legend" of the Southern Belle as immune to history or rather spared from the test of history.[13] According to Entzminger and Silber—and

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[11] Diane Roberts, Faulkner and Southern Womanhood (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1994).

[12] Many works have also analyzed what we could call the Southern woman's willingness to obey the dictates of female behavior in exchange for the Confederacy's care and protection. According to these critics, after the Civil War, since the Confederacy failed to honor its obligation to southern women, the women failed to honor their obligations to it. Besides Silber's or Entzminger's works, we could add Nina Baym, "The Myth of the Myth of Southern Womanhood," Feminism and American Literary History: Essays (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 183-96.

[13] Scott Coltrane, "Household Labor and the Routine Production of Gender," Social Problems 36 (1989): 473-490.

this is also true for the Southern Beau—no ideal could have endured unproblematised, that is without somehow adapting to the political, economical, and social changes that had already started to be felt before the Civil War. The ideal was open to contradiction, negotiation, and even interrogation.

In the field of men's studies, however, the critical interrogation of masculinities, Stephen M. Whitehead remarks, "is a recently recent phenomenon" (355).[14] Actually, it seems that the representations of masculinity has until the last few years or so drawn far less commentary than studies dealing with slaves or free blacks or with representations of femininity, perhaps because, as the editors of Constructing Masculinity put it, "heterosexual masculinity has traditionally been structured as the normative gender and thus taken for granted" (Berger, Wallis, and Watson, "Introduction" 2).[15] Making the "case" for men's studies, Harry Bord argues that:

> the overgeneralization from male to generic human experience not only distorts our understanding of what, if anything, is truly generic to humanity but also precludes the study of masculinity as a specific male experience, rather than a universal paradigm for human experience. The most general definition of men's studies is that it is the study of masculinities and male experiences as specific and varying social-historical-cultural formations. Such studies situate masculinities as objects of study on a par with femininities, instead of elevating them to universal norms (40).

The publication of books such as The Masculine Dilemma, The Male Ordeal, The Hazards of Being Male, Changing Men, The Myth of Masculinity, Absent Fathers/Lost Sons, Men

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[14] Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J Barrett, eds. The Masculinities Reader (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).
[15] Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson, eds. Constructing Masculinity (New York: Routledge, 1995).
----. "Introduction." Berger, Wallis, and Watson 1-7.

Freeing Men, New Men/New Minds, Iron John, and Fire in the Belly, among others, and the increasing publications of works for men that appear in the field of popular psychology attest that many men today are searching for a discourse of masculinity in a feminist age. Although most of these studies examine the current debate over masculinity, the publication of Joe Dubbert's A Man's Place, which traces American concepts of masculinity from the 1840s to the 1950s, demonstrates that the question of masculinity is not exclusively a contemporary problem.

In the field of the plantation South, masculinity studies are particularly slow to appear. Studies addressing the specificity of Southern masculinity have been rather limited, and the debate, as Homberger regrets, "appears to have been carried in social, political, and cultural arenas the South's literary establishment declined to enter" (19).[16] In 1924, Francis P. Gaines published The Southern Plantation, in which he sought to compare the "conception" of the Southern plantation, its life, and its inhabitants, with "the actual." Much of Gaines's work is now out of date and focuses more on racial relations than on the issue of southern masculinity itself.[17] The most elaborate thematic study of the Southern gentleman so far is William R. Taylor's Cavalier and Yankee (1957).[18] Here the development of the image of the Southern gentleman is traced from the early nineteenth century to the eve of the Civil War. Taylor's main contention is that the Southern plantation and its chief representative were subject to glorification and to an increasing tendency to romanticise rather than depict the gentleman realistically, mainly because of the growing discord between the North and the South in the last decade prior to the Civil War.

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[16] Jorg W. Homberger, "A Further Garden: The Gentleman Ideal in Southern Fiction, 1894-1904." (Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1991).

[17] Francis Pendleton Gaines, The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and the Accuracy of a Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924).

[18] William R. Taylor, Cavalier & Yankee: The Old South and the American National Character (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

An indirect, yet significant addition to this field is formed by three studies of the Civil War novel: Robert A. Lively's <u>Fiction Fights the Civil War</u> (1957), Edmund Wilson's <u>Patriotic Gore</u> (1962), and <u>The Unwritten War</u> by Daniel Aaron (1972).[19] Of the three, only Lively's book covers twentieth-century authors, yet discussion of the novels singled out by all three authors is confined largely to plot summaries and does not analyze the issue of the Southern gentleman—an issue discussed most thoroughly in non-fictional forms, as the bibliography indicates. Wilson's and Aaron's studies are useful in showing how the Civil War produced great letters, diaries, and novels. But the issue of manhood and of southern identity is overshadowed by the larger issue of the Civil War. The texts considered here are read for what they have to say against the North or vis-à-vis slavery, thereby presenting men as universal referents—as entities passed beyond history and into legend—whose stories seemingly encompass dynamics relevant to humanity. Also, by restricting the Southern gentleman's position to his role in national and sectional politics or to the South's social and economic life, these studies have removed masculinity from the debate, concentrating uncritically on the Southern gentleman not for who he was as an individual "man," but for what he stood for—the disembodied antithesis of the "Yankee" in both vices and virtues, the personification of honour and mastery, and the living embodiment of a political and economic struggle to preserve the South's many changing institutions—from slavery and monoculture cropping to the cult of pure white womanhood and the illusion of happy peonage for blacks and poor white males who willingly defer to their "better."

Such an approach—combined with the growth of feminism as a major critical movement during the 1960s—has tended to write over the status and the lived experiences of the individual man. The "ideal" order of the South and its particular features have been mostly

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[19] Robert A. Lively, <u>Fiction Fights the Civil War: An Unfinished Chapter in the Literary History of the American People</u> (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1973); Edmund Wilson, <u>Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of</u>

considered as if they were static and eternal and the "unequal gender-based relations of power" inscribed in "unchanging, universal, monolithic" ways (Newton and Rosenfelt xvii).[20] Stephen Berry explains that scholars talk about hunting, oratory, college curricula, courtship practices, eye gouging, and fraternal organizations, examining a range of regional, ethnic, and class elements influencing masculine constitution.[21] Yet, no scholar, Berry asserts, has yet laid out an agenda for the field (x).[22] This agenda, Berry continues, should be to understand (1) how precisely the Old South's masculine ideals were constructed and maintained; (2) how that process (and the ideals themselves) changed over time; (3) how males of different classes, races, ages, and regions resisted, modified, or flouted those ideals; (4) how the public expression and private experience of masculinity were different and yet related; and (5) to what degree and in what ways the Civil War created a seismic shift in Southern masculinity (x).

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the American Civil War (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962); Daniel Aaron, The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

[20] Judith L. Newton and Deborah S. Rosenfelt, Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class, and Race in Literature and Culture (London: Taylor & Francis, 1985). Anthony E. Rotundo, for instance, has relied primarily on white elite New England sources to describe the construction of a universal male experience. Anthony E. Rotundo's American Manhood : Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era (New York : Basic Books, 1993), relies heavily on white, middle-class, New England, sources and thus, defines a regionally, ethically, and economically narrow group. Craig Thompson Friend adds that throughout the 1990s "masculinity studies have concentrated on the nineteenth century North" (Friend xiv).

[21] For regional diversity in men's studies, see, for instance, Caroline Gebbhard, "Reconstructing Southern Manhood : Race, Sentimentality, and Camp in the Plantation Myth," Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts, eds. Ann Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997) 132-55; Ted Ownby, Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Lisa Wilson, Ye Heart of a Man: The Domestic Life of Men in Colonial New England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); and Nicole Etcheson, The Emerging Midwest: Upland Southerners and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1787-1861 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993). For ethnic diversity see, for instance, Daniel P. Black, Dismantling Black Manhood: an Historical and Literary Analysis of the Legacy of Slavery (New York: Garland, 1997); For economic diversity, see, for instance, Ava Baron, "Acquiring Manly Competence: The Demise of Apprenticeship and the Remasculinization of Printers' Work," Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America, eds. Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 152-63.

[22] Stephen Berry, ed., Princes of Cotton; Four Diaries of Young Men in the South, 1548-1860 (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2007); Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., Southern Masculinity, Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

Of course, as Stephen Berry remarks, to each of these questions there are partial answers. By studying dueling, the Old South's regional literature, religious life, political culture, and the attitude toward family, education, courtship, and recreation, scholars strove to better understand the institutions, relationships, networks and practices that defined, enacted, and maintained a distinctive Southern model of masculinity and which placed Southern elite men as the undisputed masters of their own bodies and their own households (Berry xi). These scholars also reasserted Judith Butler's claim that "gender is a construction," and that "without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (273).[23] Yet, Berry eventually regrets that:

> The story of Southern masculinity continues to be understood better in its postures and poses, more for what it claimed to be than for what it was. In their studies of duels and barbecues, hunting and stump speaking, scholars have examined with greater penetration the archetypically masculine aspects of Southern life than the dithering dreams and doubts that surely dominated men's inner experience of themselves. Of the consequences for the South of its hypermasculinized culture much has been suggested. Of the consequences for the men living in and through this culture little is known. Of the general tenor of men's inner, emotional lives little has been said or written. As a result, men are denied a measure of their *humanity* (<u>All That Makes a Man</u> 11, emphasis mine).[24]

Only recently, it seems, masculinity studies have begun to explore the diversity of masculinities where paradigms of honor, mastery, and propriety may be subject to historical

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[23] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," <u>Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre</u>. Ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

change. On that note, it is important to underline Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover's Study on Southern Manhood in which the different essays suggest a movement away from the "sex-role" model in gender studies and an examination of masculinity as its own problematic gender construct.[25] Such studies, Berry admits, are providing a sense of "how different subgroups of men related to each other (fraternity and competition), to women (love and misogyny), to themselves (dreams and doubts), and to their society (self-representation and self-effacement) (xi). Drawing from the door opened by Friend and Glover, Berry concludes that much work still needs to be done, especially with respect to what he calls the fourth agenda item: how public and private constructions of masculinity created a sort of dialogue between selves and society (xii-xiii). Friend echoes Berry's concern, by trusting that his "research and interpretations w[ould] inspire further inquiry into the fertile field of Southern masculinities" (xiv).

Paraphrasing scholar Christopher Olsen, Berry thus explains that the "new agenda" for gender studies should feature "works that discuss the conflicts, but also the linkages between public expectations and private [successes and] disappointments, including the attendant psychological consequences" (xiii).[26] As a consequence, studies of Southern manhood should strive to examine male experiences as specific social, cultural, and historical formations rather than as the "normative referent," in order to understand "how the country's imperialism, romanticism, modernization, and sense of sectional crisis shaped the Old South's articulation

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[24] Stephen W. Berry, All that Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Berry calls for an agenda; yet his interrogation of masculinities—in the manner of Craig Thompson Friend—focuses on diaries, personal letters, not fiction.

[25] Michael Kimmel specifically criticizes the "sex-role" model in gender studies in "Rethinking Masculinity: New Directions in Research," Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity, ed. Michael S. Kimmel (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1987) 9-24. Martha Howell notes that social historians studying women in the 1960s and 1970s found it difficult not to reduce women's history to gender roles and, thus, to "power relations defined by men" (139). Martha Howell, "A Feminist Historian Looks at the New Historicism: What's So Historical About It?" Women's Studies 19 (1991): 139-147.

[26] Christopher J. Olsen, Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi: Masculinity, Honor, and the Antiparty Tradition, 1830-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

of a peculiar masculine ideal" and how the historical, political, and social changes "affected southern masculinity" (Berry xi).

My dissertation, therefore, seeks to push beyond the monolithic and transhistorical white male planter-cavalier paradigm of honor and mastery and demonstrate that 19th century and 20th century southern masculinity was far more varied than historians or southernists have understood.[27] Using Entzminger's approach to gender and extending on Whitehead's call for an interrogation of masculinities and Berry's call for the laying out of an agenda of southern masculinity, I wish to examine not only the construction or constitution of an elite masculinity in Southern American literature but most importantly, the deconstruction of white elite masculinity in novels and plays that seem to emphasize the fears, unsuitability, awkwardness or even, in some cases, the total absence of the Southern gentleman figure from the most obvious and immediate medium for constructing gender—written discourse. The attention paid to the Southern Belle as an archetype in both Southern fiction and history combined with the relative invisibility of the Southern gentleman in recent criticism does underscore the need for "an interrogation of masculinities"—and Southern masculinities to be precise.

Far from simplifying the task at hand, the confusion "Masculinity" versus "Manliness" has also contributed to make for rather uneasy bedfellows in critical studies. Manliness is often interpreted as the clearest indicator of gender. Used in the singular, it implies that there is a single standard of manhood—expressed in certain physical attributes and moral dispositions. It is also defined in different variants, according to class and religion, but each version claims an exclusive authority—the model of Christian manliness being one instance. Masculinities, on the contrary, is a much recent coinage, appearing in the 1970s (R. W.

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[27] Since I started working on this dissertation, a new book in the field of gender studies has been published. John Mayfield's Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South recognizes the importance of addressing the question of southern male identity by focusing on the Southern man himself. His study, however, differs from mine as he uses humor and humorists to lay the ground for investigation of male identity. I am using some of the quotes from this recent publication throughout my dissertation.

Connell being one of the first critics to use the word). The use of the plural accurately conveys the prevalent view in present-day Western society that masculinity is anything but a monolith: it should not be subject to prescription and it should express individual choice. As John Tosh remarks, "whereas manliness was treated essentially as a social attainment in the gift of one's peers, masculinity is an expression of personal authenticity, in which being true to oneself counts for much more than conforming to the expectation of others" (2-3).[28] Since the subject of this dissertation is the gendered lives of Southern men in the 19th and early 20th centuries, manliness is truly the only term through which considerations of gender should then be aired. In a contradiction which is familiar from other branches of criticism, some of the explanation or quotes offered in this dissertation may depend on a set of concepts which are quite foreign to the period itself.

I use the plural "masculinities" myself to indicate that there is not one single masculinity analyzed here, but rather a range of different representations of masculinity.[29] Indeed, white hegemonic masculinity, what historians in general have interpreted as the planter-cavalier ideal, referred only to a minority of the population. Figures vary, yet less than half of white men owned land in the Old South, and "urban dwellers, men of color, and those who owned no land or slaves collectively composed the majority of men living in the early South" (Friend xi).[30] Understandably, the ideals embodied in such a minority were often rejected, if not questioned.

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[28] John Tosh, <u>Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain</u> (Harlow: Longman, 2005).

[29] Kimmel and Messner argue that "[w]e understand now that we cannot speak of 'masculinity'as a singular term, but must examine masculinities the ways in which different men construct different versions of masculinity [. . .] and that the marginalization of certain masculinities is an important component of the reproduction of male power over women" (xv); Michael S. Kimmel and Michael Messner, eds., <u>Men's Lives</u> (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001).

[30] For figures and numbers about the South, one can read : Stephen Aron, <u>How the West was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay</u> (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Stephanie McCurry, <u>Masters of Small Worlds: Yeomen Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low County</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Lee Soltow, "Land Inequality on the Frontier: the Distribution of Land in East Tennessee at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," <u>Social Science History</u> 5 (1981); Daniel S. Dupre, <u>Transforming the Cotton Frontier:</u>

As Friend remarks, "these values were co-opted, transformed, and even rejected on occasion by the diverse men who populated the South between the Revolution and the Civil War"(x). Underlining the artificial, proscribed, and performative nature of masculine identity in the South, John Mayfield goes one step further by arguing that "being a 'man' was not a given, and [Southern men] worked hard at resolving their ambivalences and fashioning new modes of manhood" (xv).[31] Diane Barnes, for instance, explains that the Southern men forming the majority of the Southern community often resented the conservative social and political structures and consequently created "alternative ideals of manhood that rejected the conventional values of the plantation gentry" (Barnes qtd. in Friend xii).[32]

At the other end of the spectrum, conservative southerners themselves started to feel at odds with "the new values of masculinity among an emerging middle class [and] publicly mocked newer forms of masculinity inspired by market forces and an emerging middle class" (Friend xii-xiii).[33] The socio-historical transformations of the reconstruction period in particular ushered in new conditions of experiencing and thinking subjectivity. Subordinate

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Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); Lisa C. Tolbert, Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); In a recent study, Frederic Robert states that by 1860, about 80% of white southern males did not own any slaves; less than half of the slave-owning families owned no more than six slaves and less than 10% of them owned 20 slaves. The "planting class" represented a minority of the population: only 7,500 slave-owning families owned more than 50 slaves (18); Frédéric Robert, "Présentation Générale," Le Sud après la guerre de sécession: de la Reconstruction à la reségrégation (1865-1896) (Paris: Ellipses, 2009) : 9-66.

[31] John Mayfield, Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South. New Perspectives on the History of the South (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).

[32] Mary Poovey's works The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer and Uneven Developments lead to a similar conclusion, showing that the ideology of gender "was always in the making, [it] was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations" (Developments 5). Poovey's analysis serves as the basis for the introduction to Karen Volland Waters, The Perfect Gentleman: Masculine Control in Victorian Men's Fiction, 1870-1901 (New York: P. Lang, 1997). Anthony Easthope argues that "despite all that has been written over the past twenty years on femininity and feminism, masculinity has stayed pretty well concealed. This has always been its ruse in order to hold onto its power. Masculinity tries to stay invisible by passing itself off as normal and universal" (1). Anthony Easthope, What a Man's Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1986).

[33] Friend here describes these newer forms of masculinity as follows: "planters' college-aged sons rebelled against their fathers' private directives and instead wanted peer validation. Other young men turned to courtship and refinement to prove their worth. Such non-elites as artisans and militia members sought community affirmation by parading and by exhibiting their prowess" (xiii). Diane L. Barnes, "Hammer and

masculinities—obviously different from that of the Southern planter—represented a potent force that resisted the white hegemonic culture's attempt to define or eradicate their maleness, thus opening new definitions in general.[34] Moreover, if the codes of honor-bound behavior in the Old South established authority and status, they also gave a Southern man "a sense of self. [Yet] [t]hey also produced men who were acutely sensitive to being dominated by other men and who were driven by fears of humiliation and shame, rather like Homeric warriors who would rather die than appear weak" (Mayfield xvii). In this specific context, Southern men not only needed to fight a war against the North, but they also had to wage a war against themselves or, as Leverenz puts it: "anyone preoccupied with manhood, in whatever time or culture, harbors fears of being humiliated usually by other men. [. . .] A preoccupation with manhood becomes a compensatory response" (72-73, qtd. in Mayfield xvii).[35]

Though the masculinities discussed herein are selective, not comprehensive, they have been chosen to be in some sense typical of crucial historical and cultural moments. It is, I will argue, in these moments that key fictions encode the critical connection between the ideology of the South and the ideologically sanctioned form of masculinity at the time. Indeed, the fictional southern plantation which Ellen Glasgow, William Faulkner, and other 20th Century writers inherited was principally the creation of two active periods of literary and social ferment.

The first period lasted from about 1832 until the mid-60s—a time when the Southern Gentleman became an established character in American fiction, but also a time of major change in which seemingly "stable" notions of manhood began to shift. Dramatic changes in

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Hand in the Old South: Artisan Workers in Petersburg, Virginia, 1820-1860." (Diss. West Virginia University, 2000) Print.

[34] The diversity of southern masculinities, a term quoted by Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Golver in Southern Masculinity, Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction, is also presented in Christopher Waldrep, "The Making of a Border State Society: James McGready, the Great Revival, and the Prosecution of Profanity in Kentucky." American Historical Review 99.3 (1994): 767-784; Paul Gilmore, The Genuine Article: Race, Mass Culture, and American Literary Manhood (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

American society, economy, and culture reconfigured gendered ideals and practices. As Amy Greenberg explains, antebellum Americans lived through an astonishing array of changes, including mass immigration from Europe, the emergence of evangelical Christianity in the Second Great Awakening, the end of bound labor in the North, the beginnings of a "market revolution," including specialization in agriculture, changes in print technology, increasing class stratification, and universal white manhood suffrage (6).[36] These major changes had an impact on the definition of manhood, as the market economy, the world in which men evolved grew more unstable and less secure. Yet, it was in this restless sphere that man was to prove his manhood, with the risk of failure always looming ahead. This evolution challenged the model of the Genteel Patriarch, whose masculine identity was manifested through "property ownership and a benevolent authority at home" (Kimmel 13).[37] In literature also, if "the most distorted manly figure [. . .] was the postwar gentleman—or rather the postwar 'conception and estimate' of the gentleman," Mayfield notes that "even before the war the gentleman had become a quaint, cartoonish thing in literature" (125-6). All of these transformations shaped the ideology and practices of both womanhood and manhood.

The "second" period lasted from about the 1880s to the end of the Century. As slavery was abolished, as the Southern Gentleman was now deprived of his slaves (and often his plantation), and as the cotton industry developed, the old notion of a patriarchal system of rank gave way to a class system. Historian Craig Thompson Friend remarks:

> [t]he rise of consumerism, which transformed not only the American economy
> but also the nature of families and society, further complicated masculine values
> in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the North, economic
> changes led to industrial growth, wage labor, and an erosion of localistic

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[35] David Leverenz, Manhood and the American Renaissance (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

[36] Amy S. Greenberg, Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

perspectives. In the South, the new economy changed life by expanding

agricultural markets, increasing demands for farmlands in the Old Southwest,

incorporating white men into broader economic networks, and validating

slavery as a lucrative and appropriate form of labor (xii).

William R. Taylor in <u>Cavalier and Yankee</u> refers to this period as marking the passing of the

old ideal of manhood and the prominence of a new man, a "type of parvenu [who] was rapidly

making his way in their society" (334).[38] As the twentieth century approached, "men of the

older middle and upper classes started feeling increasingly alienated from economic and

social productivity and searched relentlessly for images and activities that might restore their

depleted reserves of power and virility" (Silber 167). Southern men, usually seen as self-

assured models of restraint, found themselves in a new social context with new gender

ideologies. The world had changed, and with it, the traditional ideas of manhood began to

weaken. Mayfield voices the change most vividly when explaining that "business became the

Southern man's business and the New South of Henry Grady's <u>Atlanta Constitution</u> literally

created a new elite—urban, sophisticated, and wordly men of industry" (125).

In the period of the Civil War and of the new nation, John F. Kasson adds:

"perceptions of manliness were drastically altered by the new dynamics created by vast

corporate power and immense concentrations of wealth. Fundamental to traditional

conceptions of American manhood had been autonomy and independence, which had to be

recast in a tightly integrated economy of national and international markets" (11).[39] As a

consequence, the white elite of each generation had to re-assess the traditional codes of

southern masculinity to suit its particular concerns. Rather than inheriting the innate

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[37] Michael S. Kimmel, <u>Manhood in America: A Cultural History</u> (New York: Free, 1996).
[38] William R. Taylor, <u>Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).
[39] John F. Kasson, <u>Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity</u> (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

masculinity of their forefathers, men were now forced to earn this status by performing upon the new social and commercial stage of the Postbellum South. Those who could effectively meet the requirements of this new role were deemed "manly." Redefining masculinity thus became a crucial component of the New South.

Of course, with any major change, there were also those who longed for a return to the ways of the past. Taylor notes, for example, that disgust for artificiality and deceit within the commercial realm led to a public outcry for 'true' men of integrity and sincerity, since "both the North and the South had begun to express decided reservations about the direction progress was taking and about the kind of aggressive, mercenary, self-made man" (334). Southerners were trying to live with what Richard Gray has named a "cultural schizophrenia" (38), what C. Vann Woodward has dubbed the "divided mind of the South"—the dual consciousness of a need for change and a resistance to change, an inability to "abandon the patterns of the Old South and to forego the material gains of modern America" (Gaston 8).[40]

On that note, Kathleen Brown, exploring manhood in the colonial South (as expressed in personal diaries), produces a powerful and interesting study in <u>Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia</u>.[41] She sees Virginia planters as "anxious" patriarchs, constantly striving to substantiate their claims to social, familial, and political dominance. She and other historians note the degree to which Virginia planters attempted to compensate for insecurities materially, for example, by importing costly china and clothes or building great houses and sculpting landscapes.

Writers themselves undoubtedly felt a responsibility to address, in their novels, the tension between these different renegotiations and redefinitions of southern masculinity.

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[40] Richard Gray, "Foreword," <u>South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture</u> (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2002); C. V. Woodward, <u>The Burden of Southern History</u> (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960); Paul M. Gaston, <u>The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking</u> (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).

Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), for example, responded to the mix of old ideals and new goals with impatience. The commingling of "practical common sense, progressive ideas, and progressive works" with "the duel, the inflated speech, and the jejune romanticism of an absurd past that is dead, and out of charity ought to be buried," he saw as evidence of residual effects of "Sir Walter [Scott] disease," the reminder of "sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries" not yet overcome by "the wave of progress" (375). He writes:

> It was Sir Walter Scott that made every gentleman in the South a major or a Colonel, or a General or a Judge, before the war; and it was he, also, that made these gentlemen value these bogus decorations. For it was he that created rank and castle down there, and also reverence for rank and castle, and pride and pleasure in them. Enough is laid on slavery, without fathering upon it these creations and contributions of Sir Walter. Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war (469).[42]

Whereas, in his character Tom Sawyer, Clemens satirized the new Southerner who has learned that time is money but cannot shake the ghosts of the past, most writers of Faulkner's generation were actually fighting the same struggle. As Singal emphasizes:

> The Cavalier ideal came to embody the essence of Victorian culture in the South and to dominate the imagination of most Southerners at the time Faulkner was growing up. Accordingly, the Southern writers of Faulkner's generation would each need to make a separate peace with this powerful

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[41] Kathleen M. Brown, <u>Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia</u> (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

[42] Samuel L. Clemens, <u>Life on the Mississippi</u> (1883); facsimile rpt as vol. 9 of <u>The Oxford Mark Twain</u>, ed. Shelley Fisher Fishkin (New York: Oxford UP, 1996).

symbol of their 19th century legacy. Only then could they be free to embrace the culture of their own times (7).[43]

Keeping this in mind, this dissertation focuses on novels and plays from the 1830s to 1930s as a vehicle for discursive constitution (or deconstruction) of self and manhood concentrating on dominant forms of masculine ids such as white, straight, and planter-class masculine identities. With attention to both genders and in relation to specific historical and cultural contexts, this project examines literary texts conditioned by the historical experience in which the texts themselves are embedded, and with attention to Stephen Berry's agenda, each of the chapters on the novel under analysis will investigate the following questions: How did Southern writers (or writers about the South) express/view Southern masculinity in their works? How did the Southern elite male characters define or perform their manhood? What gave meaning (and non-meaning) to their constitution of masculinity?[44]

This dissertation will attempt to answer these questions, using multiple theories. As Sally Robinson remarks, much work on theorizing and analyzing white masculinity takes as its starting point the assumption that masculinity retains its power because it is invisible, i.e. taken for granted and thus, opaque to analysis. "White male power," she claims, "has benefited enormously from keeping whiteness and masculinity in the dark" (1).[45] In this view, masculine power, like ideological power, operates invisibly.

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[43] Daniel J. Singal, <u>William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist</u> (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[44] Of course, and as David M. Posner remarks:

> While history generates the conditions of possibility for literature, modulating what a given text can articulate or reflect, a text also creates its own re-vision of history, laying claim to a certain (perhaps illusory) autonomy. Whatever its legitimacy, that claim generates a space, a zone of tension, between text and history (2).

It is this space that the present study seeks to explore; David M. Posner, <u>The Performance of Nobility in Early Modern European Literature</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[45] Sally Robinson, <u>Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

Pierre Bourdieu says as much in <u>La Domination Masculine:</u>

> La force de l'ordre masculine se voit au fait qu'il se passe de justification: la vision androcentrique s'impose comme neutre et n'a pas besoin de s'énoncer dans des discours visant à la légitimité (15).

> [The strength of masculine social order is apparent in the fact that it does not require justification: the andro-centric worldview has imposed itself as neutral and has no need to legitimate itself overtly through discourse.][46]

Accordingly, Sally Robinson speaks of the privilege of inhabiting an unmarked and disembodied body, for "to be unmarked," she argues, "means to be invisible [. . .] the self-evident standard against which all differences are measured" and against which all problematic "others" can be assessed (blacks, women, minorities, the enslaved, the colonized, etc) (1). The argument goes "one cannot question, let alone dismantle, what remains invisible from view" (1). To be unmarked, disembodied and invisible, appears a necessary condition for the perpetuation of male dominance. Seen in this light, the comparative neglect of attention to the gentleman-figure, as compared to the Southern Belle problem, is also emblematic of the wider sense in which "heterosexual masculinity has tended to remain unproblematised precisely because of its function as the structuring norm around which the rest of gender and sexualized representations are defined" (qtd. in Edwards 118).[47]

It is in this sense that Mayfield suggests that "we know quite a bit about [Southern] women by looking at how they defined themselves in relation to men [and] we know much

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[46] Pierre Bourdieu, <u>La domination masculine</u> (Paris: Seuil, 1998). I am indebted to Nick Growse's paper for this reference and translation. Nick Growse, "Lads, Men, and The Reluctant Patriarch," Proc. of Paper for Performing the Invisible: Masculinities in the English-Speaking World, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris.

[47] Tim Edwards, <u>Cultures of Masculinity</u> (New York: Routledge, 2006); Discussing Faulkner's novels, Jay Martin establishes a similar concern. "The imbalance between the increasingly sophisticated understanding of female life and the relatively unchanged, rather primitive, understanding of male life," Martin asserts "has made for an astonishing distortion of intellectual life all over the world" (125). Today, Martin argues, masculinity constitutes the unexplored wilderness, a terrain that intellectuals have defined through a female model only; Jay Martin, "Faulkner's 'Male Commedia': The Triumph of Manly Grief," <u>Faulkner and Psychology,</u> Kartiganer and Abadie, eds (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994) 123-64.

about slaves and free blacks based upon how they defined themselves in relation to white men," while deploring that "patriarchy serves almost as a mathematical constant here, something by which other points can be calculated" (xiv). By presenting itself as the invisible norm, masculinity thus becomes a self-serving discourse and there lies an undetected performance of masculinity—a coating surrounding every male being with its normative codes. At the same time, masculinity has been indissolubly associated with the notions of performance, and performance, it can safely be argued, is all but invisible. As Robert Connell asserts in Gender and Power, "hegemonic masculinity is very public" (185).[48] Because gender structures social relationships, it advocates and reproduces rules and patterns of expectation. As Frank Barrett suggests, "individuals act out gender norms; they are constructing gendered systems of dominance and power" (79).[49] The visibility of gender is then confirmed through the way the gentleman (in our specific case study) tries to reach a normative ideal of male behaviour in conformity with gendered social (and patriarchal) expectations.

Framing masculinity as an invisible performative entity thus raises incompatible and self-contradictory tensions, for masculine power has traditionally been associated with honesty, integrity, authenticity, whereas the notion of performativity itself has led to associations of play-acting, pretending, deceit and ultimately weakness. This reasoning also makes it nearly impossible to see how whiteness and masculinity have managed to retain their power as hegemonic or to see how times of crises have marked masculinity, making it "visible" in ways that can be both progressive and reactionary.

In order to find a way out of the ruins of contemporary debate—as Judith Butler defines them—I have decided to follow Butler's anti-essentialist logic which calls for an

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[48] R. W. Connell, Gender and Power : Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987)

[49] Frank J. Barrett, "The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the US Navy," The Masculinities Reader, eds. Stephen M. Whitehead & Frank J. Barett (Malden: University of California Press, 2005).

interrogation of gender, as she ponders: "if gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently or does its constructedness imply some form of social determinism, foreclosing the possibility of agency and transformation?" (11).[50] Butler contends that an analysis of the ways in which the performance is given shape may reveal to what extent the political and ideological content of the novels or plays are gendered constructs whose ambivalence and contradictions turn masculinity into an unstable realm of experience.[51] Sally Robinson concurs with this approach by claiming that it is more fruitful "to think about how normativity constantly under revision shifts in response to the changing social, political, and cultural terrain" (4) and to place men within the field of struggles over cultural priority. Placing men within these struggles, of course, produces a "dramatization of the male subject at war with himself" (Savran 176), for the kind of masculinity at work in the novel or play might turn out to be an aporetic experience involving different forms of performance which may prove incompatible. As Mayfield justly remarks: "in a region that added over 25 million acres of prime real estate in the fifteen years after Cherokee removal began in 1830 alone, that by 1860 produced 70% of the world's cotton supply, life was anything but stable, and in changing environments like these even tough traditions like patriarchy can get fluid, be redefined, and go off tangents" (xiv). Keeping this in mind, I will thus integrate the suggestions of feminist scholars who have conceptualized gender identies as "performance" involving

> reiterating or reappropriating the norms by which one is constituted; it is not a
>
> radical fabrication of a gendered self. It is a compulsory repetition of prior and
>
> subjectivating norms, ones which cannot be thrown at will, but which work to
>
> animate and constrain the gendered subject and which are also the resources

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[50] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity N(ew York: Routledge, 1990).

from which resistance, subversion and displacement are to be forged (Butler,

"Critically Queer" 22).[52]

Investigating Southern male identity as open to creation or "self-fabrication" (Mayfield xv)

should aid in exposing "gender as an unstable system of meaning," a system that is constantly

reshaped through individual interaction with material circumstances and larger cultural

representations.[53]

In selecting the primary texts for my discussion, I have chosen to focus on works that

undertake in some way to represent fictional rather than historical figures. After all, models

provided by real-life idealized males such as Robert E. Lee did not matter for what they did

but rather for what they stood for. History is important to my discussion, but this is primarily

a literary and not a historical study, so I have restricted historical analysis to those places

where it provides the necessary context for an understanding of literature. Taking a cross-

generic or interdisciplinary approach, this dissertation explicitly connects representations of

masculinity to the ideological imperatives underpinning the South, to an historical, cultural,

and, at times, political understanding of the connection between masculinity, femininity,

Southernhood, and violence.

This study is arranged around and according to the demands of its central subject, the

Southern gentleman, though, admittedly, this thematic preoccupation is implicit in, or even

marginal to, the central concern of a considerable number of those novels. The selection has

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[51] I am indebted to Ronan Ludot-Vlassak's introduction for this formulation. Ronan Ludot-Vlassak, "Too Much to Perform: Edwin Forrest and Masculinity in Jack Crade and The Gladiator," Proc. of Paper for Performing the Invisible: Masculinities in the English-Speaking World, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris.

[52] Judith Butler, "Critically Queer." GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies 1 (1993): 17-32.

[53] This view is defended by Martha C. Howell, in "A Feminist Historian Looks at the New Historicism," 141. For additional feminist criticism of the New Historicism, see, for instance, Wai-Chee Dimock, "Feminism, New Historicism, and The Reader," Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism, eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 635-50; Jane Marcus, "The Asylums of Antaeus: Women, War, and Madness—Is There a Feminist Fetishism?" The New Historicism, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 132-51; Ellen Pollak, "Feminism and the New Historicism: A Tale of Difference or the Same Old Story." Eighteenth Century: Theory and

been confined to works by authors normally found in standard literary histories and works of literary criticism dealing with the South, such as Jay B. Hubbell's <u>The South in American Literature, 1607-1900</u> (1954), John Bradbury's <u>Renaissance in the South</u> (1963), Frederick J. Hoffman's <u>The Art of Southern Fiction</u> (1967), and other general texts of the same nature.[54] Each of the novels under discussion – John P. Kennedy's <u>Swallow Barn; or, A Sojourn in The Old Dominion</u> (1832), William Faulkner's <u>The Sound and The Fury</u> (1929), Ellen Glasgow's <u>The Sheltered Life</u> (1932), Margaret Mitchell's <u>Gone with the Wind</u> (1936), and Tennessee Williams' <u>The Glass Menagerie</u> (1946) as well as <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u> (1947) – will be examined with a view to the image of the Southern gentleman.

For decades, it has been customary to refer indiscriminately to the "planter," the "Cavalier," the Southern "aristocrat," "the Southern Beau," and the "Southern gentleman" as being one and the same. These terms are not, of course, semantically identical. Yet, my dissertation will not attempt to make any distinction between the different uses and will look upon the subject with the same spirit as a well-known passage from Sterne's <u>Tristram Shandy</u>: "For by the word 'Southern Gentleman,' throughout all this long chapter of Southern gentlemen, and in every part of my work where the Southern gentleman occurs—I declare, by that word, I mean a Southern gentleman and nothing more, or less" (178).[55]

These pieces of literature have been chosen for the insights they provide about the perception of Southern elite masculinity and for their diversity, as a way to reflect broadly upon how these men were perceived and defined by perceptive male and female writers,

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<u>Interpretation</u> 29 (Fall 1988): 281-6; Carolyn Porter, "Are We Being Historical Yet?" <u>South Atlantic Quarterly</u> 87 (Fall 1988): 783-86.

[54] Jay B. Hubbell, <u>The South in American Literature, 1607-1900</u> (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1954); John M. Bradbury, <u>Renaissance in the South: a Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960</u> (Chapel Hill NC: University Of North Carolina, 1963); Frederick J. Hoffman, <u>The Art of Southern Fiction: A Study of Some Modern Novelists</u> (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1967).

[55] Sterne, Laurence. <u>The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman</u>. Ed. Melvyn New and Joan New (London: Penguin Books, 1997).

Northerners and Southerners of the Antebellum and Postbellum periods.[56] I have been especially interested in choosing texts that have been discussed for their "Southern Belle" problem and as result, texts that did not seem to focus on, even less challenge a cultural masculinity that was—by contrast—assumed to perform both powerfully and invisibly.

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[56] John Pendleton Kennedy, <u>Swallow Barn; or, A Sojourn in The Old Dominion</u>, 2 vols (Philadelphia: Carey & Lee, 1832); William Faulkner, <u>The Sound and the Fury</u> (New York: J. Cape and H. Smith, 1929); Ellen Glasgow, <u>The Sheltered Life</u> (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, inc., 1932; rpt. New York: Hill and Wang, 1979); Margaret Mitchell, <u>Gone with the Wind</u> (New York: Macmillan, 1936); Tennessee Williams, <u>A Streetcar Named Desire,</u> ed. E. Martin Browne (New York: New Directions, 1947; rpt. New York: Penguin, 1984) and <u>The Glass Menagerie</u> (New York: New Directions, 1999).

CHAPTER 1

FASHIONING THE SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN AS AN ABSOLUTE

1.1. The Hegemonic Model of Masculinity in the Old South.

In 1622, Henry Peacham in his conduct book offered the gentleman aid "in fashioning him absolute in the most necessary and commendable qualities concerning minde [sic] or bodie [sic] that may be required" (i).[57] Peacham's book emerged during an explosion of secular prescriptive literature in early modern England that promised help in shaping the ideal English gentleman.[58] In the nineteenth century, scholars and popular writers followed Peacham's lead, presenting the American planter as equivalent to the English ideal and as the epitome of the romantic cavalier legend that could be found in Southern American fiction from John Pendleton Kennedy to Thomas Nelson Page. More recently however, some scholars have painted a darker picture of the planter. Rather than a graceful, confident, witty, controlled man, the scholars portray the planter as personally ambitious, a psychologically unhealthy colonial exile who struggled throughout his life to reconcile his ambition for status as an English gentleman with the realities of his provincial life.[59]

Among the causes of the dichotomy in scholarship were the realizations that the southern ideal, operating within the construct of hegemonic masculinity, a term employed by R.W. Connell,[60] was hard to maintain, and most gentlemen failed in their attempt to uphold

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[57] Henry Peacham, The Compleat Gentleman, ed. G.S. Gordon (London: J. Legat for F. Constable, 1634; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906).

[58] Michael Curtin, "A Question of Manners: Status and Gender in Etiquette and Courtesy." Journal of Modern History 57 (1985): 396-7; Anthony Fletcher, Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800 (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1996) 335.

[59] This idea is most fully expressed in Montgomery Wolf's MA Thesis: Montgomery Wolf, "Elite Male Self-Fashioning in Colonial Virginia: The Diaries of William Byrd of Westover, Landon Carter, and Philip Vickers Fithian." (M.A. Thesis. Georgia State University, 1999) Print.

[60] R. W. Connell, Gender and Power : Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987) 183-5; Scholars who use Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity include Michael Kimmel, Manhood in America: A Cultural History (New York: Free Press, 1996) 5-6; and Mark E. Kann, On the Man Question: Gender and Civic Virtue in America (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991) 28-9, 134, and A Republic of Men: The American Founders, Gendered Language, and Patriarchal Politics (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 3; Sharon R. Bird, "Welcome to the Men's Club: Homosociality and Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity." Gender & Society 10.2 (1996): 120-132. Bird explains that

these ideals; in fact, as Connell explains, the winning of hegemony may involve the creation of "fantasy figures" representing a fugitive standard of, put another way, "normative" concepts of masculinity. In fact and despite the attempts to bolster gentlemanly ideology through examples of perfect gentility, Craig Thompson Friend and Lori Glover's study itself, by juxtaposing material from the popular culture of the South as conduct and self-help books, underscores the inherent ideological inconsistencies within the idea of the gentleman itself, as the ideal came to be more and more perceived to be inaccessible, an illusion, and as challenges to traditional gender stereotypes came to redefine the nature and role of the Southern Gentleman: Patriarchy, as they saw it, was thus rendered mutable and vulnerable.

Rather than implying that competing versions of masculinity did not exist, the concept of hegemonic masculinity assumes resistance and tension and suggests "ascendancy achieved within a balance of forces" (Connell 183-5). The paragon of the English gentleman described in contemporary prescriptive literature served such a role. The gentleman's dress and manners reflected his civility and refinement; his classical education, his love for literature signified his rightful position of authority over those around him; above all, he was the picture of self-control and moderation. The Southern Gentleman claimed one writer as early as 1957,

> is tolerant, kindly, broadminded, non-puritan, moderate, hospitable, and
> courteous…a totally integrated personality, he is also supremely gregarious and
> sees himself as rightly into an organic familial and social order that has a sense
> of purpose and unity [. . .] His counterpart, the Southern lady was—according

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"[t]hrough male homosocial heterosexual interaction, hegemonic masculinity is maintained as the norm to which men are held accountable despite individual conceptualizations of masculinity that depart from that norm [. . .] Masculinity means being emotionally detached and competitive and [. . .] masculinity involves viewing women as sexual objects" and the daily interactions of these men "help perpetuate a system that subordinates femininity and non hegemonic masculinities. Non hegemonic masculinities fail to influence structural gender arrangements significantly because their expression is either relegated to heterosocial settings or suppressed entirely" (Bird 120).

to the mythology—equally a paragon of moral innocence and selflessness whose prime concern was upholding the canon of sexual purity (Singal 7).[61]

These roles were not, it should be stressed, mere window-dressing. Joel Williamson assures that "[t]he relishing …of the idea of men as chivalrous knights and women as castellated ladies was not merely coincidental, nor was it frivolous. On the contrary, it was imminent and deadly serious" (6-7).[62] However, such romanticized pictures did not correspond—as most historians have remarked—to the reality of the quintessential Southern man.

Although the white aristocracy governed Southern society, planters were indeed, as mentioned previously, a minority. This privileged elite, according to the figures given by Tindall and Shi in America: A Narrative History constituted less than 4% of the adult white males in the South but perceived themselves as "community leaders and their interests as the interests of the entire South" (633, qted. in Dominguez i Rué 4).[63] Most Southerners were actually yeomen, small farmers cultivating cotton, tobacco or sugar and living in two-roomed houses. Yet, "even though many middle-class farmers owned no slaves, most of them supported the slave system, as they enjoyed the privileged status race gave them and did not want to compete with blacks for land" (Dominguez 42). As historian Samuel E. Morison explains, "white trash" farmers formed another class—undernourished, illiterate and often barefoot—whose "only pride was their colour" (257).[64] These were also called "dirt eaters" because they were often forced to chew clay. Truly, "their white skins were virtually the only thing that separated white trash from the utter deshumanization that black slaves suffered"

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[61] Daniel J. Singal, William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

[62] Joel Williamson, A Rage for Order: Black/White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[63] George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, America: A Narrative History (New York and London: Norton, 1984); Emma Dominguez I Rué, "Ellen Through the Looking Glass: Female Invalidism as Metaphor in the Fiction of Ellen Glasgow," Diss. Universitat de Lleida, 2004. Web. 20 Oct. 2009. <www.tesisenxarxa.net/TESIS_UdL/AVAILABLE/TDX...//Tedr1de1.pdf>.

[64] Samuel Eliot Morison, The Oxford History of the American People, Volume Two: 1789 through Reconstruction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

(Dominguez 42).[65] Another social group, the hillbillies, lived in secluded valleys or in the mountains. Proud, independent people, these were expert hunters and fishermen who were only seen when they marketed their homemade goods in the nearest town" (Dominguez 42); Stephanie McCurry complements this argument by describing "yeomanhood" as the essence of Southerness. Clearly distinguished from poor whites by their ownership of land, these "self-working farmers," she explains, were distinct from the elite because they physically labored on their land alongside any slaves they owned. Yet, in spite of all these differences among the minority of white Southern men, and as Tindall and Shi point out, the decision of slaveholders to retain control over the Afro-Americans slave population created "a sense of racial unity that muted conflict among whites" (628).

Two major studies of the Southern man, by W. J. Cash and Bertram Wyatt Brown, can help to better delineate the character of the quintessential southern man (in the context of this dissertation, southern man signifying the white master, slave-owner, gentleman of the south). For Cash, the southern man is not the aristocrat who typically displays the qualities we tend to associate with the traditional Southern gentleman: chivalry, autonomy, and aggression (qtd. in Friend viii). On the contrary, the southern man is individualistic, independent, and resentful of authority. Most importantly, as Cash emphasizes, the southern man "did not (typically speaking) think; he felt; and discharging his feelings immediately, he developed no need or desire for intellectual culture in its own right" (Cash 99).[66] Yet, the aristocratic culture

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[65] Stephanie McCurry, Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Other historians have portrayed the "yeoman" as the essence of Southerness: Grady McWhiney, Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988); Frank L. Owsley and Harriet C. Owsley, "The Economic Basis of Society in the Late Antebellum South." Journal of Southern History 6 (Feb 1940): 24-45; Frank L. Owsley, Plain Folk of the Old South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949).

[66] W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South (1941; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1991); Grady McWhiney, Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988); Frank L. Owsley and Harriet C. Owsley, "The Economic Basis of Society in the Late Antebellum South." Journal of Southern History 6 (Feb 1940): 24-45; Frank L. Owsley, Plain Folk of the Old South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949). Michael O'Brien supports Cash's approach in the preface to his now famous historiographical

persisted in the Old South where men still pursued honor even though they lacked the gentility of the forefathers who had settled colonial tidewater Virginia and the South Carolina low country.

Like Cash, Bertram Wyatt-Brown believes that it is emotion rather than intellect that drove southern masculinity. Southerners displayed their valor through vengeance, exalted individual will, duels, and lynching (qtd. in Friend viii). Unlike Cash, however, Bertram Wyatt-Brown puts elite men at the core of the antebellum South. The wealth and lineage of these men led them to perpetuate a code of honor "increasingly outdated in early national America, clashing with the rationalism, restraint, and respectability sought by northern middle-class men" (20, qtd. in Friend viii). For Brown, honor, being a relic of medieval European culture, reinforced how distinctively traditional the South remained in the young modernizing nation.[67]

The values of masculinity delineated by Cash and Brown have dominated the historical understanding of southern masculinity and the corpus of masculinity studies often proceeds under the influence of a notion of hegemonic masculinity partly resting on the preconceived superiority of self-control and insconpicuous desire for domination. Historians like Craig Thompson Friend have noted Southern honor "to explain the relationships of husbands to wives and children, sons to parents, men to men, and citizens to society; they employ it to

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study, by asserting: "[s]trictly, the Southerner had no mind; he had temperament. He was not a scholar; he had no intellectual training; he could not analyze an idea, and he could not even conceive of admitting two" (xi); Michael O'Brien, <u>Henry Adams and the Southern Question</u> (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

[67] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, <u>Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); For other works on Southern honor; Elliott J. Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch": the Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," <u>American Historical Review</u> 90 (1985): 18-43; Kenneth S. Greenberg, <u>Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery</u> (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Steven M. Stowe, <u>Intimacy and Power in the Old South</u> (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Kenneth S. Greenberg, <u>Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Edward L. Ayers, <u>Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century South</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Gail Bederman, "Manly Civilizations/Primitive Masculinity: Race, Gender, and Evolutions of Middle-Class American Manhood" (Diss. Brown University, 1992); Joanne B. Freeman, <u>Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

reason the Missouri crisis, the Nullification Controversy, Indian removal, the Mexican War, Bleeding Kansas, and the Civil War; they blame it for the subordination of women, the oppression of blacks, and the extension of slavery" (Friend ix). A related line of argument has centered on mastery. Mastery, as Stephanie McCurry has defined it, was the notion that manliness inhered not (only) in the control of the self but in the control of land, wives, children, and households.[68] Craig Thompson Friend uses a similar approach, when explaining that "men internalized a sense of manliness through relationships to wives, children, and slaves by subverting challenges to white male authority leveled by these dependents and by heading autonomous self-sufficient households. Masculine mastery, sometimes labeled patriarchy or paternalism, was primarily internally realized" (ix). In turn, "manhood required an independent household and landownership, a submissive wife and children, and ideally, slaves" (ix).[69] As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese posits, "the distinct Southern form of male dominance was anchored in the household as the fundamental productive and reproductive unit of slave society" (99).[70] Southern masculinity, therefore, required a subtle mixture of authority mixed with self-restraint, for "any claims to mastery of a larger world [. . .] had to be set before the community to be adjudicated according to the dictates of honor" (Berry xi).

If Honor and Mastery have been the dominant traits to understand the essence of Southern masculinity and if these terms have often been used interchangeably, Friend makes sure to distinguish honor as "a set of expectations determined and perpetuated by the community, which differentiated men in the eyes of others through public rituals," while mastery, internally realized for personal fulfillment, was "achieved by controlling households

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[68] Stephanie McCurry, <u>Masters of Small Worlds: Yeomen Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[69] Stephanie McCurry described this type of manhood in <u>Masters of Small Worlds.</u> The same idea of manhood, built on controlling others is seen in Orville Vernon Burton, <u>In My Father's House are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina</u> (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

[70] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, <u>Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South, series on Gender and American Culture</u> (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

and commanding slaves [. . .] less scripted and more of consequence to a man's self-identity"
(x). Mastery, Friend adds, "or men's refusal to be mastered by others and their insistence on
mastering slaves, after all, lay at the heart of the antebellum southern political culture" (x).

In both definitions, however, and as Friend rightly notes, the concept of Southern
manhood could not be understood without slavery, which not only corresponded to the ideal of
land acquisition and household autonomy but also to mastery. According to Stephen Berry, the
men of the ruling class inhabited "places where mastery over environment and slaves lent a
certain grandness to a man's vision" (21).[71] Not surprisingly, black men (or their masculinity)
were regarded as the antithesis of honor and mastery—dependent, controlled, enslaved, and
emasculated:

> The mastering of slaves propelled white culture and male identity in the early
> South by exaggerating the power of the planter class and by promoting a sense
> of racial solidarity among white southern men. The connection between
> manhood and the mastery of slaves was peculiarly southern as well [. . .]
> Mastering slaves, then, contributed to an increasingly self-conscious
> regionalism among white men, fueling sectionalism in the late antebellum era
> and that folly of war in 1861 (Friend x).

1.2. The Changes of the New South.

After the defeat of the Civil War, the reconstruction era brought change to a South that
still clung to traditions of grandeur. Economically, the agrarian system of the South was now
slowly overtaken by industrialization and politically, the republican government's aim was to
industrialise the South and transform its plantation agriculture into a system of family farms
so as to destroy the political and social legacy of the slave-holding aristocracy. Yet, for the
South, "reconstruction did not mean, as it did for the North, the re-introduction of defeated

states into politics" (Dominguez 49), but what Brogan defines as "rebuilding society from the foundations" (375).[72] The plantation class was bankrupt (most had mortgaged their estates to support the Confederacy effort), yet they still owned the land and the black codes tried to maintain the old plantation system.[73] Yet, the ex-slaves no longer accepted those terms and white poor farmers themselves remained illiterate and undernourished.

With the loss of most instruments of mastery (slaves, plantation, etc.), the Southern artistocrats started to fear that poor whites and blacks would create an alliance against their interests and thus passed a series of "Jim Crow" laws to ensure that their privilege would remain untouched. However, as Hugh Brogan explains, reconstruction failed both southern whites and blacks alike. Nostalgic of the glorious antebellum days, the South became a

> land of introversion and provincialism, a land, it seemed, without hope; a land paying a tragic price for tragic miscalculations… An economic and educational system devised principally to keep things as they were and the blacks unprivileged, was unable to do much for its white citizens either (383).

In this view, the South became glorified as the legitimate heir of the nation created by the Founding Fathers. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, true sons of the South, intended state governments to be superior to the national government and perhaps would have approved of the actions taken by the Confederate states. In 1798, for example, these two men had written the Virginia/Kentucky resolutions that trumpeted the superiority of states over a national government: Jefferson opposed the constitution exactly because he feared the power

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[71] Stephen W. Berry, <u>All that Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[72] Hugh Brogan, <u>The Penguin History of the United States of America</u> (London: Penguin, 1985).

[73] As new governments were formed in the Postbellum South, they passed "black codes" that denied Afro-Americans every civil right and tried to maintain antebellum salvery laws: they recognized black marriages as legal (of course, not to a white person), their right to sue or be sued in court and testify against whites, the right to hold property and to be paid wages for their work. Yet, they were denied the right to strike or leave their employment. If any black person was to be found unemployed or travelling without their employer's permission, they would be arrested. President Johnson was to denounce these measures as being unconstitutional (Dominguez 47).

of the federal government it proposed. Southerners also knew that they had dominated the Presidency and the Supreme Court since the very beginning, and this domination was also taken as proof of the political and intellectual superiority of the region. In fact, the Founding Father himself, George Washington, was a true son of the South and a slaveholder. Economically too, King Cotton was to drive the nation, for the Southern plantation—it was believed—was economically efficient and self-sufficient unlike the factories and cities of the North or farms of the Midwest. The Old South was portrayed as home to the true United States, recreating Jefferson's agrarian republic.

Yet after a devastating war on Southern soil, beliefs of superiority did not suffice. The outcome of the Civil War freed four million blacks, and would, in due course, overhaul the South's social and economic system, which had hitherto centered on the Plantation. The failure of President Andrew Johnson's program for Reconstruction, which involved a ratification of the thirteenth amendment, led to Congressional action dominated by the so-called "radical" Republicans. Union troops took control of the South, and under their supervision, a new electorate was created. State-level government in the South came under the control of the "enemy," Republicans, some of whom were black, although the majority consisted of white Southern and northern Republicans known as "scalawags" and "carpetbaggers" respectively. The problem, as Howard Rabinowitz recognized in his work The First New South, 1865-1920, was "how to hold onto the past while still embracing the future. Support for the Lost Cause can be seen as part of [. . .] the region's larger 'Divided Mind,' which reflected the tension between change and continuity" (174).[74]

It is in this context that the South's mythmakers created an image of the heroic veteran standing tall against all odds, who should be honoured for his efforts on the battle-field. Yet, not all veterans felt they had been heroic nor did they all stand tall. The men who fought

during the Civil War returned to their homes as losers entering a world that was different from the one they left. Slaves were no longer slaves: many of their family members were dead or wounded; often they were themselves maimed or ill and they represented an era that no longer existed. Veterans of the war were caught in the same dilemma that plagued their region as a whole. They were symbols of the Old South, but they were also flesh and blood people living in a New South and trying to establish an economy. They were defeated, yet acclaimed as heroes. Immediately after Appomattox, throughout the South, there were, for example, assorted days of fasting, prayers, and a day of thanksgiving. Even in defeat, these activities all marked the Confederate cause as a holy cause. Confederate Memorial Days featured trips to the local cemetery to place flowers and flags on the graves of fallen heroes. Confederate generals, especially, received funerals that resembled those given to Presidents.[75] All of these rituals reinforced the myths of both the Old South and the Lost Cause before anyone thought much about there being a New South. None of these ceremonies even acknowledged the reality of defeat, for Confederate veterans were honored and "displayed" long after the war itself was over. The fiftieth anniversary of the war, for instance, led to a spurt of building monuments on the battlefields themselves. Veterans from both sides were paraded out to the sites and granite markers were placed to mark the location of different units (Davis 116).[76] As Hugh Brogan contends,

> It would be long before anyone would accept that the whole secessionist
> adventure might have been morally wrong, socially unwise, politically
> misconceived. Southern women, particularly, remained forcefully loyal to the
> 'cause.' Mourning and commemoration were to be major preoccupations for

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[74] Howard N. Rabinowitz, The First New South, 1865-1920 (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1992).

[75] On this subject, we can read: Charles R. Wilson, Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920 (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1980) 27-29; Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, eds., Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, 4 vols (New York: Anchor Books, 1989) 681.

several generations to come; soon war memorials appeared in every important

Southern town, usually in the form of a statue of a boy in grey, his heroic young

face staring resolutely northwards. The Yankees were not forgiven; their

protégés, the freedmen, were not accepted. Slavery was dead, but slavery was

what the Africans were meant for, and something as near as possible to slavery

was what they were going to get. The South might have been defeated in war,

but her resources for racial oppression were by no means exhausted (362).[77]

As years passed, in Atlanta, the same veterans heard Henry Grady (apostle of the New

South) arguing vehemently for a Confederate Soldier's Home to take care of the living

symbols of the old one. R.B. Rosenburg's 1993 work, Living Monuments, discusses the

reasons for this spurt of Southern veterans' home openings. He ties it to the need of the South

to honor the men who fought for its holy cause: "while the functional significance of homes

for both Confederates and Union veterans increased over time—as their populations aged and

required greater custodial care—Confederate soldiers' homes continued to serve a vital

symbolic function for southerners of all ages" (5).[78] The veteran's homes became as much

places for young people to visit and learn about the region's past as they were places to house

the aging veterans. The inmates (which is what they were called) of the homes were subject to

strict moral codes of conduct and could be removed from the home for such offenses as

coming in drunk or leaving without permission. This reinforces the idea that the homes

became synonymous to commemorating the lost cause and veterans became much more

important to the South as symbols of what had been rather than as human beings living in the

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[76] Guy Stephen Davis, "Johnny Reb in Perspective: The Confederate Soldier's Image in the Southern Arts." (Diss. Emory University, 1979).

[77] Hugh Brogan, The Penguin History of the United States of America (London: Penguin, 1985).

[78] Randall. B. Rosenburg, Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers' Homes in the New South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

New South. They were valued and rewarded as long as they conducted themselves in ways consistent with the myths of the Old South and the Lost Cause.

The same need for commemoration influenced the way the next generation of Southerners learned about their cause and their history. Confederate ideologues wanted to ensure—in writing—that no one would forget what they or their fathers had done and why they had done it. Margaret Mitchell, on the contrary, thoroughly believed her novel to be realistic, the antithesis of what she called a "Thomas Nelson Pagish" novel, for "she considered the plantation myth of the Old South to be Hollywood's creation" (320):

> I believe we Southerners could write the truth about the antebellum South, its few slaveholders, its yeoman farmers, the rambling comfortable houses just fifty years away from log cabins, until Gabriel blows his trump—and everyone would go on believing the Hollywood version. The sad part is that many Southerners believe this myth even more ardently than the Northerners. A number of years ago some of us organized a club, The Association of Southerners Whose Grandpappies Did Not Live in Houses with White Columns… Its membership would be enormous if all the eligibles came in. Since my novel was published, I have been embarrassed on many occasions by finding myself included among writers who pictured the South as a land of white-columned mansions whose wealthy owners had thousands of slaves and drank thousands of juleps. I have been surprised, for North Georgia certainly was no such country—if it ever existed anywhere—and I took great pains to describe North Georgia as it was. But people believe what they like to believe and the mythical Old South has too strong a hold on their

imaginations to be altered by the mere reading of a 1037-page book" (qtd. in

Silber 320).[79]

One way for these Southerners to accomplish this romanticization of defeat was by

influencing or even altering textbooks to present their view only. In 1892, the United

Confederate Veterans approved just nine texts for use in Southern classrooms. All nine were

written by Southerners, as if veterans of the Civil War worried that their sons and grandsons

would misunderstand—or worse, forget—the struggles of their elders. They also served as

teachers and social administrators throughout the region to make sure no one could forget. [80]

In Race and Reunion, David Blight concludes that, in the late nineteenth century, the

South not only needed what he calls "a new religion of nationhood," but that Southerners also

sought as well as a new theology of manliness.[81] Beginning in the 1880s, men like Henry

Grady and Daniel Tompkins used the North as their model to bring Southward a more robust

economy (with industry and agricultural diversification), including uplifting the poor by

providing manufacturing jobs, thus empowering a new southern aristocracy and giving rise to

a white middle class (Friend xv).

These ideologues could also hear Grady proclaiming the arrival of a new, modernized

South and speaking of a South rising from its ashes to become the new shining city on the hill.

This New South, based on industrialization and urbanization, would take the best features of

the Old South and combine them with the assets of the victorious North. If southerners

expressed fears about this new industrialization and urbanisation, they were told that in this

new order, progress—if it could—would be contained within the boundaries of southern

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[79] Nina Silber, The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

[80] Susan Speare Durant, "The Gently Furled Banner: The Development of the Myth of the Lost Cause" (Diss. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1972) 49-50; quotes regarding text books can be found in J. W. Jones, School History of the United States, rev.ed. (New York and New Orleans: University Publishing Co., 1901) 254, 397.

[81] David W. Blight, Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

cultural values. Economic development would not be permitted to either contaminate the image of the Old South or to corrupt the New South as it had done the North.[82] For Henry W. Grady, the loss of the Civil War did not mean that this distinctive South was to disappear. The New South, indeed, "was a South said to be refashioned in the likeness of the Victorious North: a South of industry, commerce, and hustle—a South outdoing the Yankees at their own game, yet retaining the charm and graciousness of the Old South" (qtd. in Roland 4).[83] Replying to those who felt that the division between the North and the South "existed only as a geographical division of the United States," Wilber Joseph Cash even argued that the South was "not quite a nation within a nation, but the next thing to it" (viii).[84]

1.3. A New (Northern) Theology of Manliness.

If these industrialists never articulated how this economic development would affect Southern masculinity, New South spokesmen promoted the advent of self-made manhood. Of course, self-made manhood was not a new thing in the South, but the New South "represented a dramatic attempt to make self-made manhood the hegemonic form of masculinity in the South, as it had become in the North" (Friend xv). Added to this, as Friend rightly remarks, the "desolation and poverty of the South evidenced the incredible failure of the old communal manhood that pulled the region into the Civil War" (xv). In promoting industrial growth, New South advocates "specifically pushed Southern masculinity away from its past," so much that redefining masculinity actually became a crucial feature of the New South (Friend xv).[85]

One obvious cause for the redefinition of Southern manhood was that Northern victory in the Civil War and Reconstruction meant, as Silber explains, the "final affirmation of

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[82] Rollin Osterweis, The Myth of The Lost Cause, 1865-1900, (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1973) 137.
[83] Charles P. Roland, "The Ever-Vanishing South." The Journal of Southern History 48.1 (Feb 1982): 3-20.
[84] Wilbur Joseph Cash, The Mind of the South (New York: Knopf, 1941).
[85] Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., Southern Masculinity, Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

Northern men's superior model of manliness" (634).[86] As a result, she argues, the Civil War was not only waged on the battlefield but also waged on the basis of regionally-competing versions of masculinity. Indeed, "Northern antislavery advocates often assaulted the 'brute force' and 'pugnaciousness' of southern men, indicting them for their worship of seemingly 'masculine' but extremely distasteful vices" (Silber 9). Northerners "also attacked white southern men and women for their apparent disregard for any and every form of honorable labor, for their devotion to a system which rested on idleness and slothfulness" (9). Northern men, for instance, contrasted Southern idleness to their superior masculinity, which rested on "hard-work and self-improvement [and] thus projected an image of two competing notions of masculinity … suggest[ing] that their Civil War victory had settled this contest once and for all" (Silber 616).

On that note and devoting a chapter of her book to the accused effeminacy of southerners, Nina Silber lists the "[s]tories [that] circulated through the North in June 1865 concerning the Confederates' military inaptitude" (Silber 616). For instance, Whitelaw Reid, a Northern Journalist who toured the South in May 1865, portrayed the Confederates as concerned "with feasting, and dancing, and love-making, with music improvised from the ball room," taking an even impetuous, feminine approach to war and, as Silber explains, "[t]he postwar questioning of Southern manhood involved much more than turning the rebels into whining and whimpering cowards" (qtd. in Silber 617). Northern postwar questioning of the Southern code of masculinity attacked the long and strong tradition of "chivalric and heroic behavior [. . .] the Southern code of honor [that had] bec[o]me the standard by which Southern manhood, especially the aristocrat was judged" within Southern culture (Silber 617). Silber continues: "[t]he Northern Victory, many claimed, proved that the assertions of

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[86] For more on the construction of middle-class masculinity in the antebellum north, see Charles Rosenberg, "Sexuality, Class and Role in Nineteenth Century America." American Quarterly 25 (May 1973): 131-53; and

antebellum southern men had been a sham that proved that all the talk about the Southern gentleman's strength and chivalry had been mere bravado" (620). According to Union Soldier John Phelps, Southern men "knew nothing of true masculinity" for "the Southern idea of manhood," he asserts, was little more than "a self-assured superiority and arrogance over the people of the South" (qtd. in Silber 620).

Interestingly, the Northern men's attacks on (or redefinition of) Southern masculinity did not stop when the war ended; quite the contrary. When the war stopped, Northern abolitionists were "reinvigorating their cause with a spirit of manly virility," hoping that "Southern men would now recognize Northern masculine energy" (Silber 619). The Chicago Tribune emphasized that "before the war, the Southern chivalry did not respect the Northern mudsills, and the Northern man did not come up to the Southern gentleman in his essential ideas of manhood … [I]n manly courage, a noble sense of honor, and statesmanlike qualities, a Northern man had no claims in the estimation of the South which the oligarchy were bound to respect" (2). But, now, as the Tribune explained, this gendered hierarchy has been turned on its head: "Northern courage has commanded respectful consideration" (2).[87]

Studying the character of the Southern man, some Northern doctors, as Silber explains, even suggested that the pugnaciousness and exaggerated masculinity of Southern men was rooted in their "nervous constitution, thus connecting Southern men to the same hysteria-prone physique which nineteenth century doctors frequently attributed to women" (622). In short, these doctors implied that Southern men, like many women, had "lost control of their bodily, and hence emotional, powers" (Silber 622).[88] In these times of crisis,

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Anthony E. Rotundo, "Body and Soul: Changing Ideals of American Middle-Class Manhood, 1770-1920." Journal of Social History 16 (1983): 23-38.

[87] See John W. Phelps, John W. Phelps Papers 7:87, New York Public Library (NYPL); Chicago Tribune, 25 May 1865.

[88] Dr. A. P. Dutcher, for instance, wrote: "The great rebellion that has just closed was precipitated upon the nation, in a great measure, by the high nervous temperament of the Southern people, particularly their leaders". A. P. Dutcher, "A Lecture on the Temperaments," Medical and Surgical Reporter 15.1 (Dec. 1866): 451-52; For more on the 19th century views of woman's unstable biology, read Charles Rosenberg and Carroll-

Northerners therefore did not simply ignore Southern manhood. They redefined it in terms that made it "obnoxious and offensive to the Northern understanding of respectability and self-control" (Silber 621).

As Silber remarks, when the war ended and when the nation was celebrating its reunification, most Northern men were even loathe to acknowledge any degree of "distinctive" Southern masculinity:

> Pride, indolence, luxury, and licentiousness…Manners are fantastic and fierce; brute force supplants moral principle…a sensitive vanity is called honor, and cowardly swagger, chivalry [. . .] Northerners were keenly aware that the Southern man laid claim to a certain aura of manliness, but by using the rhetoric of free-labor ideology, Northern men attempted to uncover the fallacy of those claims (620-621).

For Oliver Wendell Holmes, in particular, the notion of Southern manliness was to be discarded easily because it rested on falsehoods. Writing to Senator Albert Beveridge, he said: "I hope that time will explode the humbug of the Southern gentleman in your mind … the Southern gentlemen generally were an arrogant crew who knew nothing of the ideas that make the life of the few thousands that may be called civilized" (qtd. in Aaron 166-7).[89]

Some Northerners, however, were less prone to discard completely the idea of a distinctive Southern manliness: Northern editor Josia Holland, for instance, was one of the few northerners who recognized that "there was such a thing as manhood in the South" (qtd. in Silber 620).[90] Yet again, seen in the eyes of these Northerners, Southern masculinity

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Smith Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Women," <u>No Other Gods: On Science and American Thought</u> (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 54-70.

[89] Letter of Oliver W. Holmes to Senator A. J. Beveridge; quoted in Daniel Aaron, <u>The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War</u> (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973) 166-67.

[90] <u>Diary of George Templeton Strong</u>, 3: 583-84; John W. Phelps, <u>Phelps Papers</u>, 7: 87; quote of James M. Morey in Daniel Sutherland, <u>The Confederate Carpetbaggers</u> (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987) 236.

became the subject of redefinitions; always, of course, according to Northern standards. The

New York Tribune, for instance, stated Southern masculinity was linked to the ability to take

up honest labor:

> If there be any manhood among the ex-slaveholders, we shall soon find out.
> We mean the manhood which cheerfully attacks the difficulties of peace
> and wins victories not less renowned than those of war … The sooner all
> Southern employers, whether 'gentlemen' or not, understand the new
> organization [of labor], the better for Southern production and prosperity
> (qtd. in Silber 621).

In the same column, the journalist and novelist John De Forest suggested that the brand of

Southern masculinity rested mainly "on an overblown notion of virility and the sins of riotous

and ungoverned living," and he added scornfully, "the central trait of the 'chivalrous

southron' is an intense respect for virility. He will forgive almost any vice in a man who is

'manly' but this admiration is actually for "vices which are but exaggerations of the

masculine" (qtd. in Silber 622).[91]

The critical attention to Southern men, however, was soon complemented by a strong

focalization on Southern woman. If Southern masculinity could be discarded or redefined

according to Northern standards, the strength of southern women posed an entirely different

problem to Northern mentality, for the women "displayed an attachment to the Confederacy,

and a hostility toward the union, that far surpassed the disloyalty of Southern men" (Silber

623). Northern Journalist Sidney Andrews remarked: "the men who did the fighting are

everywhere the men who most readily accept the issues of the war" (318).[92] For the women,

however, accepting defeat was far from being a reality. A visionary Lippincott's writer (in

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[91] New York Tribune, 12 May 1865, 4; John W. DeForest, A Union Officer in the Reconstruction (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948) 183, 185.

1860) said that the women "would hear no truce and no peace" (Andrews 187). Textbook writer James Schouler added: "Southern women inspired the cause of Southern secession and scarcely an order was seen emanating from Confederate generals for exciting hatred of the North that did not allude to the softer sex" (319-20, qtd. in Silber 624).[93]

Eventually, as Silber notes, "the intransigence of Southern women became a potent symbol in Northerners' postwar political discourse, suggesting the bitterness and anger Northerners would encounter in the postwar settlement" and making "Southern women the very foundation of the Confederacy—its main supporters and defenders" (623-624). Paradoxically, "this feminine sectionalism again confirmed the weakness of Southern masculinity as it pointed to the failure of Southern leaders to assert their control over their womenfolk" (Silber 624).

Northerners took the issue of Southern gender even further, by displaying images of an emasculated and femininized Jefferson Davis, and later, through "their depictions of weak and effeminate southern men who were mired in their impotent devotion to the lost cause" (Silber 9). Seen in that light, "Davis became a symbol of all the Southern rulers' deceptive claims to manliness and chivalric courage [, and] Southerners clearly recognized in the Davis imagery an assault on their manhood" (Silber 629). The New York Independent portrayed the former president of the Confederacy as someone "[w]ho is yonder aged, lean-faced female, flying through the woods with skirts lifted of the wind, and with cloven feet disclosed in boots. That is no other than the masculine hero who promised never to desert the fortunes of the Southern Confederacy" (2, qtd. in Silber 629).[94] By playing up Davis's flight disguised as

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[92] Sidney Andrews, The South Since the War, as Shown by Fourteen Weeks of Travel and Observation in Georgia and in the Carolinas (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1866).

[93] Silber mentions the circulation of a cartoon representing Jefferson Davis, the "petticoated president," dressed in the clothes of an old women, a reference to the disguise Davis is said to have worn in fleeing the Union forces, and adds that " the wide circulation of the cartoons, as well as Barnum's display, suggest ways in which an initially middle-class image of inadequate Southern manliness reached a broader audience in the North" (626).

[94] New York Independent, 18 May 1865.

a Southern female, Northerners pictured the Southern male as an imposter of manliness no longer able to protect the women (Silber 632). Such images also found a way to "stifle this feminine hostility, to squelch that aspect of the rebellion that could not be defeated on the battlefield" (Silber 631). Ultimately, the depictions of a female-led and feminine-inspired Confederacy, offered Northern men more than just "a vehicle for subduing Southern women's intransigence" (Silber 632); it also provided Northerners the opportunity to turn "the assertions of Southern men on their heads" (Silber 630).

1.4. The Veteran and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation.

By the 1890s however, as historian Nina Silber remarks, men of the older middle and upper classes were "seeing their power and prestige under siege by new corporate leaders and by working class and immigrant unruliness" (167). For Silber, such anxiety became even more acute as many Americans found themselves challenged in their concepts of honor and mastery, not only by the loss of slaves, not only by the emancipation of women, but also by an "American society [that] underwent a series of profound transformation destined to make life in the twentieth century fundamentally different from what it had been in the nineteenth" (159). She adds:

> A wave of immigration swept over the American continent, bringing thousands
> of sojourners and settlers from distant European and Asian countries into the
> United States. These migrants from foreign lands, and also from rural America,
> poured into cities that grew even larger and ever more strained by their
> increasing, and often impoverished, populations (159).[95]

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[95] For more on the "masculinity" crisis in the late 19th century and the search for a more aggressive and active image of manliness, see John Higham, "The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s," Writing American History: Essays on Modern Scholarship, ed. John Higham (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1970) 73-102; Anthony E. Rotundo, "Body and Soul: Changing Ideals of American Middle-Class Manhood, 1770-1920." Journal of Social History 16 (Fall 1983): 23-38; and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870-1936," Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 245-96; George M. Fredrickson, The Inner Civil War: Modern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) explores

As the separate-spheres doctrine waned and the frontier closed, many turn-of-the-century men responded by redrawing gender lines and turning what were once necessary male attributes in need of restraint—aggression, passion, combativeness, strength—into male virtues in need of cultivation; hence the vogue of martial arts, competitive athletics, and the warrior ethic. The assertion of manliness had heavy ideological import: Teddy Roosevelt presented his ideal of the 'strenuous life' as a solution to the pervasive 'sissiness' that threatened the vitality and future of the nation, reinventing the Progressive reformer as a man—not a woman—and a redeemer of manly virtues, and justifying imperialism and war as a means of masculine regeneration, playing on extant anxieties about manhood and helping shape them (Schlesinger 245).[96] Many of these men, Silber explains, thus "hoped to capture a sense of masculine authority [. . .] they tried to resurrect a sense of sexual order, which was assumed to be natural and immutable, as a way to counteract what seemed to be a decaying social hierarchy and their own loss of control (167).[97] As historians emphasize, crisis situations and the ways people respond to them shape their perception of reality, and masculinity itself is constructed within a specific historical context; Thus did Southern men attempt to restore their damaged manhood after their humiliating defeat in the Civil War. Examining the postbellum world of leisure activities for men and women, Ted Ownby's Subduing Satan, for instance, draws a contrast between the 'fighting' South and the 'praying'

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northern intellectuals' postwar search for virility in the experience of the Civil War. On the masculinity crisis in the South, see Joel Williamson, The Crucible of Race, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[96] Roosevelt's discourse of Soft vs. Hard masculinity will be re-echoed later by John Fitzgerald Kennedy.in 1960. See: Dean, Robert. D. "Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy," Diplomatic History 22(1998): 29–62.

[97] For more on the "masculinity" crisis in the late 19th century and the search for a more aggressive and active image of manliness, see John Higham, "The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s," Writing American History: Essays on Modern Scholarship, ed. John Higham (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970) 73-102; Anthony E. Rotundo, "Body and Soul: Changing Ideals of American Middle-Class Manhood, 1770-1920." Journal of Social History 16 (Fall 1983): 23-38; and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870-1936," Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 245-96; George Fredrickson in The Inner Civil War (New York: Harper and Row, 1993) 2202-25, explores northern intellectuals' postwar search for virility in the experience of the Civil War. On the masculinity crisis in the South, see Joel Williamson, The Crucible of Race (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

South in which women were seen as guardians of Christian piety and virtue, while men were seen as rambunctious ne'er do-wells, constantly seeking the solace of other men in hunting, swearing, drinking, and brawling. If home and church belonged to women, street, saloon, and woods belonged to men.

Voicing what Kaplan names "a rescue mission for American manhood, from the equally threatening forces of a modern industrial democracy" (659), the revitalized male body, geographic distension and overseas conquest figure[d] as a temporal return to origins, literally as nostalgia, *nostos*, the return home (Kaplan 664). In this context and while urging the US to annex the Philippines in the 1900s, Senator Albert Beveridge asked his fellow men: "[w]hat does all this mean for everyone of us?" and answered: "it means opportunity for all the glorious manhood of the republic—the most virile, ambitious, impatient, militant manhood the world has ever seen" (qtd. in Kaplan 660). Kaplan concludes: "in a period of the 'New Woman,'the 'New South,' and the 'New Empire,' the New White American Man was invented as a tradition, to use Hobsbawm's term [. . .] as nothing new at all, but an enduring recoverable past" (664).

A similar "rescue" mission was conducted on the pages of the popular historical romances at the turn of the century. Indeed, referring to the 1898 bestseller by Charles Major, When Knighthood Was in Flower, Kaplan quotes the heroine's declaration on seeing the hero fighting a duel: "For once I have found a real man, full of manliness" (Major 27).[98] Major's novel inspired a host of imitations and these novels, as Kaplan explains, become "the site where a man can reassert his 'militant manhood,' and where a woman serves as the eyes of the world" (659).[99] In the 1890s, the lament for the close of the frontier, announced by Frederick Jackson Turner in his 1893 address, loudly voiced such nostalgia for the "formative

[98] Charles Major, When Knighthood Was in Flower (1898: rpt. Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2009).
[99] Amy Kaplan, "Romancing the Empire: The Embodiement of American Masculinity in the Popular Historical Novel of the 1890s." American Literary History 2.4 (1990): 659-690.

crucible of American Manhood [, and] territorial expansion overseas offered a new frontier, where the essential American man could be reconstituted" (Kaplan 664).[100]

Eventually, the efforts of the historical romancers seemed to take effect, and most Northerners found themselves paying homage to a new and invigorated image of southern white manhood—to the manly, even patriotic, veterans of the Confederacy. For many men indeed—veterans and sons of veterans as well as noncombatants—the Civil War, Silber notes, represented the "pinnacle of manliness" (169). The heroic veterans of the most recent war in Spain were also venerated. Novelists likewise paid tribute to the southern white men and gave American culture a new set of regional icons. Perhaps none was more enduring—with the exception of the deified Robert E. Lee—than the one personified in Owen Wister's hugely successful novel of the early twentieth century, The Virginian" (Silber 12), which, portraying a southerner as a cowboy in the West without any reference to the war, established a new mythical American manhood. Wister's laconic Wyoming cowboy also ironically taps into the business spirit of the turn of the century, embroidering a tall tale about frog ranching in Tulare, California, with roundups and corrals and scores of web-footed ranch hands herding the creatures so they could be sent in tank cars to New York and San Francisco as restaurant delicacies. It might have mattered to the creator of Rhett Butler that Wister was the grandson of Pierce Butler, a rich Philadelphian who inherited a Georgia sea island cotton plantation and married the actress Fanny Kemble, who after visiting the plantation and seeing slavery first hand, quarreled so strongly with her husband that he divorced her and won custody of their two daughters.[101]

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[100] Even Tom, in The Glass Menagerie, seems to tell us that the Southern man, himself, needs open spaces, new frontiers where he could reconstitute his essential manhood.

[101] In "To the Reader," the introduction to The Virginian, Wister wrote that, when first published, his book's title caused reviewers to suspect that it was a sentimental southern colonial historical romance. He goes on to explain that it is historical, but already the world he had known and depicted in the west is gone:

It is a vanished world. No journeys, save those which memory can take, will bring you to it now. The mountains are there, far and shining, and the sunlight, and the infinite earth, and the air that seems forever the true fountain of youth, but where is the buffalo, and the wild antelope, and

Robert E. Lee died in 1870, but neither he nor his legend disappeared. In fact, the legend grew along with the sprouting of all those Confederate town square monuments and the memorializing of the Southern "Lost Cause." It transcended the South. For instance, Northerners praised "Lee as the exceptional Southern man, as the one who possessed the masculine reserve which all others had apparently lacked," for, according to Silber, "Lee epitomized the possibility of reformed Southern manhood, how the Southern man might be northernized in the context of military defeat and the postwar settlement" (623). He embodied the man whose individuality had been sacrificed on the altar of political allegiances. A Northern textbook writer wrote: "[w]hatever real anguish Lee may have felt [at Appotomax], he kept all emotion suppressed while the formal interview lasted; his manner was dignified and impassive" (qtd. in Schouler 600).[102] In this age of greed and materialism, there was a sense that the Civil War veteran, who supposedly had fought for principles and not for money, offered a truly masculine ideal, so much that terms like "honor," "duty," and "pride" formerly reserved to a small percentage of the Southern society—i.e. the planter's class—were now referring to a larger community of living monuments. James Fenimore Cooper once justly observed that "in proportion to the population, there are more men who belong to what is termed the class of gentlemen, in the old southern states of America than in any other country

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where the horseman with his pasturing thousands? So like its old self does the sage-brush seem when revisited, that you wait for the horseman to appear. But he will never come again. He rides in his historic yesterday. … And yet the horseman is still so near our day that in some chapters of this book, which were published separate at the close of the nineteenth century, the present tense was used. … Time has flowed faster than my ink.

As Wister ponders,

[w]hat is become of the horseman, the cowpuncher, the last romantic figure upon our soil? For he was romantic. Whatever he did, he did with his might. The bread that he earned was earned hard, the wages that he squandered were squandered hard….The cow-puncher's ungoverned hours did not unman him. If he gave his word, he kept it; Wall Street would have found him behind the times. Nor did he talk lewdly to women; Newport would have thought him old-fashioned. He and his brief epoch make a complete picture, for in themselves they were as complete as the pioneers of the land or the explorers of the sea.

Owen Wister, <u>The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains</u> (New York: Macmillan, 1902).

[102] James Schouler, <u>History of the United States of America, Under the Constitution</u>, 6 vols (1899; New York: Dodd, Mead, 1904).

in the world" (292, qtd. in William R. Taylor 97).[103] Rejecting the enslavement and the dependency of the pocketbook, the former soldier/gentleman demonstrated that "courageous and manly independence which now seemed sorely lacking in American society" (Silber 169). Paying tribute to the old soldiers at an 1892 Memorial Day ceremony in Dubuque, Iowa, one speaker called attention to these soldiers' exemplary manhood: "[t]hey remind us that with all the greed there is in this world, the holy leaven of manliness, true manliness may yet be found" (qtd. in Silber 169).[104]

If the character of the war veteran soon offered the perfect outlet to what could be qualified as a gendered postwar reconstruction, the national admiration for manly courage and bravery was to be felt in both camps—the North and the South alike. As Silber explains:

> [t]he appeal to a common manhood thus became a critical component of the
> reunion mentality in the 1890s. [. . .] In a truly civilized and democratic
> society, all men could share in the common recognition of their strength and
> virility and all women could benefit from the protection they would receive
> from manly endeavors (168).

Most notably, the Civil War veteran revealed "the nation's common and now-unified legacy of manliness" (Silber 168). As orator Theodore Bean explains, in 1888:

> the great fatherhood of our country left a progeny North and South, whose
> loyalty to leaders, whose bravery in battle, whose industry and indurance [sic],

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[103] Dubuque Daily Times, May 31, 1892, May 31, 1894. In the introduction to his book, Democracy and Empire (1900), sociologist Franklin Giddings saw a distinctly modern development which located the beginning of the 20th Century and the American territorial expansion as the site for recuperating a primitive corporeal virility. Change in masculinity was no change at all, but simply a return to a mythical origin. Novelist Frank Norris explains: "somewhere deep down in the heart of every Anglo-Saxon lies the predatory instinct of his Viking ancestors—an instinct that a thousand years of respectability and taxpaying have not quite succeeded in eliminating," qtd. in Amy Kaplan, The Anarchy of the Empire 98 and Larzer Ziff 265; Frank Norris, "The Frontier Gone at Last" (1902); rpt. in Frank Norris, Novels and Essays (New York: Library of America, 1986); Amy Kaplan, The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Larzer Ziff, The American 1890s: Life and Times of a Lost Generation (New York: Viking Press, 1966).

demonstrates the glory of our enheritance [sic], and in the grand battles fought

between ourselves, however unfortunate in some respects, reveals a manhood of

the Republic, as now reunited, capable and willing to protect and defend the

Union against the political powers of the earth. [105]

To signify these relationships of power, numerous movements of reconciliation arose.

Organized in 1889, the fraternal society, the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), for

instance, stressed Southern patriotism, suggesting that a recollection of the revolution to

which the South had made great contributions, could erase the memory of the Civil War

(Silber 164). Like the SAR, the Daughters of the American Revolution, founded in 1890,

believed in the necessity of a recollection of the heroic deeds in the American Revolution.

Admiration for a common manhood would thus transform a private and sectional romance

into a collective romance.[106]

Part of the sentimental rhetoric of reconciliation—what Silber names "romance of

reunion"—could also be found in literature, where the marriage between northern men and

southern women, for example, often became a potent metaphor for legitimizing the political

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[104] William R. Taylor, <u>Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character</u> (New York: George Braziller, 1961); James Fenimore Cooper, <u>Notions of the Americans Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor</u>, 2 vols (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1832).

[105] Address of Theodore W. Bean of Norristown, Pennsylvania, Delivered at Seven Pines national Cemetery on Memorial Day, May 30, 1888. Under the Auspices of Phil Kearny Post No.10, GAR of Richmond, Virginia, Richmond, 1888, 5; qtd. in Silber, <u>The Romance of Reunion</u> 169. Paying tribute to the old soldiers at an 1892 Memorial Day ceremony in Dubuque, Iowa, one speaker called attention to their manhood: "They remind us that with all the greed there is in this world, the holy leaven of manliness, true manliness may yet be found". <u>Dubuque Daily Times</u>, May 31, 1892, May 31, 1894; qtd. in Nina Silber, <u>The Romance of Reunion,</u> 169.

[106] I use the term "romance" here to refer to the "ideal" model of manhood that became praised at the time. According to Sheldon Van Auken in "The Southern Historical Novel in the Early Twentieth Century," the volume of historical romances published in the 1890s was "unprecedented in American history" (158). According to Fred Lewis Pattee in <u>A History of American Literature Since 1870</u>, this infatuation with Southern fiction began as early as the 1870s and the South as literary subject became "a national phenomenon" primarily because of Northern publishers and, in part, by a desire to heal sectional rivalries after the Civil War, in turn sentimentalizing the South as a paradise, a lost garden of Eden (294-5). Much of the literature portrayed a romantic image of the South, so much that <u>Scribner's</u> in a 1881 editorial denounced the market for lavishing an "unreasoning idolatry … upon Southern literature of the past" (Moses 456, qtd. in Harold 94); Sheldon Van Auken, "The Southern Historical Novel in the Early Twentieth Century," <u>The Journal of Southern History</u> 14.2 (May 1948): 157-91; Fred Lewis Pattee, <u>A History of American Literature Since 1870</u> (New York: Century, 1915); Montrose J. Moses, <u>The Literature of the South</u> (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell,

and social reconstruction of the formerly divided states. Used as a reconciliation device, "the southern female become[s] the tempestuous and romantic belle, the object of northern man's desires, and, ultimately, the feminine partner in a symbolic marital alliance which became the principal representation of sectional union" (Silber 6).[107] Marriage between the regions came to signify an arrangement of proper, well-ordered, and hierarchical gender relations and became the metaphor for the reunited states and for a nation of clearly defined laws and hierarchies in regard to both the North and South and men and women (Silber 633).

Understandably, and since women were to be the principal agents of this desirable reconciliation, when confederate feelings still lingered heavily in the South, Yankees "often held southern women responsible for maintaining this vision of hindsight" (Silber 165). As Silber explains:

> The now elderly ladies of the Civil war generation, the southern grandes dames of the 1890s, it was believed, clung most fervently to the old Southern's legacy [. . .] and Northerners believed that Southern women possessed a more constricted world view which clung to family, neighborhood, and state and could not make the more abstract leap to nationhood (Silber 165).

For Silber, such discourses also found their way into literature, as texts often reasserted "the traditional Victorian view of gender, a view that placed women by hearth and home while men moved in a wider and more complicated world of national allegiances" (166). The issue of gender thus came to be placed at the center of the literature of reconstruction in the Postbellum South, as authors seemed to argue that if Southern belles were not ready to

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1910); Gwendolyn Jones Harold, "Mary Johnston and the Virginia Tradition, Part One," The Ellen Glasgow Journal of Southern Women Writers. Vol.2 (2009): 85-120.

[107] On this subject, we can read: Jane Turner Censer, "Reimagining the North-South Reunion: Southern Women Novelists and the Intersectional Romance, 1876-1900," Southern Cultures 5 (Summer 1999): 64-91.

surrender, reconstruction would go through men. Such an argument, however, immediately prompts another question: which men?

For the national leaders of the time, the nation had to commit itself to something noble and high-minded, and it had to reveal the vigor and fortitude of men; or, as Silber puts it, "[f]eeling increasingly alienated from economic and social productivity, American men at the turn of the century searched relentlessly for images and activities that might restore their depleted reserves of power and virility" (167). Theodore Roosevelt himself, who infused all of his rhetoric with references to manhood, frequently connected the will of the nation with the virility of its men. His view of manhood thus stressed a gendered notion of courage and bravery, as well as a commitment to higher principles. Roosevelt often berated the overcivilized fop, the decadent individual who abandoned America, hungered for European culture, and "lost the hardihood and manly courage by which alone he can conquer in the keen struggle of our national life" (201). Putting the issue even more directly, Roosevelt explained, "[n]o nation can achieve real greatness if its people are not both essentially moral and essentially manly" (201).[108]

If times of crisis offered for the Northern and Southern males the opportunity to reimagine the masculine self, since "American males hoped to reestablish seemingly natural gender demarcations that would affirm a basis sense of male virility and female weakness" (Silber 168)[109] and, if as Silber notes, continuity and reconstruction were articulated on a postwar conception of manhood—a conception which stressed similarities in manhoods rather

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[108] Theodore Roosevelt, "The Monroe Doctrine," rpt. in Theodore Roosevelt, American Ideals and Other Essays, Social and Political (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1897) 241; Read also Theodore Roosevelt, "What 'Americanism' Means." Forum 17 (April 1894): 196-206.

[109] Silber details how "students in the 1890s became obsessed with a rough and aggressive athleticism, perhaps hoping to challenge "the model of vigorous femininity" that had emerged in female colleges in the 1880s where women's physical well-being had been emphasized [. . .] In doing so, they often reinterpreted the whole concept of manhood, focusing on aggressiveness and athleticism more than the earlier qualities of restraint and self-control" (The Romance of Reunion 168). See also Howard Mumford Jones, The Age of Energy (New York: Viking, 1971).

than on their distinctiveness with "American men [seemingly] agree[ing] on the need to reinvigorate the nation with a proper sense of manliness" (171), the arguments differed on the question of what made a proper man, an ideal man. Silber explains:

> Southern men undoubtedly appeared as warriors who had failed, or perhaps refused, to adapt to a modern industrial society and this would be forever linked to a soldierly, and masculine, past. Of course, this image did not always confer respect on southern manhood. In some circles, northerners continued to subscribe to an image of weak, old, and impotent Confederates who chattered, harmlessly and humorously, about the lost cause. But northern men's anxieties about their own masculinity helped to put that image, and the Confederate veteran, in a more positive light. In effect, the southern soldier became a more noble warrior precisely because his cause had been lost and because he had not been able to share the fruits of victory. His loss, in other words, insured his manly independence from the state and from all-pervasive money powers, in turn translating the Southern Gentleman, the hero of the South, into mythic status (173).

Not surprisingly, everywhere they turned, veterans themselves were caught between myths and realities. Seen in the mythographer Joseph Campbell's light, the hero returning from his quest sacrifices his own individuality for the good of his society. Campbell indicates that the archetypal hero was faced with three possible scenarios: being overwhelmed by trying to educate people who are most concerned about their own survival, being destroyed after being found not to be worthy of adulation, or having people not understand the point of the quest, and seeing his heroic career come to an inglorious end. In Campbell's view "the return and reintegration with society [. . .] the hero himself may find the most difficult requirement of

all" (36).[110] Heroes are often important to their community as symbols of what could be, not as individuals. They are elevated to heroes because they are conceived as having made some past or present attempt to save or preserve their world. Commemoration of them is, therefore, in a sense an attempt to order the past, to extract from its frightening disorder events or people or ideas the culture needs to celebrate in order to understand the present.

How many "Southern Gentlemen" took part in these parades and how many of them were "displayed" or "showcased" as living monuments of an old order is hard to tell. Yet as these instances of commemoration in the 19th Century reveal, it soon became clear that the history of Reconstruction, unlike that of the Civil War, would be controversial and uneasy, yet obviously hinged around the needs for a remasculinization of the South. The Lost Cause mythology and reconstruction rested upon the idea of the South as the site of the Veteran, the hero, the Gentleman—a figure who was necessarily silent about his mastery (Clark 2).[111] It also becomes obvious that the Southern Gentleman—outside his possible role as veteran of the war—must have felt caught between two worlds, the old order that he had known—an order for which he was the prime symbol whether as planter, lawyer, politician, or country squire—and the new one in which he was asked to believe. No man, even the strongest, could have survived the war and faced the defeat without wondering what was awaiting him in a culture and a land that had suffered so much. That was, as C. Vann Woodward has argued, in The Burden of Southern History, so "un-American."[112] Just as with Campbell's mythical hero, the return from the quest for our Southern Gentleman may have undoubtedly been accompanied by fears. Yet, as Stephen Berry remarks, Southern men were "encouraged to cloak their hearts and stifle their doubts" (11). By hushing these for the benefit of the

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[110] Joseph Campbell, <u>Hero With a Thousand Faces</u> (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949).

[111] Suzanne Clark, <u>Cold Warriors: Manliness on Trial in the Rhetoric of the West</u> (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

[112] C. V. Woodward, <u>The Burden of Southern History</u> (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960).

community, these men "carefully groom[ed] their public persona as to become it" (Berry 11).[113] Individual fears of identity loss may nonetheless have been too real.

1.5. The 'Feminine Men' of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.

Almost immediately following the Civil War, Southerners had proclaimed a "New South," implying not only the end of the "Old" Southern institutions of segregation and slavery but also the beginning of a new era of growth, industrialization, and prosperity. From the vantage point of the 21st Century, this assessment seemed premature, if not downright wrong. In fact, the South, as Michael O'Brien explains, remained primarily a land of poor farming lands until the 1940s.[114] Only then, and after World War II, did the real New South of industrial growth and urban development begin to emerge.[115]

By the 1940s, on the front of economic transformations, the "regime change" of the South, as economists would call it, was almost total. Developments such as the mechanization of cotton harvesting, induced vigorous movements to attract business through tax-breaks, municipal bonds for plant construction, and industrial development, what James C. Cobb refers to as the "selling of the South".[116] The forces of Southern boosterism, however, did not come into collision with the demands of racial justice before the 1960s. As a consequence, and as Gavin Wright explains, "surplus labor conditions made it relatively easy for employers to reserve newly created job openings for white only" (82).[117] For example, in South Carolina, which had been a black-majority state as late as 1920, 90% of new manufacturing jobs went to whites between 1940 and 1965. The South was thus trying to modernize economically

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[113] Stephen W. Berry, All that Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[114] Michael O'Brien, The Idea of the American South: 1920-1941 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

[115] On this subject, we can read: Jack Temple Kirby, Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

[116] James C. Cobb, The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1980 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982. 2d edition Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

while maintaining entrenched traditions and institutions of racial segregation. As historian Numan Bartley puts it, "in the 1940, the *raison d'être* of Southern State governments was [still] their protection of white supremacy and social stability" (160).[118] The hard lesson of this history, as Wright notes, is that "purely economic forces were relatively ineffectual in bringing about fundamental social change" (82). In light of these effects, Blackwelder adds, "poor education levels and the caste system of the South had discouraged Northern industrialists from moving South in the 1940s and 1950s, despite the attraction of low wages and weak labour organizations," rendering the South's particularity surprisingly persistent in economic as well as in cultural or political life (50).

On the front of social change and as early as the 1920s, massive out-migration from the region marked the South, as Southerners were beginning to move into the region's towns and cities, a trend that continued into "the twentieth-century as textile mills, garment factories and tobacco plants rose from the landscape (Blackwelder 45). It was women who "predominated among these city's newcomers" (Blackwelder 45). Between 1900 and 1920, for instance, the number of single, white-working women in Atlanta tripled and the number of single African-American women grew as well. With these changes in women's work patterns, Julia Blackwelder explains that an "increasing proportion of white families came to depend on women's wages for all or part of their income" (45).[119]

This influx of women into the public arena was particularly unsettling to the men of the period (for Southerners and Northerners alike). In the white-collar office by 1930, women comprised 52.5 percent of the total clerical workforce and 96 percent of all stenographers and

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[117] Gavin Wright, "Persisting Dixie: The South as an Economic Region," The American South in the Twentieth Century, eds. Craig S. Pascoe, Karen Trahan Leathem, and Andy Ambrose (Athens: University of Georgia Press. 2005) 77-90.
[118] Numan Bartley, "In Search of the New South: Southern Politics after Reconstruction," The Promise of American History, eds. Stanley T. Kutler and Stanley N. Katz (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

typists (Kimmel 87). Little wonder if in the "gendered office" a man might feel he "had lost his manhood" (Kimmel 97). Even before the Crash of 1929 rendered many men jobless and powerless, men's work had become "an increasingly unreliable proving ground" of manhood (Kimmel 192). Inversely, the entrance of women en masse into colleges and voting booths as well as the workplace was perceived as "masculinizing" them (96; see also Allen 73-101).[120] Kimmel quotes Anthony Ludovici, who declared in 1927: "Feminism really spells Masculinism" since "exposure to the vicissitudes and asperities of the struggle for existence brings out the combative, predatory, and latent male side of female nature, and represses and impoverishes its dependent, peace loving and sequacious side" (198).[121] The flip side of masculinized women was feminized men: a popular song of 1926— "Masculine Women! Feminine Men!"—noted that "It's hard to tell 'em apart today" (qtd. in Kimmel 204). As the workplace became increasingly "a site of uneasiness" wherein men did "women's work" (Kimmel 118), the ideal of manhood gradually gave way to the notion of masculinity— something that had to be constantly demonstrated, was always in question, and could easily be "undone by a perception of being too feminine" (Kimmel 120).

The problem of male identity was even taken up by experts and professionals who sought to foster proper sex-role socialization within the family. The problem of absent or distant fathers, excessive maternal influence, and the "overfeminization" of boys became standard themes in academic and popular discourse, and the enemy for many midcentury male critics was less the female reformer and more the assertive, civilizing woman in the private

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[119] Julia Kirk Blackwelder, "Women and Leadership: A Century of Change in the South," <u>The American South in the Twentieth Century,</u> eds. Craig S. Pascoe, Karen Trahan Leathem, and Andy Ambrose (Athens: University of Georgia Press. 2005) 39-50.

[120] Michael S. Kimmel, <u>Manhood in America: A Cultural History</u> (New York: Free, 1996); Frederick Lewis Allen, <u>Only Yesterday</u> (New York: Harper, 1931).

[121] Anthony Ludovici, "Woman's Encroachment on Man's Domain," <u>Antifeminism in America: A Collection of Readings from the Literature of the Opponents to U.S. Feminism, 1848 to the Present</u>, eds. Angela Howard, Sasha Ranaé & Adams Tarrant (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1997).

sphere and a looming matriarchy emanating from the home (Schlesinger 246).[122] Critics worried that professional men were now living a pampered life of ease; that the expanding, impersonal bureaucracy doomed too many men to sedentary, unambitious lives of paper pushing and that urban boys lived a namby-pamby existence, enveloped by female influence. Luxury and idleness had long been scorned as emasculating, but the fear that males were internalizing feminine values provoked a new dread as critics decried the 'overcivilization' of the nation by aggressive female reformers and moralizing women who attacked saloons and brothels.

American males thus became the victims of a smothering, overpowering, suspiciously collectivist mass society—a society that had smashed the once-autonomous male self, elevated women to a position of power in the home, and doomed men to a slavish conformity not wholly unlike that experienced by men living under Yankee rule. American men had grown soft. Whether they were "organization men" softened by the "group ethos" (William H. Whyte), "other-directed" men made conformist and self-less by an affluent mass society (David Riesman), men left sexually distorted by puritanical norms that constrain healthy heterosexual relations and ultimately encourage male sexual "inversion" (Robert Lindner), weak men and helpless boys victimized by parasitic women and/or overbearing mothers (Philip Wylie, Edward Strecker), or men who fell prey to some admixture of the above forces (Look writers), American males were now the subject of unprecedented scrutiny.[123]

For instance, psychiatrists "routinely diagnosed men as homosexual if they exhibited traits that were seen as less than manly—an abnormal dread of dust and dirt; for example, or a

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[122] Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., The Politics of Hope (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963) 237–46.

[123] For expressions of concern about the state of the male self in the 1940s and 1950s, see William H. Whyte Jr., The Organization Man (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1956); David Riesman, Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950); Robert Lindner, Must You Conform? (New York: Grove Press, 1956); Philip Wylie, Generation of Vipers (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942); Philip Wylie, "The Abdicating Male and How the Gray Flannel Mind Exploits Him through His Women." Playboy 3 (Nov. 1956) 23–24, 50, 79; and Edward Strecker, Their Mothers' Sons: The Psychiatrist Examines an American Problem (Philadelphia: JB Lippincott, 1946).

finicky attention to clothing and personal appearance" (such psychiatrists would recognize in Quentin Compson a familiar syndrome) (Kimmel 99). Therefore, to avoid being branded a "sissy," one worked out in the gym (Kimmel 210) or was drawn, as countless were, to boxing ("the manly art") or joined the rest of America in going "sports crazy" (Kimmel 137; see also Allen 66, 172-75). Or one engaged in activities, like hunting, fishing, and riding that recalled earlier historical notions of manly virtue and America's frontier origins or invoked traditional virtues like "honor" and "thrift" (Kimmel 95, 102). One could also signify one's masculinity by reading about all these things. As part of the resistance to "the feminization of boyhood" (Kimmel 121), dime novels and weekly magazines and pulp fiction provided examples for boys interested in becoming real men.

If male bonding was part of "masculine resistance to feminization" (Kimmel 124), displaying itself in horseplay, games, and drinking, such resistance was problematized by psychologists and other reformers who linked such male socializing to sexual deviance (125-26). Furthermore, "[i]f women abandoned their traditional role as homemakers or if men abandoned their traditional role as breadwinners," wrong messages might be sent (Kimmel 201-02). Bread-making dads, emasculated by default, risked turning their boys into sissies. "By the 1930s," Kimmel notes, "three fourths of American fathers said they regularly read magazine articles about child care" (201), a statistic that can be interpreted in a number of ways: as indicating a new notion of manhood that included "a strong orientation toward the family and home" (Donaldson 64),[124] or as the response of disempowered fathers bent on helping their sons avoid their fathers' fate (Kimmel 201).

In their pep-talk about courage and duty addressed to younger boys or to younger men-in-the making, the fathers also suggested that manhood was "made," in the sense of

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[124] Susan V. Donaldson, "Cracked Urns: Faulkner, Gender, and Art in the South," Faulkner and the Artist: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1993, eds. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1996) 51-81.

being a personal accomplishment. Manhood thus meant adhering to a set of values by which men could judge other men. As a result "being a man" required proving oneself as one the lads by demonstration of physical strength, ability, sexual prowess, and so on. The injunction "Be A Man!," as John Tosh remarks, implies that there were indeed only certain ways in which one could be a man. Such standards obviously demanded a high degree of effort and suppression of self.[125] Manhood thus became a concept in the critical discourse of gender, signaling not only an affirmation of masculinity, but also a dissection of its social privileges.

Not surprisingly and to use Berry's words, a staggering amount of evidence in critical and historical studies has been "dedicated to the public, external, and projected aspects of men's lives and significantly less dedicated to the private, internal, and introspective" (11).[126] For this reason, this dissertation, then, will be dedicated to the "inner experience of masculinity, to the private landscapes men negotiated in their confrontation with what their society claimed a man should do and be" (Berry 12). Yet, if Stephen Berry attempts an "empathetic" account of Southern manhood, as he calls it, through the lens of diaries and personal letters, I attempt the exercise using the lens of Southern fiction.

The first chapter examines Ned Hazard in John Pendleton Kennedy's <u>Swallow Barn</u>, a planter-to-be who strives to fashion himself according to the ideal of the English gentleman and to the chivalric fancies of his "Belle," Bel Tracy. If one believes the happy ending of the novel, Ned does live up to the ideal of Southern masculinity that he finally "secures" through his official union to Bel Tracy. A close reading of the novel, however, suggests a man less moderate than the persona followed by Ned's fellow-planters and gentlemen. Ned, the young

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[125] John Tosh, <u>Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain</u> (Harlow: Longman, 2005). On this subject, we can read: Anthony Rotundo, <u>American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era</u> (New York: Basic Books, 1993) or Peter N. Stearns, <u>Be A Man! Males in Modern Society</u> (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979).

[126] Stephen W. Berry, <u>All that Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

bachelor, is torn by insecurities as he wishes to find balance, learning, and control of the Gentleman but finds his formulation of a masculine self threatened externally by female instability and patriarchal authority and internally by his own insecurities. As John Mayfield remarks, Kennedy suggests that the ideal of Southern gentility is on the verge of extinction, yet the novel serves as an essential point of reference for understanding Southern masculinity (xxv).

Like Pendleton's character, William Faulkner himself was all too aware that he had an imposing masculine legacy to live up to. In an era defined by historians such as Michael Kimmel, Anthony Rotundo, Clyde Griffen, Angus McLaren, and Kevin White as "anxiety-ridden" with a radical instability and multiplicity of identities—femininity, masculinity, and heterosexuality—it is no wonder then that masculine performances in Faulkner tend to reverberate with considerable anxiety.[127] Gender became increasingly crucial, "often eclipsing," Angus McLaren argues, "one's rank, status, profession, race, or religion as the key determinant of personality" (1). Also, in a time when gender and sexuality were receiving ever-increasing emphasis as determinants of identity, worries were publicly voiced about what was perceived as a collective decline in virility. If manhood could be achieved through various rites of passage—through war, hunting, athleticism, ordeals of various sorts—it could also be lost, and the possibility of that loss hovered over Faulkner and his entire generation. From this perspective, the flowering of Southern literature in the 1920s and 1930s testified to this search for another South and it brought with it a different approach to Southern

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[127] On this subject, read Susan V. Donaldson, guest ed. "Faulkner, Memory, History; Faulkner and Masculinity; Faulkner and Sexuality." Special Issues of The Faulkner Journal, (Fall 2004/Spring 2005) (Fall 1999/Spring 2000) (Fall 1993/Spring 1994). Michael Kimmel, Manhood in America: A Cultural History (New York: Free, 1996); Michel Gresset, Fascination: Faulkner's Fiction, 1919-1936 (Durham: Duke UP, 1989); Clyde Griffen, "Reconstructing Masculinity from the Evangelical Revival to the Waning of Progressivism: A Speculative Synthesis," Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America, eds. Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1990) 183-204; Kevin White, The First Sexual Revolution: The Emergence of Male Heterosexuality in Modern America (New York: New York UP, 1993); Angus McLaren, The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870-1930 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997).

masculinity, surprisingly "resurrecting the old paradigm of honor and mastery" (Friend xvii). As Numan V. Bartley explains, the "ethic of the Old Order was reexamined in order to provide an angle of moral vision never attempted in the South" (116).[128] Seen in this light, the three brothers at the center of <u>The Sound and The Fury</u> represent not only three different masculinities, but three different ways in which Southerners of the era sought other worlds to live in: Quentin Compson, the eldest, embraces the aristocratic model of southern gentlemanliness; the next brother, Jason, attaches himself to the present and the emerging southern liberalism that framed the rise of the New South; the youngest brother, Benjy, is beyond time, "stripped of history, memory, and authority" as well as the conceptualizations of race and gender. As embodied through the three brothers at the center of the novel, the atmosphere in which Faulkner's male characters live (and in which Faulkner lived) is one of hesitation and gender confusion (Mayfield xvii). Chapter three of this dissertation will thus attempt to explore this world as it is portrayed in Faulkner's <u>The Sound and the Fury</u>.

The fourth chapter examines the masculine self-fashioning of General Archbald in Ellen Glasgow's <u>The Sheltered Life</u>. Given what is expected of the "hero" in Southern romance, the novel appears as a devastating satire on patrician values. As Archbald reflects on his life as Southern gentleman in a time of cultural and historical transformation, the issues of father-son relations, southern gentility, the hunting tradition, and aging emerge as the most important aspects for Archbald's and the other men's constitution of masculinity. Glasgow identifies General Archbald as something of a liminal figure, poised between an older organic, hierarchical worldview and self-made individualism. General Archbald's struggle, especially his attempt to question the patriarchal model prescribed for elite men, and his younger neighbor George Birdsong's failure to fashion himself according to Eva Birdsong's ideal, highlight conflicting ideals of masculinity in twentieth-century Virginia. General Archbald's

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[128] Numan V. Bartley, <u>The Evolution of Southern Culture</u> (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988).

reflections on aging and the young generation's departure for war demonstrate that roles and expectations for aging patriarchs and for the young men of this period were indefinite and frustrating.

The fifth chapter focuses on Margaret Mitchell's <u>Gone with the Wind</u> and the masculine images it portrays in a time of war, a time demanding an effective display of typically-masculine qualities (strength, courage, control, mastery, honor). The novel offers a catalog of manly positions and men live in a zone where polarities (Southerner vs. Yankee, soft vs. hard masculinities, masculinity vs. femininity) are not as fixed as they first appear. Men—Ashley, Rhett, or even Gerald O'Hara—and women—Scarlett or Melanie—are no longer static representatives of a decorous culture but emphasize that a new ideal was being born. To use Mayfield's words, and seen through the lens of masculinity, <u>Gone with the Wind</u> witnesses a type of "masterless men who cut themselves loose from society, challenge it, redefine it, and often leave it altogether" (486). This type of man helps to reflect on what William Gilmore Simms himself defined as a "mixt" character, whose "place on the Great Chain was shaky and who was taking new forms, for better or for worse" (Simms, qtd. in Mayfield 486).[129]

The sixth and final chapters explore two works of Tennessee Williams and his portrayal of the Southern "bachelor-boy" to the detriment of the Southern man and to the detriment of the Southern Beau who seems to have completely "disappeared" from both <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u> and <u>The Glass Menagerie</u>. Scholars such as Harvey Graff recognize the importance of "adolescence," to use an anachronistic term, as an important aspect of social and familial history.[130] Likewise, historians such as Anthony Rotundo see the cultural

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[129] John Mayfield, "'The Soul of a Man!' William Gilmore Simms and the Myths of Southern Manhood." <u>Journal of the Early Republic</u> 15.3 (1995): 477-500.

[130] Harvey J. Graff, <u>Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America</u> (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995).

construction of manhood occurring, in part, against definitions of boyhood.[131] Building on such work, this project examines Williams' perspectives on Southern boyhood and manhood (fathers, southern planters, etc) and the relation of those perceptions in the constitution of a masculinity inherited from 'absent' or 'invisible' representatives of manhood.

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[131] Anthony E. Rotundo, "Boy Culture: Middle-Class Boyhood in Nineteenth Century America," in <u>Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America</u>, 15-36; and <u>American Manhood</u>, 20-1.

CHAPTER 2

JOHN PENDLETON KENNEDY'S SWALLOW BARN (1832)

In 1828 (the year John Pendleton Kennedy began planning Swallow Barn), Andrew Jackson was elected. Two years later, in 1831-32, Virginia came near adopting legislation looking toward emancipation of slaves, William Lloyd Garrison going so far as to advocate a dissolution of the Union, maintaining that to remain united with states that retained slavery was "an agreement with hell and a covenant with death" (qtd. in The South, Old and New 21).[132] His violent abolition sheet "The Liberator," which bore the motto, "No Union with slaveholders" (1844), came to be adopted as a slogan of the abolitionists—a band of active agitators who followed Garrison's lead. The Southampton insurrection (1831) eventually alarmed the slaveholders, and the rise of the anti-slavery agitators—to whose influence the insurrection was attributed—awakened great resentment. Above all things however, Garrison's movement announced that a social and political transformation was already at work.

Economically also, the adoption of improved machinery, notably the cotton gin, was making the growing of cotton far more profitable than it had been before, and the rapid development of the Gulf States greatly increased the demand for slave labor. But in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Virginia social life was already in a transitional stage. Many of the great planters had been ruined by the Revolution, which in Virginia had far-reaching economic and social consequences. By disestablishing the Anglican Church and abolishing the laws of primogeniture that had kept intact the great tobacco farms, Jefferson and his followers had split the large plantations. Many of the aristocrats, now poverty-stricken, had gone west and their lands had passed into other hands. The 1830s voiced increased concerns and demands for abolition, and on the other hand, an increasing demand for slave labor, thus

splitting the South between an engrained reverence for the past and the traditionary on one side, and the advent of a speculating, commercial world on the other side. In 1833, the year after the publication of <u>Swallow Barn</u>, Henry Clay noted:

> in whose hands now are the once proud seats of Westover, Cerles, Maycocks, Shirley, and others on the James and lower Virginia? They have passed into other and stranger hands. Some of the descendants of illustrious parentage have gone to the far West, while others, lingering behind, have contrasted their present condition with that of their venerated ancestors. They behold themselves excluded from their father's houses, now in the hands of those who were once their fathers' overseers, or sinking into decay (qtd. in Ambler 33).[133]

In these times of crisis, and to overcome its difficulties, the South, under the leadership of John C. Calhoun, began to dream—in Jay B. Hubbell's words—of "a Greek democracy with slavery at its corner-stone. A new spirit appeared in Southern oratory, journalism, and fiction—bombastic, boastful, [and] slightly hysterical" (xxvi). In literature particularly, Hubbell notes that the phrase 'Southern Chivalry' began to be widely used and it can be safely inferred that this was so "because authors sensed that Southern Chivalry and what the term stood for, i.e. innate, engrained and fixed definitions of masculinity, was already endangered" (<u>Swallow Barn</u>, Introduction xxvi). As early as 1817, James Kirke Paulding, after a visit to Virginia, writes:

> a few of these ancient establishments are still kept up, but many of the houses are shut; others have passed into the hands of the industrious, or the speculating, whose modes of thinking, feeling, and acting, are totally different; and, with

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[132] Francis Butler Simkins, <u>The South, Old and New: a History, 1820-1947</u> (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1947).
[133] Quoted in C. H. Ambler's <u>Sectionalism in Virginia, from 1776 to 1861</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910). The question of the myths of the West as related to the myths of the South would take another entire dissertation, but we can read among other studies: Joseph M. Flora, "Relocating Southerners in the

here and there an exception, nothing now remains, but the traditionary details of some aged matron, who lives only in the recollections of the past, of ancient modes, and ancient hospitality (43).[134]

The 1830s were indeed an interesting and conflicted moment for traditional white masculinity. As Craig Thomson Friend explains, "[f]or a time during the 1830s and 1840s, the ideal of the republican gentleman coexisted with that of the self-made man and gogetter. The coexistence however was uneasy: antebellum Southerners never fully abandoned the republican gentleman and never fully endorsed the man of enterprise" (130). Moreover, the presidential elections of Andrew Jackson (1829-1837) and his successor Martin Van Buren (1837-1841) were vexing for Southerners, especially the white elite class, which held pretensions of aristocracy. Although Jackson was a slave-owner from Tennessee, his celebration of the common man and his push for a more democratic America ultimately threatened the status of the South's upper-class. As the plantation elite became more associated with the opposing Whig party, they began to paint Democrats Jackson and Van Buren as out-of-control autocrats, who were ignoring the rights of the individual states and were willing to use force to preserve the authority of the federal government. Some of Jackson's actions as President, including his threats to send troops into South Carolina after it refused to enforce federal tariffs during the Nullification crisis of 1833 and his dismantling of the Bank of the United States, which was used by critics to blame his policies for the panic of 1837, made this partisan characterization of him as a tyrant possible. To varying degrees, Kennedy, Caruthers, and Tucker all grew increasingly disappointed with Jackson's policies and wary of his and Van Buren's use of their executive power.

West," The Southern Literary Journal 33:2 (2001) 150-152; Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. Contemporary Southern Writers and the West (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2000).

[134] James. K. Paulding, Letters from the South, vol.1. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1832).

John Pendleton Kennedy, a Baltimore lawyer, began writing <u>Swallow Barn</u> in late 1829, before Nat Turner's rebellion, before Garrison's founding of <u>The Liberator</u>, before nullification, and before "the Virginians had rejected the idea of gradually abolishing slavery in their constitutional revisions of 1831" (<u>Southern Manhood</u> 118).[135] Yet Kennedy was perfectly aware of the transformations that were affecting the South, and in particular, Southern society. Kennedy had begun to figure in politics at least twelve years before the publication of <u>Swallow Barn</u>. After a long career in politics, he ascended to the position of Secretary of the Navy, yet never hid that he had gradually grown tired of politics and disgusted with politicians. In 1852, he writes to his favorite uncle:

> [D]o you remark how lamentably destitute the country is of men in public station of whom we may speak with any pride? We have, with very few exceptions, no man of eminent ability, none of high accomplishment, none of lofty sentiment, in any conspicuous position. How completely has the conception and estimate of a gentleman been obliterated from the popular mind! What a miserable array of charlatans and make-believe statesmen and little clap-trap demagogues and mock gentleman manufactured out of blackguards, are everywhere in the lead (qtd. in Tuckerman 187).[136]

Kennedy's concern here addresses the very "essence" of what makes the gentleman, an essence distorted by make-believers and charlatans who have transformed manhood, formerly associated with "lofty sentiment," and "high accomplishment"—i.e. the epitome of inward strength and spiritual grace—into a performative "manufactured" manhood that is socially

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[135] Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., <u>Southern Masculinity, Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction</u> (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); also in Jay B. Hubbell, ed., "Introduction," <u>Swallow Barn; or, a Sojourn in the Old Dominion</u>, by John Pendleton Kennedy (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1929; Jay B. Hubbell also mentions that in 1832, the economic revolution was already at work in Baltimore. Baltimore was becoming less of a market for tobacco and more of a southern manufacturing center. The city was growing less and less Southern, even before the Civil War. Political control was passing from the gentleman farmer to the merchant and manufacturer. Jay B. Hubbell, <u>The South in American Literature, 1607-1900</u> (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1954).

created and outwardly displayed. The second concern addresses the "public" eye that is, now, it seems, unable to discern what a real gentleman is. Since this status is no longer estimated in the popular mind, Kennedy worries that the public may not be able to discern real gentlemen from fake charlatans, and understandably so.

For John Mayfield, Swallow Barn goes even further than simply expressing the concerns that are found in Kennedy's letter to his uncle, for the work represents "an exercise in masculine image-making," the reaction to "a fairly rapid evolution away from the patrician ideal and toward the entrepreneur [which] demonstrate[s] ambivalence and uncertainty" (118). Critic John L. Hare remarks that Kennedy's letters emphasize that the author had a profound disdain for the "New Man" who was already making his way into American society. Kennedy, like many of his Southern contemporaries, was a truly committed man concerned with the immediate issues facing the nation, ranging from questions of tariffs, road construction, or national banks, among others.

Most importantly, and as John Mayfield remarks, Kennedy became increasingly concerned with the sense of masculine insecurity that was now pervading the whole South. Studying the Southern character, the latter said:

> If I were to describe in a word the primal source of germ out or which this commotion has sprung, I would say it was the egotism of the Southern character. There are no people in the world who have a higher opinion of themselves and their surroundings than the inhabitants of certain districts of the South. They are accustomed to speak of themselves as possessing the very highest type of civilization, as preeminent in all the qualities of generous manhood; as hospitable, frank, brave beyond all other people, quick to resent dishonour; keen in their perception of what is great or noble; and elegant in

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[136] Henry T. Tuckerman, The Life of John Pendleton Kennedy (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1871).

manners. They claim, besides, superior talent, more acute insight, and higher energy than their neighbours. They are prolific in statesmen, orators and politicians. They are manly, truthful, and *chevalresque*. This is the portrait they draw of themselves (The Slave Question 5, qtd. in Mayfield 123).[137]

With the civil war conflict looming on the horizon, the above portrait was not boding well for the Southern gentleman. The war, Kennedy was persuaded, was not even about slavery (even less about abolition), but rather "a war waged by and for the Southern ego" (123)—an ego, which, as this chapter shall reveal, seemed too insulated and far too insecure to sustain the changes that lay ahead.

2.1. Insulated Place.

In Swallow Barn, Kennedy depicts life at a tobacco plantation in Virginia on the James River as seen through the eyes of a New York visitor, Mark Littleton. Swallow Barn, probably the first important fictional treatment of Virginia life, was so well acclaimed by its readers that its popularity helped to make Virginia a favorite fictional background with later novelists.[138] Critics themselves have praised this charming little romance for its nostalgic painting of a lost and gone society. As "the type of the good-natured, appreciative nineteenth century traveler who comes into the locus amoenus to comment on life outside," (44) Mark describes the characters he meets with sympathetic good-humor. In his preface to the 1832 edition, Kennedy himself apologized for the "mirthful mood" of his narrative by explaining that "the ordinary actions of men, in their household intercourse, have naturally a humorous or comic character" (vii). The names of the characters, "in the way of the nineteenth century romance," Bakker remarks, "[also] reveal their personalities and functions in the story.

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[137] John Pendleton Kennedy [Paul Ambrose, pseudonym]. The Slave Question: A Pretext to Lead the Masses on to Revolution (Washington, DC: 1863, rpt. from National Intelligencer, March 1863).

[138] John Pendleton Kennedy, Swallow Barn; or, A Sojourn in The Old Dominion (Philadelphia: J.B.Lippincott, 1860).

Frank's surname [Meriwether], for instance, suggests a phase of good times in fair weather"
(44). There is also Chub, the pedantic parson-teacher; the dreamy and irresponsible Ned
Hazard who is heir to the plantation; and his equally impractical belle, Bel Tracy, daughter of
Isaac Tracy, the owner of a neighboring plantation, The Brakes.

The novel opens with the chapter "A Word in Advance" in which the narrator
describes his story as "a picture of country life in Virginia as it existed in the first quarter of
the present century" (8). His travel account (presented as a "romance," a pastoral idealization
of the southern plantation and its peaceful family life) will be concerned with the domestic
affairs, political beliefs, and economic habits of Virginia planters. Author James Kirke
Paulding, who was greatly impressed by the descriptions of rural Virginia, wrote to his own
publisher, Henry C. Carey, that Swallow Barn offered a picture of country life in the South
"drawn from nature" (Paulding 122, qtd. in Bakker 42).[139] William Wirt, in receiving the
book, probably best summarizes life at Swallow Barn. He notes: "it is a sort of novel of which
the scene is laid in Virginia – but it is a non descript sort of novel - very little incident - & a
great deal of what is called sketches of characters" (qtd. in Hubbell 492).[140] The narrator of
the novel seems to concur with Wirt's reading, as he introduces himself as a picturesque
tourist, "a man of mark and authentic as a witness" (16) who "travels pen in hand," showing
how impressions are much more distinct "than those of a business voyager" (16). This light-
hearted voyager is going to be a painter (picturesque) rather than a reporter, a sentimentalist
rather than a sociologist. The subtitle of the narrative, "A Sojourn in the Old Dominion,"
indicates that the "journey is a casual and self-indulgent undertaking" (Ackermann 52).[141]
Like Irving did for the Hudson Valley or the Catskill Mountains, Kennedy intends to use the

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[139] Jan Bakker, Pastoral in Antebellum Southern Romance (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press,
    1989).
[140] Jay B. Hubell, The South in American Literature, 1607-1900 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1954).
[141] Zeno Ackermann, "Working at Romance. Poetics and Ideology in Novels of the Antebellum American South,
    1824-1854." (Diss. Universitat Regensburg, 2004).

"Old Dominion" as a picturesque counterpoint to ubiquitous change, a poetical rather than a political phenomenon.[142] Mark Littleton, the narrator, transforms the landscape into mental paintings and the effect is a fictionalization of landscape, which comes to occupy an intermediary zone between the actual and the pictorial.

In particular, the buddy bond that develops between Ned Hazard, the Southerner, and Mark Littleton, the Northerner, serves a purpose that is bigger than the bond between these two men, for Littleton endeavours to take a holiday in the South in order to correct his "unseemly prejudices against the Old Dominion."[143] Male friendship will also provide for the peaceful resolution of thorny political or social issues. In the midst of historical moments of socio-economic transformation, the detached version of a Northern visitor provides here a useful narrative tool. As Zeno Ackermann explains:

> The device of using the persona of an outside visitor who explains the American South to another outsider allows for a detached investigation of southern life and institutions. At the same time, the format of the epistolary travel account is a potent tool for assimilation. Littleton's letters traverse the boundary between the sections. They domesticate the political, social and moral strangeness of Virginia by confidentially relating a series of intimate encounters with the southern way of life as it supposedly offers a detached investigation of Southern life and institutions (52).[144]

The use of the pastoral is not particularly surprising, since as Taylor describes, "the uncertainty that Americans began to feel in the first half of the century about the general drift

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[142] Kennedy not only sent a copy of the book to Irving but he also dedicated his second novel, <u>Horse-Shoe Robinson</u>, to the famous writer.

[143] An interesting development of the buddy bond in Southern culture is developed by Claire Dutriaux, "White Buddy Politics: Interrogating Performances of American Masculinity through Male Bonding in Mississippi Burning (Parker, 1989) and Forrest Gump (Zemeckis, 1994)," Proc. of Paper for Performing the Invisible: Masculinities in the English-Speaking World, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris.

of their civilization led them to attach greater significance to their pastoral setting [. . .] stable and untouched by progress" (186). In terms of ideological functions, the pastoral is a tool for suspending or for sublimating history. It produces a representation of the "country," the longing for a state of perfect harmony which is situated beyond the beginning of history as a process of alienation. Virginia, in this portrayal, is a nation within a nation, a territory that nursed "four Presidents" (70) and that is protected from modernization as it "has no large towns where men may meet and devise improvements or changes in the arts of life" (71). In addition, "her laws and habits, in consequence, have a certain fixedness, which even reject many of the valuable improvements of the day" (71).

As the plot develops, the narrative's focus becomes the ancestral home presented in all the traditional imagery of isolation, tranquility, and gracious entertainment, as if nothing else of large historical portent could happen. The Old Dominion is seen as a place that has somehow managed to remain exempt from the divisive powers of modern history.[145] The plantation, for instance, described as an "aristocratical old edifice which sits like a brooding hen on the southern bank of the James River" (27) seemingly managed to pass through history untouched: "the parlour was one of those specimens of architecture of which there are not many survivors, and in another half century, they will, perhaps, be extinct" (24). This "time-honoured mansion" (27) does bear the traces of the ancestors, as it is "more than a century old" (27) and it is also "a secluded spot, cut off from much of that sort of commerce with the world which is almost essential to enliven and mature the sympathies of young persons" (64). The plantation is definitely a self-contained system, a rural haven with an organic, stable social order peacefully secluded from the urban environment of Virginia. The description of

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[144] Bakker notes: "[Kennedy] wanted his romance of American life to be read, enjoyed, and approved in the South as well as the North. He wanted to make an impact without putting himself on the spot as another harping Yankee critic of southern ways" (42).

the school that is located on the plantation grounds calls to mind a beehive, which reinforces the idea of an organic society: "as we approach, the murmur becomes more distinct, until, reaching the door, we find the whole swarm running over their long, tough syllables, in a high concert pitch, with their elbows upon the decks [. . .] this little empire is under the dominion of Parson Chub" (64).

In such an environment featuring "dilapidated buildings in view" (158) giving it "an air of additional desolation" (159) and which also includes an "extensive swamp," civilization does not have a chance to grow vigorous.[146] The Tracys seem fairly confident that the world outside the plantation will never really intrude; they appear quite reluctant to acknowledge the outside world and are equally certain that their domestic sphere is immune to change. "The uneventful lawsuit about the "Old Mill" for instance illustrates very well the difficulty of economic and political improvements in Virginia. Our young hero's grandfather dammed a small stream that constituted the border between Swallow Barn and the neighbouring estate of the Tracys and built a mill. However, fed by an insufficient supply of water, the mill soon had to be closed down. To gain space for the reservoir created by the damming up of Apple-pie Branch, Old Ned Hazard had bought ground from the neighbouring Tracy Family. For decades, this land has been the object of legal contentions between Isaac Tracy and the owners of Swallow Barn. Frank Meriwether is eager to terminate the conflict, but does not know how to do so "without wounding the feelings of his neighbour" (151). The final victory of the small brook over the attempt to convert it into a source of progress is rendered as a "fable on the resilience of the pastoral order. The intrusion of the machine into the garden has

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[145] William Wirt (1832), in receiving the book, said, "it is a sort of novel of which the scene is laid in Virginia – but it is a non descript sort of novel - very little incident - & a great deal of what is called sketches of characters" (qtd. in Hubbell's The South in American Literature, 1607-1900, 492)

[146] For many critics, the swamp itself is a metaphor for the denial of history. See, Anthony Wilson, Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2006).

been repelled" and the pastoral urge to suspend history results in the absence of any serious action in the novel (Ackermann 61).

The containing function of the plantation actually seems to reach far beyond the sole limits of the dominion. The celebration of the 4th of July, for instance, is held at a decaying trading station—The Landing—and the scenery shows traces of abandoned efforts at economic activity, which are reminiscent of the dilapidated mill. Having "originally been used for ... foreign trade," The Landing has now become "nothing more than the place of resort for a few river craft, used in carrying the country produce to market" (158) Again, nature preveails over the threatening market. Bakker remarks in particular the noiseless imagery of a scene "suspended in air," movements of those ghostly, dehumanized "beings," the sailors aboard the little schooner" (47). As a consequence, "The National Anniversary" chapter reads as a portrait of Virginian society insulated against history and commerce or rather of a society from which the noisier part of nineteenth-century history has been erased. To see the river as simply the servant of foreign trade, industry, and military strategy would be to admit the merits of civilization but also to admit the fast-vanishing wilderness. Understandably, with humorous grace, the narrator portrays the sketch of the river's deserted splendor, dwelling at length on the "voluptuous landscape" (160) surrounding the landing where the "national anniversary" is held. The narrator suggests "a picture of that striking repose, which is peculiar to the tide-water views; soft, indolent and clear, as if nature had retreated into this drowsy nook, and fallen asleep over her own image, as it was reflected from this beautiful mirror [i.e. the river]" (160). Also, in its description of the river's "smooth surface [. . .] only ruffled by the frequent but lonely leap of some small fish above the water" (160), Kennedy not only recalls Twain's way of immortalising the Mississippi river in the minds of most Americans, but also evokes the impression that Virginian society is approaching what Ackermann names "an entropic standstill" (61). The picturesque reaches its

climax in the description of "the country," where everything "wears a Sunday look, the skies have a deeper blue, the clouds rest upon them like painting" (307). These paintings—both celebrating wilderness and reclaiming nature from the divisive dynamics of development—epitomize Kennedy's longing to privilege the natural over the industrialized world, the past over the commercial present or future, even if reality dictates otherwise.

2.2. Insulated Society.

Like the plantation and like the landscape, people and manners can be considered as insulated from history, or rather from the challenges brought by modernity and change. There is "a dash of the picturesque in the character" (48) of Prudence Meriwether because the spinster has intentionally transformed her life along the lines of educated fancy. Bel Tracy "reads descriptions of ladies of chivalry, and takes the field in imitation of them. Her head is full of these fancies, and she almost persuades herself that this is the fourteenth century" (86). Unable to distinguish between past and present, given to nostalgia, and reared in retreat, Bel Tracy has read reality from books. As Ned mentions, she thinks that the events of romances have occurred, and expects them to recur in her own life (Walter Scott himself is mentioned as the primary cause of Bel's delusions). The narrator's perspective is ironical but he is charmed by the boldness of the Virginia planter class mix of literature and art. Bel's quixotic mistakes not only provide great pleasure to the picturesque tourist but also the material for the Ned-Bel relationship, as she frustrates her well-meaning suitor until she is finally brought to reason in the end. Ackermann justly remarks that:

> Ned Hazard's wooing of Bel Tracy is a series of non-events ironically distorted
> to mock-heroic dimensions. The labels provided for Ned's feats by the respective
> chapter titles evoke a heroic plot with which the real occurrences are comically
> at odds. Thus, the chapter entitled "Knight Errantry" (351–358) recounts his

attempt to regain Bel's good will by catching "Fairbourne," her escaped falcon (which, of course, is really a hawk) (64).

The slave quarter itself, described with the pastoral convention, seems suspended beyond history as Littleton manages to view the slave quarter as "an exceedingly picturesque landscape" (449). Thus doing, Kennedy attempts to argue slavery out of politics by stressing that it is a phenomenon beyond human intervention, a part of natural history rather than of social and political history. Slavery is regarded as a highly questionable institution from the perspective of absolute morals, yet the narrative goes out of its way to stress that slavery is essentially a beneficent institution. The portrayal of the slaves, in this instance, corresponds to what Ackermann names the "longing for a saeculum aureum" (58), a Golden Age, which is rendered explicit in Swallow Barn, in the following passage:

> Nothing more attracted my observation than the swarms of little negroes that basked on the sunny sides of these cabins, and congregated to gaze at us as we surveyed their haunts. They were nearly all in that costume of the golden age which I have heretofore described; and showed their slim shanks and long heels in all varieties of their grotesque natures. Their predominant love of sunshine, and their lazy, listless postures, and apparent content to be silently looking abroad, might well afford a comparison to a set of terrapins luxuriating in the genial warmth of summer, on the logs of a mill pond (450–451).

The architecture of the narrative itself also contributes to the endeavour to remove slavery and the political from the debate. Structurally speaking, Mark Littleton's visit to the slave cabins on the plantation is postponed and, when he does go, he adopts the view of the childlike Black as best served by the supervision of a kind but just white master. Actual black men are only wonderful if they stay within the gender and race parameters set up by the white male imagination: blacks are happy and contented, under "mild and beneficent guardianship,

adapted to the actual state of their intellectual feebleness" (452). The claim that their position in southern society allows the slaves to remain in a state of perfect innocence ("they never could become a happier people than I find them here" (452)) is also a pastoral ratification of the changelessness of Virginia (Ackermann 59). One day, the narrator admits, in the due course of history, "interest, necessity, and instinct, all work to give progression to the relations of mankind, and finally to elevate each tribe or race to its maximum of refinement and power. We have no reason to suppose that the negro will be an exception to this law" (453). But "at present, I have said, he is parasitical" (453).

The theoretical frame for the book—which may well have been influenced by the then current political events and the writer's known opinion of these events—deals with the plantation and the family as a hierarchical structure in which all members have certain roles to play and which is led by a "ruler-father," an authority figure over dependent, subordinate members, whose duty is to look out for the needs of all others, providing thus an example of effective leadership. Old Isaac Tracy, a loyalist planter, rules over The Brakes plantation, with a "seigniorial pride, attached to his position... [which] manifests itself in a contemptuous defiance of the feudal dignity" (148). The older gentleman "still adheres to the ancient costume, and is now observed taking his rides in the morning, [wearing] a long-waisted coat, of a snuff color [. . .] a formality, correspondent with his appearance, is conspicuous in his manners" (77). Isaac Tracy quickly emerges as the chief role model for the new generation. His worn but elegant coat signifies his gentility, his whole persona being the perfect example of the charismatic hero described by Max Weber. On that subject, the latter suggests that "the recognition of the charismatic hero (to which type the southern hero is curiously related) is the first phase of social organization—those who share the common recognition of the hero figure become, thereby, a social group organized, at least rudimentarily, by their recognition"

(365).[147] Charismatic characters are, according to Weber, transmitted "by the conception that charisma is a quality transmitted by heredity; thus that is participated in by the kinsmen of its bearer, particularly by his closest relatives" (365). In <u>Swallow Barn</u>, outward appearance and a sort of invisible "inward code of conduct" echo each other. The author, in this case, to use Michael Kreyling's words, is not

> merely creating a matinee idol for feminine swooning and masculine emasculation. He attempts a far-reaching formal and mythopoeic function. The hero must offer himself for his people's affirmation, and he does so by posing for recognition [. . .] the vertical thrust of the posture, the lean body unencumbered by the ills and vices of the flesh, the serene face and eyes indicating a soul in harmony with some power and certainty that transcends historical contingency (13, 37).[148]

Kennedy describes Tracy's honourable character as timeless: "he seems to stand like a landmark in the stream of time, which is destined to have everything gliding past it, itself unchanged" (77). Just like the landscape Kennedy has painted, the gentleman seems insulated against history, time, and ultimately against change.

Frank Meriwether rules over Swallow Barn, the second plantation, with a political temperament that is displaced into the imaginary, an "archaic and parochial conservatism that manifests itself in a peculiar fondness for paradoxes" (72).[149] Frank "is an ardent admirer of the genius of Virginia [. . .] it is a familiar thing with him to speak of the aristocracy of talent

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[147] Max Weber, <u>The Theory of Social and Economic Organizations</u> (New York: Free Press, 1947).
Michael Kreyling, <u>Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative</u> (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

[148] Michael Kreyling, <u>Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative</u> (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

[149] Henry Tuckerman describes Frank Meriwether as a character inspired by Kennedy's own uncle who, we learn, "had little sympathy with the spirit of the age; detested its social innovations, and ignored its locomotive facilities … in the country round, he was looked up to and consulted; unenterprising, and old-fashioned in his tastes, he was patriotic and contented; he was fond of argument and a game of backgammon;

as only inferior to that of the landed interest" (35). The Chapter "Traces of the Feudal System" introduces a man whose status is fixed in land and family traditions. This "very model of a landed gentleman" has little experience of the world outside Virginia and considers Richmond "as the centre of civilization." The sentence here ironically echoes the mention of the courthouse, which stands as "the centre of business." By displacing "business" to the self-sufficient, private "civilization" of Richmond, the narrator constructs a man and a system of values immune to time and change. He is a tall, finely browed lover of horses and old books, a man who dotes upon his children and dominates his neighbours. By making "a guest [. . .] one of his daily wants," he displaces "commerce" to his own private purposes (32).

This "statism" is reflected in his life. This is an insulated estate and the man who rules it is an insulated man. His days, Mayfield justly remarks, are filled with idle walks around the fields, food, cigars and the ever-present guests, living in the summer of 1829 as if tomorrow would never come: "he lives, in effect, in a world insulated from conflict, an organic community that must remain [. . .] motionless" (15). As the narrator explains: "Frank Meriwether is an early riser ... and generally breakfasts before the rest of the family... This gives him time to make a circuit on horseback, to inspect the progress of his farm concerns. He returns before the heat of the day, and about noon, may be found stretched upon a broad settee in the hall" (307-8). This gentleman's *raison d'être* obviously corresponds to "being" rather than "doing" much of anything. Yet, he functions as a productive model, a good "ruler-father" who is able to set a model for the next generation and to put aside his own personal interests and rule in favour of his neighbour as a means of promoting community harmony.[150]

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in a word, he was very much such a man as the Frank Meriwether portrayed by his nephew" (401-402). Henry T. Tuckerman, The Life of John Pendleton Kennedy (1871).

[150] Critic John L. Hare remarks, for instance, that the dispute between the Meriwether plantation "Swallow Barn" and the neighbouring estate owned by Isaac Tracy becomes a metaphor for the sectional conflicts arising in the nation over the National Road and the tariff. For more information on John L. Hare, read: Will the Circle be

As the lawsuit illustrates, the law in <u>Swallow Barn</u> is a point where the interests of the community and the interests of the individual compete for supremacy. The community clearly dominates, for Meriwether's cast of mind—just like the community's—is literary and imaginative rather than political. Unlike President Jackson, whose poor handling of sectional disputes only increased strife, Frank Meriwether becomes a model for what authority figures should be: selfless governors whose diplomacy and wisdom could unite parties rather than divide them.

Reading has played an important role in shaping this planter's peculiar temperament. In the planter's library, for instance, political radicalism is displaced into "abstruse reading" (67), thus transforming the library into a place of refuge from the modern world. The most extreme representative of this type of refugee is the tutor of the family, Parson Chub, "a good scholar," who "having confined his reading entirely to the learning of the ancients," [. . .] "has never read any politics of later date than the time of the Emperor Constance, not even a newspaper" (66). Through the older generation of gentlemen he portrays, Kennedy suggests that the denial of the present is the most radical political statement engaged in. Daniel Hundley's <u>Social Relations in Our Southern States</u> (1860) dwells extensively on the gentleman's autonomy, explaining that in most cases and like Meriwether:

> the Southern Gentleman, even the most assiduous in business, labours only for occupation, or *pour passer le temps*, his daily toil being his daily pleasure; and not, as in busier and more money-getting communities, a painful drudgery, submitted to but for the sake of a scarcely understood good beyond. He never buries the man in the business, but makes his business itself his social

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<u>Unbroken? Family and Sectionalism in the Virginia Novels of Kennedy, Caruthers, and Tucker, 1830-1845</u> (New York: Routledge, 2002). This work examines eight Virginia novels against the background of the political and social concerns of the Jacksonian years in which they were written, arguing that the authors used familial processes as a metaphor to discuss issues that they regarded as critical.

enjoyment and his true life. But whatever may be his engagements, he seems never to have anything to do but to amuse himself and his family and the stranger within his gates (58, emphasis mine).

"Insulated" from time and change, <u>Swallow Barn</u> does offer, as Friend has remarked, "a fond look at a patrician paradise – organic, self-sufficient, hierarchical, traditional, and genteel" (118). Pursuing two lines of plot, a litigation issue and a love affair, Kennedy seems actually more preoccupied with summoning up a vision of graceful repose in the feudal South. The vision certainly has its charms, for there is indeed an air of serenity and indifference to time in it (Mayfield 5). Yet, the painting of perfection is gently minimized by the vein of satire that runs thoughout the book. Whereas Hundley dwells on the autonomy of the gentleman, this autonomy might however be a form of self-indulgence. Hundley's efforts to wrench a social benefit from the gentleman's occupations *pour passer le temps* approach the absurd (Homberger 16). The danger of meaninglessness implicit in the realization of the ideal is as present to Hundley as it is to Kennedy, for the settling of the conflict, in the end, leaves the old patriarch with nothing else to do, for it is indeed the image of a man pondering "sorrowfully over the extinguished controversy. A favorite fancy had been annihiliated, untimely cropped, as a flower in the field. He could not realize the idea. The privation left him no substitute" (322). Bakker adds: "[w]hen Meriwether contrives to end the suit in the old veteran's favor, Isaac Tracy is crestfallen. Suddenly he is left with nothing to occupy his mind in his rural retreat" (46). As Bakker remarks "Kennedy revealed an unpastoral conviction that although rural life could be stable and secure on the surface, it also could be conducive to isolation and ignorance. This is so in his depiction of <u>Swallow Barn</u>" (41). Once Isaac Tracy settles the affair of the useless plot of land, his last words are particularly compelling, as he says: "I wish the thing were to go over again" (506).

In the portrayal of Meriwether, Kennedy identifies three essential characteristics of the patrician (or elite) masculine ideal: 1) domesticity, for "this is a paternalistic Eden, where the man of the house is above all a nurturing figure" towards his slaves, children, guests and women (Mayfield 13). This domesticity encourages a second trait: the patrician's localism. The world of the patriarch is confined and stable and anything that introduces change is suspect. Meriwether is alarmed by federal plans for roads and canals, which he sees as indirect government support for Northern commerce over Southern agriculture. "I don't deny that the steamboat is destined to produce valuable results," he orates, "but after all, I much question…if it were not better without it… This annihilation of space, sir, is not to be desired… Virginia was never so good as when her roads were at their worst" (72). Frank Meriwether also has a strong disdain for the commercial stage, because "he thinks lightly of the mercantile interest, and, in fact, undervalues the manners of the large cities generally. He believes that those who live in them are hollow-hearted and insincere, and wanting in that substantial intelligence and virtue, which he affirms to be characteristic of the country" (29).

Kennedy thus indirectly suggests that no matter how much the Tracys might resist that possibility, Swallow Barn is indeed a novel about change. The description of the secluded plantation world should not exclude the fact that the narrator is perfectly able to account for changes occurring beyond its limits. In his own words:

> The mellow, bland, and sunny luxuriance of her old-time society—its good
> fellowship, its hearty and constitutional companionableness, the thriftless gayety
> of the people, their dogged but amiable invincibility of opinion, and that
> overflowing hospitality which knew no ebb—[. . .] are modified at the present
> day by circumstances which have been gradually attaining a marked influence
> over social life as well as political relation (8).

Change is expressed through the numerous allusions to the difference between past and present, between "old-time" manners and "progress," two concepts that the narrator explicitly associates with dandyism, fashion, surface, varnish, gloss, and artificiality:

> the manners of our country have been tending towards a uniformity which is visibly effacing all local differences [. . .] The country now apes the city in what is supposed to be the elegancies of life, and the city is inclined to value and adopt the fashions it is able to import across the Atlantic, and thus the whole surface of society is exhibiting the traces of progress by which it is likely to be rubbed down, in time, to one level, and varnished with the same gloss (9).

Through attention to the visual—conveyed through words like varnish, gloss, fashion, visibly—John Pendleton Kennedy, badly dissimulated behind his narrator, fears that an "insipidity of character" may contaminate the South and that "we no longer present in our pictures of domestic life [. . .] something which belongs to us and to no one else" (9). There is change also when Kennedy accounts that, "in time," this progress threatens to confine the Southern identity to "one level," something which will no longer differentiate it as unique and individual, but that will entail the South's fusion with the whole. This fusion is not only regional, it is also cultural, as the narrator already complains that "the general fusion of thought [. . .] ha[s] made sad work, even in the present generation" (9). The narrative is also concerned with the phenomenon of political and economic change, which is viewed as inevitable and threatening, since "what is called 'the progress' have made many innovations there, as they have done everywhere else. The Old Dominion is losing somewhat of the raciness of her once peculiar [. . .] insulated manners" (8).

Kennedy's writing is therefore not only dealing with a seemingly quiet family romance, but it is also reactionary, dealing with the inexorable passage of time. It is

essentially—as the narrator explains—the writing of an artist who is "not willing to allow these sketches of mine entirely to pass away" as "they have already begun to assume the tints of a relic of the past, and may, in another generation, become archeological, and sink into the chapter of antiquities" (10). "Passing away" in Kennedy's words is worse than death, for it also means that the next generation will not assume the role and the heritage left by their ancestors, precisely because the heritage has been forgotten and because of "the fruitlessness of modern invention" (9). In the new preface to the 1851 edition of Swallow Barn, Kennedy comments with regret on the kind of social and economic progress that is breaking in on the "distinctive habits and modes of life" of the countryside. He further wonders if the resulting "insipidity of character" is worth the loss of the old "rough but pleasant favor" of American types (8-9).[151] The "romance" created in defense of their losses becomes, then, the mastering of an anxiety that threatens to disrupt the traditional order.

These portents of historical change may also suggest that the boundaries between history and the domestic, the public and the private, are not nearly as impenetrable as the Tracys would like to assume. However confident the family may feel in the remoteness of their domestic life from the great public events of history, momentous changes loom just out of sight. And the closer one looks at the patriach's legacy, in fact, the more complicated and deceptive it appears. Even ownership of the family's plantation appears highly problematic and remarkably fluid.

The legal dispute over the stream boundary line undoubtedly reinforces this aspect: The "Apple-Pie Branch,' a swamp actually, inspired Edward Hazard around 1750 to build a dam and flour mill. As the mill wheel began its first turning, Hazard danced gleefully, exclaiming that "this comes of energy and foresight; this shows the use of a man's faculties, my boy" (133). His mill pond, however, emptied in less than two hours. Since then, a "large,

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[151] John Pendleton Kennedy, Swallow Barn; or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion (Philadelphia: Carey & Lea,

pestilent lake" had formed, engendering "foul vapors that made the country, in the autumn, very unhealthy" (139). Nature soon reclaimed her due, sending, the swamp back to its original unkempt state and the use of a man's faculties to ridicule. Hazard's son, having learned nothing, later decided to drain the swamp to plan a meadow. Yet, unable to decide over the limits of the swamp, both neighbors have left the "Apple-pie Branch" to its own unruly ways, and the boundary line between the two plantations to be extremely uncertain. The irony of the situation is heightened by the fact that the land, described by the narrator as an "unprofitable tract of waste land" soon became "the most valuable part of the estate" (132).

As for Ned Hazard, the third generation, he is "genetically" predisposed for the role of the gentleman, since his ancestors "belonged to the House of Burgesses" (108). He nonetheless represents an interesting perversion of the idea of inherited manhood, for he epitomizes a generation whose status as "planter" or "gentleman" is no longer secured by family and rank. The "spells of love and mortgage," indeed, "have translated the possession [from Ned Hazard's father] to Frank Meriwether" (27). The narrator, his cousin, describes a plantation now operated by Ned's brother-in-law Frank Meriwether, for the bad management by Ned's deceased father and his predecessors had almost ruined the place. On that note, Ned's grand-uncle's dreams of "grandeur" are ridiculed by the narrator who pokes fun at his "wig" and his big schemes for a mill that only worked for two hours. Portraying Ned's "sanguine temperament, his public spirit, his odd perceptions, and that dash of comic, headstrong humorousness that [. . .] has reappeared [. . .] in Ned" (143), the narrator closely conflates the story of Self with History. As if to represent the passing of a traditional masculinity, the author centers his work upon Ned enduring economic and emotional uncertainty after the loss of his father, for "he is regarded in the family as the next heir to Swallow Barn; but the marriage of his sister, and soon afterwards, the demise of his father,

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1832); rpt. with introduction and notes by William S. Osborne (New York, Hafner, 1962).

disclosed the encumbered condition of the freehold, to which he had before been a stranger" (49). Property and ownership—the boasts of Southern legacy—have become problematic; so too are the portraits of masculinity in Swallow Barn.

2.3. Southern Masculinity in Crisis.

As a matter of fact, only Abe, the reckless slave whose "imagination was awakened by the attractions of his field of adventure; by the free roving of the sailor" (471) becomes, in Kennedy's exploration of manly ideals, the true model of manliness, a cavalier "impelled by that love of daring which the romancers call chivalry" (482). He is enjoying "the full perfection of manhood" (477) and the term 'manhood' is actually repeated four times throughout the chapter to refer to Abe—a term that has been withheld from the white gentlemen characters' description in the first four-hundred pages of the narrative. Kennedy's "frustration in man-making" (Mayfield 24) has reached a climax, even more so as Mark Littleton concludes the novel within the walls of the plantation-library by looking for heroic acts of manhood in some ancient biography of Captain John Smith. Kennedy seems to suggest that, at a time when "the very characteristics that once imparted manliness to the country gentleman [i.e., the squire's leisure, his attachment to the soil, his protracted boyhood, his circle of dependents, and his highly localized, contained world] were being relegated to a domesticated life of femininized passivity [and] left behind by new men" (Mayfield 24), the only models for republican manhood belonged to history. Swallow Barn may reveal, as Mayfield justly remarks, that "within a pastoral arcadia of endless games and genteel foolishness," mock-heroic attempts at romance were "passé and that the Southerner's overblown sense of honor was becoming a theatrical liability" (24). Abe's story, however, verges on the caricatural: because this embodiment of manhood is "sent out from the pastoral place off to sea where he sails well and dies bravely in a stormy Chesapeake rescue attempt (Bakker 45), whiteness remains freed of the burden of representing racial difference. As a

result, and even if outwardly dealing with the question of race, Swallow Barn prioritizes, not questions of class or race, but rather the masculine over anything else. Because it is Abe who is portrayed as the ultimate embodiment of manhood in the novel, part of the process of exploring the masculine in Swallow Barn may thus require re-visiting staples and icons of Southern masculinity.

The deconstruction is facilitated by the gentlemen at play in Swallow Barn. Ned Hazard is not only homeless (at least to the extent that he has not yet inherited the plantation, to which he is nonetheless entitled), but he is also nameless: "Ned" is but a nickname. He is also, and most importantly, a "rank-less" boy who has been cast out of the theater of "college laurels," only to creep "quietly back to Swallow Barn" (61). Even then, and as Bakker has rightly remarked:

> Ned is less interested in helping Meriwether manage Swallow Barn than in
> organizing household theatricals where the slaves are taught to provide the
> special sound effects. His playful exuberance is further expressed with a touch
> of scorn for art when he mocks the voices and attitudes of opera singers of both
> sexes while walking in the woods with Littleton (44).

He is now engaged, the narrator explains, in "lonely pursuits" of adventure and picturesque incidents. On that note, Stephen Berry remarks that Southern gentlemen, who came away from college, often found themselves "armed only with unachievable ideals and dreams of greatness so lofty they had little practical application" (36). Ned is no different: placed in a situation of social obscurity, his patrimony—like Gordon in Thomas Nelson Page's Gordon Keith (1903)—is that he is the son of a Gentleman. Educated on the plantation by Chub, and then sent off to Princeton, Ned drank, dueled, and later fell in love with an older woman with whom he nearly eloped. He then headed to South America in search of a purpose in life. There, he was "well bitten with fleas," and apprehended as a 'spy,' and nearly assassinated as

a 'heretic' to later come home "the most disquixotted cavalier that ever hung up his shield at the end of a scurvy crusade" (53). He has still, however, a comfortable patrimony, as the narrator explains that he has "has ample liberty to pursue his own whims in regard to his future occupation in life" (49). Not without irony, the use of the word "whims," in this instance, seems to indicate that Ned is more a boy than a man. Ned, the inheritor of the plantation, is also seen, on many occasions, preferring the company of boys to that of men. To the children of Swallow Barn, he is, as the narrator remarks, "especially captivating" (52).

Yet, the childish and disquixotted Ned is engaged throughout the novel in a very manly performance to capture the heart of Bel Tracy against his most precious enemy (pun intended), Swansdown the dandy. As a matter of fact, the core of the love-story that constitutes the main narrative concerns precisely the tension between two interpretations of manliness: on the one hand, Kennedy portrays an older patriarchal system with a vision of masculinity that is interpreted as something innate and fixed; on the other hand, the younger "beaux," Ned and Swansdown, represent a "younger" generation, in which masculinity appears as something performative and "theatrical," a fluid social construct close to make-believe. At the heart of the distinction between the two "beaux" is the debate concerning whether manhood is innate, a social construction, or social performance, and at the centre of this masculine negotiation is the Belle, a young creature whose mind is full of fancies from the 14th century.

In this *mise en abyme* of masculine models, Swansdown's masculinity is predicated on how effectively he appeals to the approval of a fickle public eye. Swansdown's entry on stage causes much debate and interest and is theatrical in itself. Yet it is only a few chapters later, after a lot of suspense, that he enters the novel as himself. Rip (Frank Meriwether's son) is the one to introduce him and says that "if we wanted to see something worth looking at, we should come downstairs quickly, for there was Mr. Swansdown spinning up to the house, and

making the gravel fly like hail" (121). The title of the chapter, "A Man of Pretensions" (Chap. XIII) sets the stage: Swansdown, "the phenomenon that excited Rip's admiration" (121) is really a sight to wonder at.

Being observed from behind the windows of the house, Swansdown becomes a wealthy spectacle, someone to be looked at: "it was very evident that Mr. Singleton Oglethorpe Swansdown was a man to produce a sensation in the country [. . .] and seemed determined to please everybody" (123). This "very model of delicate and dainty gentleman" (110) arrives in a new light-blue curricle, the plate of the harness mouldings "glitter[ing] with an astounding brilliancy in the sun, and the spokes of the wheels emit[ing] that spirited flare which belongs to an equipage of the highest polish" (110). Ned, at the same moment, is shown standing in the dark confined space of Mark's "chamber," a space usually associated with the feminine, rather than the masculine (100). The allusion is confirmed by the posture of Mark and Ned, both lying "extended at full length upon the bed," with their "feet up against the bed-posts" (121).

The narrator evokes the connection between the sunlight and the public "spotlight" that informs the theme of masculine self-presentation throughout the novel. The "sun" seems to expose all that is to be revealed and everybody engages in the "spectacle" of Swansdown. Accordingly, he is observed from behind doors or windows. The portrait given is therefore indirect (blurry even), reinforcing the mysterious nature of this man. The different interpretations of his character add to the mystery. Indeed, Singleton Oglethorpe Swansdown is, to the women, "an elegant, refined, sweet-spoken, grave, and dignified gentleman" and, to men like Ned, "the most preposterous ass—the most enormous humbug—the most remarkable coxcomb in Virginia," and "[i]t is hard," says the narrator, "to tell the counterfeit from the real in these things" (113).

The two younger Belles, Prudence and Catherine, particularly, are faced with this dilemma. Both engage in a sort of melodramatic soap-opera in which they both imagine themselves in love with, and soon after hating, Swansdown. Behind this romantic endeavour, the reader cannot miss that the Belles, here, are trying to decipher the character of Swansdown and to make out the "real" from the fake. As seen by Prudence, "there are men, [. . .] of such attenuated fibre, that they shrink at the rude touch of reality. They have the sensitiveness of the mimosa, and find their affectations withering up where the blast of scrutiny blows too roughly upon them. Such a man is [aptly named] Singleton" (299). Catherine later acknowledges, "I have a horror of a man of extravagant professions, and have often doubted the sincerity of [Singleton] Swansdown" (303). Prudence answers, "I should doubt it myself [. . .] if it were not remarkable for those affected ornaments of style which disfigure even the best of his effusions. You may easily see that it abounds in those vicious decorations which betray a false taste, those superfluous redundancies that sparkle out in his compositions" (304).

Such an apt pleaser is yet unable to please a woman. For Harvey Riggs, "kinsman of the Tracy family" (89) gifted with "strong and earnest good sense" (89), Swansdown is "such an ass" (94). Tellingly, "[h]e can reckon," the narrator ironically adds, "more refusals on his head than a through-paced political office-hunter" (123-4) and "is believed now to encourage the opinion that your raging belles are not apt to make the best wives; that a discreet lady, of good family, and unpretending manners, is most likely to make a sensible man happy; great beauty is not essential" (124). His refusals in love become closely connected to his failure on the political stage, since the narrator does not fail to mention that Swansdown "has twice been very nearly elected to Congress, and ascribes his failure to his not being sufficiently active in the canvass" (123). The description indicates that men like Swansdown might be great performing socialites but prove to be very poor social achievers indeed.

Swansdown is here clearly associated with the personage of the Dandy, for he has "a tall figure, and an effeminate and shallow complexion, somewhat impaired perhaps by ill health, a head of dark hair, partially bald, a soft black eye, a gentle movement, a musical, low-toned voice, and a highly finished style of dress" (122). When he leaves the scene, the theatrical spotlight follows him: "the philosopher, poet, patron, arbitrator, and aspiring statesman, ascended his radiant car, and whisked away with the brisk and astounding flourish that belongs to this race of gifted mortals" (156). The narrator, opposing Swansdown to Ned's namelessness and selflessness, does not hide that [Singleton] Swansdown, who takes special delight "to hear himself talk" (123), is self-conscious and likes the public eye, for, he says:

> there is nothing equal to the self-possession of a gentleman who has travelled
> about the world, and frequented the circles of fashion, when he comes into a
> quiet, orderly, respectable family in the country [. . .] His memory is stored with
> a multitude of pretty sayings [. . .] which he embellishes with a due proportion of
> sentiment (123).

Even though Swansdown cannot be definitely labelled as one of these businessmen that Kennedy execrated, his arrival and presence at the plantation associate him with the lust for gain and fame and the insincerity of manners which, for the narrator, characterize the artificiality of a new order asking men to show their manliness to the public and depend upon it for approval.

What is worse is that Swansdown's charm even appeals to the older generation for whom the lawyer-gentleman settles the claim of land. Swansdown launches into a "long, prosing discourse with Mr. Tracy" (296) as it can be read that "the achievement of the award had wrought him into that state of self-complacency which generally attends upon ambition when saturated with a great exploit. He [. . .] was pleased to float upon the billow of his vanity, high borne above all frivolous things" (296). As a consequence, Ned Hazard (whose

surname may derive from a passage in Shakespeare's <u>King John</u> that the realist writer William Deam Howells would later use to title one of his best novels, <u>A Hazard of New Fortunes</u>) not only endures economic uncertainty, but he must also negotiate his way (from boyhood to manhood) through a world in which such a deceitful and charming character as Swansdown (Ned's rival) is publicly celebrated as a "gentleman" because of his pleasing manners and the outward signs of manliness he projects. Ned, however, seems unqualified for this test of masculinity, since "he is a man who can no more hold a secret than a crystal decanter can hold wine invisible" (108). According to the narrator, Ned "seems to have an unfortunate tendency [. . .] to present himself to [Bel] under those drawbacks which most shock her conceptions of the decorum she is inclined to expect from a lover" (109). If Bel "has a vein of romance in her composition which [. . .] gives her [. . .] a predilection for that solemn foppery which women sometimes imagine to be refinement," Ned "has not the slightest infusion" of it (109). By contrast, and as the narrator aptly underscores, Ned Hazard is "purblind to all the consequences of his own conduct, and as little calculated to play the politician as a child" (221). There is a shift in masculine power that indicates that the stronger manifestation of masculinity is the one displayed by Swansdown, which involves manipulation and deceit.

The character of the gentleman is perverted here, for if Victorian men like Swansdown were usually ridiculed as "dull" and effeminate dandies, here "the grave and empty pedantry in Singleton Swansdown" is, in Bel's eyes, "so like the hero of a novel" (110). Artful conversation is, in Swansdown's characterization, vital to genteel status and for the Southern Belle's approval in proving a man's worth in Southern society. On that note and talking about Harvey Riggs, Bel Tracy emphasizes the fabricated character of Southern knighthood, as she says: "I have trained him to it. Now, Mr. Cavalier, your hand" (106). As is the case with the trained Cavalier, Swansdown's passion for performative masculinity, his conversational and

oratical grace, become commodities that he publicly trades in or uses to separate himself from non-elite rivals. As Bel herself adds, "what she terms, a refined gentleman," is essentially "a character which runs a fair risk of being set down in the general opinion as sufficiently dull and insipid" (110). If historian Kenneth Greenberg has defined oratory as "the public display of a superior personality," allowing gentlemen to perform "their superior intelligence and virtue" (101), Bel reveals the changes that have occurred on the public stage, for insipid oratory and pedantry have been recognized as the real thing while the refined gentleman of intelligence and virtue may no longer be accepted by the popular mind as an effective model of manhood.[152]

To resist Dandyism and performative masculinity, men can refuse to perform in the public "spotlight" or can retreat from it into the shade of seclusion, where men might remain unconquerable by women and domesticity. Rip Meriwether, for instance, described by the narrator as "a shrewd, mischievous imp" and "a chartered libertine" (40) has an air of "an untrimmed colt torn down and disorderly" (41) and prefers the natural world (and here Kennedy seems to pay homage to Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle). Also for Ralph Tracy, the young man rejects the company of women and the public realm. In particular, "he contracted slovenly habits of dress at college, and has not since abandoned them; has a dislike to the company of women [. . .] and lives a good deal out of doors, not being fond, as he says, of being stuck up in the parlor to hear the women talk" (79). The idea of a world away from women, a woman-free zone is appealing to Rip seeking to heal beleaguered masculinity. Independence, being a central element to the shaping of the Jacksonian masculine ethos (this was particularly visible when A. Jackson declared war on big government and on the Bank of America), Rip and Ralph's insurrectionary movements may be read as gendered performances through which untainted masculinity is tested, proved, and achieved.

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[152] Kenneth Greenberg, Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery (Baltimore: Johns

Dark, enclosed rooms (and domesticity) are indeed seen as stifling to masculine power. Ned, for instance, in his school years, is preoccupied by a fear that he will never escape from such rooms and enter the "open" world. Dark rooms, it seems, are synonymous with the death of a predominately male power; on this analysis, confinement becomes synonymous with a lack of manhood. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that this is an exclusively feminine fear, but intriguingly enough, Kennedy seems ready to explore this unconventional and "unmanly" male fear.[153] The image of a boy locked in the closet by his mother-figure represents an interesting inversion of Gilbert and Gubar's Madwoman in the Attic. Ralph's rejection of the mother and of women in general, however, does not seem to mark a movement from boyhood to manhood, from feminized home to a more masculine and aggressive world. As for Rip, the latter is still a boy, with the influence of college years still heavily felt upon him. Rip rejects the public realm not to assert his masculinity, but because he is afraid of being enclosed. The novel here has a gendered argument that potentially divides political and public space into inside/outside, domestic/public, female/male arenas. Ned projects another model. Like Rip, he refers to his young years as a fear of being enclosed; yet, he also knows that manliness—as college years have taught his fellow college students— is essentially performative, for "the chivalrous lore displayed [at the time] by Ned Hazard was a matter of college renown" (61). The underlying validity of Ned's worries implies that males who completely disregard public opinion may be jeopardizing their status as men.

Ned, also, is intent on fleeing society in order to maintain his idealized views of aristocratic tradition: autonomy, heroism, and comradeship. But he is cripplingly aware that a

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Hopkins University Press, 1985).

[153] In Gone with the Wind, Margaret Mitchell seems ready to explore the same unconventional masculinity. Rhett assumes the role of mother and father, and when Bonnie, his daughter, dies, he feels her imprisonment and stays the night, weeping in the dark next to the dead body, even if such an attitude may be deemed unmanly; Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

man must make a name for himself. By way of example, Rip, who flees domesticity and women, does not have a name, only a nickname. Only by gathering his private and public sides, by gathering domesticity and social performance, can Ned have a name and find a place, for the closing chapters remind the readers that "it was a part of the family plans that Ned should live, for the present, at The Brakes" (505). Masculinity, Kennedy suggests, is not equated with the conquest of domesticity. It is not equated with the conquest of things and it should not be measured by the standards of men like Swansdown, be it clothing, speech or oratorical performativity. For Ned, the possibility of retreat into the woods or away from women is refused.

The passage from boyhood into manhood is indeed far from being simple: it is important to remember that throughout the narrative, Ned seems to have been submitted to outside forces that have directed his life and led to his current defeats: when he was "ten or eleven years old, he was put under the government of a respectable teacher" (44); then, he is sent to "Princeton." Frank Meriwether is the one "having by arrangement taken possession of the inheritance" (51). Ned is a traveller who has taken a fancy to travel to South America, what he calls "this theater of glory" (43). Ned is therefore characterized by departures, and he returns to Swallow Barn in order to hide his failures. Now on the threshold of adulthood, Ned is torn between his allegiances to old ideas of what it means to be a man, as if (again) unable to decide for himself: he wishes to fulfil an early Victorian notion of self-containment and wants to engage in traditional acts of brotherhood. He also idealizes the nobility of duelling and ancient standards of warfare. The chapter, "A Joust at Utterance" (359–368), illustrates Ned's confusion as it shows our young gentleman engaging in a pointless fight with a notorious troublemaker who insults Bel's father by calling him a "stark Old English Tory" (362). A street fight is arranged and Ned eventually wins. The duel, here, is an anachronism based upon ancient codes of honor. The duel (or affair of honor), as Donaldson notes, "often

served as the principal means for resolving questions or tensions—at least temporarily," for duels constituted the ultimate defense of reputation and display of status among adult Southern gentleman (<u>Keeping Quentin Alive</u> 65).[154] Duels also played a profound role in demarcating gentility among men in the region.[155]

In the tradition of chivalry, Ned engages in a duel with Rutherford because the man has "spoiled" the sanctity of Bel's father's name, and has tried to mock Bel's hawk bearing the name of 'my lady's grace': "my lady's grace! I suppose," the man says, "we shall hear of my lord's grace too, before long! There are some among us who, if they durst do it, would carry their heads high enough for such a title. If that stark old English Tory Isaac Tracy, of the Brakes, - as he calls himself" (*Rutherford is interrupted*) (36). As Ned is also literally defending the honor of Isaac Tracy, the living embodiement of an older hegemonic ideal of masculinity, there is a sense that Ned wishes to see the duel as a noble attempt to practice the honourable ethics of the great ones gone. However, a new social context has changed the meanings of these activities. Manly solidarity has been replaced by commercial competition and duels are no longer fought for honor but are tainted with a desire for public exposure and fame. The duel between Ned and Rutherford particularly epitomizes the speaker's need to be seen as a man of invulnerable dominance in the eyes of his audience: "He [Ned] changed the character of the war, and pressed upon Rutherford with such science and effect, as very soon to demonstrate that he had the entire command of the game" (365). What Kennedy reveals is that the codes of manhood produce men who are acutely sensitive to being dominated by other men and driven by fears of humiliation and shame. Rutherford may ironically point at Ned's attempt to "carry" his head high enough, and be a male spectacle, in order to ascend to

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[154] Susan V. Donaldson, "Keeping Quentin Compson Alive: The Last Gentleman, The Second Coming, and the Problems of Masculinity," <u>Walker Percy's Feminine Characters</u>, Eds. Lewis A. Lawson and Elzbieta H. Oleksy. Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 1995.

[155] On the importance of duels, read Lorri Glover, <u>Southern Sons, Becoming Men in the New Nation</u>, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

the "title" of Lord. Seen in this light, for these men whose status is no longer secured by family or rank, they may have to resort to other—more commercial or political—means.

The duel with Miles Rutherford also exemplifies the rampant fear that men may, if they did not control their emotions, lack self-control. "Originally educated in liberal studies," Rutherford "had fallen into disgrace through vicious habits. An unfortunate reputation for brilliant talents, in early life, had misled him into the belief that the care by which a good name is won and preserved is a useless virtue, and that self-control is a tax which only men of inferior parts pay for success" (361). Seen in this light, Rutherford becomes the very example of a "scrub aristocrat who has lapsed into sheer laziness and dissolution" (Mayfield 21). He also represents what Ned might become if the latter loses self-control himself.

At the end of this chapter, the narrator comments on Ned and the narrator's regaining Swallow Barn, "returning like knights to a bannered castle from a successful inroad,—flushed with heat and victory,—covered with dust and glory; our enemies subdued and our lady's pledge redeemed" (368). Harvey Riggs, who serves as an "extension of the narrator's ironic voice" (Ackermann 64), comments on Ned's embarrassing attempt at chivalry: "Fancy that you have heard of a tilting match between a bull and a cavalier, and that the bull was beaten. Romance and chivalry are souvereign varnishes for cracked crowns and bloody noses" (385). Despite Harvey's cynicism, Ned's attempt at heroism does not fail and his numerous endeavours at playing the part cannot be extricated from its social context. The narrator explains: "we mounted our horses amidst the congratulations of the whole hamlet for the salutary discipline which Ned had inflicted upon his splenetic antagonist" (368). The theatricality of the event—as the words *congratulations* and *demonstrate* emphasize—also conforms to the artificiality which Kennedy feels is characteristic of his era. Ned wants to be seen as the hero of romance, but he knows that he will be regarded as a fool. As a consequence, his only chance of ridding his feelings of worthlessness and emotional

uncertainty is to gain the favour of a society which celebrates aggressive competitors. At the same time and if Ned seems confronted with new gender codes, Bel and the older generation impose codes of masculinity and chivalry that no longer apply in this new age and will not hold in face of reality, while being charmed by the treacherous publicity of Swansdown's ersatz masculinity.

Read in this light, Swansdown (like Miles Rutherford), the usurper of masculinity, threatens the group by his deceit, for the Southern man is here depicted as a multiple identity rather than a cohesive figure. Thus doing, the narrator raises the possibility that the basis of all character may well be incompleteness and omission. Given the complexity of knowing someone, interpretation in Swallow Barn becomes a deep exploration of these mistaken perceptions that hamper the process of deciphering the truths of the human character and a realization that, behind Miles' and Swansdown's spectacles, there is no essence. The issue, however, in Swallow Barn—and as seen through the examples of Miles Rutherford or Swansdown—is not so much to unmask imposters but rather, the impossibility of personifying a "real" man. This impossibility not only sets out the opposition of two different models of masculinities at the heart of the community, but also makes arguable each individual attempt to achieve a masculine ideal: Ned is repeatedly haunted by suspicions about his own inadequacy and first sees Swansdown as an embodiment of ideal masculinity. But the narrator hints that even this perception is haunted by the truth of masculinity's performative nature—bodies can be faked—thereby making the "dandy" both ideal and suspect.[156] Ultimately, if masculinity is indeed a socially constructed role rather than a purely natural entity, it is no surprise that men like Ned will understandably long for external solutions to internal confusions.

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[156] I am indebted to Melanie Gourarier, "Performing the Insivible: Masculinities in the English-Speaking World," Proc. of Paper for Performing the Invisible: Masculinities in the English-Speaking World, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris.

2.4. What is it that Makes a Gentleman?

In his anachronistic need to engage in "noble" duels, Ned attempts to escape from society's contemporary appraisal of his worthlessness by concocting a timeless romance plot in which he can become a gallant lover. In doing so, Ned embodies the impossibility to construct a self that is independent from social or even cultural influence. Kennedy also implies that all aspects of manliness are indeed a form of role play. Ned's pose as a true lover, in this light, is an appeal to the eyes of Bel and to an imagined audience which may still harbour nostalgia for such timeless caricatures. Ned knows it well, as he says "I dread the very thought that Bel should hear of this quarrel. She will say—as she always says—that I have descended from my proper elevation of character. I wish I had a hornbook of gentility to go by!" (370). Anxious at passing the test of gentility that will prove his valor to men like Miles Rutherford and that will defend Bel's honor, Ned is also crippingly aware that this very manhood could be lost if only Bel refused to recognize his gentility. This loss hovers over the whole duel episode. Confronted with Miles Rutherford's challenge, the narrator asserts that "it became a man to take a stand in affairs of this nature!" (391). Yet, Bel would rather see him "stand by, and acknowledge himself a man, when she [. . .]—for an attack upon her father was an attack upon her—was reviled and made ther subject of profane jest and vituperation on the lips of an outlaw" (391). Consequently, for the confused Ned, "chastising that blackguard" entails "throwing away the gentleman" (370). Empowerment on the public stage for Ned is thus directly linked to an inevitable disempowerment on the private stage.

By placing men like Ned and Swansdown under the pressure of social influence, the author seems to question whether these men can freely express their feelings in a world which has begun to value male spectacle. Ned, for instance, finds it difficult to differentiate his personal sincerity from social performance, for he constantly equates his own courtship with

the commercial realm. Mark justly remarks that "Ned always spoke [. . .] of his courtship as 'this business' [and] had a boyish repugnance to call it by his right name" (353). Moreover, Ned feels the need to be aware of how his behaviour in matters of a private nature—such as courtship—might be interpreted by society. For example, when Ned and Mark decide to ride their horses in the middle of a field, Mark starts singing and Ned asserts, "I am truly astonished that you can find amusement in this preposterous flourish of your voice. Are you not aware that you make a dismal compromise of your proper and inherent dignity [. . .] by bawling in this fashion in the woods?" (82). Ned nevertheless attempts to teach him how to sing properly in what he calls "a rehearsal" (84) of a serenade for Bel Tracy, which later is recalled as "the height of tomfoolery" (85). Bel, who happens to be riding nearby, interrupts him and leaves the scene utterly vexed, but not without reminding Ned that her father's estate is not "modern enough for such strains" (84). Ned not only fears that Bel might possibly misinterpret the incident, but also that the "stiff old curmudgeon, her father," might regard him as "at the very antipodes of a polished man" (85). Other men like Harvey Riggs "will not improve the matter, because [they] will have [their] joke upon it" (85).

Bel's allusion to her father in this scene reveals that what is most desired in Swallow Barn is the recognition that comes from other men, essentially Bel's father, all the more performing for Bel is always an act more or less directed to her father's approval. Being approved by the woman is thus essentially negotiating the approval of the male generation and maintaining a masculine narrative. The courting of Bel eventually turns into sending dead partridges to her father. Afraid of being "taken in the high flood" of "nonsense!" (85), Ned feels insignificant. Yet, his feelings of insignificance, in this case, do not stem from self-righteous indignation at Bel's fancies, but from the worthlessness of his name and from his awareness that he has been cast out of a world in which men are tested and names are made. Of course, Ned's fear is not groundless. Because of the high-stakes—money, status,

plantation, and manhood—finding a mate in <u>Swallow Barn</u> (and as a general rule for antebellum Southern society) is not simply a private, emotional matter, but is intrinsically bound up in consideration of public reputation and calculated power. On that note, Michael Kimmel posits that the construction of masculinity is defined primarily by men's relation to other men. Certainly, for Ned, attainment of the gentleman ideal requires the respect of his male peers. Whereas women can create boys, only men can indeed create other men.[157]

In a telling manner, Ned can never fully escape the gaze of an imagined audience, which he consciously or unconsciously always associates with Bel. As the narrator explains, "Bel's good opinion of him was the very breath of his nostrils, and her rigid estimate of the proprieties of life the greatest of his terrors" (351). Understandably, and as if animated by some impervious necessity to act, Ned is repeatedly cripplingly sensitive to the dominant ideology of the external world, tortured between his desire to flee from the world and his knowledge that his value as a man depends upon his ability to perform for others, and for Bel, in particular. In each case, the performance is not satisfactory because, as the narrator demonstrates, masculinity is essentially performative, not real. Ned, for instance, seems to be crippled by his fear, not only of Bel's good judgement, but mainly by his fear that he may simply be a poor player performing upon a stage. Yet, on the other hand, he is asked to hide his weaknesses from others or theatrically project false images of manly strength, and is constantly enslaved by the influence of the public eye, as he acknowledges: "I feel qualmish at being seen there too often. People are so fond of gossiping" (388). The need to be recognized by others appears as a pivotal point of being a man, and it is no wonder why males, like Ralph, try to escape domestic imprisonment.

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[157] On that aspect of the construction of masculine identity, we can read the works of anthropologists Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead who have demonstrated that prestige systems, structures by which men define themselves and each other, are one of the most elemental aspects in the cultural construction of gender. Kimmel, <u>Manhood in America</u>, 6-8; Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, "Introduction: Accounting for

In each instance, the performance of masculinity is emphasized by a specific *mise-en-scène* in which anticipation is crucial, and what is anticipated always materializes. Ned offers, for instance, a catalog of the bad things that might happen, what Bel might say, what her father might think, and this foreshadowing, to some extent, bespeaks the character's psychological desire to set the scene, to be the director of his own drama, an active, masculine position that ironically leads to further disempowerment.

To quell his emotional uncertainty, Ned starts to look outwardly for advice, first by "hastily glacing his eye at [Mark]" (83) and later exclaiming, "why, Mark, [. . .] hadn't you your eyes about you?" (85). What is relevant about these lines is that the speaker's uncertain internal emotions always compel him to voice outward questions. He seems to be asking what he must do and what the acceptable behaviour for a man would be. There is no indication, however, in this passage that Ned is capable of acting upon his feelings without appealing to this audience. Ned, in this scene, remains emotionally illiterate, appealing to an imaginary audience in order to define his manhood: "[n]o man can stand such a flagrant exposure" (83).

Chapter XII provides another striking example of Ned's inability to disclose his emotions. While the narrator seems to read the secrets of Ned's heart and wishes to lead him to the confession of his feelings for Bel, Ned remains emotionally illiterate. Ned looks outwardly for guidance, dependent on an audience which he hopes will answer his questions and give him an indication of his character and value. Ned may sensitively experience intense emotions, and sometimes "the confession was on his lips" (112). Yet, he is unable to gain any insight into the validity of his feelings or why he feels the way he does, and eventually he even asks the narrator, "you think so?" (112). By exploring themes of personal integrity and also alluding to emotional facades, Kennedy encourages its readers to ponder whether men can maintain their allegiance to an old notion of internalized manly strength or whether they

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Sexual Meanings," <u>Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality</u>, eds. Sherry B.

will be tempted to outwardly act upon the commercial stage. If manliness is a quality which is learned and imposed upon males by society, men like Ned will be set adrift in a terrifying crisis of class and gender. The speaker's helplessness can only be expected.

Ned's lack of agency and his self-alienation are certainly in opposition to the Victorians' notion of instinctual manhood, since men were supposed to look inward—not outward—for guidance. Here, Ned must appeal to his society—and Bel at its center—in order to determine the shifting character of manly behaviour. The change that Kennedy seems soberly to acknowledge implies that masculinity is based upon society's perspective rather than a form of self-contained autonomy. Ned's miseries come precisely from "the tyranny to which a man is exposed who is obliged to square his conduct to the caprices of a mistress" (371). On that note and in discussing the Victorian ideal of the "Angel of the House," Dowling states that men who fantasized about a women's apparent domestic purity were often living vicariously through this "angel of the house" as a means of escaping from the conflicts of their business endeavours. Women were considered as moral guides, and society looked to women to maintain a level of purity untainted by the world of economic conquest. Bel fulfils the role perfectly as the reader can see Ned asking for her guidance in times of masculine insecurity: "'for heaven's sake, Bel!' he ejaculated, 'what have I done?'" (432). A proper "Victorian" wife was expected to practice womanly spirituality and provide support for both men and their heirs. As Silber explains, "because women were assumed to be the moral caretakers of the age, southern female characters in antebellum fiction often embodied the antimaterialist sensibilities of the region and the prewar era" (7). Bel, however, is unable to see Ned's inward fortitude and as a result, makes acts of concealment and performance necessary, since she believes Swansdown's performance to represent true chivalry and masculinity. The Belle is not presented as a solace from the commercial realm of business, but

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Ortner and Harriet Whitehead (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 10-20.

rather as dispossessing Ned of "his free agency, his judgment, his inclinations, his sense of duty" (391). Indeed, Ned seems initially intimidated by Bel's powerful femininity, as he acknowledges: "here am I, he continued, a man grown in a girl's leading-strings" (353). Ned is also afraid of being earnest since he feels that "he had possibly [. . .], in [Bel's] very sight and hearing, committed a thousand trespasses upon her notions of decorum" (351), and that "the most innocent actions of [his] life will bear a reading that may turn them, in Bel Tracy's judgement, into abiding topics of reproof" (370).

Ned's inability to harness inward fortitude as a means of withstanding external influences becomes clear when he discusses other men. In his discussion of the vanity and artificiality of the men of his age, Ned constantly criticizes Swansdown's pride and vanity, agreeing with the narrator that there is "an affectation of elegance utterly at war with his ordinary manners" (122). Notions of manhood founded upon an internal integrity have become destabilized, and with this, the basis from which to judge men. As Mayfield remarks, only "Meriwether's simplicity rests on what Henry Adams would later call 'the habit of command.' No one really questions or tests him" (13). Regarding the younger generation, however, Mr. Tracy "considers all men, not yet arrived at middle age, as mere air-brained boys [. . .] He is of opinion that Frank Meriwether himself has scarcely attained to manhood. But as for Ned Hazard or even Harvey Riggs, he thinks them not yet out of their teens" (221).

This uncertain treatment of manhood and, at the same time, some radical rethinking of manhood as a social construct, seem to undermine the traditional belief according to which the Southern man was at heart a Victorian, i.e. self-sufficient, with traditions of manhood based upon rank and essential selfhood. Despite Ned's claim that he wishes to leave the public behind, he often expresses a far more passive approach to this sphere. The jealousy he harbours towards those with wealth and prestige (Swansdown) emphasizes that the values of the economy and commercial realm may already be imprinted upon his psyche. Logically, he

interprets the possible reasons why Bel will not love him on a value scale. And since the larger community watches Ned's (or even Swandown's) performance of courting, incompetence and particularly rejection means, as Lorri Glover has remarked, not merely private heartache but also public humiliation (134).[158] Understandably, Ned worries about courting as much as he prizes it. Ned's identity, in this light, is not so much "monolithically dertermined," but rather "inextricably linked to their understanding of what it is that women expect of [him]" (Goddard 23).[159] Ned sees well that Bel is putting him upon a stage to play a role which he cannot possibly attain. Though he is aware of the falsity of Bel's projections, he has not yet developed the resilience to withstand her vision. Bel is hardly intimidating, yet her gaze causes him to feel like a boy, and emphasizes the vulnerability of his self-identity.

Kennedy reveals that if a society values outward display of manly strength, women will value male spectacle and fail to recognize that Swansdown, much like "The Romaunt of Dryasdale" that he tried to write, is nothing more than the author who "has been more successful in his rhyme than his story" (128). Another problem, Kennedy seems to suggest, comes from the fact that, by attempting to forego his need for public recognition in favour of the approval of his beloved, Ned is not asserting his true manliness but is merely performing for a new audience. The narrator is clearly willing to explore the insecurities which may compel a man to seek the comfort of loving eyes so desperately.

The gentleman seems here confused, tentative, and in search for the right pose, for he constantly "perceives" himself as threatened by the powerful influence of women and by the fear that he is not living up to an idea of manliness seen as stronger in a previous age or generation. That night at The Brakes,

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[158] Lorri Glover, Southern Sons, Becoming Men in the New Nation (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

[159] Kevin Goddard, "Looks Maketh the Man": The Female Gaze and the Construction of Masculinity."The Journal of Men's Studies 9.1 (Fall 2002): 23-39; Goddard adds that this expectation is first formed by the male child's emotional attachment to the mother" (25).

during the day Ned made a great many efforts at sentiment, but they generally

ended either in unmeaning words or dull discourses, which came from him

with a gravity and an earnestness that attracted universal remark [. . .] by night

fall, it was admitted by the ladies, that Hazard had a good deal of information

on topics to which he was hitherto deemed a total stranger (418).

Ned, able to perform the role accepted by the public, crosses the boundaries between daylight and darkness, social obscurity and male spectacle, boyhood and manhood. Ned's powerlessness is made clear when he sees himself rejected by Bel and rejected as well from the masculine arena and concealed within the crowd; "you fling me back upon the world the most wretched scapegrace that ever hid himself in its crowds" (432). Ned's inability to maintain his self-identity amid such crowds is closely associated with his return to social obscurity, for "he had no further purpose in remaining at The Brakes" (433). It becomes clear that Ned's feelings of helplessness stem from his awareness of social insignificance. Most importantly, and as seen through the woundings of disempowered men like Ned, Kennedy reveals shifting codes of masculinity at a time when men like Ned no longer produce their manhood on farms, the plantation, in the hunt or in the nature and instead, have to consume it through courtship, oratorical skills, and performance. Ned in this case no longer acts out a manhood which is synonymous with the term "adulthood," the opposite of childhood but acts out a masculinity that is best expressed in opposition to "femininity." If Ned is not a naturally "gallant" lover, love is not naturally gallant either.

In the scene when Ned finally decides to face Bel, Ned aligns excitement, fear, and feelings of inadequacy and it is such a combination that makes him feel most alive. Just how much one can take is unknowable but problematic since the uncertain limits to this sort of "masochistic" experience structure Ned's pleasure: Ned is full of fear, feeling weak and incompetent but excited. Ned "spoke like a frightened man, and accompanied almost every

thing he said with a muscular effort at deglutition, which is one of the ordinary physical symptoms of fear" (426). But as the novel finally poses it, Ned is the mental and physical agent of his own suffering, and that makes all the difference.

For instance, when Ned believes he is failing at playing the gentleman of Bel's dreams, he readily describes himself as "the most particularly wretched and miserable coxcomb in the whole state of Virginia" (430), adding "I am a boy,—a drivelling fool [. . .] I am vexed with myself, and do not deserve to be permitted to approach you" (430). The structure of the lines "I am a drivelling fool" or "I am the most egregious buffoon" is not firmly stating that he will rise into a state of manliness but is passively hoping that such a change will occur. Ned's mistake, in other words, is not that he accepts that Bel imposes foolish expectations upon himself and herself but that he accepts that his manliness is dependent on forces that are beyond his control. He might be seen as subjected to an abstracted external force, to the fantasies of Bel, yet the pain or the suffering he feels become a mechanism for experiencing Bel's fantasy as "real." If his anxiety is that he is only an image of manhood, his virile suffering affirms that he is indeed an embodiment of manhood. Ned can safely return to the exact domesticated plantation life that has threatened him in the beginning because he knows he has what it takes should it all come down to the man. The episode of the encounter with Bel, half way between the garden and the music room, can be read as a reflexive masochism that incorporates the possible uncertain, vulnerable, and passive male position, and then turns that vulnerability into a unique opportunity for masculine reconstruction. Bel, in this scene, is depicted as the ideal Victorian "angel of the house" as she "retreats to the drawing room and sat down to the piano, where she played and sung" (426). Yet, the narrator perverts the tradition as Ned tries to find refuge in the garden: "his walk by the river side was designed to reassemble his scattered forces; an undertaking that he found impossible in the face of the enemy" (426). Soon after, the drawing room—

symbol of domesticity and purity—becomes here a contested site where issues of power and performativity are explored: "as a man who takes his seat in a surgeon-dentist's chair [. . .] having made his mind to endure the operation [. . .] is hurried on to higher degrees of pain [. . .] until at last it seems to him as if his powers of sufferance could be wound up to no higher pitch [. . .] so did Ned find himself" (428). His face, at the end of this part, is "bathed in blushes," (429) while Bel defiantly turns her chair half-round, "so as to enable her to catch the expression of his countenance" (429). Kennedy explores here not the privilege of being a man but instead, the wounds of manhood, as Ned knows he must project a calculated image of manly power if he is to remedy his namelessness. Interestingly, Ned addresses her as "Miss Tracy" to which she answers by a "Sir." For the first time, and only in this scene, does Bel "give" him a name, "Mr. Hazard" (431).

As a consequence and more than the danger of a potential rise in feminine power or feminine romantic imagination, Mark Littleton, the narrator, is far more concerned, it seems, with new performative modes of masculinity, for if Ned and the narrator satirize the dandified self-awareness of characters such as Swansdown, Ned himself is only with difficulty able to resist this behaviour. Ned, for instance, often projects the same feelings of self-consciousness that he dismisses as feeble and effeminate in Swansdown. The Beau is in crisis and becomes a curious compound of the hero and the dandy. Yet, if Southern manhood is an innate and internal constant, a natural characteristic, there is no need for a man, like Ned, to center value according to changing audiences and to remain the slave of self-consciousness or outward appeals.

The narrative voice "dominates" the last part of the novel, and the omniscient narrator now frees Ned from theatrically performing for the reader in a first person style. Ned is also not given any opportunity to perform to the public eye, since Ned and Mark Littleton leave The Brakes. Their integrity is safe: "if a stranger could have seen, they would have persuaded

him that the performer was either an unhappy mortal, on his way to a madhouse, or a happy lover on the way from his mistress" (434). By using the conditional "if," the narrator refuses to have Ned exposed to a crowd, and thus emphasizes his own unwillingness to set Ned adrift with the support of sympathetic spectators who would properly interpret this man. He unintentionally implies that there may be limits to how much public abuse a man may take. Added to this, there is no reason for Ned to adopt such a pose because he is, at heart, a true gentleman, and because despite Swandown's polished manners, "Bel's a woman of fine sense [. . .] she is not to be trifled with," (433) and will—in due course—recognize him as a true gentleman. There is never an instance in which Ned is really in danger of losing control of his emotions in the face of social pressures, and the narrator seeks to affirm that Ned possesses the integrity to voice his feelings regardless of public response. The irony of Ned's self-effacement is that while other men hide their weaknesses behind social masks, Ned hides his strengths, the very things that make him a man. Kennedy shows that Bel does impose a sense of self-consciousness upon her gallant lover; yet, there is never an implication that Ned's inner strength is infiltrated. Ned—even in his performance of chivalric cavalier—remains unreconstructed; his fortitude remains untainted and unused. In light of these effects, Bel's authority over Ned does not stem from a rising feminine power or a weakening gentility but simply from Ned's misguided willingness to allow his spectator to influence him.

To complicate things even further, there is also a sense that the southern gentleman is inherently prone to expressions of emotional inadequacy. For instance, when he declares his love to Bel, the narrator mentions that "never did there rush from an opened flood-gate a more impetuous torrent than now flowed from [Ned's] heart through the channel of his lips. He was hyperbolically oratorical and told her, among other things, that she "was the bright luminary that gilded his happiest dreams" (432). It is in this sense that Bel is urged not to "mistake his madness for mirth," [for] "he is distracted, and therefore, unaccountable for his actions"

(235). His self-defeated behaviour reaches a critical state when he decides to play the part of the chivalric hero that Bel desires, while clearly performing a role rather than affirming his real self. Bel indeed wonders if it is "impossible for him to be in earnest long enough to sum up his own thoughts upon the subject" (235).

By showing that male anxiety is endemic to Southern masculinity (and not only dependent on the gentleman's social or economical environment), Kennedy underlines that the cure to what ails men like Ned is not so much the abolition of patriarchy or the retreat to a space freed from all female presence but rather the inhibited release of emotional energies. Ned Hazard needs to learn that victory or resistance in the struggle with change does not necessarily follow from attempts to dominate the source of the outrage—exertions of an outmoded masculinity demanded through the fancies of Bel Tracy—nor does it come through transcendence by efforts, like Rip Meriwether's, to escape from the perversity of modern culture. The solution for Kennedy "lies not in opposition nor denial, but in reconciliation, in coming to grips with that which threatens the premises upon which conventional notions of masculinity are based" (Rogers 134).[160] After all, as Allen Tate explained, the "Antebellum man, insofar as he achieved a unity between his moral nature and his livelihood, was a traditional man. He dominated the means of life; he is not dominated by it" (228).[161] Ned is, in other words, a victim of his own making more than a victim of a social or even patriarchal oppression.

In the end, Bel has finally released him of all "decorum," precisely because she eventually "grew heartily tired of that incompatible formality of manner which he assumed at our instigation. It sat upon him like an ill-fitted garment and rendered him the dullest of mortals" (504). Bel therefore "took the matter into consideration and at last, begged him to be

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[160] David Rogers, "A Masculinity of Faded Blue: V. K. Ratliff and Faulkner's Creation of Transpositional Space." <u>The Faulkner Journal</u>. 15.1-2 (1999): 125-150.

himself again" (504). In her ability to free Ned from presenting his true self or presenting a false identity, Bel appears to serve as an antidote to theatrical behaviour: "Hazard and Bel were joined in the bands of holy wedlock, Bel having at last, surrendered at discretion" (504). The plot thus concludes on an optimistic note, inspiring confidence that despite the advent of an age which seems to value theatrical display, in the end, society and women can still recognize and love true men. The focus, however, obscures certain questions that <u>Swallow Barn</u> does not investigate: will expressing emotions effectively liberate men or instead feminize them? Will the ethos of melodramatic release be in the true interests of women?

By ending his novels on a marriage, Kennedy brings to the surface (like Simms does in his novels) that the hero's task is not only to conquer the enemy in the field but also to obtain the ideal mate ordained by the visionary cultural order (Kreyling 39). As a consequence, above marriage lies the specter of History, of the making of men through state-sanctionned institutions. In a country in turmoil, shaken to its core by counter values of commercialism and profit, men find themselves in a very fragile position, which creates a void that marriage to the Belle is expected to fill. Kennedy is ultimately not willing to let Ned be misinterpreted by his audience: if a modern market-society produces pervasive ambiguities by which loss and gain, lustre and truth, masquerade and authenticity feed on each other to become ultimately indistinguishable, Bel allows him to maintain his stable identity within a society that may coerce him to act according to fluid notions of manly behaviour. The dandical attitude of Swansdown and his failure to get Bel Tracy's hand indicates also that self-discipline does not necessarily entitle men to be leaders and is not even commendable.

The marriage, however, is rather an ironic solution to Ned's masculinity crisis since, the "solution" to Ned's crisis—i.e., his union to Bel—is not what the narrator elaborates on. On the contrary, the news of Ned and Bel's marriage is briefly retranscribed afterward by the

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[161] Allen Tate, "What is a Traditional Society?" Phi Beta Kappa Address. University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

third-person narrator, whereas Ned's difficulty at asserting himself as a man (and a man of his own making) occupies most of the plot. Kennedy's solution, the retreat into the plantation, the country and the recollection of old unchangeable values, also dissolves itself into yet another ambiguity, for marriage to Bel Tracy, in <u>Swallow Barn,</u> collapses into boyhood. Indeed, if it may be envisioned as the rite of passage, marking the passage from childhood into adulthood, the union between Ned and Bel remains closely entertwined to Ned's boyhood. Bel eventually decides to recognize his "incorrigible" boyhood (421). "Never did a schoolboy," indeed, "enjoy a holiday more than he this freedom" (421). Interestingly enough, if Ned has not reached the "manhood" stage, it is only when Ned decides to "be the very essence of dullness, and the quintessence of decorum" (392) that the narrator uses the word "manhood." Preparing to meet Bel, Ned "inwardly fortified his resolution by frequent appeals to his manhood" (426). The apparent contradiction shifts the terms of the issue, proposing the seduction of the belle not as the aim, but rather as the method by which to achieve masculinity. Becoming a great seducer is, first of all, to fulfil oneself as a real man which occurs through the achievement of the skills of dullness and decorum specifically and ironically viewed as masculine.

By way of apprenticeship of seduction, it is actually the acquisition of masculinity that is at play, an acquisition which is all the more facilitated by the "still life" of <u>Swallow Barn</u>. The absence of plot thus becomes a way of posing and testing (ineffectual) manly ideals, since it sets Kennedy "free literally to make men, to create men and examine them without committing himself to any hard conclusion" (Mayfield 10). And since Ned's story is not about being a Southern man but about becoming one, the move from "no-house" to the plantation (which will come with his wedding to Bel Tracy) is a crucial step in his identity quest. It allows Ned to possibly explore and refashion his masculine identity, as Kennedy removes

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1936. <u>Reason in Madness and Critical Essays</u>. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1941. 217-30. Print.

Ned from the integrated setting which has been the backdrop of his life (the plantation he was supposed to inherit) to a world in which he is viewed with suspicion as an outsider. Ned may thus temporarily disengage from the stability of occupying one's assigned position in class hierarchy, creating a space "in which identity, and identity politics, may be productively explored" (Brigham 293).[162]

The theatre play clearly underlines this aspect. Ned and Harvey Riggs both decide to stage a play of murderers "disputing the propriety of the uncle's famous order to put the babes to death" (99). As the black minstrelsy parody of a slave rebellion, the skit also reveals latent fears that flourished throughout the period of slavery. There may be an allusion to the possible "death" of the next male generation, since both male-actors are ill-fitted for their roles, ill-fitted for the colour of the skin (they are white, not black), and ill-fitted for their suits. And yet, the political melodrama that could become the cause for serious action is here ridiculed. The narrator explains that "Ned and Harvey entered, each with a huge sabre attached to his girdle, their faces smutted with burnt cork, and their figures disguised in old uniform coats oddly disproportioned to their persons" (99). The suits they wear communicate very particular messages about masculine gender identity and its relationship to the male body. Of course, in this play, Ned and his fellow-actor act out a fantasy complete with costuming, dialogue, and behavior, possibly creating the temporary illusion of performing masculinity and becoming men "other" than themselves (black characters) but also possibly celebrating their own identity as "other" men living on the margins of the dominant culture. Ned could therefore articulate his divergence from traditional gender codings as a desire to acknowledge his

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[162] Cathy Brigham, "Identity, Masculinity, and Desire in David Bradley's Fiction." <u>Contemporary Literature</u> 36.2. (1995): 289-316.

"personalist terrain" which Una Chaudhuri identifies as "one's difference within" (qted. in Act like a Man 199).[163]

The fact that Ned is nameless, homeless also highlights his possible resistance at conventional masculinity discourses. Moreover, the surname of Ned Hazard suggests chance, a hazard of good fortune, and the threatening. Yet, in the end, Ned is shown cleaning his face and welcoming again his whiteness and maleness: "the two tragedians changed their dresses and washed the smut from their faces, and joined us in a short time on the porch at the front door, where we found ourselves in a very different mood [. . .] our late boisterous occupations inclined us with more zest to contemplate the beautiful repose of nature" (99). The pastoral order has remained untouched by the events of the evening. The threatening, once domesticated (that is, performed within the intimacy of the plantation parlor), is made less dangerous. In the end, the play "raised a general laugh, which put an end to the tragedy" (99). By containing the possible melodrama in a poorly acted play, the narrator allows the world of the plantation to remain untouched. The possibility for tragedy is ridiculed; reality kept at bay. The two men have retrieved their whiteness, and in the end, the next generation of Southerners needs not worry, because as Hollander argues, the uniform regularizes the natural curves and contours of the male body, disguising its explicit form and the individuality of its wearer. The fact that Ned's uniform is too large may indeed emphasize that he is not yet cut out for the role. Yet it also emphasizes that Ned's performance is productive to the whole, since he fits into the uniform of those heroes who have preceded him.

By fitting into the suit, Ned's performance epitomizes how the suit contributes to a homogenized masculine gender identity and the narrowly defined parameters to which men are required to limit themselves, in order for the larger patriarchal system to construct or

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[163] Una Chaudhuri, "The Future of the Hyphen: Interculturalism, Textuality, and the Difference Within," Interculturalism and Performance, ed. Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1991) 197-207.

create, as well as communicate and signify, what Southern masculine identity is. Ned might be insecure about his own individual identity as a man, yet his performance for Bel, as well as for her father, is necessary to secure and maintain a powerful, unified Southern masculine identity through association with male values and ideals that are distinctively considered as Southern. The "list" of possible ideals tellingly includes those commonly associated with masculine images of war. Since he desires to embody a stereotype of masculine invulnerability, Ned's performance is productive for the good of the overall culture. As Anne Hollander argues, "clothes make not the man, but the image of the man" (27).[164] Thus envisioned, masculinity is an issue of community trajectories. Masculinity in this instance becomes the subject of survisibility, strategies and theatrical showy practices, aiming to make qualities perceived as invisible, observable in order to better quantify them.

To some extent, revealing that the Southern Man is anxious at being dispossessed or that he is ineffectual on a political and competitive scene is indeed useful, for it recenters attention on men but also deconstructs the myth as it shows that white southern males had a far more ambivalent and challenged sense of manhood than we generally give them credit for (Mayfield 15).[165] It also serves to deconstruct the language of antebellum Southern men as this "has more often than not been interpreted wholly in terms of power and assertion, not in terms of introspection and self-doubt" (Mayfield xvi). Yet, the gentleman appears as a complicated figure, noble but of questionable use in a modernizing world and no model of masculinity in Swallow Barn really prevails over another. Even more alarming is the possibility that to be a Southern gentleman means only to manifest the outward signs of masculinity.

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[164] Anne Hollander, Sex and Suits (New York: Knopf/Random House, 1994).
[165] John Mayfield, Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South. New Perspectives on the History of the South (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).

More complicated even is the fact that a man like Ned is indeed oppressed and weakened by patriarchy; yet, this same anxiety also yields a positive effect for Ned's insecurity is put to productive use. It is Ned's fear of emotional (and masculine) inadequacy that leads Ned to act upon himself and play the part. As the narrator emphasizes, Ned "scorned to put on a character to win a woman [. . .] if he should be successful, it would be rank hypocrisy" (390). In a similar manner, he criticizes Swansdown's pride and vanity, asserting that:

> [Bel] cannot be mistaken in Swansdown [. . .] Bel Tracy is a woman of sense, and discriminates amongst men with remarkable acuteness. She has some old fancies—but Swansdown is not one of them. I don't believe she can abide him. D---m it, I know she can't. Women will do queer things sometimes—but Bel will never have Swansdown as long as her name is Bel Tracy (112).

Despite his attempt to heighten the sanctity of his relationship by purging it of dandyism and despite his efforts to create a relationship based on ideals of feminine innocence and romance, Ned is often portrayed wandering off into into contradiction, reservation or asides. Ned, for instance (and as seen in the above passage), may start with solid, unambiguous pronouncements, yet, to win Bel's approval, Ned is ready to play along and declares he is "resolved to show her" that he "can *play* the part of the most solemn fool in the world" (331). He says:

> I will come up [. . .] as near as possible to that model of precision and grace, the ineffable Swansdown—whom Bel thinks one of the lights of the age. Ned, accordingly, withdrew to make his toilet, and in due time, reappeared, decked out in a new suit of clothes, adjusted with a certain air of fashion which *he knew very well how to put on.* His cravat, especially, was worthy of observation, as it was composed with that elaborate and ingenious skill which,

more than the regulation of any other part of the apparel, denotes a familiarity

with the usages of the world of dandyism (412, emphasis mine).

In the end, Ned marries Bel and will live at The Brakes. In a community where the major issue is to "become a man," the ability to measure this process is absolutely necessary. Thus, as a whole, the part of the seducer is structured around modalities of assessment which permit Ned to place himself in relationship to Swansdown and Bel as well. The seduction of the belle serves to more than a conquest: the homeless Ned is literally brought home, to the plantation that is probably not a "theatre of glory" or a place for adventures on the sea, but a place where "there is," for the narrator,

fascination in the quiet, irresponsible, and reckless nature of these country pursuits, that is apt to seize upon the imagination of a man who has felt the perplexities of business. Ever since I have been at Swallow Barn, I have entertained a very philosophical longing for the calm and dignified retirement of the woods. I begin to grow moderate in my desires [. . .] I doubt not, after this, I shall be considered a man of few wants, and great resources within myself (261).

Additionally, seduction acts as an instrument to measure masculinity: knowing how to make oneself desirable to a woman—the very source of Ned's anxieties—appears to be the commonly understood result of the incorporation of masculine qualities. Ned's anxiety, as seen in Kennedy's conclusion, is actually quite problematic, for it is presented at once as an inevitable product of patriarchy at the same time as it contributes to the continuity of the patriarchal model. In such a context, the figures of the great seducer (the dandy) and the "real" man are confused.

CHAPTER 3

WILLIAM FAULKNER'S THE SOUND AND THE FURY (1929)

As our analysis of John Pendleton Kennedy's Swallow Barn has emphasized, beneath the narrative of Southern "normative" masculine construction, there exists layered narratives which are laden with varied perspectives on gender norms. And although there are pockets of resistance to, or anxiety caused by, the gendered traditions, most of the opposition to and confusion with gender emerges within the suppressed narratives; that of Ned Hazard in particular, which is retranscribed through the tale of the outsider/foreigner (and Northern cousin) visiting Virginia. These struggles are of course vital, as they also constitute most of the plot, but their internalization (and limitation to the borders of the plantation or the bedroom) ensures that gender, to use West and Zimmerman's terms, is "the task undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production" (125).[166] Without the journey into private minds, Ned's suppressed narrative would be hidden and therefore under analyzed.

Faulkner with The Sound and the Fury (1929) refuses, it seems, to let the masculine narratives remain silent or even unnoticed. The novel focuses on the story of the Compson family and the family of black servants working for them. Yet it is not narrated by an (unknown) omniscient narrator. On the contrary, the first three parts of the story are alternately narrated by the Compson brothers—the first part of the novel, by Benjy, who suffers from mental disability. His narrative takes place on April 7, 1928, on the family estate in the town of Jefferson, Mississippi, and is unique in the way it collapses past and present, perception and memory. The Compson house is in town, and in 1928, its grounds are much diminished because the "pasture" was sold long ago and has become a golf course. The second section of the novel is narrated by Quentin and takes place on June 2, 1910, in

Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Quentin is attending Harvard University. The narrative focuses almost exclusively on his sister Caddy, her lover Dalton Ames, and the last hours of his life before he commits suicide by drowning in the Charles River. Like Benjy's narrative, this section sometimes alternates between an obsessive preoccupation with the past and a rather distorted perception of his present. The third section of the novel is narrated by Jason and takes place on April 6, 1928, again in the town of Jefferson, Mississippi. This section tells of Jason's attempts to discipline Caddy's teenage daughter, Quentin, and most of the action is here concerned with Jason's failing attempts at catching Quentin with a carnival worker with whom she is having a flirt. The final section of the novel is narrated omnisciently and is set on April 8, 1928. It begins by detailing the Easter morning activities of Dilsey, the Compson's main servant. It also details the female Quentin's revenge on Jason and his stealing from her the money that was sent over the years by her mother, Caddy, and that is rightfully Miss Quentin's.

The four parts of the novel relate many of the same episodes, each as seen from a different point of view. The interweaving of the three streams of (male) consciousness and the non-linear structure makes the novel's synopsis truly difficult since the narrators, speaking from their own personal account, are all unreliable in their own way. What unites the three masculine sections, however, is the immobility and the stillness of the male discourses as they all focus on Caddy and most generally, the problematic female body. "Cut off, inward-turning, backward-looking," here are a few characteristics Robert Pen Warren finds in the South portrayed in The Sound and the Fury, "a culture [offering] an image, if one was romantic, of the unchangeableness of the human condition" (2).[167] That the story of the Compson family and Caddy must be told again and again through four different sections may

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[166] Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender." Gender and Society 1.2 (1987): 125-151.

[167] Robert Penn Warren, ed., "Introduction: Faulkner: Past and Future," Faulkner: a Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966) 1-22.

be revealing, however, of the radical instability of such romantic perception as well as the fearful proximity of change and destruction.

3.1. William Faulkner and the Performances of Gender.

The 1920s, as Kimmel explains, put indeed severe stress on those who idealized the masculine past, the stillness and unchangeability of the human condition. In a decade marked by fears of national and masculine enfeeblement, by technological changes that had transformed the workplace, depersonalized it, and emasculated men by depriving them of their autonomy (Kimmel 83), many writers, as Duvall notes, and Faulkner among them, were working "through a larger cultural pathology in male sexual self-identification" (49).[168] Not surprisingly maybe, Friend sees in the flowering of literature in the 1920s and 1930s the "search for another South," one that would resist destruction by bringing with it "a different approach to Southern masculinity, surprisingly resurrecting the old paradigm of honor and mastery" (xvii).[169]

Throughout his life, William Faulkner found himself embedded in conflicting models of manhood. Daniel Singal explains that "[a]ll his life Faulkner would struggle to reconcile two divergent approaches to selfhood—the Victorian urge toward unity and stability he had inherited as a child of the Southern rural gentry, and the Modernist drive for multiplicity and change that he had absorbed very early in his career as a self-identifying member of the international artistic avant-garde" (15). Faulkner, he adds, "was profoundly self-divided [. . .] [I]n his youth, he experimented with an extensive repertoire of trial identities, ranging from the battle-scarred 1st world war aviator to the bona fide Southern aristocrat to the bohemian writer and small-town derelict" (15). By the late 1920s, however, a pattern of two central

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[168] John N. Duvall, "Faulkner's Crying Game: Male Homosexual Panic," <u>Faulkner and Gender: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1994</u>, eds. Donald M. Kartiganer, and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1996) 48-72.

[169] Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., <u>Southern Masculinity, Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction</u> (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

selves—old-fashioned country gentleman and contemporary writer—became reasonably well-established. On occasion, these two Faulkners would appear in startling juxtaposition. "You might see him riding a horse some day, all liveried up as they say—had on the dress like a colonel," notes an old friend, "Then, he'd come out with long whiskers and look like a hippie" (15).[170]

To a startling degree, Faulkner's life suggests the flexible and performative nature of gender as articulated by theoreticians like Judith Butler, who observes in Gender Trouble that "[g]ender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (140).[171] Susan Donaldson remarks that William Faulkner, who, for all his protestations against public life and his insistence upon privacy, was photographed throughout his life striking multiple, and often contradictory, masculine attitudes: returning war veteran (albeit largely manufactured), bohemian artist, avid sailor, dashing aviator, family patriarch, rough-and-ready hunter, reluctant Hollywood screenwriter, and in his last years, elegant in full fox-hunting regalia. Behind the photographs, Faulkner's sense of self-fluidity and his "vexed" masculinity underlined that "constructing masculinity," seemed to have become an integral part of his life (qtd. in Singal 114).

As Donaldson remarks, Faulkner himself was all too aware that he had an imposing "heroic" legacy to live up to in the intimidating figure of his great-grandfather Colonel William C. Falkner—soldier, duelist, entrepreneur, and only incidentally, novelist. Indeed, Colonel William C. Falkner, had become enshrouded by legend, "bestowing on him a kind of mythical status" (Singal 24). Faulkner, for instance, told Robert Cantwell that

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[170] Daniel J. Singal, William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

[171] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990).

people at Ripley talk of him as if he were still alive, up in the hills some place,

and might come in at any time [. . .] It's a strange thing; there are lots of people

who knew him well, and yet no two of them remember him alike or describe him

the same way. One will say he was [very short] like me, and another will swear

he was 6 feet tall" (qtd. in Singal 36).[172]

William Faulkner, a young man with dreamy artistic ambitions and little inclination to work

in a conventional job was not likely to measure up to this mythical ancestor. Rejected as

unsuitable husband material by the family of his childhood sweetheart Estelle Oldham and

called "Count No Count," Faulkner may have been well aware that he served as an exemplar

of "unmanliness" in an era that was obsessed with defining and cataloguing the opposites of

manliness. Indeed, it was easier, as Angus McLaren argues, to denounce what was seen as a

lack of manliness "than to agree on the specifics of true masculinity" and hence late

nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century cultural commentators "created a number of

stock counterparts"- pimps, Apaches in France, working-class criminals, vagrants, tramps,

and homosexuals (27).[173] The chronically unemployed and alternately dandyish and scruffy

young Faulkner filled the bill all too easily (Donaldson 55).[174]

Hence it comes as no surprise that Faulkner was given to making brief, cryptic

comments throughout his career about the consequences of choosing an artistic vocation that,

from the perspective of conventional white male heterosexuals, was to render his own sense

of masculinity problematic at best and suspect at worst. When Faulkner was corresponding

with Malcolm Cowley about the making of The Portable Faulkner, the author informed

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[172] In 1938, Robert Cantwell was assigned the task of writing a magazine article on Faulkner for Time magazine. His conversation with William Faulkner has been retranscribed in M. Thomas Inge, Conversations with William Faulkner (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1999); Robert Cantwell, "The Faulkners: Recollections of a Gifted Family," William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, eds. Frederick J. Hoffmann and Olga Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960) 58-59.

[173] Angus McLaren, The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870-1930 (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1997).

Cowley, with a touch of bitterness, that art in the South "was really no manly business" (qtd. in Selected Letters 216).[175] More than a decade before, he had even gone as far as to argue in one of the aborted introductions to The Sound and the Fury that the male artist in the South was "forced to choose, lady and tiger fashion, between being an artist and being a man" ("Introduction" 24).[176]

If Faulkner's own life resembles in some respects a series of such stylized acts of masculinity, so too do his narratives and his characters suggest meditations on masculine styles, from Bayard Sartoris' performance as a self-destructive world war veteran to Horace Benbow's aesthete to Flem Snopes's homemade persona as a man on the make. So markedly different and stylized are these poses—Bayard's violence, Horace's idealism, Flem's single-minded acquisitiveness—that Faulkner's fictional men sometimes appear to be weighing and measuring their sense of masculinity against one another, almost as though they and their creator feel the pressing need to "prove" their differing versions of manhood over and over again.

In his treatment of women, also, "to the end of his days, the 19th Century attitudes toward sex and gender that [William Faulkner] had internalized as a child would remain to encounter him, rendering problematic his relationships with his wife and many of the other women with whom he interacted as an adult" (Singal 19). Faulkner's own approach to the Southern idea(l) of femininity was complex, for:

> [l]ike so many men of his era, he would both idealize women as paragons of
> sexual purity and simultaneously resent them for the moral standard they
> seemed to enforce on him [. . .] He would commence with what might be called

[174] Susan V. Donaldson, "Introduction: Faulkner and Masculinity." The Faulkner Journal 15.1-2 (Fall 1999/Spring 2000): 3-13.
[175] William Faulkner, Selected Letters of William Faulkner, ed. Joseph Blotner (New York: Vintage, 1978).

an unveiling of the Southern lady, revealing her to be a person with the normal range of human passions and sexual drives behind her façade of absolute purity, and then proceed to create a number of female characters who broke decisively not only with the "belle" identity but with the Victorian mores in general (Singal 19).

If Faulkner often defined himself as a "modernist" who deeply admired liberated women, he was also, as Singal remarks, a "Victorian." This internal psychic imbalance may, in turn, explain why "the narratives in which [these liberated women] appeared duly punish them for their sins, either through death or some form of mutilation" (19). In the Yoknapatawpha conference volume on Faulkner and Gender, Robert Dale Parker ventures to say that Faulkner actually "feels queasier about the burdens on masculinity than about the more concretely threatening burdens of women" (4). "For women," Parker continues, Faulkner "imagines or at least tries to imagine the dialectic between sex and gender in terms of individual women, whereas for men, he imagines sex and gender through a more frankly puzzled uneasiness about the broader possibilities for masculinity," adding that Faulkner's fiction reveals far more worries about "whether males are real men than about whether females are real women" (93). Almost as if to test that reality, Faulkner repeatedly returns, Parker adds, "to the border regions of gender performance" (93), and the (re)configuration of gendered private and public spaces in his novels often reverberate with considerable masculine anxiety when faced with manifestations of gender resistance. [177]

Whereas Parker (among other critics) promotes here a discussion of gender trying to uncover what Michael Kimmel has called "invisible" or "genderless" masculinity, and study

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[176] William Faulkner, "An Introduction to The Sound and the Fury," Faulkner: New Perspectives, ed. Richard H. Brodhead (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice, 1983) 20-28; Daniel J. Singal, William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 1997).

men "as men," gender identities do not develop in isolation but "are produced together, in the process that makes a gender order" (40).[178] Thus envisioned, masculinity refines, constructs and perfects itself through its encounter with the feminine. I will thus begin this chapter by discussing the portrayal of women as "women" in The Sound and the Fury.

3.2. The Feminine Voices.

Because the first three sections of The Sound and the Fury are given from the perspective of the Compson brothers and because the fourth starts with Dilsey the black servant of the family, but also indirectly centers upon Caddy through Jason's obsession with his niece Quentin and even his mother, the narrative neglects to bestow Caddy with a first person account. And throughout the novel, naming, description, allusion by the women themselves are actually always mediated through the narrator's and other characters' voices.

Reduced to silence, Caddy sheds light on the issue of womanhood and woman's status in Southern society. Seen from the outside, from her brothers' perspectives for the most part, she is first presented as Benjy's comforter in times of anxiety. Caddy, for instance, reassures Benjy that she is not going to run away. Later, she washes off her perfume and gives the rest of it to Dilsey in order to reassure him. Even when she has agreed to marry Herbert Head, she tries to "bind Quentin to a promise of seeing that Benjy's life is not further distorted by his being committed to a mental institution" (Vickery, qtd. in The Sound and the Fury 283).[179] She is also at other times her mother's pacifier and in most cases, she even takes upon herself the parental role as the following passage for instance emphasizes:

> 'Let them mind me tonight, Father,' Caddy said. 'I won't,' Jason said. 'I'm
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> going to mind Dilsey.' 'You'll have to, if Father says so.' Caddy said. 'Let them

[177] Robert Dale Parker, "Sex and Gender, Feminine and Masculine: Faulkner and the Polymorphous Exchange of Cultural Binaries," Faulkner and Gender: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1994, eds. Ann J. Abadie and Donald M. Kartiganer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996) 73-96.
[178] R. W. Connell, The Men and the Boys (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

mind me, father.' 'I wont.' Jason said. 'I wont mind you.' 'Hush.' Father said.

'You all mind Caddy, then. When they are done, bring them up the back stairs,

Dilsey' (16).

Caddy, as the female descent of a declined Southern aristocratic family, is burdened here with the myth of Southern ladyhood, a myth which in the tradition of Southern family romance, caught the Southern woman in a double-bind: toward the men—her brothers and father—she is supposed to be submissive and meek and in the management of the household, she is supposed to display initiative and energy (King 35).[180]

The lack of motherhood in the scene is correspondent with the disembodied status of womanhood throughout the novel. Mrs. Compson—the female head of the family—is also portrayed from the outside, from her sons' perspective. On first acquaintance, Mrs Compson seems to be the one defending the family from disgrace, protecting the males of the family from the threatening immorality of the Southern rebels/belles of Caddy's generation. Deprived of inner monologue, her text is registered through her sons, as in Quentin's memory of "[a] face reproachful tearful an odor of camphor and of tears" in one of her scenes with Caddy's fiancé Herbert Head: "You needn't be jealous though it's just an old woman he's flattering a grown married daughter I cant believe it" (61). The only roles Mrs. Compson can play are what Philip Weinstein reads as "premarital coquetry or post-maternal grief" (431).[181] Like Eva Birdsong in Glasgow's novel, The Sheltered Life, between her "childless adolescence and her child-complicated middle age," no other viable script has become, it

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[179] Olga W. Vickery, "The Sound and the Fury: A Study in Perspective." 1959. Rpt. in The Sound and the Fury (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987) 278-89.

[180] Richard H. King, "A Southern Renaissance," A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[181] Philip. M. Weinstein. "If I Could Say Mother: Construing the Unsayable About Faulknerian Maternity," The Sound and the Fury, ed. James B. Meriwether (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1970) 89-101; rpt. David Minter, ed., The Sound and the Fury (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1987) 430-442.

seems, available to her. As Weinstein remarks, "Mrs. Compson literally has nothing else to say" (qtd. in <u>The Sound and the Fury</u> 431).

Yet, it is important to notice that the mother is actually far more concerned with the superficiality of propriety than with the affection and supervision most often associated with her nurturing role. Mrs Compson, for instance, chides Caddy for trying to carry Benjy, but not only on the grounds that "he's too big for you to carry," or because "you'll injure your back" but because "all of our women have prided themselves on their carriage" (40). Weeping and mourning, or ritually heading for the cemetery throughout the novel, she registers her marital and maternal experience as a curse that makes a mockery of all her training. She has turned to the extreme opposite, "a hypochondriac who uses her supposed frailty and illness to impose guilt on those around her, [. . .] the Southern damsel in distress [who] cleverly manipulates the men to fuss over her needs" (Shumeyko 15).[182] More dangerous, the weakness that she professes detracts from her ability to guide her family from a mother's position. Her problem, however, is not only her inability to be an effective mother, but also—like General Archbald in <u>The Sheltered Life</u>—the recognition that she does not truly want to assume this position. For instance, the mother continuously tries to assert her status as the last lady in her family name. In doing so, she manages to separate herself from the Compson name, from the guilt associated with this name, as well as from her own daughter. She says to her son Jason, "We, Bascombs need nobody's charity. Certainly not that of a fallen woman [. . .] I'm a lady. You might not believe that from my offspring, but I am" (220, 300). She adds:

> I was unfortunate I was only a Bascomb I was taught there is no halfway ground
>
> that a woman is either a lady or not but I never dreamed when I held her in my
>
> arms that any daughter of mine could let herself (103).

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[182] Amelia Mari Shumeyko, "<u>Gender Within Stream of Consciousness: To the Lighthouse and The Sound and the Fury</u>." (MA. Thesis, Boston College, 2008) http://escholarship.bc.edu/dissertations

As Caroline Compson flirts with Caddy's fiancé Herbert, drawing on the social model of the Southern Belle, her son further registers her absence from the Compson family but also her maternal absence from his life. Indeed, and as exemplified by Benjy's memories, the man who is most on mother's mind is not her husband, but her womanizing brother Uncle Maury. In Quentin's section, Uncle Maury even appears more as a father than Mr. Compson himself. In this sense, as Weinstein justly remarks, her brother Maury serves as her way of remaining a Bascomb, of "refusing to consummate her entry into Compsonhood" (432). Mrs Compson is thus portrayed as an absent provider, both for her children and for her husband, a position which ironically allows her to remain outside of conventional gender roles, yet at the same time to interrogate the unified normative practices guaranteeing men's domination over women.

Deserted by an ineffectual mother and responsible for her brothers' needs, Caddy's presence throughout the text translates as a daughter, a sister, or a surrogate-mother. Denied any individual consciousness (and called upon to deny her emotions as well as all erotic appeal), Caddy becomes disembodied of herself, an absent center, as Brooks calls her, one that is observed from the outside and one toward whom all eyes, all memories and also all (male) approving gazes are directed (325).[183] She has become, like her mother and yet in a quite different manner, the absent provider for the family.

She provides, for instance, for Quentin's attachment to the chivalric concept of honor when the latter tries to rescript Caddy's love affair with Dalton Ames in terms of his own preconceptions. Whereas Caddy initially refuses to say that she did not want to have sex with her lover, refuses to say that she hates him, that is refuses to play along with the male-written narrative of Southern womanhood, she eventually accepts. The dialogue between Quentin, the director of the conversation, and Caddy, the actor, reads as follows: "Caddy you hate him

don't you don't you [. . .] Caddy you hate him don't you [. . .] Yes I hate him and I would die for him Ive already died for him I die for him over and over again everytime this [the rapid beating of her heart] goes" (95). In this scene, Caddy submits to Quentin's authority while being threatened by "the point of [Quentin's] knife at her throat" (96). Of course, in this scene, readers may understand very well that "in Caddy's romantic rhetoric, hate is merely another word for love and death is a euphemism for sex [and that] [t]his is decidedly not the heroic resonances of these words that Quentin means to invoke" (Breu 114).[184] As a consequence, the voiceless female in this scene is far from being disempowered, as she turns her forced or imposed silence into accepted (and highly subversive) silence, one that actually dismantles the very source of the narrator's authority. Despite the explicit privileging of men's definition of women in this scene, Faulkner's silences install a significant and potentially subversive dissymmetry between the voiceless female and the male narrator of female experience.

Faulkner never explained why he adopted such treatment except that "Caddie was ... too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going on," and that "it would be more passionate to see her through somebody else's eyes" (Faulkner in the University 1).[185] Women, like Caddy, Faulkner seems to suggest, can difficultly be free from the men's eyesight. As a result, the matter of identity formation, in Caddy's case, will have to take into account not only her silence but also the other's gaze. Caddy actually never exists in the same way in the different textual productions of her brothers. On that note, the recurrence of the mirror motif reinforces the defocalized figuration of Caddy who appears fighting in the mirror

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[183] Cleanth Brooks. "Man, Time, and Eternity," William Faulkner, the Yoknapatwapha Country (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963) 325-48.

[184] Christopher Breu, "Privilege's Mausoleum: The Ruination of White Southern Manhood in The Sound and the Fury," Southern Masculinity, Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction, eds. Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004) 106-128.

[185] Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph Blotner, eds. Faulkner in the University (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1965; the University Press of Virginia, 1959; reprinted 1977): 1-3.

with Jason (64) as seen through Benjy's eyes whereas Quentin sees Caddy and Dalton Ames not as people but as silhouettes against the sky. Glenn Sandstrom and other critics relate the mirror to narcissism, convinced that all the difficulties and conflicts situated around Quentin can be explained, for example, in terms of a replaced and transformed desire of narcissism.[186] In this view, Dalton is understood as Quentin's double, his mirror image. Seen in this light, such matters which concern gender representation only refer to the problems of narcissistic males. Because she arises from the consciousness of every perceiver, Caddy would thus exist but essentially in the domain of male desire; man being represented as a seeing subject while the object to be seen is described as feminine. As Diaz-Diocaretz recognizes, "Caddy as a bounded text [and image] illustrates that each woman is a product of interpretation [. . .] Caddy is structurally speaking a tale told by a man" (269).[187] Understandably, Caddy's role can only be grasped from inside—inside the text (and its attendant silences) and inside the image.

The reductive account of The Sound and the Fury to narcissistic fixation, however, may overlook one important critical aspect of the mirror motif. Whereas the narcissistic relation to mirror images appear as primary motifs in The Sound and the Fury, since Quentin the observer, for instance, is at the same time, inside and outside the imaginary circle, the scene does not here dramatize the interplays of gaze as rather binominal relations but actually features the exchange of glances into a triangular relationship: the viewer breaks through the self confinement of both Caddy/Jason or Caddy/Dalton whom he sees in the mirroring image. Faulkner seems to suggest that the formation of masculinity does not so much take place only within a narcissistic imaginary self-relation, as it already comprises external determination to

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[186] Glenn Sandstrom, "Identity Diffusion: Joe Christmas and Quentin Compson." American Quarterly 2.1 (1967): 207-223.

[187] Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, "Faulkner's Hen House: Woman as Bounded Text," Faulkner and Women, eds. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986): 235–69. Doreen Fowler

be able to form a generalized gender representation. Moreover, by running "right out of the mirror, out of the banked scent" (49), Caddy not only expresses her desire for un-representation, but also confines Quentin in a self-referential relation of the mirror. In looking at the mirror, Quentin might discover his own image, instead of Caddy's. A few pages later, Quentin reasserts Caddy's ability to escape definition as "she ran out of the mirror like a cloud" (52). The mirror has turned on narcissus. In this instance, Caddy shows the fundamental instability of binary relations such as men/women and of a masculine subjectivity based on the exclusion of the feminized other.

Whereas Caddy's silence becomes a resistance to the monological authoritative discourse of the male narrators, Caddy's voice also reveals that the power of individuation—if it is anywhere to be found—resides in the feminine voices in the novel. Indeed, a strong character, Caddy adamantly refuses, on several occasions, to remain constrained by male (or even female) discourse. Breaching her father's command, she symbolically climbs the pear tree to spy on her grandmother's funeral and learn the forbidden knowledge of death (Seidel 133). Her insurgency in this scene is emphasized, by comparing her to Eve in the Garden. She also repeatedly refuses, for instance, to suppress her emotions for the sake of propriety and defies her mother's orders in showering Benjy with affection. Carrying on like a man who displays sexual prowess, she does not hesitate to seek out sexual relationships and from an early age, when kissing a boy for the first time, explains defiantly to Quentin: "I didn't let him. I made him" (84). Her instinct for rebellion is probably nowhere more apparent than when she disobeys her parents and gets her dress wet. "I don't care whether they know or not," she tells Quentin. "I'm going to tell myself" (13). Through Quentin's memories, also, Caddy exchanges roles: "[s]he never was a queen or a fairy," Quentin remembers, "she was always king or a giant or a general [ready to] break that place open and drag them out and [. .

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and Ann J. Abadie, eds. Faulkner and Women: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1985 (Jackson: University Press

.] whip them good" (109). Caddy here breaks with the stereotypically feminine patterns of queen and fairy. In this instance, she suggests that she can and wishes to take on a role that is not typically reserved to the "feminine" sphere. Yet, if that role is not a feminine one—in the sense of being reserved for the females of the children-enacted play—it is not even a masculine role as Faulkner seems to suggest, since none of the males in this little play could ever assume—even if they wanted to—the responsibility of being a king, nor even fit in such a costume. In her reported assertion that a little girl can become a king, she asserts a self-created identity and thus, breaks with the traditional patterns that have, for centuries, reinforced the immutable (almost transhistorical) active-male vs. passive-female dichotomy. Caddy has become, to use Michael Millgate's words, "a principle and a symbol of social disruption" (95). Quentin and Caddy, as Singal remarks, also unmistakably exchange sexual roles when Quentin walks to his duel with Dalton Ames while Caddy rides up later on Quentin's horse, "the perennial symbol of planter authority" (131). Galloping like a cavalier, Caddy eventually finds her brother lying on the ground, having "passed out like a girl" (103).

If Caddy eventually recognizes her transgressive nature and admits to her wrongdoings, by exculpating her brother Quentin, when saying: "I am don't cry Im bad anyway you cant help it, [. . .] theres a curse on us its not our fault is it our fault" (100), her daughter Quentin appears as one of Faulkner's most subversive female characters since she does not find reason to accept the blame that her mother so readily shoulders. After Jason yells at what he considers licentious behavior, the female Quentin tells him: "Whatever I do, it's your fault; she says, "If I'm bad, it's because I had to be. You made me. I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead" (162). Thus doing, (Miss) Quentin throws the blame not onto nature, but onto nurture. Mrs Compson indirectly supports this view by adding that her granddaughter "has inherited all the headstrong traits. Quentin's too. I thought at the time,

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of Mississippi, 1986).

with the heritage she would already have, to give her that name, too. Sometimes I think she is the judgment of both of them upon me" (163). Although Miss Quentin has not been raised by her true mother, Mrs. Compson seems to argue that the girl has inherited all the aspects from her mother and uncle without having been socialized by them, thus calling into question the system of categorization used for self-definition. It is not sexuality per se, or knowledge, which brings about the fall; it is rather, as (Miss) Quentin suggests, society's denial of its women's strength and curiosity (Seidel 133).[188]

In appealing to death as a way to salvation, (Miss) Quentin, in the above instance, also foreshadows the words of Father (in Quentin's section) when the latter defines death as the only "state in which the others are left" (50). Nothing but death will make it possible to avoid the gaze of the other. Only death may allow one, either male or female, to remain truly authentic in the face of incessant cultural strain. Ironically, Quentin is, to some extent—at least metaphorically—dead, for she is performing gender through ontological invisibility. Indeed, she is presented as a queer being because she lacks most of the things that determine an average gender formation: she has no father; is raised by a misogynist uncle; her mother has also been forced to leave her and she carries the (masculine) name of her diseased uncle. (Miss) Quentin also suffers from Jason's voyeuristic drives as he looks at her and notices that her kimono slipping off her shoulder, or falls open to show her, in Jason's words, "dam near naked" (113). Moore points out that, in Jason's method of categorizing women into Virgin and whore, Jason the mother is seen as virgin while Quentin, the "bitch," is seen "as a mother substitute who has the phallus, and can either give it and provide wholeness, or withhold it and expose him as lacking" (544).[189] (Miss) Quentin's sexual identity is thus unstable, if not biologically, at least culturally: (Miss) Quentin can be both man and woman, as her name

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[188] Kathryn Lee Seidel, The Southern Belle in the American Novel (Tampa: University Press of Florida, 1985).
[189] Kathleen Moore, "Jason Compson and the Mother Complex." The Mississippi Quarterly 53.4 (2000): 533-550.

emphasizes. (Miss) Quentin's perversion however is converted into a metaphor of pure possibilities for becoming: Quentin inhabits a sort of gender-free category, one that blurs the male-female distinction and dissolves "femalehood" on the grounds of "personhood," i.e. absolute individualism. Quentin can also be defined in several ways: the first, as a female character who transcends proscribed gender and sexual boundaries and who further exposes the shaky foundations of the Compson men's sense of masculinity; the second, as someone who has phallus substitutes, a potent and excessive feminine signifier which (at once) signals and disavows the phallus. These definitions overlap each other since both of them function as what Matsuoka names "a kind of zero symbol in gender formation" (1)[190]—which is, at once, both a signifier of emptiness and an empty signifier. Seen through the examples of Caddy and Miss Quentin and in a sort of Mulveyan argument, man, the possessor of the penis, is assured access to the Symbolic and mastery of the gaze (assumed to be phallic) while woman, defined by her lack of the significant organ, occupies an ambiguous place. [191] For the descendants of the antebellum elite, Faulkner—and as best seen through the marginalized yet dissident voices of the subordinate others—seems to suggest that the entire process of gender identification has irretrievably been broken down (Singal 131).

3.3. Quentin: When Nihilism Counteracts Hegemony.

The reliance on clear gendered structures—the allegiance to the principle of chivalry, the alleged prerogative of the gentleman to which Quentin always returns—actually carries to the exact opposite extreme. To be white and male, in the Compson's world, certainly means—to use Robinson's terms—"to be forced to embody values or ideas or politics that might have nothing to do with one's own" (63). As a law student, Quentin, for instance, metaphorically

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[190] Shinya Matsuoka, "Gaze of Others and Gender Representation:"The Big Shot"/ "Dull Tale" and the revised Sanctuary." The Faulkner Journal of Japan 4 (September 2002).
<http://www.isc.senshu-u.ac.jp/~thb0559/No4/Matsuoka.htm >

represents the uncorrupted authority of patriarchal law. Quentin lives inside the law and inside the masculine ethos, a position which assures him privileges, security, and power, his for maintaining the hegemonic model of masculinity. The ensuing confusion is reflected in Quentin's difficulty with creating a mind of his own, especially as his initial thoughts center on his father's and grandfather's perceptions that heavily impact the way Quentin thinks in terms of gender roles.

The father's strongest point of authority over Quentin is of course in the attitude towards women and sex. As Quentin says "Father and I protect women from one another from themselves as women" (110). And because these codes involve the nature of women and the responsibility of men to protect them, Quentin—in defense of that honor—gets into fights which he starts with the same question: "did you ever have a sister?" (105). Violence, honor, and aggression thus become inextricably-linked notions. The notions of protection and masculine strength have become engraved in the men's minds (and Quentin's particularly) "because women so delicate so mysterious Father said" (81). The sentence here is particularly interesting as readers may notice the obvious absence of a verb. "Are" women delicate and mysterious? Or do they simply "pretend" to be delicate or mysterious? The narrative lack here emphasizes, even if indirectly, the fallibility of the male narrator(s). Quentin has been deprived of his own text, for the latter is uttered by Father but also because the text alludes to the inability of its own writer to convey precise meaning.

Added to this (and just like the matriarch), Faulkner's patriarch is not disclosed through inner monologue. He is only revealed through the consciousness of his sons' narrations. The distinction between son and father is so difficult that the inner monologue of one has almost become intermingled in the narrative inherited from the father. Quentin's section, for example, is saturated with instances of "Father said" and with references,

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[191] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." <u>Screen</u> 16.3 (1975): 6-18.

comparisons, or observations that Father made, as if Quentin was utterly incapable of creating a mind of his own. In the end, because it is culture that controls the life of men like Quentin and because Quentin's masculinity (or masculine construction) depends so much on the codes introduced to him by his father and Southern society when listening to him: "whose voice is this?"

The absence of mastery, be it "male" mastery over women or "narrative" mastery over meaning (pen and phallus have both been reduced to an imaginary and forever postponed dominance) is further exemplified when Quentin ironically argues: "Father and I protect women from one another from themselves our women" (62). The quotation continues in italics, suggesting that the words are exactly the ones uttered by Mr. Compson:

> *Women are like that they don't acquire knowledge of people we are for that they*
> *are just born with a practical fertility of suspicion that makes a crop every so*
> *often and usually right they have an affinity for evil for supplying whatever the*
> *evil lacks in itself for drawing it about them instinctively as you do bed-clothing*
> *in slumber fertilising the mind for it until the evil has served its purpose whether*
> *it existed or no* (62).

Another confusion in Quentin's mind is produced over the question of female virtue, as exemplified clearly when "father said it's because you are a virgin: don't you see? Women are never virgins. Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It's nature is hurting you not Caddy and I said that's just words and he said so is virginity and I said you don't know" (74). Here, Quentin's characterization of his father underlines the obvious link between the fear of women and their affinity for evil at the same time as his admission that virginity is socially constructed by men: "He said it was men invented virginity not women. [. . .] But to believe it doesn't matter and he said, That's what's so sad about anything; not only virginity and I said, Why couldn't it have been me and not her who is unvirgin and he said,

That's why that's sad too; nothing is even worth the changing of it" (50). Father's view here complicates Quentin's view of his own masculinity. Even worse, by forcing knowledge about sexualityupon his son, the father forces Quentin out of the genderless space of childhood into the space of adulthood. Caddy—and to follow the tradition of the Southern woman—is feared almost as deeply as she is venerated; venerated because—as Bertram Wyatt-Brown explains—"in the beautiful female countenance [Southern men] hoped to see the favorable image of their own honorable selves;" feared because "the woman (daughter, wife, sister) might bring the clan into disgrace at any moment by producing a bastard, by marrying outside the circle of kin and capital, or by witnessing the male's cowardice and immorality" (24).[192] In the end, the father shows not the discrepancy but the frightening complementarity between the social and the natural, the logical and the illogical, the conditioned and the instinctive, the material and the spiritual. Even though the father instills Southern masculine pride, Mr. Compson's nihilism as regards to the subject of women's virginity counteracts hegemony (Shumeyko 26).

The father-figure, in this instance, instills a binary view of life at the same time as it deconstructs it. Consequently, the Southern gentleman has become increasingly self-conscious and ironic: "Father said it used to be a gentleman was known by his books; nowadays, he is known by the ones he has not returned" (51). Mr. Compson contributes, in this sense, to Faulkner's "marking and undoing of his inherited idealism and its masculinity of fear, its denial of the Other and desire for order and control, its complicity with a politics of opposition and a dichotomous worldview" (Rogers 127).[193] Like Caddy and like Miss Quentin, Father offers in his awareness the tragic illumination that man (in this case, woman) is not a creature of limitations but of possibilities. Understandably, the father, whose cynical

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[192] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, <u>Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

realism stands in clear opposition to Quentin's romantic idealism, has become "Quentin's principal enemy, his cold and cynical logic persistently undermining the very basis of all those idealistic concepts to which Quentin so passionately holds (Millgate 304).[194]

In a quite similar manner, Quentin's grandfather highlights new ways of thinking about male subjectivity and clearly counteracts hegemony when deconstructing the epic heroism of the cavalier tradition. While giving a watch to his grandson, the grandfather exposes victory, honor, heritage, and conquest as notions that have no core. With the watch comes the challenge to abandon all fight as he says, "I give it to you [Quentin] not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it" (304). Time indeed is the conquering champion "because no battle is ever won, he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools" (48). Because life, the grandfather underscores, never amounts to anything more than "the tedious and insignificant ticking of segmented sameness" (Street 1),[195] no event, not Caddy's loss of virginity, not even Quentin's alleged incest with his sister, rises in significance above any other event; they are all relegated to reduction: "It's always the idle habits you will regret. Father said that. That Christ was not crucified: he was worn away by a minute clicking of little wheels" (52). The religious subversion is amplified when Father asserts that "all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away the sawdust flowing from what wound in what side that not for me died not"

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[193] David Rogers, "A Masculinity of Faded Blue: V. K. Ratliff and Faulkner's Creation of Transpositional Space." The Faulkner Journal. 15.1-2 (1999): 125-150.

[194] Michael Millgate, "The Sound and the Fury: Story and Novel," The Achievement of William Faulkner. (New York: Random House, 1966) 94-111; rpt. David Minter, ed., The Sound and the Fury (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1994) 297-310.

[195] Anna J. Street, "Loss: Faulkner's The Sound and The Fury." Southeast Missouri State University. 21 Sept. 2010. <http://www6.semo.edu/cfs/TFN_online/street.htm>.

(111). The mention of Christ in this instance further denies the idea that there is anything worth being lost, much less anything that can be redeemed (Street 1).

Functioning as an omnipresent force of devaluation, the father and grandfather constantly disrupt Quentin's attempts at re-establishing definition in a chaotic meaningless world. When Quentin admits having committed incest with his sister, even this worst conceivable act does not make an impression. The father replies, "[i]f we could have just done something so dreadful and Father said That's sad too, people cannot do anything that dreadful they cannot do anything very dreadful at all they cannot even remember tomorrow what seems dreadful today" (56). The act fades merely, Street explains, "into the same stream of hopelessly reduced experience on which unvirginity floated indifferently along" (1). In a similar manner, when Quentin resists the idea that his sister's virginity does not matter, i.e. when Quentin reasserts virginity as a clear point of distinction between what is and what is not, his father replies, "[t]hat's what's so sad about anything: not only virginity, and I said, Why couldn't it have been me and not her who is unvirgin and he said, That's why that's sad too; nothing is even worth the changing of it" (52). The Father and grandfather, in these instances, turn the sources of Quentin's tragedy upside down, revealing a tragedy whose greatest outrage is the absence of anything tragic at all. "Rather, in Faulkner," Wadlington writes, "the binary logic that produces in the first instance the tragic heroic crisis must also eventuate in devastating everydayness: tomorrow and tomorrow . . . Faulkner's title echoes the most famous protest against a life without climax" (68).[196]

By rendering meaning meaningless, the father and grandfather (like the marginalized feminine voices) expose the shaky foundations of the Compson men's sense of masculinity. Yet, as Faulkner emphasizes and as the lingering impact of Mr. Compson's framework on the new generation exemplifies, the simple questioning of the binary logic that produces the crisis

of gender identities will not leave its connotations behind. Quentin cannot accept new gender performances and there is no place for the father's and the grandfather's narratives in the story. Quentin, the narrator, who sees himself as the hero of the family drama, the "bitter prophet and inflexible corruptless judge of what he considered the family's honor and its doom" (208) even refuses the chance to explore such performances. If the father recognizes the fallacy of the codes by deconstructing the myth about women (and therefore indirectly about men) and also suggests that the very foundations of the family's world and sense of time and history are profoundly unstable, Quentin does not even want to know of its possibility. The fear to find a self lacking any significance remains Quentin's basic concern of identity. The following instance is particularly telling:

> Sometimes I could put myself to sleep saying that over and over until after the honeysuckle got all mixed up in it the whole thing came to symbolise night and unrest I seemed to be lying neither asleep nor awake looking down a long corridor of gray half-light where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible form antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed thinking *I was I was not who was not was not who* (SF 170, italics mine).

Quentin here clearly exposes his refusal to define one in terms of the "Other" and to accept, as David Rogers writes, the "recognition of the nonpolar world [self and other] jointly signify" (132).[197] The reference to the "shadow" in the above instance underlines that, in that figuration, Quentin becomes suspended between the "that" and the "not-that," the trope of undecidability. The shadowy presence—emblem of instability—occupies both sides of the

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[196]   Warwick Wadlington, Reading Faulknerian Tragedy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).
[197]   David Rogers, "A Masculinity of Faded Blue: V. K. Ratliff and Faulkner's Creation of Transpositional Space." The Faulkner Journal 15.1-2 (1999): 125-150.

familiar binaries structuring the old South: self/other, surface/depth, active/passive, masculine/feminine, soul/body, inside/outside. Quentin is thus caught in a double bind: if he wants to be loyal to his father's message, he must be indifferent to Caddy's predicament; if he wants to be loyal to his "father's metamessage," he must die of grief (Bockting 8).[198] Torn between the resolutions of "to be or not to be," Quentin has become another Hamlet, torn by the idea to cross over into the space of the transpositional, the space of new gender performances, that is out of "the safety and metaphysical comfort that underpinned the attitudes and assumptions of conventional Victorian masculinity—the home, the ivory tower, the sanctuary" (Rogers 132). This new way of experiencing gender is utterly unimaginable to Quentin who chooses to remain an unreconstructed character, a monomaniac driven by his own obsessions, among which the chivalric notion of female purity.[199] For Quentin, the inside and the outside, the reality and appearance must coincide, and if they do not—as is the case in the world Quentin inhabits—then, the monomaniac is found yearning for and subsequently attempting to retrieve what could be called the singleness of vision that life in the New South no longer permits.

Quentin is not only torn by his allegiances to Southern manhood and to the need "to defend his family's honor, and his own sexual honor" (Dobbs 7)[200] since Caddy's loss of virginity symbolizes the loss of family honor and thus the faltering of the Symbolic order; he is also influenced by the "New America" ethic of gender and racial relations that he has been exposed to after moving to the North for his study at Harvard. There, as Weinstein notes, "he is exposed to black migration, to the limits and effects of Southern racial ideology, and to the

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[198] Ineke Bockting, "The Impossible World of the 'Schizophrenic': William Faulkner's Quentin Compson." Style 24.3 (Fall 1990): 484-97.

[199] On the subject of Faulkner and Shakespeare, we can read: Joseph B. Keener, Shakespeare and Masculinity in Southern Fiction: Faulkner, Simms, Page, and Dixon (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[200] Ricky Floyd Dobbs, "Case Study in Soicial Neurosis: Quentin Compson and the Lost Cause," Papers on Language and Literature 33.4 (Fall 1997): 366-9.

dissolution of his identity as a racial subject" (140).[201] This impact contributes to trigger Quentin's neurotic splitting because he is torn between two ideologies: New America vs. Lost Cause (South), finding no hope to reconcile the ideology of the North with that of the South, Man with Woman, and past with present.

Only the simple, uncluttered horizon of a world devoid of Dalton Ames can possibly endow Quentin with the undisturbed sense of self that he needs to pass the test of manhood. He knows, as Walker Percy would later say of his last gentleman's great-grandfather, "what [is] what and [acts] accordingly" (The Last Gentleman 16), never in doubt about who he is and what honor compels him to do.[202] Whereas Ned Hazard in Swallow Barn hesitates between withdrawal to a no-woman place, dueling, homosocial performativity, or getting Bel Tracy's hand, Quentin, as Vickery remarks, "has not the slightest doubt as to what he ought to do: he ought to drive Caddy's seducer out of town, and if the seducer refuses to go, he ought to shoot him" (293). Moreover, in insisting that Caddy has been raped serves to reinscribe reality and appearance through the filter of Quentin's truth, as a way to reappropriate Caddy's possible—even if undisclosable and intolerable—sexual deviance. By rescripting Caddy's loss of virginity as rape, Quentin casts himself in the role of protector-avenger. Ultimately, because Dalton Ames—the symbol of virility to Quentin, as well as the seducer of Caddy— "looked like he was made out of bronze in his khaki shirt" (197) and because Dalton Ames, who has "crossed all the oceans all around the world" (150) reminds Quentin of the man on a ship whose skin "was burned the color of leaf tobacco," The Sound and the Fury implicitly turns Quentin's adversary into a colored adversary. Quentin's white body, in this instance, pales in contrast to the overtly sexual Dalton. Yet, readers may find in this correlation an allusion to what Southerners envisioned as the myth of the black rapist which was, according to Nelson, founded through allegorical coding for: "in the rape myth, the black man and the

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[201] Philip M. Weinstein, Ed. The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995).

white woman perform predetermined parts in much the same manner as [. . .] two stylized actors on stage" (qtd. in Robinson 51). In this binary, the single vision of Quentin's world would then be reasserted and his confusion discarded.

Yet, as if stuck into eternal boyhood, Quentin is of course utterly incapable of assuming the role of the avenger. This inability, in turn, explains why Quentin becomes fascinated with Dalton Ames, for the latter does what Quentin is unable to do and unable to be: a man. According to Noel Polk, Quentin "cannot be a man because he cannot control his sister's sexual life, because he cannot shoot a gun or hold a knife, because he cannot live up to a 'tradition' that males behave in certain ways, and not least perhaps because he is struggling with his own homosexuality" (46).[203] Constantly vacillating between myths of black rapists, of gentility, and honor, considering his father's words and acknowledging his own feelings towards his sister, Quentin becomes therefore "decentered" and marked in his own masculinity as he finds himself located on the margins of his own narrative. Southern white masculinity is no longer portrayed as a force of nature, as something invisible or normative, the standard by which marginalized others (foreigners, non-whites, and women) measure themselves. On the contrary, Quentin ends up being presented as a wounded individual, a disempowered victim who subtly revises the traditional concept of male dominance.

Quentin is undoubtedly not up for the heroic role: he cannot hurt nor even less kill his sister's lover. Believing that his imagined sin of incest might reduce Caddy's sin of promiscuity, he starts to imagine the desire to confess his hypothetical sin to his father. The mixture of emotions provokes Quentin's insanity and is described in pathological terms: his sanity drifts. The disintegration of Quentin's masculine self before his final suicide becomes obvious with the disappearance of punctuation and capitalization, when he says for instance:

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[202] Walker Percy, The Last Gentleman (New York: Avon, 1966).

[203] Noel Polk, "Testing Masculinity in The Snopes Trilogy," Faulkner and Welty and the Southern Literary Tradition (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008) 44-63.

> i was afraid to i was afraid she might and then it would have done any good but
> if i could tell you we did it would have been so and then the others wouldnt be
> so and then the world would roar away and he and now this other you are not
> lying now either but you are still blind to what is in yourself to that part of
> general truth the sequence of natural events and their causes which shadows
> every mans brow (112).

Christopher Breu, applying Lacan's theory, reads the breakdown in conventional linguistic distinctions in this passage as "marking the disintegration of Quentin's identity" (116).[204] Certainly, his mind is occupied with echoes of the past or with what could/should have been, obsessions which make him utterly unable to take action in the present. Yet, the disintegration of individual language is also symbolic of the larger dynamics at work in the novel. The use of the conditional mode (marked by the recurrence of "would" in the above passage) also reflects Quentin's desire to put an end to the meaninglessness of this world, as if speaking an act could call it into existence, and thus render time's erasure immaterial.

Death, as the end of time, reestablishes, if only through imagination, the conventional interplay between object and subject, the "I" and the external world. As Donaldson explains:

> suicide ultimately emerges as the only recourse for the traditional white
> southern male to retain his honor. Only through self-destruction, apparently,
> can he resolve his problematic relationships with women and black
> subordinates and questions about his own masculinity. Only through a duel
> with himself, so to speak, can he answer once and for all the questions raised
> over and over about his manhood [. . .] suicide also provides Quentin with
> escape from a world of ambiguities into the timeless, insular realm of death,

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[204] Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 412-41.

where his sister Caddie can be protected, traditional masculinity and feminity

restored, and honor reclaimed (69).

In the manner of the Lost Cause's practitioners who endorsed a society based upon white

supremacy, social order, and moral purity, thus providing identity, stability, and clear moral

definitions, Quentin's fundamental mistake is that in his quest for self-definition as man, he

totally depends on a number of symbols he cannot unify. Understandably, only death—the

mark on the dial that does not disappear with the movement of clock hands—holds the

condition by which meaninglessness can end (Street 1).

By choosing death as a means of escape, Quentin, however, ironically underscores the

impossibility of recuperating a fiction of abstract individualism and unmarkedness (Robinson

9). Indeed, recovering a sense of order and meaning out of chaos is, in Quentin's case,

directly linked to the voicing of emotional pain, recognition of masculine inadequacy and a

voluntary distanciation from humanity for which, Faulkner seems to suggest that there is no

possible salvation (and therefore no condemnation). Quentin's suicide thus reveals itself not

as an undertaking but a fatality.[205] Quentin's constant returning to his father's philosophy of

life conveys a sense of "stasis in motion," of being caught up in a "senseless repetition of

meaningless events that leave no room for change, for growth, for progress, for escape"

(Bockting 4). Thus, a strong feeling of stagnation, depression, and hopelessness dominates

these pages. Street concurs with this reading, when asserting that "Quentin's tragedy does not

belong to him, was never his, however desperately he longed for it" (1). Betrayed by a

meaningless patriarchy and a closed future, Quentin, in the manner of Blanche Dubois in <u>A</u>

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[205] On this aspect of time in <u>The Sound and the Fury</u>, read : Jean Paul Sartre, <u>On the Sound and the Fury, Time in the Work of Faulkner</u>. Trans. Annette Michelson. <u>Literary and Philosophical Essays</u> (London: Rider, 1955) 79-87. Originally published as Jean-Paul Sartre, "A propos de 'Le Bruit et la Fureur': La Temporalité chez Faulkner," <u>La Nouvelle Revue Française</u> 309 (1939): 1057-61.

Streetcar Named Desire, who so well 'internalized' the patriarchal ideals of chivalry to become herself 'internalized' in a mental institution, has become ready for asylum.

3.4. Jason and the Hallmarks of Misogyny.

Whereas Quentin is caught up with the "ostensible heroic, yet antiquated ideals of antebellum manhood" (Breu 120), one that is retrospectively focused on the image of the antebellum planter, Jason Compson his brother (and the narrator of the third section in the novel) embodies a much more present and future-oriented version of modern masculinity, one that acknowledges the transformations and modernizations that have produced the New South. Jason is indeed animated by an implacable logic, a "calculating approach to experience" (Breu 118).[206] His method of ordering translates in his explaining his actions in terms of cause and effect, profit and loss, gain and recompense. In the way he dichotomizes and categorizes things, Jason constructs fixed and normalized identities by way of binary oppositions— the virgin vs. the whore, the victim vs. the victimizer, good vs. bad. Convinced that his niece Quentin is essentially bad in character, Jason believes that she has robbed him of his money (which is actually rightfully hers). For this very reason, Jason is portrayed chasing but never actually catching Quentin throughout the third section of the novel. (Miss) Quentin, as he asserts, "cost me a job, the one chance I ever had to get ahead, that killed my father and is shortening my mother's life every day and made my name a laughing stock in the town" (189). In Jason's reasoning, if his mother (or himself) is placed as a victim, then his niece Miss Quentin must be (logically) positioned as the promiscuous whore. Hemmed in by his obsession for gain and profit, his obsession with getting the household to run in order (he is the breadwinner of the family) and his obsession with his niece's body and the job he

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[206] Christopher Breu, "Privilege's Mausoleum: The Ruination of White Southern Manhood in The Sound and the Fury," Southern Manhood, Perspectives on Masculinity in the South since Reconstruction, eds. Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2009) 106-128.

lost when Caddy's marriage to Herbert Head fell apart, Jason becomes isolated in his certitudes as much as isolated physically, in his hardware store in the town of Jefferson in which, as his mother claims, he had to bury himself, Starting as half owner, he new has just a job (139).

More than a simple obsession, the hatred he feels toward his niece becomes part of the feelings he feels toward every woman. As seen through Jason's consciousness, the representation of womanhood indulges here in the twin excesses that are the hallmarks of misogyny—idealization and demonization (Schor 115). His sense of self-worth as a man is actually built on insulting women, as he says, "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say" (113), or commenting on Caddy's letter, set up to make up generalizations to degrade the entire sex: "I tore it up and burned it over the spittoon. I make it a rule never to keep a scrap of paper bearing a woman's hand, and I never write them at all" (122). Here Jason's reasoning works through a double-coded logic: it ascribes outsider status to the women it features, thereby allowing the novel to position the female "perverse" subject as aberrant and exceptional, while also positioning these women as representative of Southern mainstream behaviors. Jason thus reveals that the failings of his niece or his sister might not be quarantined to a safe outside. The Sound and The Fury plays here on tacit fear tactics, suggesting that its female subjects represent a form of unacceptable counter-cultural desire that is, in fact, everywhere and in all women.

Yet, and as if the novel could not quite tolerate such a possibility, it moves to Jason's allusions to the prostitute Lorraine, suggesting that his statements might not, in fact, include all women. His obsession with Quentin's [his niece] sexual liaisons displaces his own ongoing alliances with a Memphis prostitute: It is Quentin who is a "damn little slut" (117) and women in general who "dress like they were trying to make every man passed on the street want to reach out and clap his hand on it," (145) while Jason sees himself as a pillar of

respectability who has no causal part in a sexual economy that constructs women as objects for male consumption" (Breu 120). Jason is a true hypocrite—another of these monomaniacs in The Sound and the Fury—who, unlike Quentin, is fully aware of doubleness, yet asserts the moral superiority of his vision, and, in spite of a complete departure from it himself, attempts imposing it upon the others. As Vickery explains, it is

> his very insistence on facing facts that causes his distorted view of Caddy, his family, and the whole human race. He cannot imagine that there might be other facts, other aspects of the situation, than the ones that directly affect him; as a result, he sees certain things so clearly that all others escape him. In the process, logic replaces truth and law, justice (286).[207]

Despite assertions of power and authority, Jason is as vulnerable as—if not more vulnerable than—the rest of the male cast in The Sound and the Fury. The following passage is worth quoting in full:

> He thought about Lorraine. He imagined himself in bed with her, only he was just lying beside her, pleading with her to help him, then he thought of the money again, and that he had been outwitted by a woman, a girl. If he could just believe it was the man who had robbed him. But to have been robbed of that which was to have compensated him for the lost job, which he had acquired through so much effort and risk, by the very symbol of the lost job itself, and worst of all, by a bitch of a girl (191).

In this passage, Jason has been emasculated literally, for he is in bed with Lorraine, but thinks of his robbery and his lost job. Jason's affair with Lorraine and his being in bed with her—which should be the symbol of masculine assertion—becomes closely intertwined here with

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[207] Olga W. Vickery, "The Sound and the Fury: A Study in Perspective," The Novels of William Faulkner : A Critical Interpretation (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1959); rpt. David Minter, 2d ed., The Sound and the Fury (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1994) 278-289.

Jason's ineffectual attempt at asserting his own masculinity. The bed even becomes a castrating element, since he imagines himself "just lying beside her" and his dreams become nightmares of a deeper castration, one that is made public through his "lost job" and the fact that "the whole world would know that he, Jason Compson, had been robbed by Quentin, his niece, a bitch" (192). If in Jason's world, no margin for error is allowed, his defeat in front of his niece finalizes what Breu calls "the novel's parodic representation of Jason's masculinity" (120).[208]

His business acumen, which he links to the display of typically masculine values of "effort and risk," is but another illusion. Of course, Jason has inherited the house: "it's yours," Mother says. "You are head of it now" (257), meaning he is responsible for it, her, and the servants; but he has secretly sold out his share of the store and his cotton speculation will cost him dearly before Miss Quentin steals the money stolen from her and runs off. Jason has "assumed the entire burden of the rotting family in the rotting house, supporting his idiot brother because of their mother, sacrificing what pleasures might have been the right and just due and even the necessity of a thirty-year-old bachelor" (212). Caroline Compson's attachment to Jason may also be understood by the fact that he is, as she sees it, a Bascomb rather than a Compson. Jason indeed reminisces that "[m]other called me back and cried on me a while….While we were waiting there for them to start she says Thank God if he had to be taken to, it is you left me and not Quentin. Thank God you are not a Compson" (121). Uncle Maury perhaps unconsciously heaps coals on Jason's fragile sense of self-worth when he writes in his letter, "I have long and unflaggingly striven (for) the ultimate solidification of my affairs by which I may restore to its rightful position that family of which I have the honor

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[208] For more reading on the comic performance of Jason, read: Harriet Hustis, ""Masculinity as/in Comic Performance in As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury," The Faulkner Journal 15.1-2 (1999): 107-123. Hustis examines the comic performances of Jason Compson and Anse Bundren, and using Freud's "Jokes and

to be the sole remaining male descendant" (140). Ironically, the already lost heritage of the little country hardware store is far from reasserting the male descent of the family, since earlier in the novel, readers had heard through the mother's voice that "you [Jason] haven't had the chance the others had [. . .]. I [mother] wanted you to get ahead. I knew your father would never realize that you were the only one who had any business sense" (139). Jason also continuously remarks that, unlike his brother Quentin who was sent to Harvard, his birthright has been squandered and thus he is forced to make his way by the liberal ethos of the self-made man: "Well, Jason likes work: I says no I never had university advantages because at Harvard they teach you to go for a swim at night without knowing how to swim" (123). Confined within a sort of oedipus triangle between uncle/father, mother, and "me," Jason is dwelling in a closed space. As Weinstein has pointed out, "if [Jason] seems the free–moving tracker of his niece, he is equally tracked by the racial/gender tropes and economic structures of his culture" (115). Because racial and gender demarcation has been imprinted on his mind irrevocably, Jason, much like the neurotic Quentin, cannot escape from his self-made prison.

3.5. Benjy: The Specter of White Southern Masculinity.

As seen through the sections of Quentin and Jason, the world as The Sound and the Fury depicts it is one in which women's agency is growing while men's power—even though still holding hegemony—is weakening. Whereas masculinity in Swallow Barn somehow evades social criticism by representing itself as a force of nature, Faulkner's men do not reinforce the naturalness, authority, and distinctive Southerness of white male privilege and dominance. Quite the contrary.

If the second and third sections, however, seem to argue that male disability or male crisis resides first and foremost in one's mind, the issue of male (im)potency in Benjy's section is shown in a very literal way, through Faulkner's exploration of the castration of a

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Their Relation to the Unconscious" as her primary critical tool, argues that both novels subvert "the scenarios

thirty-three-year-old idiot. In fact, the fear of castration is not unique to this section and it hovers throughout the novel: Jason's section establishes a strong focus on man's organs of reproduction, seen in this particular case as unused or unusable when in bed with Lorraine, the prostitute. In Quentin's section also, Faulkner recurrently turns to the figurative castration of a man who is portrayed as being impotent, physically weak, and surely effeminate. Benjy's castration is literal: when Benjy becomes a burden, Jason has him castrated and later, once Mrs. Compson had died, Jason packs him off into the insane asylum. Benjy cries when he looks at himself, while Luster, a young negro, tells him to "Hush [. . .] [since] looking for them aint going to do no good. They're gone" (47). The genitals will no longer be the source of identification in the institutional site of this section of the novel. As a result, Benjy's characterization is based on the absence of the ultimate phallic signifier and thus inaugurates a new existential representation of the self—a space of individuation exploring the multiplicity of possibilities provided by the inability to submit to male uniformity.

This space of individuation, which is complemented by a unique mechanism of perception and unvoluntary memory, is characterized by his constant conciliation between the abstract and the concrete of aesthetic experience of the world he inhabits: portrayed as a child who cannot make sense of time and even less of space, this thirty-three-year-old idiot cries or yells whenever he wishes to express himself. His inability to follow heteronormative prescriptions of expression is poignantly shown in the following paragraph, for instance:

> They came on. I opened the gate and they stopped, turning. I was trying to
> say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say
> and trying and the bright shapes began to stop and I tried to get out. I tried to
> get it off of my face, but the bright shapes were going again (34).

of male homosocial bonding" created through joking.

Seen in this light, the form of subjectivity embodied by Benjy represents the "most extreme version of the ruination of conventional embodiments of modernist masculinity" (Breu 122), for Benjy literally represents the male subject stripped of these very structures that sustain Quentin's and Jason's identities. And because language is the most important weapon of the males, Benjy's inability to speak out his own thoughts reveals the impossibility of his participating in, imitating or identifying with his brothers' system of individuation. His body, Bleikasten explains, is "not any more his own than his mind; each part of it seems to act autonomously; his throat makes sounds of its own (48), his hand "[tries] to go back to his mouth" (72). Even the pain of burning is something external to him. Benjy's body is thus considered not just a natural possession, but an essence, in Merleau-Ponty's famous dictum, "je 'n'ai' pas un corps, mais 'je suis' mon corps".[209] The fragmentation of Benjy's body and mind echoes here a sort of Freudian fear of castration as the provocative strangeness and absence of the phallus threatens the male subject's physical integrity and his power of accurate perception (212).[210] In 1924, Freud indeed theorized that males respond to sexual difference through fears of castration, while females experience penis envy. In this view, the man who does not have "balls" lacks the basic ingredients of manhood to assure his masculinity. Such a conflation between the penis/testicles and phallus offers sustenance to the idea critiqued by John Sloop (2004) in Disciplining Gender that, "to be male demands the presence of the penis" (75).[211] If then, a master trope of masculinity is the insistence that a biological male's greatest fear should be the threat of losing genitalia and if castration or penis-absence unsexes the male by turning the body into the very personification of lack (which is to say, female), it only stands to reason that male genitalia serves as a significant

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[209] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, L'œil et l'esprit (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).
[210] Sigmund Freud, Sexuality and the Psychology of Love (New York: Collier, 1963).
[211] John M. Sloop, Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary U.S. Culture (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

gendering purpose. What can be made, then, given the tie between one's manhood and manhood, of this subculture of men like Benjy in the midst of aggressive or normative models of masculinity like Jason's or Quentin's. Benjy's castration, like the subversive voices of Caddy, Miss Quentin, or even Father, is posited as an affront to Southern society's sense of wholeness. Whereas the voices of marginalized people have, until then, remained in the margin of the text emerging only through a double-voiced text, Benjy's voice, however, breaks through the other male narratives that seemingly protect dominant masculine subjectivity and reframes the meanings of masculine dominance into a zone of non-gratification. Perhaps not officially recognized, there are unspeakable aspects of Southern masculinity in Benjy that are expressed nonetheless.

The physical description of Benjy probably best emphasizes the vivid image of an idiot, possessing not a whole self, but being an assemblage of partial objects: "a big man who appeared to have been shaped of some substance whose particles would not or did not cohere to one another or to the frame which supported it" (342). Benjy's incoherent self cannot support the frame of the Southern order and the only standard from which to judge him is precisely the absence of these traditional or conventional masculine standards from which to judge his brothers. And if there is no standard, it is precisely because he is "only" an idiot, thus stripped away of all possibilities of masculine becoming or being, representing nothing less and nothing more than undeveloped mind and body. Faulkner himself, in his introduction to the novel, said that he wanted Benjy to be:

> impervious to the future [. . .] Without thought or comprehension; shapeless,
>
> neuter, like something eyeless and voiceless which might have lived, existed
>
> merely because of its ability to suffer, in the beginning of life; half fluid,

groping, a pallid and helpless mass of all mindless agony under sun, in time yet

not of it (231).[212]

In the above description, Benjy's castration thus moves the masculine body into the space of the "it" ("its ability to suffer"), a place of supposed sex neutrality, inhabiting a world free of gender categorization: Benjy is but a "pallid and helpless mass" (231). In making this claim, Faulkner acknowledges that he wants Benjy's body not to be coded as male but instead, marked as individual, an, iteration of identity outside of, and indeed free from, what he considers to be the taint of masculine gender specificity. As such, Benjy's fragmented body and mind suggests new conditions of experiencing and thinking subjectivity.

Whereas Quentin and Jason, for instance, "have already organized their [narrative] materials for us [readers]," by selecting in and out certain things or accenting what seems to them the important fact of their history, Benjy "lacking any selecting devices, does not sort at all. He takes in and reports on everything he sees, feels, smells, hears" (Wise 11-12).[213] Benjy cannot simplify. As a result, he reports things how they happened, he does not embellish things.

Whereas Quentin's "testicles" held him captive to sexual thoughts; Jason's to material concerns and to sexual thoughts for his niece, Faulkner underpins here a western intellectual tradition linking back at least to Plato who contended that the body, "with its deceptive sense, keeps us from real knowledge; it rivets us in a world of material things which is far removed from the world of reality; and it tempts us away from the virtuous life" (Symposium 221).[214]

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[212] William Faulkner, "An Introduction to The Sound and The Fury," in Norton Critical Edition of The Sound and the Fury, ed. David Minteer, 2d edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994).

[213] Gene Wise, American Historical Explanations: A Strategy for Grounded Inquiry (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

[214] Plato, "Symposium," Plato III: Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias. Trans. W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); quoted in. Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views." Feminist Studies 8 (1982): 109-131. This denigration of the body and esteem for the mind is not wholly an inheritance from Plato. As Susan Bordo (2004) has shown, many of the great philosophers, Plato, Augustine and Descartes provide "instructions, rules, or models on how to gain control over

Michael Millgate expresses his version of Plato's creed for the supremacy of the mind as the site of superior identity through reflections of Benjy's castrated body, as he explains that

> [Benjy's] observations do not pass through an intelligence which is capable of ordering, and hence distorting them; he reports the events of which he is a spectator, and even those in which he is himself a participator, with camera-like fidelity. Benjy does not himself interpret situations and events; still less does he attempt to impose a biased interpret on the reader (69).[215]

Lastly, because Benjy can only understand the world on the primitive level of familiar smells, shapes and rhythms, the implication suggests that the male body, freed from male body chemistry can thus lay claim to pure agency and volition, a possibility of human experience that his brothers have been unable to explore. Fragmented mind and fragmented body offer Benjy the freedom from the emotional and libidinous distortions (and the conscious censorship) that have blocked the true expression of a real uncorrupted self.

Castration not only elaborates a cultural unconscious not confined to verbal language, but also "the possibility of a more utopian, progressive construction of masculinity" (Breu 120). Because it is already fragmented and deprived of natural authority, castration—symbol of a wounded and disempowered masculinity—also frees him from any of the threats of emasculation that constantly haunt his brothers and provides him with the open space of escape: escape from the dichotomy of the South and North, Man and Woman, White and Black. Benjy, for instance, does not perceive race either. In his perception, Luster and Roskus, two of the Compson's black servants are not marked as black. Christopher Breu remarks that

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the body with the ultimate aim [. . .] of learning to live without it" (145); Susan Bordo, <u>Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body,</u> 1994 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[215] Michael Millgate, <u>The Sound and the Fury: Story and Novel, The Achievement of William Faulkner</u> (New York: Random House, 1966).

"even the dialect that Luster speaks is hard to fully separate from the dialect spoken by working-class white characters in this text" (122). He adds:

> What the text imagines in Benjy's refusal to see race is a form of white southern masculinity that is not predicated on white supremacy and one that can be open to the experiences and narratives of those who do not occupy a position of historical and social privilege. Colorblindness in this sense is not a refusal to see race or racism, but rather to treat privilege and inequality as either natural or justified (123).

Being liberated from the ego-grounded assumptions of his brothers, the disempowered idiot subverts the oppressive, organizational grids established by the Southern hegemonic order of masculinity and its power structures. While Quentin and Jason yearn to maintain the division with others and thus establish their identities, Benjy's fragmented subjectivity strives to break out of the same boundaries and to deconstruct his brothers' unifying models, precisely because the subject position, in this case, no longer sticks to pre-given, essentialist concepts. The famous icons of Southern masculinity—the self-made man, the Cavalier, the father and even the grand-father—are kept at a distance by Benjy's misunderstanding, which leaves the third brother without any true male role model to follow, without a watch to inherit, without any code to abide by or any time to forget. In contrast with his brothers, this stripping away of all that makes him bound to the body—that is, to time and space—becomes the very source of empowering possibilities. Through a constant tension between finding unity between concrete and aesthetic experience, manifested in fragmentation, a renewed form of the Southern man seems to appear.

Read in this light, the paradoxical plurality of voices in Benjy's monologue underline, not only his kaleidoscopic mind, but also a subject that is shattered by becoming multiple. As Bleikasten explains:

> [R]eported conversation (by people of normal intelligence) occupies more than half of Benjy's monologue—a monologue which, strictly speaking, is no monologue at all but rather a polylogue, a mosaic or patchwork of many voices seemingly recorded at random by an unselective mind (68).[216]

His monologue is actually comparable to that of an infant—chaotic and babbling. Infancy precisely becomes the productive moment of possibilities, for "within the choral world of the infant," as Catherine JuYu Cheng proposes, "there is no hierarchy, but braches that stretch and interchange with other braches" (17). Unlike the world of Jason and Quentin, in which everything is "linear, hierarchic, sedentary, and full of segmentation and striation," Benjy's world, on the contrary, is "a smooth space, and lines of escape on it transgress boundaries imposed by vertical lines of hierarchies and order" (Cheng 17).[217]

Although Benjy inhabits a world free of gender (and race), the way he organizes and evaluates his experience with Caddy is very similar to Quentin's approach, for "the objects he has learned to recognize constitute an inflexible pattern which he defends against novelty or change with every bellow of his overgrown body" (Vickery 283). Benjy's literal system of identification finds an obvious illustration when golfers yell "caddy." For Benjy, Caddy can only mean one thing and elicit one response (Vickery 283). Within his rigid systems of impressions and even in the context of Benjy's radically alternative psychology, Caddy is still constructed according to a virgin vs. whore dichotomy, and Benjy's mention that she no longer smelled liked trees clearly refers to his sister's estrangement from this world of innocence (and virginity) that they both shared when they were children. As Vickery argues, "as long as Caddy is in time, she cannot free herself or his world from change. His

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[216] André Bleikasten, <u>The Most Splendid Failure: Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury</u> (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1976).

[217] Catherine Ju-Yu Cheng, "Psychoanalysis and Schizophrenia," "Deleuzian Rhizosphere: Jason, Quentin, and Benjy in William Faulkner's <u>The Sound and the Fury</u>. Proc. of Folly, University of London, Goldsmiths. Web. 31 Aug. 2010. <www.ntnu.edu.tw/acad/docmeet/96/a11/a1105.doc>.

dependence on her physical presence, her scent of trees, is subject to constant threats which he fends off to the best of his ability. Sin and perfume are equally resented as intrusions of change into his arbitrary and absolute pattern (283).

Interestingly enough, and to somewhat qualify Vickery's argument, the perception of Caddy in terms of smells suggests however that, in Benjy's system of definition, Caddy inhabits a space that is very different from the conventional one. For one thing, Benjy does not understand any of the pressures placed upon him to conform to a certain model of hegemonic masculinity and therefore, he does not acknowledge them. Benjy, also, creates a feminine identity which is not as utterly dependent on the dichotomies expressed by Quentin in terms of "I was/I was not." He "smells" Caddy and Benjy's sensitivity to odors is actually reiterated several times throughout the novel.[218] In the opening lines of the novel, Benjy also refrains from offering a visual description of his sister Caddy, though Faulkner himself claims that "what that idiot child saw" establishes "the groundwork of that story" (qtd. in Faulkner in the University 86), and relies instead on an olfactory image to produce his sister: "Caddy," Benjy recalls, "smell[s] like trees and when she says we were asleep" (5). This detail is important, for the olfactory becomes Benjy's discourse, a way of accessing knowledge which supplies more than sense-based evidence. In doing so, Faulkner demonstrates a novelistic approach to knowledge via the body, particularly through the aesthetics of smell. Benjy's perception opens up possibilities for interrogating the traditional conceptualization of gender in The Sound and the Fury, for as Clarke remarks "a smell, after all, cannot be cross-dressed

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[218] Benjy's numerous references to Caddy's smell include the following: "like leaves" (5); "like trees" (5); "like trees" (6); "like trees in the rain" (12); "Caddy smelled like trees" (27); "She smelled like trees" (27); "Caddy smelled like trees" (29); "like trees" (31); "She smelled like trees" (46); "She smelled like trees" [italics Faulkner's](46); "Caddy held me . . . and something I could smell" (48).

and may thus offer a fourth term, a term which depends neither on binary logic nor its dissolution (249).[219]

In establishing the opportunity of a "fourth term," Benjy's perception bypasses the visual in favor of the experiential immediacy of touch, of taste and smell. Such an approach to the female body provides a foil for the generational and gendered structure, the all-or-nothing logic, to which his brothers must return. Quentin, it is true, also experiences the olfactory presence of Caddy, as he associates her memory to the smell of honeysuckle. Yet, the smell, far from being liberating the subject, only serves in Quentin's case to reinforce the human subject caught in all sorts of delusions from which he cannot disentangle himself. When recalling that smell in relation to Caddy, Quentin finds the atmosphere so thick that he can hardly breathe. In the memory sequence in which Quentin encounters Caddy at the branch – Quentin bellows, "damn that honeysuckle I wish it would stop (97).[220] The smell leads Quentin here to become further affiliated with a system that does not remind him to forget and that extends to him an ownership of memories and an attempted ownership of Caddy's virginity. Benjy's attention to smells, on a different note, renders an image of Caddy which is often transformed at the same time. The fact, for instance, that the discourse of Caddy rests in Benjy's section maintains indeed a certain skepticism about its referring to anything real. Caddy is thus granted the possibility to avoid the imprisoning gaze of the seer, offering in her disembodied presence "a lingering hope for a system of identity both grounded in the body and independent of it, a system which can operate beyond" (Clarke 249).

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[219] Deborah Clarke, "Gender, War, and Cross-Dressing in The Unvanquished," Faulkner and Gender, Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1994, eds. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996) 228-251

[220] A very interesting study of Faulkner's references to smells can be found in Terri S. Ruckel, The Scent of a New World Novel: Translating the Olfactory Language of Faulkner and Garcia Marquez. Diss. Louisiana State University, 2006. Web. 15 May 2010. <http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-11172006-095153/unrestricted/ruckel_dis.pdf>.

Critical to Benjy's section is also the fact that it is men who are electively castrating men (in this case Jason). As a result, women are sidelined as either passive spectators or they simply become non-existent, their embodied realities completely without relevance to the primacy of the penis and phallus. Such a postulation thus reframes the contemporary meanings of castration in significant ways, since it also relegates the threatening (castrating) female to a zone of non-signification. Benjy's section thus becomes a sort of declaration on behalf of queering categories: the castrated idiot appeals to category dissolution on the grounds of absolute individualism.

Yet, individualism itself is not a gender-free category. Faulkner can rewrite Benjy's anatomy but castration cannot edit the identity markers of race, class, and even body size through which others decode him. Within the context of The Sound and the Fury, it becomes impossible to represent a theology of body fragmentation without falling into generalized meanings that link the mind to consciousness, intelligent, and coherent selfhood in contradiction to the recalcitrant body that the mind must govern and that are excessive to the conventional representation of man as a phallocentric, rational, unitary speaking subject. Moreover, in many ways, Benjy is represented simultaneously as the most transgressive and the most tamed instance of masculinity in the novel. The perception of his castrated body parts as well as Luster's repetitive attempts at whipping Benjy, when saying for instance, "I fixin to whup you" (195) or when joking about looking for "balls" (10) soon undercut the empowering claims of a male-nullified system of identification.

At the same time, by uncovering new ways of performing gender into the section of the castrated Benjy, Faulkner also ironically suggests that Southern masculine (or feminine) reconstruction in the aftermath of the Civil War and destruction, may only be achieved through wounded, painful, and fragmented—no longer unified—subjectivities. The intricacy of mediating gender opens here a fresh vantage point on the workings of Southern

masculinity. Benjy's section may be applauded for its erosion of phallic authority: as so presented, castration allows Benjy to perform gender through ontological invisibility. But this applause would involve a fundamental misunderstanding of Lacan, for it is precisely through the chosen absence of the penis that phallic power finds its fullest expression. For Lacan indeed, it is important to remember that the phallus "can play its role only when veiled" (Ecrits 277). The hiddeness of the penis enables the phallus to appear as its equivalent, thus reinforcing the mystique of phallic power (Friedlander 42).[221] As a number of recent analysts of masculinity have argued, the mystique of the phallus (male power) is dependent on keeping the penis invisible. As Maxine Sheets-Johnstone puts it, "a penis remains shrouded in mystery. It is protected, hidden from sight. What is normally no more than a swag of flesh in this way gains unassailable stature and power" (69).[222] In addition, by avoiding the sight of Benjy's genitalia, The Sound and the Fury denies the castration implicit in the voyeuristic look of the reader, since to witness castration would be to participate in a long history of voyeuristic gaze that, would, itself, effectively castrate Benjy. In this sense, the novel both represses the construction of the spectator's gaze within a homosexual economy of desire and reinscribes the penis as the phallus.

There is no healing to the crisis of Southern masculinity, not in Quentin's section, not in Jason's, not even (even less) in Benjy's. On the contrary, far from being resolved, this crisis gets repeated again and again. The fact that the novel starts and ends with Benjy reinforces this painful circling movement. Most importantly, Benjy's rejection of phallic identity does not undermine its power, for it does not further self-making ends. Castration in The Sound and the Fury is not cast as one of agentive choice, but instead as a violation of the

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[221] Jennifer Friedlander, Feminine Look: Sexuation, Spectatorship, Subversion (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007).
[222] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, "Corporeal Archetypes and Power," Hypathia 7.3 (1992): 39-76.

body, thus neutralizing the text's more progressive possibilities for Benjy's dismembered male body.

3.6. The "Crisis from Without" and the "Crisis from Within".

Obviously, the masculine malaise felt by Quentin or even Jason can be traced beyond their own personal faults and their crisis could well be transposed onto something else other than masculinity as such. Men (as Whitehead also explains) have different pressures other than masculinity; such as race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, culture, etc. that are more pressing problems in their everyday lives.[223] The Sound and the Fury proposes different ways of approaching and possibly explaining the masculine crisis experienced here, and as many critics have already remarked, the failures of the Compson brothers are not—it is true—entirely theirs.

To finance Quentin's studies in Yankee territory, the father has also sold part of his land (Benjy's inheritance) that is now used for the sterile pleasure of golf-players. Plagued with alcoholism, malady, idiocy, suicide, autism, or abandonment, the Compson family bears the mark of what Mark Twain deplored as the "Gilded Age" (Cochoy 17).[224] Read in this light, Jason and Quentin exemplify the fate of many white slave-owners who have been deprived of these masculine, agrarian values at the core of the myth of Southern grandeur. Jason ironically comments on such a transformation in the South, unable to understand "why it was just poison oak and not a snake or something" (151). The Garden of Eden has now turned into a grotesque poisoned jungle, causing these men's sense of identity to disintegrate: women can no longer be counted upon to "help define the boundaries of white male identity" ("Keeping Quentin Alive" 65), because as Quentin muses, "they have an affinity for evil" (96) whether they admit it or not.

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[223] This idea is developed in Harry Brod, ed. The Making of Masculinities **:** The New Men's Studies, ed. by Harry Brod (Boston, Mass. ; London : Allen and Unwin, 1987).

A similar problem arises from blacks in the novel. Quentin actually acknowledges that black subordination to white authority might well be an elaborately constructed fiction: "that was when I realized a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behavior, a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among" (109). Eventually, the foundation of white southern masculinity is in danger of disintegrating in the face of socio-economic change. As Donaldson recognizes:

> so potent is the threat offered by the unpredictable behavior of 'inferiors' like white women and blacks that there simply seems to be no room any longer for the sort of white male honor by which Quentin and his father define themselves. What permeates is the lingering sense of defeat that permeates Quentin's section (66).

The novel's logic indicates that it is precisely the disintegration of the traditional Southern order that creates the fertile ground for these males in crisis. An atomized aristocratic structure is abetted by an ethos of liberal individualism, so much that the traditional forms of shaping identity through ethinicity, religion, or culture have become non substantial. Through Dilsey's eyes, in particular, the reader finds "Calvary, wid de sacred trees, [see] de thief en de murderer en de least of dese" and hear "de boasting en de braggin" and see "de darkness en de death everlasting upon de generations" (370).

Moreover, because the father and grandfather insist on the very emptiness of the principles and ideas that they are nonetheless handling down to the following generation, Faulkner may also suggest that patriarchy has deserted its own role, leaving the sons without parental guidance, yet in charge of imposing these codes onto others. It is also Mr. Compson's ineffectuality as a lawgiver and his early death which propel Jason to become a substitute husband for his mother, Caroline Compson and a substitute father for Caddy's daughter, Miss

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[224] Nathalie Cochoy. "Loss and Wonder in The Sound and the Fury," <u>Rapport Agrégation Interne</u> (2003): 17-21.

Quentin. From his childhood on, Jason has been educated to serve as a supervisor to discipline women and to internalize the culture-constructed clock, upholding the patriarchal tradition in the same way his brother attempted. His despotic control of the women in his household signifies that men's "[p]atriarchal insistence upon mastering female sexuality shapes a discursive practice in which women enter the male gaze only as creatures of their own bodies" (Weistein 117). The "culture-constructed clock they follow in Faulknerian narrative (as in most Western narrative)," Weinstein continues, is "the clock of their sex-coded bodies: virginity, menstruation, intercourse, childbearing, menopause, sexless old age" (117). Yet and as the novel underlines, if the clock "tick-tocked solemn and profound," it may also signify "the dry pulse of the decaying house itself" (177).

The ruination of masculinity in the novel is also directly linked to the hypochondriac mother, the licentious sister, and treacherous niece. And, it might be equally tempting to read the story as "a parable of the disintegration of the modern man, [of] individuals no longer sustained by familial or cultural unity [who] are alienated and lost in private worlds" (Vickery 295). For Cleanth Brooks, the basic cause of the breakup of the Compson family is the cold and self-centered mother who is sensitive about the social status of her own family, the Bascombs, who "feels the birth of an idiot son as a kind of personal affront, who spoils and corrupts her favorite son, and who withholds any real love and affection from her husband and children" (qtd. in The Sound and The Fury 293). Quentin says to himself "If I'd just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother" (172), thus laying the blame for his numerous problems on his mother.[225] In a quite similar manner, Jason (running after his niece) merges Quentin, his mother and his employer into one antagonist, as if these were all and the same:

Web. 09 Nov. 2009. <ftp://trf.education.gouv.fr/pub/edutel/siac/siac2/jury/agreg_int/anglais2.pdf>.

[225] Cleanth Brooks, "Man, Time, and Eternity," William Faulkner, the Yoknapatwapha Country (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963) 325-48; qtd. in David Minter, ed., The Sound and the Fury (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1987).

> I dont owe anything to anybody that has no more consideration for me, that wouldn't be a damn bit above planting that ford there and making me spend a whole afternoon and Earl taking her back there and showing her the books just because of your grandmother, but just let me catch you doing it one time on this place, where my mother lives (151).

Most importantly maybe, the decline of the Compson family is linked to this "absent center" that is Caddy. It is not Caddy's fault alone as the Compson family (like the Dubois family in A Streetcar Named Desire) is riddled with alcoholism, adultery, mental insanity, and instability. Yet Caddy's sexual purity seems to serve as the redemption of the family's status. Once that purity is gone, "there is nothing left to raise them back into their former standing" (Shumeyko 70).

The sons, also (Quentin and Jason particularly) seem to have faults that are individual exacerbations of their father's flaws. More than making a statement on femininity or masculinity, Faulkner denies the "essence" of Southerness that eventually served to redeem the anxieties and crisis of masculinity found in Swallow Barn. Faulkner, indeed, alludes mostly to the emptiness in the most suppressed narratives of these Southern males: to their weaknesses, anxieties, and insecurities. The males are shown reproducing discourses of an invisible patriarchy, understanding the gestural significations of these discourses; yet, as Polk remarks, "they cannot completely understand the origins and the workings of the traditional discourses of masculinity which control their needs and their dreams" (47).[226] Read in that light, the failings of Jason or Quentin might not be their failings only. The grandfather, it is true, "wore his uniform and [. . .] was always right" (111). But there is also—in the same grandfather's legacy graduation watch and his father's claim that Quentin, for instance, needs to forget time—the idea that Southern masculinity may be faulty at the core, the idea that the

old order "held the seeds of its own ruin in itself" (Penn Warren 316).[227] And since Faulkner denies insight into the parental consciousness as well as into a transcendent consciousness for the entire story, this results in reactionary connections between parent and child. Jason and Quentin are not so much responsible for their defeat, but rather for the mode of their defeat.

The stream-of-consciousness technique, in particular, promises a freedom and an intimacy with men's individual desires and the repressed narratives of masculinities—bringing therefore the expressive male to the forefront. The stream-of-consciousness technique, because it allows each of the male characters to express all his thoughts, offers a chance to the reader and to the narrator alike to explore the personal "terrain" of each brother, and to expose the socially constructed foundations of masculine codes and the larger tragedy of men's place in gender construction. That opportunity for self-exploration (and possibly for exploring new ways of performing gender) is however soon deflected. Whereas language, as Vorlicky notes, becomes for Faulkner's men the weapon of choice and social dialogue their ammunition (45),[228] the three brothers fail to recognize the pervasive impact of their dialogue. Quentin and Jason, for example, are seen conversing on topics supported by the thematic of the masculine ethos and its attending myths (virginity, etc) and they all assume speaking positions that are not necessarily representative of their own voices; each takes a voice that is, in effect, outside of himself. Even when Quentin wishes to stand against Dalton Ames, for instance, his voice significantly fails him. The ultimatum that he utters, "I'll give you until sundown to leave town" (159) derives, to quote Zender, "from schoolboy philosophy, turn-of-the-century melodrama, and the southern code of honor" (17),[229] or, more specifically, from a

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[226] Noel Polk, "Testing Masculinity in The Snopes Trilogy," <u>Faulkner and Welty and The Southern LiteraryTradition</u> (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 200) 44-63.

[227] Robert Penn Warren, "Cowley's Faulkner," in <u>William Faulkner: The Critical Heritage,</u> John Bassett, ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1997).

[228] Robert Vorlicky, <u>Act Like a Man. Challenging Masculinities in American Drama</u> (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

[229] Karl F. Zender, <u>The Crossing of the Ways: William Faulkner, the South, and the Modern World</u> (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989). We can also read Jane Millgate, "Quentin Compson as Poor

novel about a Southerner displaced into the American West, <u>The Virginian</u>. Quentin then asserts "my mouth said it I didn't say it at all" (101). Quentin's speech is largely made up of other people's speech, remembered and imaginary conversations. In other words, the stream of consciousness technique promises a male voice that is denied and replaced instead by the voice of authority, be it father, mother, or symbolic father. Read in this light, masculinity is therefore not audible except in the margin of the narrative. This is, at least, the stance of Judith Halberstam who considers masculinity to "become legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male [...] body" (2).[230] And because these voices in the margin are all addressing the common concern of masculinity in the play, masculinity must resort to discursive practices in order to render it perceptible and to materialize it in a physical sense. That is precisely, of course, the work of a stereotype, which, in fixing some characteristics to the detriment of any sort of internally recognized self, authorizes comparison and evaluation.[231]

More problematic to the use of language in Faulkner is that, instead of clarifying what goes on within the Southern male, it further complicates the issue, revealing different masculinities within the same class and gender, so much so that Millgate believes <u>The Sound and the Fury</u> to be essentially "concerned with the elusiveness, the multivalence of truth, or at least with man's persistent necessary tendency to make of truth a personal thing" (298).[232] More than Caddy's sexual promiscuity (which is always related but clearly unspoken, since Caddy is never given free-flowing thought with an interior monologue), the declining

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Player: Verbal and Social Clichés in <u>The Sound and the Fury</u>." <u>Revue des Langues Vivantes</u> 34 (1968): 40-49, rprt. André Bleikasten, <u>The Most Splendid Failure: Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury</u> (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1976) 95-96.

[230] Judith Halberstam, <u>Female Masculinity</u> (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

[231] For this remark, I am indebted to Gilbert Pham-Thanh, "Male after a Fashion: Post-Genital Masculinity in Question." Proc. of Paper for Performing the Invisible: Masculinities in the English-Speaking World, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris.

[232] Michael Millgate, "The Sound and the Fury: Story and Novel," <u>The Achievement of William Faulkner</u>. (New York: Random House, 1966) 94-111; rpt. David Minter, ed., <u>The Sound and the Fury</u> (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1987) 297-310.

Compson family might also owe its downfall to the isolating effects of these masculine interior monologues, since each of these sections reveals how much pain these men bear, a pain they do not share among themselves. With the decline of the Compson family, The Sound and the Fury triggers here the sudden awareness that aristocratic masculinity no longer equates with hegemonic masculinity and this realization causes dismay and anxiety among the male characters. Accustomed to being the norm, the once-called majority has been reduced to a large mass of individual sufferings, unable to gather around common values.

Not surprisingly, redemption in the novel, Shumeyko remarks, is not to be found in the men of the novel—those who have traditionally been associated with male dominance and power—but rather in the marginal characters that have been silenced. Dilsey the black servant, for instance, "offers the ideal of purity to the corrupt state of Southern gentility contributing to the Compson's demise" (79). Caddy, herself, has become the victim of patriarchy as her roles are clearly delineated by the codes of Southern culture: she is not granted an explicit voice of consciousness, yet "this stylistic maneuver also allows the reader to view her as the strongest, most beautiful, and ironically purest character in the novel" (Shumeyko 80). The absent mother remains the predominant topic of the introductory section, and the discourse of incoherence of Benjy reveals multiple layers of "otherness" in the male dialogue. The most obvious "unmasculine/unbeau" level is the actual reference to the absent mother: The Compson son talks as the son who has taken on his mother's role and the cross-gendered voices emerging from such a discourse also dramatize the absent belle's power by presenting her own presence or becoming the voice of a male who struggles to assert his own personal voice. The absent women's words penetrate the male discourse and demand to be heard, thus redirecting the conversation away from the men's mythical performance. Women—be it Caddy or Mother—insert their presence into the men's dialogue, not only through the character's reiteration of her words, but through the character's discussion of her

role (as is the case with Caddy or Quentin Compson). And by bringing the mother and Caddy as focus points in the novel, the "sons" not the "men" become the central figures of <u>The Sound and The Fury</u>. We may even wonder if male anxieties in Faulkner are about manhood (that is defining the self as "man" against childhood, the child) or about masculinity (in itself, defined against femininity). Obviously, by doing so, Faulkner makes a clear statement upon Southern values or their negative effects in voiceless, female characters. These must deal "with their subjugated roles by conforming or resisting this traditional construct" (Shumeyko 82).

These "marginal" voices—by voicing new forms of resistance to conventional gender discourses and practices—offer opportunities for exploring an identity that may become "self-defined" rather than simply defined according to a collective model. Yet, contrary to the Southern "rebelles," none of the Compson brothers has any idea of how to use gender privilege to his advantage. Neither can envision a new kind of power. They have no sense, to use Vorlicky's terms,

> as to how, when, or where to use this culturally coded power to help to understand it any better. On the other hand, [they] have no idea of the power that [they] can unleash through [their] freedom of choice: [they] can choose to live as a differently masculine man outside the definitions of the masculine ethos (55).

If only they could explore their profound discontents with the values of the masculine ethos, such a vision would probably signal the dismantlement of the gender-coded system. In the New South portrayed in <u>The Sound and the Fury</u>, despite the obvious impossibility of imposing the patriarchal code of the defeated South on a changing world and despite the masculine disease resulting from such inability, the novel seems to manifest resilient gender asymmetries, leaving no room for these men to envision new ways of performing gender or

new ways of reconstructing their wounded masculinity. Breu goes even further presenting these men are essentially wounded individuals awaiting a medical diagnosis. He writes:

> Quentin is melancholically and finally suicidal, obsessed with a nostalgic fancy of antebellum aristocratic, paternalist manhood, while Jason's paranoia represents the anxiety-ridden attempt at the reconstitution of white male privilege in the future-oriented liberal ideology of the New South, and Benjy's schizophrenic subjectivity represents a form of subjective destitution that strips white masculinity of its privilege, a privilege built on systematic forms of race, class, and gender inequality, and reorients it towards the open present (109).

By linking the individual—Quentin, Jason, or Benjy—with the universal—"manhood," "white male privilege," and "white masculinity"—Breu is pointing here at a very difficult aspect of the masculinity problem in Faulkner as one can ask: is there a crisis of men in The Sound and the Fury or a crisis of masculinity in a more fundamental sense? Whatever the cause, the "evidence" or the diagnosis of a crisis in The Sound and the Fury actually seems to be an untenable proposition as the men that are directly affected by the social, cultural or historical transformations are always (as Quentin exemplifies best) geographically, demographically and temporally distinct, leaving some men unscathed by these transformations.

To the question "is there a masculinity crisis?" Tim Edwards, in his very enlightening study Cultures of Masculinity, provides a theoretically convincing account of what he names the "crisis from without" (8), which relates to the position of men within such institutions as family, education, and work.[233] A specific concern here is the perception that "men have lost, or are losing, power or privilege relative to their prior status in these institutions" (8).

Edwards' approach resonates perfectly through Quentin's and Jason's sections, since both refer to the changing position of men within different social contexts: work, education, family, patriarchy, sexuality and gender-coded behaviors appear as arenas into which men's position has become highly problematic. What is highlighted in this approach, however, is not truly evidence of a new "crisis." Indeed, the issues of domestic violence, misogyny, health or mental concerns, and emotional difficulties do not appear to be new at all (as father and grandfather underscore) but are perennial problems affecting men at work and in the home. The crisis of masculinity in this sense does not constitute an overall or universal crisis of masculinity but a tendency toward crisis for *some* men—in our case, Quentin and Jason specifically.

It is Edwards' contention, though, that a crisis of masculinity can only be upheld when considering these relations along with a "crisis from within" (8). The term here applies precisely to a perceived shift in men's experiences of "their position as men, their maleness, and what it means," and how these men relate to their masculinity which often refers, he says, "to a sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and uncertainty (8). There are, of course, voices from "within" in Faulkner's text that should not be considered lightly, for these voices underline the way these men respond to their crisis and to the discourse of hegemonic masculinity handed down from generations. Read in this light, men like Quentin or Jason must survive not only the erosion of their power but also the myth of male privilege. Yet, the "crisis from within" is equally difficult to substantiate in anything other than in a personal and specific form leaving the crisis of masculinity once again as a local manifestation of, and personal reaction to, changes in social, economic and gender relations.

As a result and as suggested by Edwards' analysis, ascertaining the causes of the Southern masculine "crisis" may be less important than attending to its effects. The revision

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[233] Tim Edwards, Cultures of Masculinity (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

of Southern masculinity may, of course, be interpreted as an act of resistance to traditional hegemonic models, a variation on the theme of finding the right, masculine, most effective way of being a Southern man in a changing world. Through a constant tension between the three brothers, the process of finding the new Southern male is based on the exploration of such notions as disability, potency, and power. For Breu, this therapeutic model of manhood—in particular Jason's—serves to demonstrate the fragility of the paranoid logic that held together Southern male hegemony in the modernist period (120). Breu's focalization on the social or cultural disease affecting the Southerner makes sense; yet, it could be argued that Breu is missing here an important critical aspect of the novel since Quentin's or Jason's ruined manhood actually work not so much to criticize the logic of hegemonic masculinity (even less reinvent Southern manhood or to underscore new forms of resistance to gender conventions) but rather to *individualize* the crisis of masculinity that is at stake here. As a matter of fact and because Quentin or Jason frequently choose to portray themselves as the fractured victims of their sister, of Dalton Ames, or of Miss Quentin the thief, these narrators focus on a discourse of individual victimization instead of privileging a dialogue of masculine liberation. Jason, for instance, has become "othered" from the larger scheme of southern male hegemony, precisely because of his association with his mother, uncle and his family. His crisis of masculinity becomes more emblematic of a pathological individual who needs to be healed, rather than emblematic or even common to the "universal," i.e. to the social class or category of Southern gentlemen.

To complete this argument, the three sections in <u>The Sound and the Fury</u>—narrated by three would-be Southern "gentlemen"—appear quite unrelated, even though they repeat certain incidents: Jason does not recognize his own wounds in his brother Quentin, for example. However, these sections are all concerned with the same problem: Caddy and her loss of virginity. Therefore, Caddy's behavior—her refusal to play the role of the Southern

Belle—seems to be a common and even universal concern to Southern society, a concern that is voiced by the three brothers, the father, the mother, and even Quentin's non-Southern roommate, Shreve, who claims of Mrs. Bland, the Virginia artistocrat: "that woman has got more ways like a bitch than any lady in these sovereign states and dominions" (107). The Belle becomes a catalyst that unites and rejoins the intimacy of the individual female body to a sort of universal female body. What has been imagined as a "private" or "personal" matter in Swallow Barn—i.e. the irrational fancies of the Southern Belles that are quickly discarded and contained to the plantation—has now become a "political" or "universal" matter in The Sound and the Fury. In Jason's view, his niece's shortcomings become the shortcomings of all Southern women as he says, for instance: "Just like a woman. Six days late. Yet they try to make men believe that they're capable of conducting a business. How long would a man that thought the first of the month came on the sixth last in business" (190). The Southern female "rebel"—in this case his niece—possesses an aura of universality. On the contrary, the male "rebel," i.e. the southern man who claims confusion, resistance to, or inability to mirror himself according to the hegemonic model of manhood, is not imagined as speaking for the universal (and the political), but rather from the voice of the personal.

Quentin's suicide, for instance, dwells more on the hazards of having a sister and of being a male in a changing world and in a family led by an impotent father and a castrating mother than on the irrational antics of Southern gentility that have caused these hazards in the first place. The suicide, being a personal act of ultimate withdrawal from time and space, calls for men like him to be healed rather than for society to be transformed. Of course, the father's voice—by invalidating the sustaining foundations of the Southern social order—interrogates the traditional conceptualization of gender and sexualities, yet the father's dissenting voice is eventually submitted to the fallacy and pathology of his son's stream-of-consciousness, Quentin—the monomaniac—has imposed his single, unified, standardized vision upon the

double vision of others and the threats of father's deviant possibility—like that embodied in Blanche Dubois's narrative—has finally been dealt with by being incorporated, i.e guarded, in the son's pathology.

A therapeutic model of masculinity—Benjy through his mental incapacity, Quentin by his confused psychosis and shame, and Jason by his bitter and hubristic masculinity personalizes the crises of these three brothers and, subsequently, makes them unhegemonic due to their unhegemonic nature. The Sound and the Fury thus locates the crisis of masculinity, not so much in the 1930s, but in the close circle of absent fathers, ineffectual mothers, and rebellious sisters/nieces. The individual wounded and enfeebled male may indeed reveal a crisis elsewhere (one that actually threatens to expose the lie of chivalry, honor, and disembodied normativity so often attached to the white Southern male archetype), yet the narratives of male crisis in The Sound and the Fury spring from, but also obscure, the social, cultural, or political causes operating beyond the specific and the personal. As Robinson justly remarks, "individualizing a more properly social wound is a way to evade, forget, deny the very marking that has produced those wounds in the first place" (8).[234] The dynamics at stake here suggest some ways to resist conventional hegemonic discourses about femininity and masculinity in the South; yet, because men like Quentin or Jason choose to remain in allegiance with myths that they consider normative, the symptoms of male malady have also become—by an ironical *tour de force*—the cure to the disease of Southern masculinity.

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[234] Sally Robinson, Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

CHAPTER 4

ELLEN GLASGOW'S THE SHELTERED LIFE (1932)

Set in the town of Queenborough, Virginia, a fictionalized version of Richmond, from 1906 to the eve of the First World War, Ellen Glasgow's The Sheltered Life dramatizes the crisis of the two remaining "good families" on Washington Street, the Archbalds and the Birdsongs. The story is told from two different perspectives: the patriarch General David Archbald who casts the "wise but unrealistic outlook of the poet he once wanted to be, still educated in the romantic glamour of plantation life" and his granddaughter Jenny Blair who provides the perspective of "the woman of the New South who, above all, wants to live her own life, but will fail to escape the constraints of her upbringing" (Dominguez 265).[235]

When the book begins, the old patriarch of the Archbald household, General David Archbald, an only child born in the 1830s (coincidentally the period of the setting of Swallow Barn), is seventy-six (Dominguez 263). In the long aftermath of the Civil War, he lives in a handsome, dignified house on Washington Street, with Etta and Isabella, his two daughters, Cora the wife of his dead son, and his young granddaughter, Jenny Blair. Near the Archbalds lives George Birdsong, a middle-class lawyer and his ravishingly beautiful wife Eva, the reigning belle of Queenborough society during the 1890s. "Balanced between their memories of the splendorous balls of the 1890s and a twentieth-century city which threatens to become modern," the two families try to find a place; yet industrialism stinks and "progress is killing the vulnerable old elms of Washington Street" (Santos 95).[236] If in Swallow Barn, the self-sufficiency of place promoted the isolation, and as such, the sense of family among the Tracys and the Meriwethers, here in The Sheltered Life, the attempted isolation becomes the sign of a

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[235] Emma Dominguez I Rué, "Ellen Through the Looking Glass: Female Invalidism as Metaphor in the Fiction of Ellen Glasgow," Diss. Universitat de Lleida, 2004. Web. 20 Oct. 2009. <www.tesisenxarxa.net/TESIS_UdL/AVAILABLE/TDX...//Tedr3de1.pdf>.
[236] Eloina Santos, "Contrasting Visions: The Past and the Future in The Sheltered Life, a Novel by Ellen Glasgow." Fragmentos 2 (July 1986): 95-106.

resistance against time and change: "industrialism might conquer, but they [the Birdsongs and the Archbalds] would never surrender" (5). Yet, there is a sense that in this fractured world, the Birdsongs and the Archbalds are fighting for something that has already been lost:

> That was the way modern life compared to the variegated hues of the past, as neutral as asphalt. Here and there, a dignified Georgian house retreated, like an aristocrat of architecture, from inferior associates. It was pathetic, he [General Archbald] told himself, to see Washington Street sink down to the level of boarding houses and shops, as the relict of a Confederate General might fall into honorable but neglected adversity (132).

In that respect, both families represent the last stalwart symbols of the old Southern order who struggle to ignore the demise of southern traditions and values under the pressures of moral decay and the capitalist modernization that manifests itself in the strong chemical stench that comes from a factory nearby; "still undaunted, the two families [. . .] might have asked, were they not defending their homes from a second invasion?" (7). The critic Louis Auchincloss aptly notes that the smell is not only "the modern world that threatens them from without, but also a reminder of the decadence that attacks them from within," (79) what Hayden White describes as "the apperception of a shape of social life grown old" (142).[237]

To put the situation in perspective and to use game imagery, when the distribution of power shifts, players act differently. Some can sprint "into new territory; some can continue by the old rules, hoping that the shift is nothing more than an illusion or that another turn will bring the wheel back to the status-quo ante; still others [like the Archbalds and the Birdsongs of Glasgow's novel] twist in the wind, unable to decide between the old and the new"

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[237] Louis Auchincloss, Ellen Glasgow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964); Hayden V. White, The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). Read also, Louis Auchincloss, Pioneers and Caretakers: A Study of 9 American Women Novelists (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965).

(Kreyling 4).[238] Indeed, "the two families held the breach between the old and the new order, sustained by pride and by some moral quality more enduring than pride" (6). Glasgow here places her players in a "new" game where power has been redistributed, and it seems that she simply waits to see the results. In her preface to the book, Glasgow explains with a similar imagery: "these people were there, I felt, according to a design, for a planned attack upon life, and to push them out of the way would only spur them to more intense activity" (xv).

In such a setting the author pretends to surprise an adulterous George Birdsong, a middle-aged failed beau and a sexually-aware girl of the modern generation playing a dangerous game. Between souvenirs from dance balls and modern decrepitude, Ellen Glasgow, here, equates the decline in morality with the disappearance of southern aristocratic families brought about by the deterioration of the city, of the South, of the world with the war" (Santos 95). Unaware (or willingly oblivious) of the changes around them, General Archbald and company cling to a dream of the past that has died, just as decaying Belles like Eva Birdsong cling to their memories of past glories. This society has become stagnant and ingrown because it "blindly holds to past ideals and past rules of conduct while the future knocks at the door" (Manning 300).[239] The group, to use White's terms, has lost "its power to locate itself in history, to come to grips with the Necessity that its past represents for it, and to imagine a creative, if only provisional transcendence of its fate" (148-149). As the narrator emphasizes:

> [e]ver since the War between the States had transformed opulent planters into
> eminent citizens, a dozen old country families had clung to the lower end of
> Washington Street. Here they had lived; knit together by ties of kinship and
> tradition, in the Sabbath peace that comes only to those who have been

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[238] Michael Kreyling, "Toward 'A New Southern Studies'," South Central Review 22.1 (Spring 2005): 4-18.
[239] Carol S. Manning, "Afterward," in Ellen Glasgow, The Sheltered Life (1932; rpt. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994).

vanquished in war. Here they resisted change and adversity and progress; and here at last they were scattered by nothing more tangible than a stench…Only the Archbalds and the Birdsongs… stood their ground and watched the invasion of ugliness" (5).

In this new era, the decline of the old-landed aristocratic South is inevitable. Yet if the "signs of modernization indicate that [Glasgow] is portraying the South at a time of change, the novel's action does not rest on a conflict between the old and new ages. [. . .] Rather than changing times, Glasgow's focus here is the Old South tradition itself… the Old South's values, enforced by a strict code of behavior, stunt individuals" (Manning 302). As Carol Manning remarks, the Archbald's walled garden, in particular, symbolizes the family's attempt to hold at bay the new order and to make time stand still (301). Seen in this light, the intense clannishness of the families is not merely an expression of their power of love but a defense against the menace of these conditions. They are clannish because loyalty to one another is their only hope of survival, their only social support in a world which grants them neither security nor identity. Most critics have encouraged such an interpretation by finding Glasgow searching for new approaches to what Allen Tate once defined as the "Southern subject"—"the destruction by war and the later degradation of the South by carpetbaggers and scalawags, and a consequent lack of moral force and imagination in the cynical materialism of the New South" (275).[240] Other critics like Carol Manning have complemented this view, focusing on the women in Glasgow's fiction and arguing that the allegorical figuration or appropriation of the body, more specifically the female body, becomes a possibility for the meaningful transformation of history, and thus a successful example of what Jameson,

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[240] Allen Tate, "The New Provincialism: With an Epilogue on the Southern Novel." The Virginia Quarterly Review 21 (Spring 1945): 272-80.

paraphrasing Karl Marx, names "the collective struggle to wrest a real of freedom from a real of necessity" (31).[241]

4.1. The Female Body as Collective Artifact.

Through special attention to Eva Birdsong who is "still regarded less as a woman than as a memorable occasion," (7) to Etta Archbald—"the woman who lacks beauty" and who cannot win any man[242]—or to Cora Archbald who has "assumed the role of the society's other, more sedate ideal of womanhood," the Southern Lady (Manning 307) and who believes that appearance "matters [. . .] more than anything in the world" (Manning 308), some critics (Manning included) have added that The Sheltered Life shows Glasgow's bitter attempt to expose the evils of the cult of the womanly woman (or true womanhood), a male-defined ideal that cripples the women's lives and aspirations by representing the woman's actions as artificial and the woman's body (and most specifically the Southern Belle's body) as a collective artifact rather than as an individual body. As Dominguez remarks, "the end of the nineteenth century and the early decade of the twentieth century still validated the strict antebellum codes of behavior and thought for women in the South" (56).

Glasgow herself admitted that The Sheltered Life sprang from desire to condemn the cult of womanly woman that she had experienced in her native Richmond: "the background is that of my girlhood, and the rudiments of the theme must have lain buried somewhere in my consciousness ... I saw a shallow and aimless society of happiness-hunters, who lived in a perpetual flight from reality" (Glasgow, A Certain Measure 203).[243] In her biography of Ellen Glasgow, Susan Goodman addresses the problematic reaction of critics when finding out that the author of The Descendant, a book praised to be "distinctively, almost audaciously, virile

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[241] Frederic Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative As a Socially Symbolic Act (New York: Routledge, 1983).

[242] For a detailed analysis of Cora Archbald, refer to Carol S. Manning's afterword to Glasgow's The Sheltered Life. Carol S. Manning, "Afterward," in Ellen Glasgow, The Sheltered Life (1932; rpt. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994).

and vigorous" was in fact the work of a Southern woman (Reviews, qtd. in Goodman 60).[244] As Goodman explains, "the contrast between her [Glasgow's] 'feminine' façade and 'masculine' mind apparently caused this woman with a penchant for scent, lace-trimmed negligees, and high-heeled shoes more amusement than anguish" (60-61). It is precisely from the conflict between "her career as a professional woman writer and her desire for inclusion in a decidedly masculine canon," that her most memorable characters resulted (Lear 17).[245] Her protagonists, as most critics have remarked, take on the very personalities with which Glasgow struggled most of her life—"the father-figure struggling with his internal revolt from sentimentality and the younger woman who defies the narrative plot that has been contrived for her life" (Lear 16).

Eva Birdsong, in particular, is endowed with some unrealistic qualities. On that note, the first part of the novel "The Age of Make-Believe" begins when Eva Birdsong is thirty-four and still a magnificient beauty. According to the General, she "would have had all London at her feet," and she is characterized as the only thing able to give meaning, sense, and hope to this time and place, for "as long as Mrs. Birdsong remained, Washington Street might decline, but it could not be stripped of its old elegance" (6).

This woman is "frozen in the role of the Southern belle, expected [by men] to be forever young, vivacious, and beautiful" (Manning 307). Eva Birdsong is one perfect example of what Eloina Santos names a female tragedy:

> [t]hough completely presented from the outside, Eva becomes the pervasive
>
> spiritual center of the novel. She represents for the General all his era had
>
> idealized in women: legendary glamour, courage, mystery [. . .] Eva's pride
>
> comes to mean more than love or even life; it becomes the main sustenance of

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[243] Ellen Glasgow, A Certain Measure: An Interpretation of Prose Fiction (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1943).
[244] Susan Goodman, Ellen Glasgow: A Biography (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998).

the families in their resistance against modern industrialization with its disruption of values they have lived by" (99).

Depicted as initially able to "freeze" death in its wake, and described in her thirties with eyes like "bluebirds flying" (15), Eva Birdsong's beauty is given abstract value. And it is true that the narrative introduces her as an essentially "frozen" figure. Her marriage had "kept her from parties where she once shone so brilliantly, had saved her also from brooding, from that fatal introspection which is the curse of women and poets. She had had no time to fall out of love. She had not had time to discover that George [her husband] was unworthy" (100-1). Delivered from the curse of women and poets—of this humanity that Tennessee Williams so fondly admired in his own tragic characters—she has passed beyond history, into the myth. Santos explains: she "deserves to be worshipped and recounted in stories. She is known to have stopped processions and even a funeral. She is followed everywhere by admiring eyes, strolling down the street or waltzing with George" (98). The introductory scene of the funeral procession underlines that Eva Birdsong's movement through the streets of town is, in this instance, experienced both as a subject who is the origin of spatial and also social relations as well as positioned in space as an object: "rumors spread from door to door as she [Eva] walked down the street; crowds gathered at corners or flocked breathlessly to the windows of clubs. In her middle 30s [. . .] she had already passed into legend" (6). Her presence echoes I.M. Young's argument that women within a patriarchal society are "physically inhibited, confused, positioned, and objectified" (153).[246] Besides, and just like Swansdown's presence in Swallow Barn, Eva's existence is announced before it is physically embodied. The mention of Eva's name is enough for Jenny to spring to her feet, rush into the library and ask: "Oh, Mamma, is she coming? Do you suppose she will speak to us?" (14).

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[245]Ashley Andrews Lear, "Ellen Glasgow: The "'feminine' façade" and the "'masculine' mind," The Ellen Glasgow Journal of Southern Women Writers. vol.2. (2009): 16-38.

The waltzing party climaxes the first part of the novel and reveals Eva's frustration as George steals off to the garden with Delia Barron, one of the youngest beauties of Queenborough. Eva's nervous breakdown, however, is retranscribed in the privacy of the bedroom:

'I saw them, Mary. I saw them with my own eyes.'

'Hush, Eva. It is much wiser to pretend that you didn't. Even if you know, it is safer not to suspect anything.'

'I am flesh and blood. I've sacrificed everything' (87).

Because she has sacrificed herself, this "queenly woman," to quote Frederick McDowell, has thus become "the crown of a hierarchical society. In that her love represents a lost cause and her gallant nature is defeated more through the circumstances than through spiritual weakness, she may symbolize the Old South caught in its unequal struggle during the Civil War" (187).[247] Yet, she is also described as "one of those celebrated beauties who, if they exist, have ceased to be celebrated" (15). Her smile and heroic appearance of happiness disguise her husband's unfaithfulness. Cora Archbald herself points out that even if Eva "knew everything, she would never betray herself. When happiness failed her, she would begin to live on her pride, which wears better. Keeping up an appearance is more than a habit with Eva. It is a second nature" (19). Like her canary Ariel, Eva is imprisoned in a cage that she has created for herself, yet that she dreams of leaving:

"I sometimes wonder," she said [. . .] if it is fair to keep a single bird, even a canary, in a cage. If I let him out, what would become of him?"

"He would fly away. You would never find him again."

"Yes, when a bird flies away, you never find him again" (210).

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[246] I. M. Young, <u>Throwing like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory</u> (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

Living in a cage according to the society's expectations of women (Manning 321) also means that women exist as projections of the male gaze, suggesting that, in the power relationships rooted in gender, the male gaze wins.[248] Eva Birdsong, in particular, corresponds to this ideal. She has been made in the image of the patriarchal society: her education in dreams of youth, beauty, and service to husband and family are permanent, and she is incapable of adjusting to a new order not controlled by a husband standing in for the patriarchal order. The irony, of course, is that "the moral tradition formed by men like General Archbald is responsible for Eva's idealization of marriage, while it is her passion for George and her continued loyalty to him that excuses limitations and his inadequacy to sustain a perfect marriage" (Santos 98). Betrayed by a husband who keeps a mulatto mistress in the lower part of town, and an order which has faded, she begins a slow isolated demise. Yet she does exert some late power over the male before she fades from memory. She claims her nephew, the young doctor and George Birdsong as protectors and of course, the old General as her principal admirer, a role that he readily assumes since, like Arthur Peyton in [Glasgow's] Life and Gabriella, he has "surrendered active male [life] in the present for an ethereal and abstract life of service to an ideal embodied by the Madonna" (Kreyling, qtd. In Santos 95).[249]

Women also are crippled because they have taken on themselves the responsibility (and the willingness) to maintain some illusion in the face of realism and rescue the "aristocratic" community from the new modern age, while "trying vainly to put something else in its place" (113). Women, indeed, are the ones who most often express their concern

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[247] Frederick McDowell, Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1960).

[248] The concept of a "male gaze," has been discussed in feminist art and film theory since the mid-1970s. See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen, 16.3 (1975): 6-18; and Ann E. Kaplan, Women & Film: Both Sides of the Camera (New York: Methuen, 1983).

[249] Michael Kreyling, "Ellen Glasgow and the Dismantling of Heroic Narrative" Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

when faced with the smells coming from the industry next door, and they are the ones who wish to maintain a protective illusion of familial sobriety. There is Etta, for instance, the General's daughter whose plainness makes for pretence. As she prepares for a party, she uses the conditional tense to dream openly: "Wouldn't it be too wonderful if somebody I'd never met were to fall in love with me tonight for the sake of my sweet expression? Men have done that before" (77). There is also Cora Archbald, Jennie's mother, who has made for herself a complete universe of make-believe with which to cope with indelicate and unwelcome life (Siegel 1).[250] In this Postbellum South, the stage is set and the performers only have to play by their scripts. At the center of the stage stands Eva Birdsong who repeatedly appeals to the stage audience to remind "people [. . .] that I haven't lost my looks," as she says (56). And yet, looks have been lost, the make-believe remains temporary because it is (like Eva's body) fragile. Eva's grace and beauty may have been admired in London, but not in Washington Street. As the use of the conditional mode suggests, Glasgow places this world—its momentary survival and pretense—on the verge of an abyss.

The feminist discourse that has largely dominated the interpretation of The Sheltered Life should not come as a surprise, for times of crisis, as Hilda Smith remarks, work to reinforce the understanding of the cult of true womanhood that stood at the core of Southern culture.[251] Indeed, if the "planter social system had been demonized by the Western world and defeated by the victorious North," the reconstruction contributed to a "romantic view of the planter class through chivalric literary tradition" (Dominguez 50). Borrowing from historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Tindall and Shi explain that it was the gentleman's obsession with

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[250] Eli Siegel, Rev. of The Sheltered Life, by Ellen Glasgow. Scribner's Magazine Oct. 1932. Web. 20 Oct. 2008. <http://aestheticrealism.net/reviews/Scribners_Glasgow_1932.htm>.

[251] Hilda Smith, "Feminism and the Methodology of Women's History," Liberating Women's History, Theoretical and Critical Essays, ed. Berenice A. Carroll (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976) 382. The doctrine of true womanhood, or the Angel of the House, was adopted from the Victorian era. According to this belief and in a public world of fierce competition, Southern gentlemen could find peace and comfort from the public arena in the privacy of the house (the women's sphere). The Angel was passive and powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious, and above all--pure.

honor—common among the Irish, Scottish, Cornish and Welsh, from whom most white southerners descended—that "provided the psychological and social underpinnings of Southern culture" (642). Southern cavaliers defended their honor and women "were supposed to defend [these men's] virtue" (Dominguez 50). According to the ideology of pure womanhood, "Southern ladies reinforced exaggerated gallantry … in their men" (Tandall and Shill 643). Elizabeth Fox-Genovese holds a similar view, explaining that

> the emphasis on female delicacy and frailty implicitly recognized the positive value of male strength. In a dangerous world ladies required protection against unruly men, white as well as black [. . .] like children, [women] ha[d] only one right—the right to protection—the right to protection involves the obligation to obey (Within the Plantation 197, 199).

Women were thus crucial in Southern culture as "the objects of male chivalry and the subjects of patriarchal rule" (Dominguez 51), precisely because in times of transformation of the economy, the elaboration of a public male sphere depends, as Smith explains, on the parallel creation of a female sphere within the home, which becomes a male's haven of retreat from a hostile and competitive environment. The cult of genteel behavior means that these women conform to male ideals of femininity and in turn, abandon all true sense of self. As the narrator explains, "the code of perfect behaviour supported [Eva] as firmly as if it had been a cross. Never by word or gesture, never by so much as a look, had she betrayed herself" (143).

On Washington Street however, the female sphere offers little solace from the social and economic anxieties of the Post Bellum South. To the contrary, in this male-female system of interaction not all women seem ready to accept the docile role of the selfless plantation Belle. The women may, at times, seem to be keeping to their place, i.e. inside the house, yet on closer acquaintance, women (especially the younger generation) turn into the rebel figure that Glasgow herself has identified in her autobiography, The Woman Within. Glasgow,

indeed, reports that she had become a rebel at an early age, saying: "I cannot recall the time when the pattern of society, as well as the scheme of things in general, had not seemed to me false and even malignant" (The Woman Within 42, qtd. in Manning 298).[252] As Elizabeth Gallup notes, "there runs throughout her [Glasgow's] novels a rebellious voice against the social situation of women" (22).[253] Jenny Blair Archbald seems to share many characteristics with the young Glasgow, for if Jenny's personality is "being shaped by the romantic image of an idealized life conveyed to her by her mother's hypocrisy and her grandfather's nostalgia" (Santos 97), she shows however a rebelliousness that is first introduced with her eyes wandering from Louisa May Alcott's Little Women to the world outside her window. Reading (an activity usually linked to the more private sphere of domesticity) has become a public display of appearances, for Archbald's granddaughter reads only for "the assured reward of a penny a page" from her grandfather (3). As could be expected, the little girl is presented as an antithesis to the female protagonists she is supposed to emulate: "Well, even if Mamma did form her character on Meg and Jo, I think they're just poky old things… Mamma may call the Marches lots of fun…but I'm different. I'm different" (3). Perhaps, Glasgow is also inviting her readers to recall that Alcott wrote Little Women and was the breadwinner for an impractical idealistic father, inviting young readers like Jenny to explore the four March girls' journeys from childhood to adulthood, but also the conflict between two emphases in a young woman's life—that which she places on herself, and that which she places on her family. In Little Women, indeed, an emphasis on domestic duties and family often detracts from various women's abilities to attend to their own personal growth.

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[252] Ellen Glasgow, The Woman Within, an Autobiography, ed. Pamela R. Matthews (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980).

[253] Elizabeth Gallup, The Social Situation of Women in the Novels of Ellen Glasgow (Hicksville: Exposition Press, 1978).

The sense of female and male anxiety in Glasgow's early twentieth-century South is clear from even a cursory look at the narrative, as Glasgow's introductory pages about Southern resistance soon change into a book of meditations. The second part of the novel "The Deep Past" takes place eight years later in the conscience of General Archbald. The General soon abandons the conditional tense to reflect over past fears, agonies and delights, on the meaning of the seasons and the never-to-be-equaled beauty of Eva Birdsong. Using a stream-of-consciousness technique, Glasgow lets the reader share the General's internal thoughts.

As he becomes lost in his reveries, readers discover how his desires to be a poet and his love for a married woman in London were shattered by conventions and duty. While living in London, he had fallen in love with a married woman and planned to elope with her. Yet, the day before they eloped, one of her children became sick and she stayed to take care of him. He then went to Paris and when he returned, she had committed suicide. After going back to Virginia and fighting in the Civil War, a sleigh accident made him marry Erminia. Because the sleigh broke and because they could not return before daybreak, the General proposed as he thought it to be his duty to save her reputation. As General Archbald moves into the "Deep Past," readers begin to make sense of all the pieces of information already received, setting things in place: married because of appearances, they never loved each other but raised a son and two daughters. Archbald is now a widower and cherishes the hope of falling in love again yet he is denied the possibility of remarrying because his daughters and daughter-in-law expect him to remain loyal to his wife's memory. The General has indeed been "[s]upported by his daughters who demanded that he should be faithful to a wife he had never loved; supported by public opinion, which exacted that he should remain inconsolable for the loss of a woman he had married by accident, his son's widow had stood, small, plump, immovable as the rock of ages, between him and his desire" (25). Indeed, his daughter-in-law,

Cora Archbald, brought up to become what Louis Auchincloss calls "a debutante of the antebellum era" (32)[254] is remembered as the one who interfered with the General's decision to remarry. She is, in his description,

> an admirable woman…., admirable and unscrupulous. Even the sanguine
> brightness of her smile, which seemed to him transparent as a glass, was the
> mirror…of persevering hypocrisy. A living triumph of self-discipline, of inward
> poise, of the confirmed habit of not wanting to be herself, she had found her
> reward in that quiet command over circumstances (180).

Sheltered by this living lie, Archbald realizes that he has lived "in an age when marriage was an invisible prison" and that his own marriage was "thirty years of heroic fidelity" during which "he had sacrificed his youth, his middle age, his dreams, his imagination, all the vital instincts that make a man, to the moral earnestness of tradition" (25). Gentility in this instance is presented as highy problematic, for men like Archbald are asked to choose between being a gentleman or a man. Between the two, there is no half-ground.

> Dreaming he would make the final years of his life happy, "he gets caught in the gentlemanly tradition of his time and remains as the head of the household for his hypochondriac unmarried daughter and his son's widow and child" (Santos 101). The text reveals a frail man wielding near-absolute power to a more subdued power, the power of his daughters, who all encroach on his individual space. Not surprisingly,

> [f]or forty years, General Archbald had tried in vain to keep the library for
> his own use; but there had always been the dread that a closed door might
> hurt somebody's feelings. Now Mrs. Archbald's workbag of flowered silk
> lay on his [the General's] desk, with the contents of bright scraps and spools
> scattered over his blotting pad (169).

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[254] Louis Auchincloss, Ellen Glasgow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964).

In Glasgow's South, no domestic space has been kept for the males' relaxation, and the house is no longer a haven. By revising the Southern home and by hinting that Southern women might only pretend to abide by the rules of ideal femininity, Glasgow redraws the boundaries of the drawing room and portrays the males as ineffectual figures of authority and leadership. The central character—General Archbald—is the last male heir to a long line of Southern landowners. Separated from his inherited place in the social and economic order by the Civil War and displaced, this patriarch faces uncertainties about his role in society and about his sense of self-worth as an individual. Even more unsettling maybe is the suggestion that there is not only a crisis of men in <u>The Sheltered Life</u> but a crisis of masculinity in a more fundamental way. In one of her letters, Ellen Glasgow once said that indeed General Archbald

> represents the tragedy, wherever it appears, of the civilized man in a world
> that is not civilized [. . .] The old man, his point of view, his thwarted strong
> body, saw the age pass by. Not in the South especially: it was throughout
> the world that ideas, forms, were changing, the familiar order going, the
> beliefs and certainties. The shelter for men's lives, of religion, convention,
> social prejudice, was at the crumbling point (xvi).

"Born out of this time" (24), and although seemingly the wisest character in the novel, "with the deepest knowledge of world and what is wrong in it" (Santos 102), he nevertheless embodies a recalcitrant, romantic age very much enfeebled. He is, according to the narrator, "a lover of wisdom, a humane and civilized soul, oppressed by the burden of tragic remembrance" (xvi). General Archbald, for instance, is no longer able to control his actions, even less the actions of his daughters and granddaughter, due in part to his frailty. A patriarch of the old landed aristocracy, the General is often confined to a chair and is mostly portrayed in the garden, tending to dandelions. The sense of futility is voiced when he describes Eva Birdsong in the hospital: "it seemed to him that the lost radiance of youth shone in her face…

But his eyes were old eyes, not to be trusted. They still looked at life through the iridescent film of a more romantic age" (137). The above description reinforces the passivity of a man who has become enslaved "by life and by the suffocating grasp of appearances" (26). Tied to a life of pretense, he has continued—like Eva Birdsong—to pay allegiance to "the kind of innocence that he and his society have lost merely in the passage of time" (Santos 102). "No man needed protection less," the narrator explains, "but, because he had lived a solitary male among women, he could never escape it, and because these women depended upon him, he had remained at their mercy" (99). As these numerous references reveal, male independence is sharply undercut by the General's obvious helplessness, which stands in marked contrast to the more virile masculinities enacted by Joseph Crocker, the carpenter who repairs the Archbalds' roof and who eventually ends up marrying Isabella. If General Archbald's title suggests the uniform, Joseph "wears overalls" (20) and belongs to these "good people, plain but respectable, the kind of plain people [. . .] who could be trusted in revolution" (20).

Of course, it could be easy to lay the blame on the New Industrial South or even on the women. Because they are often castrating in their demands, because "one woman after another had enslaved his [the General's] sympathy" (99), women (that the General describes as "stronger than he was" (99)) can indeed be regarded as the cause for the males' anxieties and failures. However, and as this chapter will suggest, the males' failures and anxieties reveal that it is the male body, as much as the female body, which becomes the object of a collective appropriation, for the stories and narratives "contained" or "dissimulated" within the male body (the gentleman) could endorse strategies for the re-interpretation or reconfiguration of a utopian narrativization of history and, thus, endanger the narrative conventionality of patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and Southern Romance.

4.2. Stigmatized Masculinity.

The term "Patriarchy," as defined by scholars, usually encompasses "the rule of the father, including the rule of older men over younger men and of fathers over daughters, as well as husbands over wives" (Ehrenreich 284).[255] So defined, patriarchy seems to be precisely what does not function in The Sheltered Life. If the title "patriarch" suggests that this man should (logically and naturally) be the head of the family—by alluding to the uncontested authority of this patriarch—Glasgow underlines that this man is an imposture, not qualified for the position. The inability to uphold patriarchy lies in his inability to pass what John Stoltenberg names "the test of loyalty to manhood" (1), a rite of passage which qualifies Southern males for hegemonic masculinity and dominance over subordinate groups.[256]

As he recalls his early years, the General revisits the narrative of masculinity that has been transmitted to him from his grandfather, who assured him "that hunting had given greater pleasure to a greater number of human beings than all the poetry since Homer" (102). To the disappointment of his grandfather, the General was not a hunter, for "the sight of blood sickened him." Instead, he "saw visions in the night and wanted to be a poet" (102). "Different," controlled by fear of his grandfather's power and of the "little girls [who] were as savage as boys [. . .] [and] had laughed when he was made sick [. . .] had mocked at his visions [. . .] had stolen his poems and used them for curl-papers" (102), Archbald comes to realize that "from his earliest childhood [. . .] he had been the victim of pity, of his own pity" (105). Since "[p]ity, said the men who had none, is a woman's virtue" (102) the General's traumatic childhood (and construction of masculinity) recalls the rigidity of conventional gender forms.[257]

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[255] Barbara Ehrenreich, "The Decline of Patriarchy," Constructing Masculinity, eds. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson (New York: Routledge, 1995) 284-90.

[256] John Stoltenberg, The End of Manhood: Parables on Sex and Selfhood (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[257] Carol S. Manning, in her afterword to the novel, alludes to the rigidity of the code, as follows: "Glasgow implies that surfaces are everything to the Old South code: if one is from an acceptable family and acts like a Southern gentleman—if one "fall[s] into the right pattern"—one is a Southern gentleman" (317).

If neither melancholy nor reflection is expected of men, a man who exhibits either is immediately femininized. Because they were deemed "unmanly," these activities even led people to call "him a milksop" (102). If, as R. W. Connell argues, one of the weapons in the ongoing struggle to maintain hegemony is "a rich vocabulary of abuse: wimp, milksop, nerd,…sissy, lily liver, jellyfish, yellow belly, candy ass," and so forth, then, Archbald, in this instance, is not only accused of effeminacy but also implicitly challenged to claim (or reclaim) his southern manhood.

In this sense, the General's masculinity is stigmatized, marked by childhood trauma. The title of the middle section of the book, "The Deep Past," is significant here. Michael Warner argues that "stigma [. . .] marked the person, not the deed, as tainted. [. . .] It is a kind of 'spoiled identity' [which ...] befalls one like fate. Like the related stigmas of racial identity or disabilities, it may have nothing to do with acts one has committed. It attaches not to doing, but to being; not to conduct, but to status" (27-28).[258] In this Southern community, masculinity is precisely a matter of status. The young Archbald understands rapidly that he must take on his father's identity that is itself merely borrowed from previous fathers or ideas of fathers. In psychoanalytic terms, there is no choice but to repeatedly enact personal stories: identity is repetition compulsion. Therefore, Archbald gives up all resistance and decides to make-believe that he is not a reader of poetry, because (like Ned Hazard in Swallow Barn) "he knew that he was watched, he knew that there were eyes somewhere among the leaves, and that these eyes, the eyes of the hunted, were watching him" while he was reading Byron's poetry (109).

This need to act out masculinity in front of an audience, the awareness that there is no escaping the gaze of either men or women, connects to the postfeminist idea of gender as a masquerade and as performance rather than as essence. Understandably, the audience

discovers a "General" whose title is honorific and who has come to think of himself as "a stranger in his world and his age," someone who has confounded places and times (118).[259] By featuring this traumatic scene in which the young General's uncertainty about his masculine role is explicitly linked to the staging of a typically "masculine" performance and to the General's appeal to outward validation, Glasgow's narrative reads as a story of deception, giving us a good instance of how southern masculine hegemony was achieved and sustained.

It is worth noting that the mention of the word "eyes," repeated three times in the sentence quoted above, adds to the stage-like effect of the scene. Putting on "clothes taken from the old garments in his father's and his grandfather's closets" (110), the young Archbald is literally "blooded" during a fox-hunt and forced to assume the role of the hunter, a gender-marked feature that marginalizes effeminate men, "milksops," poets, and artists. The passage reads as follows:

> With blood on his hands and a savage joy inflaming his face, his grandfather strode over to smear stains on a milksop. 'If you don't like the taste of blood better than milk, you'll have to be blooded. Hold still, sir, I say, and be blooded.' Then, as the blood touched him, the boy retched with sickness, and vomited over the anointing hand and the outstretched arm. 'Damn you, sir!' the old gentleman bellowed, while he wiped away the mess with his silk handkerchief. 'Go back to the nursery where you belong!'
>
> Still retching, furious and humiliated because he had been born a milksop, the boy rode home with his tutor (104-5).

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[258] Michael Warner, <u>The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life</u> (New York: Free Press, 1999).

[259] R W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity, Rethinking the Concept." <u>Gender and Society</u> 19 (2005): 829-859.

In this context, the term "Sir" acquires a set of related negative definitions: man means "not woman," "not Queer," "not effeminate," "not a boy." Glasgow, it seems, plays with a definition of Southern male identity that goes something like "you are who you aren't." He himself ponders: "which was the real David Archbald, the lover in memory, or the old man warming his inelastic arteries in the April sunshine?" (115). As Nicholas Proctor explains, the woods in particular "were not really a school for learning Americanness, but a stage. On that wild stage, hunters enacted a carefully scripted drama that displayed the white male as worthy of rule over himself and his own passions and over other humans, particularly his slaves" (822).[260] The grandfather's gaze that causes the internalization of disciplinary individuality brings to mind here of Foucault's reading of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. Constant observation is characterized by the constant threat of observation, the "unequal gaze."[261] In General Archbald's case, the masks or personas that he chooses to play are drawn from myths and icons of maleness—the hunter, the woodsman—all perceived as masculine pursuits that have not been or should not be performed by women or by effeminate men.

The passage here, revisiting the hunter's narrative inherited from his ancestors, suggests that the Southern notion of chivalry (and therefore of romance) is indeed produced by the willful manipulation of social decorum. In the performance of masculinity, "performing" for a man is the opposite of failing; a successful rite of passage, the crossing of a boundary between childhood and manhood. But to "pass" also means to get away with pretending to be who you are not, to live in shadows comparable to that of Quentin Compson's illusions and to become—like Caddy Compson—confined to a mirror, at least temporarily. By playing the role, performing the acceptable masculinity and following the scripts of Southern manhood that have been written by the patriarchs before him, General

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[260] Nicholas W. Proctor, Bathed in Blood: Hunting and Mastery in the Old South (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

[261] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison (New York: Random House, 1979).

Archbald has become no more than a simple actor, someone who has sacrificed his being on the altar of appearances.

The mention of the title *General* reinforces this aspect. It carries great romantic weight, suggesting glorious or doomed struggles. In the South, the title General in the story's era, also conjures the Civil War, the Lost Cause. It communicates to the reader not only the male-dominated institution of the army, relying on the subversion and the suppression of identity of its members to a unified corps, but also an image of the supreme leader of traditional masculinity that requires a similar repression of difference within the self. The patriarchal institution conforms to a definition—usually reserved for the peculiar institution of slavery—as a system of coercion which robs the people of their free will and their identity. Manhood thus necessarily rules out the essential quality—self-mastery—on which it is taken to be founded.

In the same chapter, the General's grandfather asks the General's mother if Archbald was "born lacking" (102). "'Not lacking, father,' his mother protested, 'but different'. Some very nice people, she added, with an encouraging glance at her peculiar child, are born different" (102). The mother, working conspiratorially with the son, can be seen as a manipulating figure, for "it distressed her that one of her sons should be deficient in manliness" (102). By deceiving the patriarch, the mother acquires power through the performance of the son she favors. Allied with the maternal, General Archbald is not only "deficient in manliness," but also "othered," thereby made feminine—or better, brought under maternal control—to perform masculinity, i.e. to become gentleman-able.[262] Because it is the mother who has staged Archbald's drama, the son who inherits the narrative future is therefore represented through greater dependence on the mother, greater vulnerability, and comparative smallness. Additionally, because the young Archbald takes on his own

grandfather's garments in this scene, the grandfather figure diminishes into a boy that dresses up as a soldier, a performing little boy. At the heart of Glasgow's ideology, lies an assumption that contradicts the idea that fatherhood (and manhood) is a natural fact that, if socially ratified, will convert southern society into a permanent alignment of essential givens (with natural aristocrats, pure women, and sturdy yeoman, all persistently content in their separate fields) (Ackermann 117).

Of course, if this "male" authority can be easily discarded, it raises questions about the clear social and gender boundaries that the South established between the real and the unreal, the Southern and the non-Southern, the masculine and the feminine, the enduring and the fading. The romance of the South may have been lacking in essence, just like the General is "lacking" what his grandfather wishes to see. It would in turn suggest (as the General does) that men are merely imitating other men, who in turn might have imitated other men before them.

An alternative psychological reading suggests itself: the grandson of the patriarch represents a split self-projection of a father anxious about his masculine identity. Compared with the other boys' unbridled masculinity, the young Archbald's masculinity may indeed represent the threat of the more maternally-allied aspects of the patriarch himself. And indeed, Archbald, by going back to the memories of his childhood, places himself between the past and the present, the then and the now of narrative and revisits the narrative of inherited masculinity. General Archbald himself asks, "[w]as it fair to blame him because he had been born different? Was anybody to blame for the way God had let him be born?" (105). Richard Collier justly remarks that what actually is being addressed in many accounts of hegemonic masculinity is a "range of popular ideologies of what constitutes ideal or actual characteristics

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[262] For this remark, I am indebted to Lori Hope Lefkovitz's article, "Passing as a Man: Narratives of Jewish Gender Performance." Narrative 10.1 (2002): 91-103.

of 'being a man'" (841).[263] What is interesting, he adds, is not this model, which is unattainable, but rather the way the young boys and men position themselves in relationship to this collective image: "men can dodge among multiple meanings according to their interactional need. Men can adopt hegemonic masculinity when it is desirable; but the same men can distance themselves strategically from hegemonic masculinity at other moments" (841). Consequently, "masculinity" represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices"—therefore, the beau or the southern gentleman should be discussed less as a type or as a given of characteristic traits (slaves, plantation…) but rather as a way to position oneself toward hegemonic masculinity.

By going back to his past and by revisiting what happened in the woods (when he was stared at by the eyes of a desperate runaway slave), Archbald proceeds to a critique of his pretext, i.e. an identity acquired from fathers before him. "By retaining passages from the original version and commenting on their antiquated mannerism" (Ackermann 183), General Archbald's narrative enacts here a conflict of styles and ideologies: fathering or grandfathering becomes a site of struggle in ways illustrating the problematic forging of new kinds of male identities and the difficulties of resolving competing versions—the individual version and the community version—here embodied by the patriarchs of the family, founding father figures who have become the motivating force of Archbald's masculine narrative. Fatherhood becomes the mode in which the value of Southern masculinity is reasserted, and in our case, the importance of fathering (or grandfathering) clearly suggests an attempt at reclamation or reappropriation of deviant masculine narratives (like the one revisited by the General, for instance) in which uncontested paternity is offered as crucial not only to children but also to the continuation of Southern masculinity. In particular, the grandfather worries that a "strain of melancholy had passed into the Archbald blood" (103).

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[263] Richard Collier, Masculinities, Crime and Criminology: Men, Heterosexuality and the Criminal(ised) Other

If, as Peter Brooks argues, "it is at the moment of death that life becomes transmissible," then <u>The Sheltered Life</u> reveals considerable anxiety about the possibility of transmission, not only transmission to the next generation, but also transmission from the previous generation. Archbald is divided in his response to his own past and to his father's past: on the one hand, he acknowledges the inheritance of his father's past, but on the other hand, he acknowledges that there is nothing compelling about that past. In the introduction to <u>Masculinities in Britain since 1800</u>, Michael Roper and John Tosh argue that, "one of the most precarious moments in the reproduction of masculinity is the transfer of power to the succeeding generation" (17).[264] Commenting on that statement, Jonathan Rutherford writes:

> The transformation of masculine subjectivities from one generation to the next is not simply an external relationship of social conditioning and role learning between parents and their children. Nor does it constitute a process whose passage of time is then confined to the past. Rather, it becomes an integral part of individual subjectivity, the child of his parents co-existing in a complex, often antagonistic relationship with the adult man. This weak link of the generational exchange of masculine values and practices, the ambivalences, conflicts and contradictions of identity, finds its expression in the structuring and dividing of male psyche (195-96).[265]

Not surprisingly, this "transfer of power" (i.e. hegemonic masculinity) from one generation to the next does become a source of tension, for if he is to avoid any breakdown in the hegemonic male narrative that has been passed on for generations, the father (or the older generation) needs to contain the son's possibly-deviant and "competing version" in a normative and conventional narrative—in Glasgow's South, the conventionality of Southern

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(London: Sage, 1998).

[264] Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds., <u>Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800</u> (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).

Romance. Significantly, there is no "father" in <u>The Sheltered Life</u>. One hears about the General's grandfather; yet, his father is absent. Jenny Blair's father is also absent from the story, killed while fox-hunting by falling from his horse, in turn suggesting that this absence of the father-figure might indeed point at a breakdown in the narrative of white hegemonic masculinity. Failing to clear a fence, he is thrown and breaks his neck, an apt metaphor for performative failure in a generational transfer of Southern patriarchy. This absence is reinforced by the grandfather figure, David Archbald, who

> does not think about how he can make life better for his precious granddaughter, how he can give her better guidance and nurturing than he received in his youth—how he can help her avoid living a life of surfaces [. . .] Never does the reader see him offer Jenny Blair moral guidance or intellectual stimulation. Archbald needs to be much involved in the present, but his thoughts and concerns (not only here but elsewhere in the novel) are much more about Eva Birdsong, the ideal of the Old South (Manning 318-319).

Whereas the idea of manhood for Archbald's grandpa—as it is also seen through a novel like <u>Swallow Barn</u>—signals a pep-talk about courage and duty addressed to younger boys like Rip or men-in-the making like Ned, the use of the word by the beginning of the 1930s seems to have disappeared entirely since General Archbald does not claim the authority to instill gender ideals in the young. Instead, manhood has become a concept in a critical discourse of gender: it signals not an affirmation of masculinity but rather a deconstruction of its social privileges.

In Archbald's example and because it attempts to reconcile a reproductive, strong masculinity with the General's frail, ineffectual male body, the narrative begins a more or less direct commentary on the limitations patriarchy imposes upon both women and men. Glasgow

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[265] Jonathan Rutherford, <u>Men's Silences: Predicaments in Masculinity</u> (London: Routledge, 1992).

focuses on the plight of the sons, who are usually confused or oppressed by their fathers or grandfathers, or befuddled by women, and yet who cannot think outside of these traditional relationships, precisely because they are unable to recognize any other alternatives for themselves. In relationship to their past, males like the General express the desire to master the anxiety of its influence. This desire becomes more pressing as time passes. Voices or events from the past keep interrupting the narrative: "[i]nstead of diminishing with time, events in the deep past grew longer, and the faces of persons long dead became more vivid and like-life than life itself" (105). The real cause lies deep. Archbald ponders:

> Was this second self of his mind, as variable as wind, as nebulous as mist, merely the forgotten consciousness of the poet who might have been? Sitting here in the spring sunshine, was he living again, was he thinking again, with that long buried part of his nature? For his very words, he realized, were the words of that second self, of the self that had always been in dreams and never been in reality [. . .] it was impossible to keep his thoughts from rambling back into the past. It was impossible to trace a connection between the past and the present (105).

Glasgow's narrative—like Archbald's split self in the above passage—is itself caught between two times. On the one hand, it moves forward: the General is seventy-six when the novel opens, and he is eighty-three at the end. Yet at the same time, the narrative moves backward, as the General constantly travels back to the past, to a time beyond (his)story, beyond the Civil War, and beyond the here and now. As he grows old, and therefore gets closer in age to the patriarchs who have preceded him, he ironically becomes "othered," i.e. feminized as his individual authority as father and husband is displaced to the people, largely women, who surround him. The decentralization of the patriarchal figure also enables an important examination and rethinking of the hegemonic construction of the male self, as the

General is seen looking for a more authentic self, for "some full-bodied virtue, some compensating humanity" (101).

By doing so, General Archbald calls our calendars into question, and the Southern calendar in particular, for Archbald is haunted by the past as if always wanting to go back to his boyhood, to the moment of his trauma. Doing so, General Archbald's "ghosts" become "historical allegories to articulate some historical injustice, referring to social reality by recourse to the not-dead" (Lim 290).[266] General Archbald ponders: "why couldn't the dead stay dead when one had put them away?" (119). The narrative here explores the dissonance between past and present and, at that point, refuses the possibility that things are just "left behind," that the past is inert and the present uniform (Lim 287). "It was impossible," he claims, "to keep his thoughts from rambling back into the past" (105), adding a few pages later: "I'm getting too old, and I am not reconciled to forgetting. Not to forgetting names I know as well as my own" (139).

As the mention of "my own" connotes, forgetting is essentially dying to oneself, losing one's existence. General Archbald's memories serve as a "fundamental impulse" to "rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear," that is, to alleviate a sense of historical estrangement (Owens 68).[267] An almost-forgotten history can become newly meaningful. General Archbald's argument over the continuous haunting of the past and of those who are dead recalls Derrida's discussion of Hamlet's declaration (upon seeing a ghost) that "the time is out of joint." General Archbald's reverie is far from a housebroken past that merely persists in the present; rather, it signals a temporality that deviates from modernity's empty, homogeneous, and disenchanted time:

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[266] Bliss C. Lim, "Spectral Times: The Ghost Film as Historical Allegory," Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique 9.2 (Fall 2001): 287-329.

[267] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism." October 12 (Spring 1980): 68-69.

a moment that no longer belongs to time, if one understands this word by the linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present: 'no,' future present). We are questioning at this instant, as we are questioning ourselves about this instant that is not docile to time, at least to what we call time (Derrida 17).[268]

Read in this light, General Archbald's recall of the past is far more than the echo of a superseded past in the present as construed by a linear, progressive time; rather, it is that "trace," that impossible "survival" which "disjoints the living present." It is what makes the present waver (Derrida xx). In the nostalgic allegory of a ghost return, what is dead and long past comes to life, "old concerns acquire a new urgency and relevance, and a radicalized historical consciousness fathoms the past's entanglement with immediate concerns" (Lim 288). By repeating events thought to have been finished or laid at rest, Archbald shows the potential to transcend his physical displacement and loss, to unsettle the linear time of conventional narrative. Like Derrida's specter, Archbald's story begins by coming back, his betraying past confronting his future (the present), which in turn enables him to discover that it is other than had been hoped for. The General discovers that "something was missing, that he had lost a part from the whole, lost that sense of fulfillment not only in himself, but in what men call Divine Goodness" (128). Characters and readers alike come to experience time with the past and to get access to Archbald's prior conflict through the lens of the current one.

Thus doing, Glasgow positions characters who, according to Vorlicky, "confront, through their language, the codings of the dominant culture by reclaiming their rightful position in a history they construct [. . .] they become the center of their own history rather

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[268] Jacques Derrida, <u>Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International</u>, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994) 17-18. Original title: <u>Spectres de Marx: L'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvee internationale</u> (Paris: Galilée, 1993).

than existing solely on the margins of the dominant culture's tale" (194).[269] Yet, in such a context, it would be, Clark explains, a "disabling mistake to think of the renewal of tradition as necessarily a reactionary nostalgia" (17). Indeed, the General's obsession with the past (or with the pretext of the narrative) encapsulates a reflection on what he has done and missed, for his remembrance of the past is not oriented toward confirming the ways in which the future has fulfilled its promise to the past. To the contrary, it forces him to remember the ways it has precisely failed to do so. As General says: "[i]t was useless to regret. It was useless to sigh for the plumed hearse of one's ancestors [because] people, even the best people, were more selfish, now, and fought only when their material interests were menaced" (128). Thus doing, Glasgow seems to suggest that "the utopian moment of antebellum southern literature, then, is to be found less in some of the 'values' endorsed by these texts than in their (failing) insistence on the (destructive) possibility of a utopian narrativization of human history and their (faltering) endorsement—under the title of 'romance'—of strategies for the interpretation of history" (Ackermann 205).

The General's memories or ghosts serve to underscore this theme of "transience" – what is there and what is not there. It also casts a deeper meaning on the "presence within absence" that appears as one of the dominant themes of the novel: How can one be a man when one is no longer physically able to be one? Can you be a gentleman when one is no longer able to be a man, or when the community around one has come to recognize only men, but not gentlemen?

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[269] Robert Vorlicky, Act Like a Man. Challenging Masculinities in American Drama (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

4.3. An Affront to Southern Wholeness.

The narrative goes further than simply revisiting and questioning the masculine narrative being transmitted from one generation to the next. It also unsettles the traditional conventions of masculinity and patriarchy and comes as an affront to Southern wholeness, for it posits a community without a (male) leader, a masculinity without even the desire for what has traditionally been understood as masculinity's hallmark: power.

Eva Birdsong's unfaithful and unsuccessful husband, George Birdsong, for example, possesses a generous heart, offering financial help for instance when Archbald needs it. Eva also recalls how she fell in love with him after having watched him go into a house in flames in order to save a Negro child. And it is true that George does try to live up to Eva's standards. George Birdsong had charm and was unusually well-favoured, but he was nothing more than a struggling attorney, who would be hard pressed to keep a modest roof over [Eva's] head" (16). As Santos explains, "during her illness he refuses to smoke or drink whiskey until she is out of danger. And although he sees in Jenny Blair a possibility of recovering Eva's lost beauty, innocence, and womanhood, he tries to resist her" (100). "Whether you know it or not," he tells Jenny, "innocence when it lives to be eighteen is wicked" (62).

However and despite his efforts, George cannot correspond to the image of manhood that his wife Eva demands. Caught between two models of manhood—the independent individualist and ineffectual husband who keeps a mulatto mistress significantly called Memoria in the lower part of the town, and the community man tied into Washington Street wherein he must be husband and provider—George is unable to see or to commit to either fully, as he later admits to the General, "[a]fter all, you can't make a man bigger than he really is. I know I'm not a big man, and when I come up against anything that is too much for me,

beauty, goodness, happiness, I give way inside" (197).[270] He is repeatedly—as his family name suggests—caged in his house, or brought back homeward, according to Eva's demand. This man has yielded power to women, both emotionally and physically. Talking about George, General Archbald mentions the fact that "for several years [. . .] George had appeared to reform, or at least to refrain. Then, when his health was restored, nature again had its way with him" (142), for "George was deficient in character" (196). Glasgow was prescient of Allen Tate's belief that the Antebellum South contained the seeds of its own destruction, that it could not have sustained its resistance to the capitalist marketplace even if the Civil War had not occurred (Young xiv). Such a realization in turn leads to the question of essence in regard to identity: Is there an essence that a man can fall back on when everything has been lost, or is southern masculine identity a performance with no center? Is there not an essence to which male performances might be anchored? Even more problematic it seems was to find a way to reconcile in a "meaningful relationship" the gentlemen's "present circumstance and the tradition to which he belonged" (Young xiii).

In that regard, Glasgow's men are hardly positive images of completed and individualized selfhood or identity. The men here are unable to cope with the world that they have helped to create, although they desire to blame the failings of their own creations on women and on systems of culture (patriarchs). Men's failures lead them to seek avoidance or an escape that nevertheless fails to free them from the problems of gender created by the patriarchal system they accept. They flee to the lower part of the town and into the arms of a mulatto mistress, they flee to the fantasies of their past, to the library, to the hunting ground, but their problems of identity do not go away. Coping for these men (like Rip in <u>Swallow Barn</u>) becomes escaping.

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[270] Significantly enough, George does not produce any children, as if to emphasize the complete sterility of what marriage and gender have given him: authority within his own family and the Southern family (and community) at large.

On that note, the irony in Memoria's name represents Glasgow's tribute to the plight of colored woman, while it also stresses the fact that pretending to ignore Memoria's presence perpetuates male exploitation of both black and white women. Indeed, Jenny Blair herself is brought into this scenario of male avoidance: skating outside of Washington Street in the lower parts of town, Jenny finds out that George is unfaithful to Eva Birdsong. George teases the young girl in promising not to tell anyone about their secret. As Linda Wagner-Martin points out, "Jenny Blair [. . .] succumb[s] to male manipulation. She covers for George and his affair with Memoria. Worse, Jenny begins the flirtation that eventually leads to her complete enthrallment" (199).[271] Moreover, Jenny Blair, in her admiration for Eva, becomes "incapable of learning from Eva's experience and betrays her only friend, thus replicating Eva's failure and conforming to an idea of femininity that conceives of relationships among women only in terms of rivalry" (Dominguez 278). Through this character, as Susan Goodman asserts, "Glasgow intertwines social history and private lives. She testifies to the impossibility of separating her history from that of Jenny Blair and the other women of Queenborough," since both black and white women are trapped in the same code that deprives them of autonomy" (190).[272]

Glasgow here explicitly problematizes the notions of authority, power, and patriarchy as the solid foundations that the Archbalds (and the South as a whole) have taken for granted. Because it reveals the fissures of patriarchy, the General's inability to uphold patriarchy (and George's failure to correspond to an image that would satisfy the traditional image of Southern manhood) is not so much due to the women who seem to have taken control over them, or to the encroaching of the female sphere onto the public (masculine) one. To the contrary, by showing that Archbald's masculine and patriarchal inabilities lie inside and by

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[271] Linda Wagner-Martin, "Glasgow's Time in The Sheltered Life," Ellen Glasgow: New Perspectives, ed Dorothy M. Scura. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995).

revealing that the men's failure is not so much due to some bad acting on a poorly arranged stage, as it is due to a deeper, inner refusal to act, the narrator raises the possibility that the Southern character may well have no countenance to it, and that Southern masculinity may be inherently anxious or faulty. Ultimately, by portraying a community deprived of any model of strong masculinity—Archbald is a crippled old man, Jennie Blair's father was killed by his desire to hunt, and George is crippled emotionally—Glasgow achieves a transformative revision of Southern patriarchy and empties "Southern masculinity" (and patriarchy) of its essential meaning, in so far as that term has depended upon the males' assumption of the authority in the family and cultural sphere.

If, as Michael Awkward has suggested, "monolithic and/or normative maleness" is conventionally defined by the "powerful, domineering patriarch" (3), then a family in which men no longer dominate is a family in which masculinity itself is called into question.[273] Displaced as patriarch and divested of his former dominance, the General's fall from grace takes place in part as a self-revelation and as an exposure to the reader of the inessentiality of all idea of patriarchy and of masculine power. The question thus remains: can a man really be a man if he no longer possesses—or claims—the power to command? Who might a father become once he is no longer a patriarch, or no longer wants to perform the role? And if, as Martha Fineman suggests, "control, dominance, and independence are quintessentially masculine" (205), then how may manhood be reconceived in a way that is not so dependent upon an all-or-nothing ideology or upon parallel binaries of male/female, strong/weak, potent/impotent, masculine/sissified?[274]

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[272] Susan Goodman, Ellen Glasgow: A Biography (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

[273] Michel Awkward, "A Black Man's Place in Black Feminist Criticism," Representing Black Men, eds., Marcellus Blount and George P. Cunningham (New York: Routledge, 1996) 3-26.

[274] Martha A. Fineman, The Neutered Mother, the Sexual Family, and Other Twentieth-Century Tragedies (New York: Routledge, 1995).

The text here goes beyond the mere representation of an absent father, one who has abdicated from the legitimate seat of patriarchal rule nor does it portray merely a father inadequately fulfilling the requirements of his assumed rightful identity. Both these possibilities evoke what Sharon Holland, following Hortense Spillers, identifies as "fatherlack": "the idea of a dream/nightmare deferred [. . .] an inevitable and unattainable fatherhood" (387).[275] Ultimately, Glasgow invites a deeper critical scrutiny, for her conclusion, to use Jenkins' terms, "contains a possibility far more bewildering than the father's absence: a father who is present, but nonetheless no longer dominant or even interested in domination" (972). In doing so, Glasgow—like Faulkner—revises the mystery of the all-transcending order of Southern society. One has to *believe* in it. Yet, it clear that the males living on the aptly named Washington Street—for the first president, a Virginian slaveowner—do *not* believe in it. Among the social and political transformations of postbellum America, the South—as the mention of Washington Street seems to suggest—was perhaps not the only place that suffered a profound disruption of patriarchy. By questioning the necessity of belief to the maintenance of a binary gender order, Glasgow demands an entirely new way of defining and understanding gender and male-female interaction, one that begins with men who are men in spite of patriarchal power, not because of it—a reality that men in Faulkner have not yet explored.

Identity, it is true, is always held up through a series of arbitrary conventions. "Masculinity," Butler argues, "is conventionally conflated with the universal and thus remains unmarked" (49). Gender, she continues, is associated with femininity, whereas masculinity is granted as an abstract, universal quality. Along these lines, Laura Berlant explains,

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[275] Sharon Holland, "Bill T. Jones, Tupac Shakur, and the (Queer) Art of Death." Callaloo 23 (2000): 384-393; Hortense J. Spillers, "The Permanent Obliquity of an in(Pha)Llibly Straight': in the Time of the Daughters and the Fathers," Daughters and Fathers, eds., Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989) 127-149; Candice M. Jenkins, "Queering Black Patriarchy: the Salvific Wish and Masculine Possibility in Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple'." Modern Fiction Studies 48 (2002): 969-1000.

[m]any formerly iconic citizens who used to feel undefensive and unfettered

feel truly exposed and vulnerable. They feel anxious about their value to

themselves, their families, their publics, and their nation. They sense that they

now have identities, when it used to be just other people who had them (2).[276]

This unmarked character is empowering for masculinity (in particular, white, middle, and

upper-class, heterosexual masculinity) and disempowering for the others—the marked—

alongside whom this unmarked identity is exercised. As Richard Dyer suggests, "the claim to

power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity" (2). Unmarked (universal,

general) bodies can do that, whereas marked bodies cannot.[277] Only by troubling these

conventions, Butler concludes, can the problematic notions of identity be transcended.[278]

To some extent, Archbald's and George's performances of masculinity do contribute

to the troubling of these conventions, for if both genders are "stageable," it seems that it is

only masculinity that is available to theatrical representations. Eva, for instance, is removed

from the "stage" through her illness and the subsequent "female" operation strips her body of

what it once was. Similarly, Eva's wish to run away (outside of herself as she claims)

addresses and embraces the "woman's libidinal economy" described by Hélène Cixous as a

pleasure in "being boundless, outside self, outside same, far from center" (90-91). Cixous's

discourse on woman's libidinal economy (true also for A Streetcar Named Desire) posits a

female body that resists the patriarchal gaze, that occupies a larger space than that which the

patriarchal gaze is capable of imagining a body that resists categorization and regulation, a

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[276] Lauren Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling. Pain, Privacy, and Politics," Transformations. Thinking Through Feminism, eds., Maureen McNeil et al (London: Routledge, 2000) 33-47.

[277] Richard Dyer, Whiteness (London: Routledge, 1997); Michael Uebel argues that an "attention to the specific historicity and textuality of privileged, often ideologically invisible, categories such as whiteness prevents the acceptance of their uniformity and autonomy." Other scholars have argued that just as masculinity is stereotypically seen as a universal, nongendered abstraction, so "white" has been framed as an abstract, nonraced race. In other words, whiteness, like traditional masculinity more generally, has conventionally been granted an abstract, universal status; Michael Uebel, Race and the Subject of Masculinities (Duke: Duke University Press, 1997).

peripheral figure that no authority can ever subjugate. The marginalized body becomes a site of resistance.[279]

Eva's body, because it is scarred and wounded, is therefore not a "useful" or "consumable" body (Ciasullo 600-604). Using Jenny Blair as the focalization point, Glasgow promises a visual spectacle, that of Eva's body constituting the main attraction of the novel. Yet the possibility of the female body as potentially erotic is both promised and subverted. Indeed, "watching the look in Mrs. Birdsong's face, the child [Jenny] was seized by the feeling of moral nakedness that came to her whenever the veil slipped away from life and even grown-up people stopped pretending" (90). Glasgow emphasizes the unnaturalness of the female body as a site of spectacle or as a sexual sight. The "Belle" body, in this instance, offends male sensibilities by being "ugly" (602).[280] As far as the General's daughter Isabella Archbald is concerned, she has inherited her male ancestor's "Roman nose" (29).[281] Looking at her essentially means looking at one of the patriarchs of the former generation. Women like Etta are offered as grotesque representations, their femininity being parodied through pathology and stereotypes. Of course, such a portrayal illustrates one of the main contradictions of Southern patriarchy: "since women's only power lays in the capacity to allure men, unattractive women who did not fulfil the male ideal of femininity were looked

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[278] For Butler, "subversive performances" such as drag shows, for example, help to demonstrate the arbitrariness of these conventions and to topple them.

[279] Hélène Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways out/Forays," in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, The Newly Born Woman, trans. Betsy Wing, Theory and History of Literature 24 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 63-132.

[280] A. M. Ciasullo, "Making her (In)visible: Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s." Feminist Studies 27.3 (2001): 577-760.

[281] One big insult to a man of honor was pulling another's nose. "For Southern men of honour, the nose was the part of the face that precedes a man as he moved in the world. It was the most prominent physical projection of a man's character and always exposed before the eyes of others. Little wonder that men of honor should regard the nose as the most important part of their bodies" (Greenberg 68). Greenburg sums up perfectly why nose pulling is so insulting to men of honor in the South, when he says, "A man of honor valued public acclamation for the parts of a man that are visible to the public, including the visible surface of his body, his words, and his version of the truth. Thus it makes sense that one of the greatest insults for a man of honor was to have his nose pulled or tweaked" (68); Kenneth S. Greenberg, Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

upon as superfluous and almost unnatural. Ironically the ravishing belles the Southern cavaliers worshipped were rendered equally powerless, as conforming to this ideal requires a complete loss of self" (Dominguez 263). Seen in this light, Etta is thus condemned to "economic parasitism by a system that venerates beauty as the greatest blessing in a woman and her marriage as her sole claim" (Dominguez 266). As Pamela Matthews notes, Etta is conscious that her unattractiveness makes her powerless and almost invisible. She is a "chronic invalid [who] acts as a cultural symbol of her society's rejection of plain women as in-valid beings" (186).[282]

Read in this light, the presentation of the Southern Belle is overlaid in gendered terms according to the following axiom:

> in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining gaze projects its phantasy on the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for a strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 11).[283]

In the refusal to show Eva's body as desirable (a similar example is found in The Glass Menagerie, as Laura's body does not serve the purpose of providing erotic interest), Ellen Glasgow revisits here the theorized gender dynamic that equates the male/masculine with the active subject and the female/feminine with the passive object. As a consequence, the narrative both promises and denies the possibility of the bodies on show. And as for Scarlett O'Hara in Gone with the Wind, none of the women surrounding Jenny (except Isabella and only partially) offers an image of self-fulfillment.

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[282] Pamela Matthews, Ellen Glasgow and a Woman's Traditions (Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1994).
[283] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Screen 16.3 (1989): 6–18.

Of course, such a dynamic also resonates with the idea that the "masculine cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification" (Mulvey 12). And yet, if women's bodies are never fully observed, the features and bodies of the men do become the objects of an emblematic gaze, which involves at the same time the taking on of "feminine" traits. The General's body for instance is marked and observed in his fragility. George's body bears the marks of Eva's illness, feeling "the pain more than Eva does" (96). He grows sick as she gets worse: "his handsome florid face had changed utterly since the beginning of her illness. The rounded contour, so youthful a few weeks before, had sagged and hardened, and there were lines of anxiety between nose and mouth and beneath the still boyish grey eyes" (182). Marked bodies clearly become synonyms of masculinity, as George's boyish eyes seem to wear off, and as his face becomes tougher. The young doctor, John's body is marked too, as one can witness, through the female gaze that "his face held manliness and sincerity and rugged authority" (199).

Etta Archbald, for instance, judges that "it is miserable for a man to be too good looking" (21). Jenny Blair instantly perceives that "it was nursing he [George] craved, the maternal sort of nursing she gave her doll after she dropped it" (55). The General himself acknowledges that George, like the other men, is judged by appearances. According to him, George is "well-favoured enough if you judged by appearances, and did women, or men either for that matter, ever judge by anything else?" (101). In this case, George is submitted to the same female gaze as Swansdown in Swallow Barn, when the latter's actions are interpreted by Prudence, Catherine or even Bel Tracy. Women either become maternal figures for men-child or emphasize the men's inabilities as adults and husbands. In both cases, men are torn between their need to be protectors, and the need to be protected. They are men and boys at the same time, unable to know who they really are. Eventually, the ones who are fully in control of self-definition are the women, for Eva Birdsong is not so much a victim as she is

the principal definer of this world. General Archbald, in particular, idealizes Eva Birdsong, who becomes "the beautiful ideal to be worshipped, but [this admiration] does not allow him to see her as a human being with human needs" (Dominguez 274). Nature, as he recognizes, "has lost the art of making queenly women" (161). Eva Birdsong's tragedy is similar to Virginia Pendleton's: she abandons all her personal aspirations for love and is denied even that. According to Dominguez, "she internalizes the ideal that society demands of its women only to be abandoned on her pedestal, and becomes empty of identity when she realizes that the man for whom she sacrificed everything (including her health) worships the ideal she represents but does not love her" (274).

In this respect, Mrs. Birdsong and General Archbald do share certain characteristics. The General passes as a man, just as Eva Birdsong passes as an innocent, chaste, and pure woman, unaware of the pretenses and the appearances that she has to sustain. The woman functions as a mirror, always revealing the instability of both gender and sexual identity. The woman is a frightening reminder that the categories and the myth by which culture confidently asserts the naturalness of gender and sexuality have no reliable boundaries.[284] Of course, insisting on the stability of categories of sex/gender and race/ethnicity may well be an elaborate defense against time (and death) and time's absolute erasure of identity boundaries, but the General's enactment and deliberate erasure of a more effeminate self (by pretending to be a hunter, not a poet) "situate[s] us on the razor's edge that is life itself, reminding us that however the stakes in which games of identity performance are played, the final role—the final identity—knows no distinctions and no boundaries" (Lefkovitz 101). As Butler notes, "passing" is indeed a kind of failing, for another definition of passing is death, and this passing away—the ultimate failure of identity boundaries—may be the source of the anxieties

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[284] On this subject, we can refer to Judith Butler, "The End of Sexual Difference?" Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century, eds., Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

about which Glasgow has been writing. Eva's unnamed disease represents the artificial conditions of her life within the artificial cult of true womanhood. Susan Goodman contends that Eva's disease "seems nowhere and everywhere—in the breast and womb and mind—as ubiquitous as the air she breathes or the myth she lives" (A Biography 190).

By placing men on a stage, Glasgow portrays a masculinity that is essentially performative, i.e. fluid and changeable, while she figures femininity as a much more fixed (but also problematic) identity. The male body is no longer the active, "unmarked," and "universally generalizable" entity (Kimmel 4), for masculinity is performative, while femininity appears as a much more fixed (and nonetheless problematic) identity. Julius Raper, interpreting Glasgow's novels, writes:

> In her books, the postwar South is a matriarchal society devoted to worshipping two feminine ideals, the Old South and the purity of Southern women; one in which figurehead 'colonels,' 'generals', and 'governors' are propped up by puritanically hard and industrious women; the war was sexual suicide for the Southern male (Without Shelter 169).

Raper's point leads one to wonder: was the sexual suicide self-motivated, or did the women in some way, as Wyatt-Brown has speculated, coerce the men into a war that could surely end male hegemony over reality, culture, and the women themselves? (Southern Honor, 34, 226).[285]

4.4. Failing the Men.

Of course, through an excess of representation itself, by constantly putting on different personae, the hero, Butler argues, can never be pinned down as a single, fixed identity, and therefore, becomes able to elude identity. General Archbald's own subversive performances

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[285] Julius Rowan Raper, Without Shelter, The Early Career of Ellen Glasgow (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971).

seem to fit these ideas wonderfully. By remembering the past with a selective memory, by conflating past and present, the memorialized Archbald flows in and out of various characters from one instance to the next:

> A surface! Yes, that, he realized now, was the flaw in the structure. Except for that one defeated passion in his youth, he had lived entirely upon the shifting surface of facts. He had been a good citizen, a successful lawyer, a faithful husband, an indulgent father; he had been, indeed, everything but himself. Always he had fallen into the right pattern; but the centre of the pattern was missing (120).

It is also through multiple performances, his multiple and competing identities, that Archbald's identity is somehow "washed away," leaving the reader with the impression that there is no real. Indeed, General Archabld often starts with assertion such as "I was young" but soon ponders: "Is this impression more real than that one? Is the fact more living than the idea?" (126). A similar example appears on page 121 with: "'My life is nearly over,' he thought, 'but who knows what life is in the end?" (121). As expressed through General Archbald, there is the evasive idealism that Glasgow denounced vehemently and that Gallup defines as follows:

> Through the lines or behavior of her characters, [Glasgow] attacked the attitude based upon sentimentalism, that blindly ignored the presence of ugliness: the attitude that leaned toward looking on the bright side of life, that preferred to cling to a dream world of tradition rather than to face the problems of the immediate present, that trusted in an antiquity on the sheer basis of its age, that let the world go by from simple inertia, that could not admit the urgency of the moment's challenge (30).

If the women, for example, constantly refer to the presence of a smell, foreshadowing that "industrialism will have swallowed us whole. Nothing can stop it" (236), the General, on the contrary, questions the reality of its presence; "I've never been positive," the General insists, "that it isn't mere imagination, or the emptying of garbage cans somewhere in the alley. I've tried my best, and I'm never able to detect it" (236).

The decline of the grand neighborhood is expressed in a parallel to Nietzche's <u>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</u>, for it is not merely commerce and industry that have encroached but a "bad smell" and the revelation that the area nearby called Penitentiary Bottom refers to the section of <u>Zarathustra</u> where the prophet speaks of bad smells coming into the cells of imprisoned spirits who have given up the perpetual challenge of an heroic life.[286] The General's deliberate refusal to "see" (and to smell) change and his capacity to "pass" unnoticed—as a fake hunter, an inoffensive aging man, a failed patriarch, and a defeated warrior—represent fluid and conflicted identities which, in turn, could become productive moments of possibilities. Yet by denying the existence of the smell, the General would avoid facing the reality by simply denying that reality. So doing, the General comes to resemble "those who so indoctrinated by tradition in the old manner of life could not change and [were] harked back to the past while surrounded by the proof of the present" (Gallup 17).

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[286] Subtitled <u>A Book for All and None</u> (<u>Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen</u>), <u>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</u> is a work by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, composed in four parts between 1883 and 1885. Much of the work deals with ideas such as the "eternal recurrence of the same," the parable on the "death of God," and the "prophecy" of the Overman. The overman (Übermensch) is a self-mastered individual who has achieved his full power. For Nietzsche, Man as a race is merely a bridge between animals and the overman. Nietzsche also makes a point that the overman is not an end result for a person, but more an image of the journey toward self-mastery. The eternal recurrence, found elsewhere in Nietzsche's writing, is the idea that all events that have happened will happen again, infinitely. Such a reality can serve as the litmus test for an overman. Faced with the knowledge that he would repeat every action that he has taken, an overman would be elated as he has no regrets and loves life. The reference to bad smells appears in section 11, "On the New Idol," in which we find the prophet's injunction: "Escape from the bad smell! Escape from the idolatry of the superfluous! Escape from the bad smell! Escape from the steam of these human sacrifices!" Zarathustra's solution is not revolution but escape away from the multitude. General Archbald revisits Zarathustra's solution, by escaping into the multitude; Friedrich Nietzsche, <u>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</u>, trans. Graham Parkers (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2005).

Conflicted identities may indeed allow for a shift of focus that becomes part of a larger pattern of family reconfiguration in the novel, as it decentralizes the patriarch and the privilege of male dominance and thus calls for a new distribution of kinship ties. The General's need to go back to the origin of the trauma represents, to some extent, men's desire for an original moment that is believed to lie somewhere within the past. By linking the past with his lost wholeness, General Archbald not only focuses on the crisis of self-definition but also offers, what Bhabaha interprets as

> the chance to reread tradition through the position of those who are on the margins, a chance for renewal [. . .] In restaging the past, it introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition. This process estranges any immediate access to an originary identity or a "received" tradition (2, qtd. in Clark 17).[287]

Achbald's memories thus become a powerful tool to resist the idea of Southern masculinity as something constant, settled, and fixed. For instance, the General continues to dream that one day he will be able to shrug off the past and create himself anew. Commenting on this aspect (and echoing Sartre's reading of the men in The Sound and the Fury), Glasgow herself argued that "the glory of men as of nations is measured not by the strength with which they cling to the past, but by the courage with which they adventure into the future … [Genius] means a departure from tribal forms and images. It means a creation of new standards and new ideals of beauty and new rules of conduct" (The Dynamic Past 75).[288]

Rather than simply taking the family and the past (and the gender binaries that underlie it) as a static, naturalized entity that cannot help but limit our conception of politics, Glasgow—using the lens of gender construction—considers how, within a culture that already

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[287] Suzanne Clark, Cold Warriors: Manliness on Trial in the Rhetoric of the West (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000); Homi K. Bhabaha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 1994).

takes family and the past as the model for nation, the family (and the past) itself, to paraphrase Candice Jenkins, "can be redefined and in the process can unsettle political "givens" that might otherwise remain equally fixed" (995).[289] By throwing off all paternal control, Glasgow ultimately "works from within (including the Southern men) by undermining the historically and culturally condoned forms by which cultural truth and power are authenticated" (Kreyling 80). In addition, celebrating the fluidity of identity also encourages subversive potentials that may work against traditional, dominant notions.

Discussing Brandon Teena, the transgendered man depicted in <u>Boys Don't Cry</u>, John M. Sloop explains:

> As has become commonplace in many contemporary discussions of gender and trouble, at least since the publication of Judith Butler's <u>Gender Trouble</u>, gender and sexuality are assumed [in this essay] to be potentially fluid, held in check by each individual's interpellation into a cultural ideology that maintains male-female difference [and yet] while this move to celebrate or highlight potential disruptions of the gender binary system is indeed a vital project, it can come at the cost of focusing on ways that dominant rhetoric/discourse of gender continues to ideologically constrain (168).[290]

Sloop's argument thus invites another reading. If drawing attention to the performative (and marked) features of gender may serve to destabilize gender ideals, the encouragement of a kind of fluidity itself may well contribute to reestablish dominant figures of identification. Indeed, the General's ability to "pass," his capacity "to drift alone into old age and beyond," can be seen as an empowering strategy of resistance, for as the General remarks, "[l]ife

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[288] Ellen Glasgow, "The Dynamic Past." <u>The Reviewer</u> i (March 15, 1921): 73-80.
[289] Candice M. Jenkins, "Queering Black Patriarchy: the Salvific Wish and Masculine Possibility in Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple'," <u>Modern Fiction Studies</u> 48 (2002): 969-1000.
[290] John M. Sloop, <u>Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary U.S. Culture</u> (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

cease[s] to be complex as soon as one escape[s] from the tangle of personalities" (186). Yet, this desire for nothingness may also be linked to the ideal of masculine whiteness as self-abstraction, what Dyers defined as "being nothing at all [. . .] nothing in particular, the representative human, the subject without properties" (80). Residing in a place of nothingness does not transcend gender at all, but in fact, heightens the manner in which each enacts the behaviors and conventions that make masculinity legible through an ethos of choice that bespeaks tropes of patriarchal coding. General Archbald—by assuming the role of father, husband, and grandfather—does not seem to embrace a kind of fluidity that is able to challenge (but rather reassert) conventionally-fixed notions of identity; quite the contrary. Seen in this manner, the no-thing-ness of whiteness reinforces the power through self-abstraction associated with the traditional, unmarked body. In Nietzchean terms, the General is unable to see how his passivity has imprisoned him.

Glasgow, by referring to the General's joints that begin hurting and remind him of his old age or the collar that he wears, includes details that seem to bear little importance to the plot but much significance to our understanding of our male character, for if General Archbald seems to be questioning the destructive heritage of masculinity inherited from his grandfather, the reference to his physical weakness tells another story. As he revisits his past, General Archbald's perception begins to change. He begins to come to terms with his own diminished condition. He needs to face a confrontation with corporeality, the self as body, despite the threats to the conventional (and disembodied) ideas of masculinity it posits. Lost in his reverie, he becomes

> flattened out beneath the pressure of age [. . .] he was aware, with an aching
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> regret, of his withered flesh, of his brittle bones, of his corded throat, of the
>
> pouched skin and bluish hollows under his eyes, of the furrows between his
>
> jutting eyebrows, and the congested veins in his nose. "I am too old," he

thought, "but an hour ago, on that green bench, I was young. I was beyond time,

and I was young (126).

The General, who lives in a timeless present (where past/present/future coalesce) seems to be unable to abandon the present and return to a place where he can recapture the vitality of the original and reappropriate for himself this body which was once reading poetry but forced to wear the mask of virility. Storytelling may indeed allow him to revisit his memories, yet it cannot change the stale version of his present situation. There is no escape away from time. In this instance, Glasgow calls to mind what Roland Barthes calls a "vertigo of time defeated," an uncanny and conflicted sense of temporality generated by old photographs of people once alive, but who are now "alive" only in the photos, prompting people to "shudder... over a catastrophe which has already occurred," because "we feel, with a pang, that the dead have yet to die and that the past has yet to happen" (96).[291] In the last chapter, appropriately entitled "The Illusion," the narrator realizes that the General "knew ... that he had been young and was now old, that when he had defeated every other antagonist, there remained time, the unconquerable" (279).

To conquer time, the old men of Archbald's generation may find refuge in a space untouched by time, as they "came, with trembling knees and enfeebled loins, to sit with him in the sunshine [. . .] excited, noble, indignant, because a virgin was ravished. Like other old men in walled gardens all over the world, they were reliving, through memory and instinct, the happiest years of their lives, the years they were more completely male in spirit and sinew" (275). Much of the recounting of their past feats is—like Eva's—celebration as if they were now as then, as if there was no temporality. Yet recovery is something impossible to achieve, the return to an old order of things is purely and simply an impossible task. The only way, Eva admits, is to "rush out of doors, to get away from myself" (284) because, "I'm worn

out with being somebody else – with being somebody's ideal. I want to turn round and be myself for a little while before it is too late, before it is all over" (285). If Eva's effort is "a desperate struggle against the combined pressure of society and biology to preserve her sanity" (Raper 142-3), the natural body existing before gender construction by society is not retrievable.[292] As the General admits, "experience had taught him that there is no place in the world where one can be different from one's self" (128).

In exploring his past, General Archbald recognizes that indeed, "he could not escape [. . .] he submitted to life" (198). Thus doing, he truly accepts his social, communal, and cultural anonymity and sees no need to assert himself conspicuously. Eventually, what makes General Archbald a Southern Gentleman in the tradition of Thomas Nelson Page is that his discourse, unlike that of the old men, is an escape *into* time rather than *from* time.[293] The General explains that "within time, and within time alone, there was life—the gleam, the quiver, the heart-beat, the immeasurable joy and anguish of being" (109). As Jorg W. Homberger justly notes:

> The victory over time, not the escape from it, is the quintessential wish enactment embedded in the desire for pastoral stasis. The distinguishing mark of Southern fiction is its persistence in confronting time, in not seeking solutions either in a timeless absolute (Melville's Ismael) or in movement through space away from civilization (Cooper's Natty Bumpo). The Southern gentleman has never been separable from a specific time and a timebound space. Time itself is the enemy, and no removal into a space as yet untouched by time or into a metaphorically detemporalized space is imaginable for him.

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[291] Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

[292] Julius Rowan Raper, From the Sunken Garden. The Fiction of Ellen Glasgow, 1916-1945 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1980).

He is not Huckleberry Finn [whose narrative] leads into the Northern solution to the problem of civilization, the movement through space to the territory ahead of the rest. He is, rather, Tom Sawyer, who wears the emblem of his affliction, a watch chain adorned with the bullet that wounded him, with irrational pride" (35-36).

The honorific title of General and the collar that he keeps on wearing remind people of the emblems of Archbald's own affliction. Personhood cannot exist in a place outside time and gender. Moving Archbald's body into the place of supposed time-neutrality creates instead not a place of unlimited agency but creates the term of the hyper articulation of gender codes.

If the General's performance is indeed simply reasserting the hegemonic mode of masculinity, both George and John become explorations of two (young) contradictory (or deviant) ideals of masculinity that could resist the dominant identities imposed by men like the General's grandfather. Seen through the eyes of Jenny Blair (the living embodiment of the new South), George is "all talk," promising theories when he is unable to sustain them. For instance, "women, especially romantic women like Eva [. . .] ma[d]e the mistake of measuring a man's love (George) by his theories" (96). George could be regarded as someone who does not have to make a choice, of a man who could be both things (on Washington Street –and where the name 'George' has resonance—and outside Washington Street), by obscuring the necessity to choose one model of manhood over another. Yet, George Birdsong's murder in the house at the end of a hunting episode reveals that the story's narrative divisions might just be limited to the antagonism between Washington Street and the rest of the town. George's multiplication of masculine selves is eventually unified through murder. When Eva comes down to the library and finds George embracing Jenny Blair, she shoots him dead with the hunting gun he has just left nearby. Manning interprets this scene as the act from a "frustrated,

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[293] We may trace here an obvious parallel with romance as an artifact that has the power to work in history, not

insecure, aging Southern belle who [. . .] cannot be sure of George's love, cannot be sure she is beautiful, and without love and beauty she is nothing" (322). General Archbald and John Welch arrive to ascertain that the murder has been an accident, protecting "Eva from going to prison and Jenny Blair from facing her responsibility in the tragedy she has been part of. The final tragedy does not serve the dissipating of the suffocating atmosphere in which these female characters are trapped" (Dominguez 279).

The symbolism of the garden serves that purpose. In the last scene—that of George Birdsong's murder—the garden is no longer an object to be looked at but is invaded by the private, as objects from within the house are to be found in the garden: "a broken saucer and an empty tomato-can lay in the middle of a border; an old broom with a broken handle was rotting away at the foot of the steps; the leaves on the untended shrubs were curled and dry, as if the edges had been eaten by caterpillars" (259). Private and public spheres have become mixed up, with no boundaries to distinguish the one from the other. The "walled" garden is not immune to the noises from the street, and significantly enough in the last scene, it becomes the place from which the fight between Mr. and Mrs Birdsong is publicly observed:

> breaking from the trance that held her, she [Jenny] ran down into the garden, far down by the old lily-pond, and circled round and round, like a small animal that is looking for the hole in a trap [. . .] She sank down on the ground behind the mulberry tree, crouching in the shadow and straining her ears for any sound from the house. In the centre of a vast loneliness, she listened to sudden noises from the street, to the long reverberations of crashing things within and without (289).

Glasgow is here mapping a set of binary oppositions onto one another: masculine is to feminine, as reason is to sentiment, as the political is to the personal, as the public is to the

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outside of history (See Ackerman).

private. The story's narrative divisions might be limited to the antagonism between the two extremes of Washington Street, the slippage between the Archbald's house and garden and the Birdsongs' place contrasted with places where Memoria lives and from which the bad smell emanates, a confluence that suggests the bad smell does not, in fact, come from factories or the penitentiary alone. At the end of the novel, the private, hidden, and true nature of Mr. Birdsong is exorcised in public (as the reader becomes the violator of the private nature of Mr. and Mrs. Birdsong's married life). Metaphorically, the re-appropriation of George's body into the conventional domestic sphere reveals that the narrative resists resolution. In a similar manner, "the old patriarchal order that keeps women conveniently sheltered still operates, disguising Jenny Blair's devious conduct and rendering Eva's plight senseless" (Dominguez 279).

As for John Welch, the young physician possesses a promising character, as Eva witnesses. For Archbald also, John's rebellious young nature may after the promise to achieve the self-satisfaction and the life without pretense that Archbald has missed: "young people were more direct than they used to be, and he knew that John, after his habit of all realists in every age, disliked sentimentality. Well, perhaps he was right, there was no doubt that he loved Mrs. Birdsong devotedly, though he was able to stand by and watch a surgeon cut into her body" (152). In his use of direct language to say that Eva "has never drawn a natural breath since she was married [and] if she dies [. . .] it will be the long pretense of her life that has killed her" (153) and in his socialist philosophy, John is "a realist; his vision of the world is accurate, scientific, unlovely, and unhopeful. He is the only character capable of showing 'moral indignation' against social injustice in the South and bold enough to criticize the Industrial Revolution openly" (Santos 103). Yet, he is also—and it is important to remember—the one who authors a false (and prettier) version of the tragedy by offering an alternative ending to George Birdsong's tragic finale (thus re-appropriating the General's

deviant version): "He [George] shot himself. It was an accident" (291). John has criticized the society's evasive idealism and "after the habits of all realists in every age, disliked sentimentality" (296), yet the man of facts eventually joins forces with the Old Order (Manning 345) and like the ambiguous philosophical hero of Thomas Mann's 1925 novel The Magic Mountain, Hans Castorp, John will head off to the terrible war of 1914-1919.

The love for war is essentially the search for a new public sphere, the glimpse of a new kind of public realm overtly distinct from commercial values (John is a good Socialist) and linked to an older model of virtue (the old men discuss the benefits and the greatness of past heroic acts). Neither domestic nor commercial and distinguishable from the market, the battlefield instills norms of discipline, good will, and civility. It also instills an illusion of "agreement about gender" that reiterates but also disperses cultural narratives and the selves they make possible" (Clark 14). However, despite the apparent promising possibility that lies behind the departure for war, Glasgow shows that war is another escape, another obscurity, the need to conform to a larger cohesively instilled version of masculinity, instead of having to make a choice of who to be. In going to war, John will only reenact the promises that have kept the Southern honor alive, thus retrieving the essential Southern masculinity. Ellen Glasgow, in her personal correspondence, recounted that, shortly after the United States entered the First World War, she had heard a famous man at a New York dinner party declare, in the manner of Tom Wingfield in the introductory pages of The Glass Menagerie: "America needs this war!" "America might need it," she retorted, "but the South doesn't; it has had its war already" (Glasgow, qtd. in Goodman 241)[294] If Glasgow may have believed "that the anguish of the Civil War and Reconstruction had given the South a deeper spiritual awareness, a kind of socially informed collective memory" (Goodman 241), General

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[294] Susan Goodman, "The Sheltered Life: Memory and Memoria in The Sheltered Life." The Mississippi Quarterly 49 (Spring 1996): 241-54.

Archbald is more skeptical, voicing instead Rhett Butler's idea that men need war. As the narrator explains, "[p]erhaps new blood, new passions, and new social taboos were the only salvation of a dying order" (76) because "in every war, the noble savage returned" (278). Indeed, as Archbald acknowledges, "[e]ven John, since he had found something to blame, had begun to feel happier. What the world needed, it appeared, was the lost emblem of evil" (291). And for Virginians, joining that war (World War) means in effect embracing the reunited country by fighting with the Yankee.

For these men confronted with the failure of their monolithic concepts, Glasgow offers a new challenge: it is not enough to register the loss of traditional orders of difference, but perceiving the emergence of new ones is necessary. If the next task is not only to record old versions of masculinity but to recognize and validate new versions, the end reveals that the emergence of new identities has yet to be achieved. General Archbald admits that "my generation felt about social injustice… John's generation talks about social injustice; and perhaps, who knows, the next generation, or the generation after the next may begin to act about social injustice" (200).

While criticizing the failing of men who have not yet started to act, Archbald himself foreshadows that letting go of old traditions is far from being achieved. When Archbald's daughters, for instance, persuade him to put on his slippers, loosen his collar, and lie down on a sofa in his library, with the doors closed, Archbald refuses: "[h]e shook his head stubbornly, shrinking from so serious an infringement of habit. Though it was commendable to rebel in one's mind, it was imperative, he felt, to keep on one's collar" (194). The reference to the "collar" alludes here to the importance of clothing in the novel as artifacts that define and shape the individual bodies into a collective norm.[295] The allusion to the collar itself calls to

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[295] Ellen Levy, "Clothes Make the Mannequin: Covering Up the Female Body in The Sheltered Life." The Mississippi Quarterly 49 (Spring 1996): 255-267; The grandfather's garment achieves General Archbald's rite

mind the collar that John will wear later on the battlefield, and the collar that George had left on the chair of his mulatto mistress in the lower part of the town, and also the collar of the domesticated pet—i.e., the damaged hunting dog that is General Archbald's "familiar," whom Cora can never understand.

George does wish that the present or the past were different: "I sometimes wish," he says desperately, "that she didn't believe in me. If she saw me as I am, I might be able to measure up better. But she would idealize me. She expected too much. I always knew it was hopeless" (185). His resistance to conventional gender practice is however depicted more as a discourse of disempowerment than a discourse of masculine possibilities: adultery neither leads to sexual release nor happiness. On the contrary, the weight of transgression is still heavily felt and the transient pleasure of feeling sexually desirable gives way to remorse. George, in this scene, tries to go back to a wishful time where he could change things, yet he commits the mistake of not silencing the representatives of the past order. As General Archbald remarks, "[n]ight after night, Eva must have waited for George in disappointment, when by staying at home, by sacrificing some trivial inclination, he might have made her perfectly happy. Yet now, when she was beyond his power to help or hurt, when she was indifferent to his remorse, he insisted upon making this savage display of grief" (196).

The General's desire to cling to Eva Birdsong as the ultimate model of purity and innocence further underlines that defining masculinity and gendered spaces will not be pursued in heroic isolation. This idea is reinforced as the narrative reveals General Archbald's anxieties concerning "real" and "fake" women, femininity and desire, and performance and meaning. Wondering, "[w]as it conceivable, as Cora suspected, that Eva knew the truth, and was merely preserving appearances?" the General attempts to re-establish distinct boundaries between "real" and "fake" women, by convincing himself that, "[n]o, he could not believe

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of deception. Eva, as Ellen Levy remarks, "makes herself into a stage figure forever seeking the right

this" (99). Because she is deemed "beautiful," "ideal," and "queenlike," because her body reads like a text of unaffected and uncontested purity. This Southern Belle must remain fixed in a recognizable (and therefore "universal") gender role, i.e. the pure, innocent, perfect Southern lady who keeps this world in order too. If women only pretended, if such an idea was believable, that alternative could suggest that women could even appropriate for themselves the ability to "pass" and could become directors of the Southern drama, leaving the men, the actors to become mere spectators. Part three of the novel entitled "The Illusion" reinforces this possibility, as it is Eva who takes charge. It starts with General Archbald going to visit Eva in the hospital with Jenny Blair now approaching eighteen and dreaming of going to New York. Eva is again more concerned with George than herself and makes the General promise that he will provide moral support to her husband both in his anxious waiting and after the operation.[296] She tells Archbald: "I want you to stay with George until it is over. I want you to come in the morning and stay with George" (139).

In failing her men, Glasgow suggests new ways of defining and understanding gender and male-female interaction. Instead of embracing or denying a unified normative practice, perhaps, she suggests, the solution is to entertain multiple versions of gender formations and experiences, to accept the making of masculinities, as Harry Brod entitles his volume of essays on the new men's studies, to resists conventional notions of masculinity to gradually accepting a multiple and fluid identity rather than a static and inescapable one.[297]

For Glasgow's men, however, there is no change of strategy, maybe because strategies cannot be changed, or because new models of masculinity have not yet been embraced or explored. Glasgow's text however remains enigmatic about the role that men can or should

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costume" (255).

[296] This scene here is very similar to the one in <u>Gone with the Wind</u> where Melanie makes Scarlett swear that she will protect Ashley, after she is gone.

[297] Harry Brod, "The Case for Men's Studies." <u>The making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies.</u> Ed. Harry Brod. Boston: Allen, 1987.

play in the postbellum South. Rather than clearly delineating a man's place, she leaves several possibilities open, as evidenced, for example, by the difference between John's quiet confidence, George's acquiescence, and Archbald's philosophical companionship. Yet the possibilities are never fully satisfying and one model of manhood cannot really prevail over another, not even Joseph Crocker, the young carpenter from a lower social class. To make matters worse, Joseph does not attend the Episcopal church. Just three days after her engagement to Thomas Lunsford, Isabella takes the train to Washington and comes back to Queensborough as Mrs. Joseph Crocker. Isabella is thus not constrained by the codes of behavior that suffocate Etta, the frustrated spinster or even Eva Birdsong, the Belle (Dominguez 266-267). Yet, even before her association with Joseph, she has become the fallen woman in The Sheltered Life, since she consents to drive "with a sober horse and a spirited young man, instead of safely reversing the order" (16), and then by marrying someone who works in overalls, abandoning her class.

Because Glasgow's characters seem to be imperfect actualizations of ideal modes of masculinity (and femininity), their choices and theories reveal the presence of desires founded on ideals (political, religious, moral or other). They also display their delusory self-conceptions, striving toward imperfectly understood goals that prevent one from reaching social, economic, emotional and psychological maturity. As Dominguez recognizes, "the bleak ending of the novel signifies the author's gloomy acknowledgement that the message in many women's stories is still being silenced or ignored [. . .] Glasgow once more points at the crucial importance of listening to women's stories in order to escape the debilitating discourse of patriarchy" (279). As this chapter has emphasized, however, listening to men's stories could also—as General Archbald or George Birdsong underline—provide warning narratives

of the patriarchal notions of masculinity that these men have internalized and provide new

performances of gender, only if those could be embraced.

CHAPTER 5

MARGARET MITCHELL, GONE WITH THE WIND (1936)

More than 60 years after the surrender of the Confederate Army at Appomattox, Margaret Mitchell wrote her world best-seller Gone with the Wind (1936) bringing together Confederates, Yankees, slaves, and plantation masters to participate in a reenactment of a war that, for this generation born too late to fight during World War I, was no longer on the national agenda. Addressing such themes as survival, romantic love, and the societal structuring of gender and class, this historical romance is set in northern Georgia during the drama of the Civil War and Reconstruction years and traces the life of Scarlett O'Hara and her relationships with Rhett Butler—a wealthy outcast from high society who "looks like one of the Borgias"—as well as Ashley Wilkes—pure Southern gentleman—and his wife, Melanie Wilkes. But does the novel, to quote Stephen Carter, stand as "an apologia for the Old South—the South of gallant white plantation owners and darkies too foolish for anything but slavery, a civilization ruined by a vengeful North that subsequently flooded that idyllic world with rapacious Union soldiers, greedy carpetbaggers and the despotic power of the Freedmen's Bureau" (1)?[298]

To wonder why Tara, the O'Hara's plantation, emerged as the regretted lost Garden of Eden or to ask why the Southern Gentleman, the confederate hero of the South, was translated into such mythic status as the ambiguous Rhett Butler is to enter vexed territory. The simplest explanation, historians explain, involves the collective response to the new rugged individualism and capitalism of the era. With the "shifting cultural and intellectual climate of the 1890s" and later, the transition to an urban economy and the pressures of a newly modernized society—what Nina Silber described in terms of a "masculinity crisis in

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[298] Stephen L. Carter, "Almost a Gentleman." New York Times 4 Nov. 2007. 12 Feb. 2009 <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/04/books/review/Carter-t.html?_r=1&pagewanted=2>.

America" (166)—the allure of a more stable patriarchal order is not hard to imagine, perhaps especially since the South had been defeated and had come to seem forever lost (166).

Once Gone with the Wind was published in 1936, there is almost no use mentioning the enormous and immediate popularity of the novel that has been translated into about forty languages (and published in fifty countries), including Kannada (India), Arabic (Egypt and Lebanon), Amharic (Ethiopia), and Farsi (Iran). Despite a three-dollar price tag ($43.50 in today's dollars), in its first year Gone with the Wind sold 1 383 000 copies.[299] Over the next several years before World War II began, twenty-four countries had published translations of the novel. Awarded the 1937 Pulitzer Prize, the novel was later adapted as a film in 1939, an achievement that won ten Academy Awards, and today, everybody (even those who have never read the novel or watched the movie) knows about Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler. Reviews of this sentimental story that follows Scarlett, the daughter of a plantation owner in north Georgia during and after the Civil War, were almost unanimously favorable. In its nostalgia for a long-bygone era, the popular romance of Scarlett and the masculine Rhett belong to the sentimental tradition. As Jonathan Yardley remarks, the words with which Rhett Butler so memorably kisses off Scarlett's O'Hara, "My dear, I don't give a damn," did "a lot more than provide a shocking conclusion to Mitchell's widely popular romance. They also secured in the national mythology an image of the white Southern cavalier that survives unto this day: bold, insouciant, raffish, devil-may-care, independent, profane."[300] Most importantly, as Marian J. Morton remarks in his article, "My Dear, I Don't Give a Damn:

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[299] Donald W. Miller, Jr., "Gone with the Wind: An American Epic." 6 Jan. 2009. <http://www.lewrockwell.com/miller/miller22.html>

[300] Jonathan Yardley, "The Rhett Stuff." The Washington Post [Washington, D.C.] 30 Jan. 2003.

Stephen W. Berry, All that Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Scarlett O'Hara and the Great Depression," the fact that both novel and movie (released in 1939) aroused such interest might show that Mitchell had "struck a responsive chord" (52).[301]

And indeed, the historical context of the time, the mid-to-late 1930s of the Depression era, demanded popular sensibility. With depression raging, many former things were indeed gone with the wind. For Susman, America "entered an era of depression and war somehow aware of a culture in crisis, already at the outset in search of a satisfactory American Way of Life, fascinated by the idea of culture itself, with a sense of some need for a kind of commitment in a world somehow between eras" (qtd. in Fox-Genovese 391).[302] With World War II looming on the horizon—and even if the parallel between Mitchell's story and twentieth-century history may have been unconscious[303]—Fox-Genovese adds, "Gone with the Wind grappled with the nature of the New South, with twentieth-century problems of social change and tension," providing valuable lessons of courage for those people going through the Depression (392). In her attempts to save Tara and in the comfort she finds in the past of her ancestors and in this land that keeps her anchored, Scarlett could resemble the many Americans who attempted to repair the problems of the Depression, a culture in crisis. Hers is a world not so far removed from the 1930s, a world which begins busting with hope and promise like the Americans of the 1920s, only to disintegrate into chaos and unreason (Levine 218).[304] Scarlett finds:

Gerald, penniless, had raised Tara; Ellen had risen above some mysterious

sorrow… There were Scarletts who had fought with the Irish volunteers for a

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[301] Marian J. Morton, "'My Dear, I Don't Give a Damn': Scarlett O'Hara and the Great Depression." Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies 5 (1980): 52-56.

[302] Warren Susman, Culture as History: The Tranformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century ((New York: Pantheon, 1984) in Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Scarlett O'Hara: the Southern lady as New Woman." American Quarterly 33.4 (1981): 391-411.

[303] On that note, read David Nicholas Eldridge, American Culture in the 1930s (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008): 53.

[304] Lawrence L. Levine, Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

free Ireland and had been hanged for their pains and the O'Haras who died at
the Boyne, battling to the end for what was theirs.

All had suffered crushing misfortune and had not been crushed. They
had not been broken by the crash of empires, the machetes of revolting slaves,
war, rebellion, proscription, confiscation. Malign fate had broken their necks,
perhaps, but never their hearts (582).[305]

The title itself Gone with the Wind (lacking the subject to the past participle "gone") refers—
even if indirectly—to the continuing elusiveness of a definite American representation of the
war and the Southern experience of defeat. After all, when histories start to be told
appropriately, there may be no need for romances anymore.

5.1. The Gendered Discourse in Gone with the Wind.

More than a nostalgic reenactment of Southern experience, Gone with the Wind also
offers an example of what Amy Kaplan defines as the reconstruction of masculinity that took
place at the turn of the century and beyond. In the portrayal of the virile and masculine Rhett
and the effeminate yet tender Ashley in the face of the Northern brutes, Mitchell portrays how
Southern manhood could be negotiated and reconstructed during these times of crisis. The
Civil War veteran in particular fit the role perfectly. As critic Maurice Thompson explains,
"the return to romance is simply a young, strong, virile generation pushing aside a flabby one.
The little war we had with Spain did not do so much for us; the thing was already done by our
schools, churches, gymnasiums, out-door sports; the war acted simply as a faucet through
which our vigor began to act" (qtd. in Kaplan 665).[306] For him, "the revival of the romance
turns a potential rupture with tradition into cultural and political continuity, a return to a
healthier, more authentic American past" (Kaplan 666). It is not too difficult to imagine why
such figures of masculinity (the veteran, the chivalric hero, or the gentleman) would

unconsciously or consciously present vectors of optimism by proposing a reassuring worldview when circumstances on the homefront (and abroad) were not so clement.

Not surprisingly, the literary potential of the South particularly bore remarkable fruit in a celebrated Southern renaissance: "detective novels, epic historical romances like <u>Gone with the Wind</u> [. . .] proved to be the most popular fiction of the decade" (Eldridge 32).[307] In explaining the conditions in which literature still flourished, David N. Eldridge finds truth in the suggestion that "an economy of high unemployment left writers and readers alike with time for contemplation" (32). Writers, he explains, were galvanized by the painful collapse of the economy and the threat of national disintegration itself. One explanation given for the Southern Renaissance is that "when the crash came, bringing the nation down almost in dust, it found the South waiting there, already on familiar terms with history's great negative lessons of poverty, failure, defeat and guilt" (Bercovitch & Patell 253).[308] More generally, the desire to explore the disordered nation, "celebrate its epic qualities and speak for its troubled populace" lay behind a vast outpouring of words, questioning: what had America become? What future might it anticipate? (Eldridge 32). <u>Gone with the Wind</u>, as Eldridge interprets it, provided a test of resilience to the protagonists, providing also a "cumulative message in the face of another impending conflict" (70). As a result and as the <u>New York Times</u> suggested, books such as <u>Gone with the Wind</u> (reported to have outsold every other book except the Bible) may be inscribed as one of these lengthy behemoths that "furnished several weeks of entertainment for only $3," and offered most readers "prolonged escape into a more colorful romantic world than the shabby one about them" (qtd. in Eldridge 53).

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[305] Margaret Mitchell, <u>Gone with the Wind</u> (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008).
[306] Maurice Thompson, "The Critics and the Romancers." <u>The Independent</u> 52 (August 1900): 1919-21.
[307] David Nicholas Eldridge, <u>American culture in the 1930s</u> (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).
[308] Sacvan Bercovitch and Cyrus R. K. Patell eds, <u>The Cambridge History of American Literature: Prose writing, 1910-1950</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Looking at her own youth, Margaret Mitchell wrote: "I was about ten years old …
before I learned that the war hadn't ended shortly before I was born" (Letters 3, qtd. in Fox-
Genovese). As Fox-Genovese remarks, the Southern stories of fathers and lullabies of
mothers ensured the widespread and living embodiments of the events of the Civil War and
Reconstruction in the Southern imagination (395). Such tales, by depicting an illusory time
when manners were seen as being more refined and more civilized, linked the private psyche
of the listener/reader to the public enthusiasm for tales of heroism and virile manhood in an
age that offered little possibility for heroism, honor, and respectability. Life in the antebellum
South, the ideals of resistance and courage against adversity, offered a stark contrast to the
situation that most Americans knew, and the Southern gentleman represented a throwback to
the idea of precorporate capitalist structure that was redefining "masculinity from a republican
quality of character based on self-control and social responsibility to a corporeal essence
identified with the vigor and prowess of the individual male body" (Kaplan 662). [309] The
hardier life of the chivalric warrior thus offered the possibility to reinvigorate an enfeebled
Southern masculinity but also a collective form of blowing off steam. It is with this specific
attention to the reconstruction of Southern masculinity that I would now like to turn my
reading of the novel. The Civil War and the Reconstruction years in Gone with the Wind—as
this chapter will—depict battles that were fought not only on the battlefield or on the estate of
the plantation, but also on the subject of masculinity and its different representations,
especially in the portrayal of a revitalized—yet deviant—male body like Rhett Butler's.

The first line of the novel, presenting as Scarlett as someone who "was not beautiful"
(3), indicates that the novel will essentially be concerned with gender. The filmed adaptation

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[309] On the shift in the meaning of masculinity, see Joseph Kett, Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790
to the Present (New York: Basic, 1977); Joe Dubbert, A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition (Eaglewood
Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979); Edward Anthony Rotundo, "Body and Soul: Changing Ideals of American
Middle-Class Manhood, 1770-1920." Journal of Social History 16 (1983): 28-33; and Elliott Gorn, The Manly
Art: Bare Knuckle Prize Fighting in America (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986).

itself opens with another clear reference to gender and, specifically, the figure of the Southern beau. The first lines appearing on the screen introduce its viewers to "a land of Cavaliers and Cotton Fields called the Old South. Here in this pretty world, Gallantry took its last bow. Here was the last ever to be seen of Knights and their Ladies Fair, of Master and Slave."

When the novel opens, Scarlett O'Hara is seen flirting with Brent and Stuart Tarleton, twin brothers who live on a nearby plantation. From the very first pages, the Tarleton twins provide Mitchell's readers with masculine looking-glasses through which one quickly understands the definition of masculinity in Clayton County, Georgia: "raising good cotton, riding well, shooting straight, dancing lightly, squiring the ladies with elegance and carrying one's liquor like a gentleman were the things that mattered" (5). And the twins who "excel" in these "accomplishments" (5) both think in terms of gender, thus giving evidence to some of the values held in high esteem for Southern gentlemen (honor, strength, duty, among others). In their gender-coded society, the twins emphasize the existence of a model of hegemonic masculinity. Able Wynder, though poor, is assigned a value: he is a "real man [because] the best shot in the Troop" (24). As for Ashley Wilkes, the young man living at Twelve Oaks, a nearby plantation, this gentleman "was born of a line of men who used their leisure for thinking, not doing, for spinning brightly colored dreams that had in them no touch of reality" (35). Seen through the lens of the Tarleton twins, the pure-blooded Ashley who is to marry his cousin Melanie Hamilton, a plain and gentle lady from Atlanta, is nonetheless too feminine and does not fit their definition of masculinity, because he is "kind of queer about music and books and scenery" (22). The opening of the novel here purposefully confuses the definition of the gentleman: Able Wynder is not a gentleman, yet is regarded as a real man. Ashley Wilkes is from gentleman-stock, yet not a real man.

The presentation of men in the opening of Gone with the Wind tends to work at the expense of others. Black men, in particular, scarcely get any "script" time. The standard of

race/blackness against which to establish whiteness—or at least define the boundaries of its social, political, or economic privileges—has been, it seems, erased from history. Actually, except for Mammy or Big Sam, Gone with the Wind has no major black characters and Mitchell "constructs no racial drama" (Hale 263).[310] Even then, Mammy is presented as the benevolent, always present and submissive mother-surrogate while Sam is presented as the one man who is ultimately more chivalric than the white men themselves as he saves Scarlett from thieves (rapists possibly). The threat of blackness, the evil of slavery has been defused, primarily because it has so fully been appropriated by whiteness: actual black men and women are only wonderful if they stay within the parameters set up by Scarlett's imagination. Contemplating the situation of reconstruction, Scarlett thinks to herself that the freed slaves, now, "childlike in mentality, easily led and from long habit accustomed to taking orders," can "conduct themselves [only] as creatures of small intelligence might naturally be expected to do" (645-6). In the end, racial difference is subsumed into a vast underclass in the novel, since "those who once ruled [are] now more helpless than their former slaves had ever been" (644). The evacuation of race from Gone with the Wind carries with it a longed-for disembodiment, a freeing of the universal from the "contingencies" of race and slavery, as Roger Kimball puts it (xv).[311] This setting aside of other identities also contributes to the establishment of one unique white heterosexual masculinity. The focus of the novel is thus placed on masculinity itself. As a consequence, more than simply depicting a world that is gone, the novel becomes "a study of gender roles, of what it means to be a man or woman" in the South (Silber 339) and rather than dealing with racial or social issues, deals with varying performances of masculinity. In fact, masculinity is, in the twins' perception, constructed or confirmed, whereas femininity is seen as a permanent essence. Commenting on Cathleen Calvert's trip to

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[310] Grace Hale, Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South (New York: Pantheon, 1998).
[311] Roger Kimball, Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education (New York: Harper and Row, 1990).

Charleston, the twins bet that "all she'll know about is the balls she went to and the beaux she collected" (20). In this way, the brothers lay claim to their particular quality linked to the masculine sex, whereas they soon deny others as becomes evident with the references to Cathleen and Ashley.

That Gone with the Wind should be organized in a gender-based discourse may not truly come as a surprise since Margaret Mitchell knew only too well that literature itself was structured and organized in this fashion. For ages, indeed, male writers have made the case that the pen is not a feminine instrument. Sandra M. Gilbert, writing on "literary paternity" in the Victorian age, observes what she calls a male claim to cultural authority, "a concept central to that Victorian culture of which he was in this case a representative male citizen" (4).[312] Like other women writers who challenged traditional norms, Mitchell understood, to use Greene and Kahn's terms here, that "gender is constructed in patriarchy to serve the interests of male supremacy" (3).[313] Few critics, for example, focused on Mitchell's Southerness. Rather, as Silber remarks, they focused on her gender, as rumors about the writer started to circulate, substituting for her competence and literary genius the more "feminine" virtue of passivity (and even infirmity). By way of contast, many critics seemed to refuse the idea that a woman could have written such a masterpiece. As Silber notes,

> the public found it incongruous that a small woman could write a large, popular, and financially successful novel. [. . .] Rumors flew that not she but her husband, father, her brother, even Sinclair Lewis had written the novel; that she was going blind, had leukemia, had a wooden leg, and wrote the novel stretched out, an invalid, in bed (316).

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[312] Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

[313] Gayle Greene, and Coppelia Khan, Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism (New York: Routledge, 1985).

Gone with the Wind, in that sense, became disembodied (physically as well) from its female writer; the author suffering here—following Barthes's lead—a second death.[314] Atlanta Journal city editor William S. Howland, for instance, remembers that the young Margaret Mitchell "wrote like a man" (Silber 325), whereas President Harry S. Truman in 1949 claimed that, "the author of Gone with the Wind [. . .] exemplified in her all too brief span of years the highest ideals of American Womanhood" (qtd. in Silber 313). Caught like her heroine between masculinity and femininity, Margaret Mitchell was very well aware that there were in the South very strong sexually-based behavior distinctions still holding strong long after the Civil War was over:

> I remember that when I was a little girl and rode my pony every afternoon, my boon companion was a fine old Confederate veteran. He looked exactly like a stage Confederate—white hair and goatee, jimswinger coat, and a habit of gallantly kissing ladies' hands, even my own grubby six-year-old hand… He and a young lady who had reached the beau age were the only two people in my part of town who owned horses. And we three went riding together … Frequently we had several veterans with us. The families of the veterans and my mother encouraged us to ride together in the belief that we'd keep each other out of mischief… I regret to say that we didn't. There was still plenty of fire and dash left in the old boys. They still had hot tempers and bullheads and they still dearly loved a fight. The day seldom passed that they didn't have a heated argument about the Civil War. And the day seldom passed when the young lady who

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[314] Ellen Glasgow suffered the same death of the female author. When meeting Prince Collier, a senior editor at MacMillan to whom she had sent her manuscript The Descendant, (that Glasgow describes as marking her "recoil from the uniform Southern heroes in fiction" in The Battle Ground, xiii) Glasgow was told to "stop writing, and go back to the South and have some babies" since apparently a woman would be judged on the quality of her babies, not of her books. (Julius Rowan Raper, Without Shelter, The Early Career of Ellen Glasgow (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 60.

accompanied us didn't turn her horse and race for home. She realized, even if I didn't, that the company of quarrelsome old gentlemen was no place for a lady" (qtd. in Silber 321).[315]

These sexually-based distinctions are expressed very clearly throughout the novel as the plantation novel configures clearly gendered private and public spaces. True to Southern ladyhood, Scarlett rejects any discussion that she considers unfit for a lady, i.e. politics and war: "[w]ar was men's business, not 'ladies', and [men] took her attitude as evidence of her femininity" (7). The narrator's choice in this passage is of course no surprise, for the war, maybe more than any other activity, is "a gendering activity, one that ritually marks the gender of all members of a society, whether or not they are combatants" (Higonnet 4-5) as it makes rigid divisions between the masculinized frontline and a feminized homefront and thus, proceeds to a retrenchment of traditional gender differences and boundaries between the public and the domestic.[316] In this view, men alone are considered historical agents while marooned on the homefront, women wait in silence.

Silence, self-denial, and self-effacing devotion, here are precisely the standards of perfect ladyhood in the novel—ones against which all other worthy (or unworthy) women are measured. "Reared in the tradition of great ladies, which had taught her how to carry her burden and still retain her charm," (80) Ellen Robillard, Scarlett's mother, embodies more any other women, the attributes of ideal femininity. As the narrator explains ""Health of the Sick," "Seat of Wisdom," "Refuge of Sinners," "Mystical Rose," [these] were beautiful because they were the attributes of Ellen" (87). Of aristocratic French ancestry and portrayed as "a pillar of strength, a fount of wisdom, the one person who knew the answers to everything" (57),

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[315] Her childhood readings, too, revealed a side of Mitchell that, like Scarlett, is closer to the rebel of the South than the proper lady: "I was not supposed to read them [stories by Beatrice Grimshaw], but an uncle of mine loved them and hid them behind the haybales in the loft of his carriage house. I used to read them there, wickedly smoking cigarettes made of rabbit tobacco rolled in toilet paper" (qtd. in Silber 322).

Ellen's life is organized around her role as mother, wife and mistress of the plantation as she cares for the wants and the needs of her family:

> Ellen's life was not easy, nor was it happy, but she did not expect life to be easy, and if it was not happy, that was woman's lot. It was a man's world, and she accepted it as such. The man owned the property, and the woman managed it. The man took the credit for the management, and the woman praised his cleverness. The man roared like a bull when a splinter was in his finger and the woman muffled the moans of childbirth, lest she disturb him. Men were rough of speech and often drunk. Women ignored the lapses of speech and put the drunkards to bed without bitter words. Men were rude and outspoken, women were always kind, gracious and forgiving. (80).

In the above description of Ellen, Mitchell draws an obvious parallel with the way Page extolled the self-effacing Southern lady in <u>Social Life in Old Virginia</u> (1897). "Her life," Page explains, "was one long act of devotion—devotion to God, devotion to her husband, devotion to her children, devotion to her servants, to the poor, to humanity [. . .] The training of her children was her work. She watched over them, inspired them…and they worshipped her (38-42).[317] Denied any erotic appeal and "stripped of any emotional nurturing attributes at all," as Richard King remarks—the perfect mother and wife—has become an archetype. Ellen, like most southern belles who are forced to assume a quasi-Virgin Mary role, has stepped out of history to enter into myth (35).[318]

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[316] Margaret R. Higonnet, "Introduction," <u>Behind The Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars</u>, ed. Higonnet et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

[317] Thomas Nelson Page, <u>Social Life in Old Virginia</u> (New York: Scribners, 1897).

[318] Richard H. King, <u>A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

5.2. Deviant ladyhood.

Because the culture Mitchell lives in and the culture she imagines place specific gendered roles upon one or the other sex, and because the Tarleton twins, in the opening passage, define the gentleman exclusively in terms of his leisure activities and the Southern Belle in terms of her role as regards her beaux or courtiers, <u>Gone with the Wind</u> implicitly—even perhaps unwittingly—acknowledges a potential gender conflict that finds its most obvious expression in the problematic character of Scarlett.

With her "magnolia-white skin" and "seventeen-inch waist" and her lack of interests in traditionally male topics like war (3), Scarlett looks and talks like a typical Southern belle. Yet, unlike the traditional southern belle, she has inherited, the "shrewd, earthy blood of an Irish peasant" (89). Also, with her "sharp" features and her high-tempered character that can be traced to her paternal heredity, Scarlett suggests a cross-gendered discourse, one that blurs the boundaries between the feminine and the masculine and revises the standard stereotypes of the antebellum South. In the portrayal of the Tarleton twins' mother also who is overly concerned with horses and with her ability to control them, the narrator depicts a woman who impersonates a man and who is often taken for one. As the narrator emphasizes, "the County could never get used to the way small Mrs. Tarleton bullied her grown sons" (8). The gender conflict here opens the possibility for new performances of gender.

Actually, if Ellen's model seems to be offered as the ultimate model of disembodied womanhood, self-effacing devotion to children, husband or servants is not offered as a viable—nor even desirable—option for Scarlett. Being a belle is a trap, a married woman is a trap, and a widow another one. There is, as Silber notes, "no female role in which she is happy," precisely because the New South needs not only disembodied ladies, but bloody independent women like Scarlett O'Hara (Silber 341). Due to war and to her forced independence as widow, single-mother, and daughter of a Southern planter who was unable to

cope with the change caused by the Civil War, Scarlett is indeed faced with the necessity to become strong, "head of the house now," thus replacing the dependence forced upon her by her gender with the opportunity to express a more masculine side (Silber 484). Mitchell shows the plight of a woman who—wishing to survive—is faced with the necessity to abandon her claim to ladyhood in the eyes of those who validate this mythic Southern status in order to survive. Scarlett declares, "As God is my witness, as God is my witness they're not going to lick me. I'm going to live through this and when it's all over, I'll never be hungry again. No, nor any of my folk. If I have to lie, steal, cheat or kill. As God is my witness, I'll never be hungry again!" (593). As Mitchell underlines here, lying, cheating and killing are necessary evils for these women caught in these times of crisis.

Hungry, Scarlett is also abandoned by the males who are supposed to protect her. Her husbands die one after another and when during one ride, Scarlett is attacked by two men, one black and one white, in Shantytown, it is Big Sam from Tara—a former slave and not a gentleman—who saves her. Eventually, her own father, Gerald O'Hara, unable to accept his wife's death and the end of the Southern order of chivalry, retreats into his childhood and hands the management of Tara to Will, the overseer and to his daughter. Powerless to change, Gerald retreats in infantilism. As Grandma Fontaine explains to Scarlett, in chapter 26:

> He's lost his mind. He acts dazed and sometimes he can't seem to remember that Mother is dead. Oh, Old Miss, it's more than I can stand to see him sit by the hour, waiting for her and so patiently too, and he used to have no more patience than a child. But it's worse when he does remember that she's gone. Every now and then, after he's sat still with his ear cocked listening for her, he jumps up suddenly and stumps out of the house and down to the burying ground. And then he comes dragging back with the tears all over his face and he says over and over till I could scream: 'Katie Scarlett, Mrs. O'Hara is dead.

Your mother is dead, and it's just like I was hearing it again for the first time. And sometimes, late at night, I hear him calling her and I get out of bed and go to him and tell him she's down at the quarters with a sick darky. And he fusses because she's always tiring herself out nursing people. And it's so hard to get him back to bed. He's like a child. . . (625).

Yet, even when adopting the "male" role and thus, distancing herself from the requirements of being a lady, Scarlett still wishes to be treated as one. She still dreams that one day, for example:

When there was security in her world again, then she would sit back and fold her hands and be a great lady as Ellen had been. She would be helpless and sheltered, as a lady should be, and then everyone would approve of her. Oh, how grand she would be when she had money again! Then she could permit herself to be kind and gentle, as Ellen had been, and thoughtful of other people and of the proprieties, too. She would not be driven by fears, day and night, and life would be a placid, unhurried affair. She would have time to play with her children and listen to their lessons. There would be long warm afternoons when ladies would call and, amid the rustlings of taffeta petticoats and the rhythmic harsh cracklings of palmetto fans, she would serve tea and delicious sandwiches and cakes and leisurely gossip the hours away. And she would be so kind to those who were suffering misfortune, take baskets to the poor and soup and jelly to the sick and "air" those less fortunate in her fine carriage. She would be a lady in the true Southern manner, as her mother had been. And then, everyone would love her as they had loved Ellen and they would say how unselfish she was and call her "Lady Bountiful" (942-3).

Scarlett is thus pictured chafing under the constraints of correct behavior and utterance, as she ponders: "what would have happened to me, to Wade, to Tara and all of us if I'd been—gentle when that Yankee came to Tara? I should have been—but I don't want to think of that" (1081). If Scarlett cannot fully hush the gendered-discourse of hegemonic masculinity and femininity, it is because these codes, as Fox-Genovese remarks, also provide her protection: "she festers at their demands, but fears a world that will not provide her the respect the codes are designed to ensure" (401).[319] When she has nightmares, especially, it is not so much self-reliance and independence that she longs for, but dependence and outer (masculine) force, as "she knew the haven she had sought in dreams … It was Rhett" (1425). The world, as Mitchell envisions it, is not coded into deviant ladyhood/perfect ladyhood, into feminine and masculine, dependence and self-reliance, strong and soft, but is both feminine and masculine, strong and soft, dependent and self-reliant. In doing so, Margaret Mitchell suggests the possibility that gender may be fluid, subject "not only to perpetual deconstruction but also to improvisation" (Person 516).[320]

Improvisation, however, is not offered an option for Scarlett, not one at least that would possibly envision new ways of performing gender. The experience of war and disaster, Moeller notes, contributes to the challenge to men's claims to superiority, since "the quality of women has been accomplished de facto. Nothing human or inhuman is foreign to her any

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[319] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Scarlett O'Hara: the Southern lady as New Woman." <u>American Quarterly</u> 33.4 (1981): 391-411.

[320] Leland S Person, Jr., "James, George Sand, and the Suspense of Masculinity," <u>PMLA</u> 106.3 (May 1991): 515-528. Scarlett is visualized as possessing men's features, but she is also visualized as a nurse throughout the novel. In <u>Divided Houses, Gender and the Civil War</u>, Nina Silber explains how "[m]any women (like Scarlett) shared [an] aversion to female nursing. Ladies who dedicated themselves to hard work, such as Pembet, Cumming, and Louisa McCord, were subjects of gossip and speculation. Women working in the hospitals were in the eyes of many Southerners to display curiously masculine strengths and abilities" (qtd. in <u>Divided Houses</u> 186). Nina Silber also quotes the example of Clara MacLean who "confided to her diary that her neighbor Eliza McKnee, recently departed for Virginia as a nurse, had always possessed such strength as to seem "almost masculine—Indeed, I used to tell her I never felt easy in her society if discussing delicate subjects; I could scarcely persuade myself she was not in disguise [. . .] Nurses were not truly women, but in some sense men in drag" (qtd in <u>Divided Houses</u> 186); Nina Silber, and Catherine Clinton, <u>Divided Houses, Gender and the Civil War</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

longer; she has been spared no terror" (105).[321] And Scarlett in all her knowledge of hunger, war, and privation, is no stranger to this horror: the war has indeed required the effective participation of women and thus, has unwillingly erased the boundaries of the home and that of the battle field. Yet, the simple questioning of gender binaries will not unfortunately leave their connotations behind. Scarlett "knew she would never feel like a lady again until her table was weighted with silver and crystal and smoking with rich food, until her own horses and carriages stood in her stables, until black hands and not white took the cotton from Tara" (848). The repetition of the adverb "until" in this instance marks that only after having reconfigured these gendered spaces turned upside down by the war, that Scarlett might be able to retrieve a proper place—that of the abiding and obedient Southern lady—the only place, it seems that a woman of her rank and status is entitled for.

Gender is fixed and immutable and its clearly defined codes and practices are the very essence to which all women must essentially return. As Silber remarks:

> Atlanta women like Mrs. Elsing, Mrs. Meade, and Mrs. Meriwether, all of whom worked after the war (sewing, painting china, or making pies for sale) and all of whom kept up the traditions and survived, [sh]ould be heroines [of survival]. Even Ellen, at the extreme of ladyhood, and Belle Watling, apparently at the other extreme as madam, stay within the traditional scheme. Because Ellen dies before the war ends, we do not see what Scarlett's model of the great lady would do after the war, and we are left only with the prewar vision of sacrificial experience. And because Belle Watling (despite her

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[321]Robert. G Moeller, "The "Remasculinization" of Germany in the 1950s: Introduction." <u>Signs</u> 21.1 (Autumn 1998): 101-106. As Moeller describes it, many German women, like Southern women, blamed men "for unquestionably following the Fuhrer from Berlin via Paris to Stalingrad and then back again…thus gambling away the sovereignty of our state, leaving our cities in ruins, destroying our homes, and leaving millions homeless and with no basis for their existence" (Dorothea Groener-Geyer to Parliamentary Council January 2, 1949, Bundesarchiv (Koblenz) Z5/111. General Archbald in Glasgow's <u>The Sheltered Life</u> has failed in his attempt to reestablish an exclusively masculine space that will not be challenged by the women's presence.

donations to the Confederacy) knows her "place" and stays in it, even refusing to permit Melanie to address her on the street, she too endorses a traditional definition of ladyhood (342).

Mitchell emphasizes here the hypocrisy of a code that will not accept "deviant" or "improvisational" definitions of ladyhood. "The silly fools don't realize that you can't be a lady without money," reflects Scarlett (849). But she is mistaken. As Nina Silber remarks, you can't be a lady with money or a gentleman either (342). Scarlett is losing her femininity by working outside the home (like many women during the Depression, for that matter) but she will lose her ideal of femininity (her aristocratic mother in her plantation) if she does not work. Torn between economic and cultural imperatives, Scarlett is damned if she does and damned if she doesn't (Morton 56).[322] As the narrator witnesses,

> the old usages went on, must go on, for the forms were all that were left to them... the leisured manners, the courtesy, the pleasant casualness in human contacts, and, most of all, the protecting attitude of the men toward their women... the men were courteous and tender and they almost succeeded in creating an atmosphere of sheltering their women from all that was harsh and unfit for feminine eyes. That, thought Scarlett, was the height of absurdity, for there was little, now, which even the most cloistered women had not seen and known in the last five years... But... they remained ladies and gentlemen (846).

In this scene, drawing on a caricature of weak womanhood, the narrator portrays Scarlett as a limited creature who wishes to abide by the rule of true ladyhood, yet "fails to realize that the prevailing etiquette represents a social effort to codify, institutionalize, and reproduce the

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Robert. G Moeller, "The "Remasculinization" of Germany in the 1950s: Introduction." <u>Signs</u> 21.1 (Autumn 1998): 101-106.

[322] Marian. J. Morton, "My Dear, I don't Give a Damn: Scarlett O'Hara and the Great Depression." <u>Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies</u> 5.3 (1980): 52-56.

deeper qualities of the lady and the fabric of an entire society" (Fox-Genovese 402).[323] In fact, in many instances, Scarlett is seen lacking the understanding of men like Rhett or even Ashley. Scarlett, for instance, fails to realize that Melanie's standards and values derive from strength and not from weakness, and "only at Melanie's deathbed does [Scarlett] realize that Melanie too would have killed the Yankee who threatened them—or would have died in the attempt" (Fox-Genovese 402). Tellingly, Scarlett also realizes that the end of an order has come, not through her own eyes but through the eyes of Rhett. When Melanie dies,

> She [Scarlett] half-grasped what was in Rhett's mind as he said farewell to the only person in the world he respected and she was desolate again with a terrible sense of loss that was no longer personal. She could not wholly understand or analyze what he was feeling, but it seemed almost as if she too had been brushed by whispering skirts, touching her softly in a last caress. She was seeing through Rhett's eyes the passing, not of a woman but of a legend—the gentle, self-effacing but steel-spined women on whom the South had builded its house in war and to whose proud and loving arms it had returned in defeat (1431).

The lack of understanding emphasizes the dramatic principle of the novel, the tragic notion of woman as a limited creature, ultimately frustrated in her fondest ambitions and highest aspirations.

Understandably, there is no role in which Scarlett can avoid damnation. As Rhett admits, financial success—the stepping onto the public (masculine) stage—comes with a price: personal failure. "As I've told you before," Rhett tells her, "that is the one unforgivable sin in any society. Be different and be damned! Scarlett, the mere fact that you've made a success of your mill is an insult to every man who hasn't succeeded. Remember, a well-bred

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[323] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Scarlett O'Hara: the Southern lady as New Woman." _American Quarterly_ 33.4

female's place is in the home and she should know nothing about this busy, brutal world" (946). Rhett's brief allusion to "every man who hasn't succeeded" briefly unveils the full horror of male egotism in the novel. Men—Rhett seems to suggest—cannot stand the sight of their blind spots and having caught a glimpse of it, need to hastily turn their gaze back on what Virginia Woolf names reassuring "female looking glasses," which possess the "delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (35).[324] Scarlett's role, as a consequence, needs to remain consigned to one of magnifying mirror. Even though "Scarlett was guided by no one but herself and was conducting her affairs in a masculine way" (891), she may, like other women, lure men "by being deferential to men's opinions" and by appearing "to be guided by what men said" (891). She may also twist "Yankee men around her finger," by enacting the role of a "refined sweet Southern lady in distress" (933). She may resort to masquerade, pastiche and disguise as acceptable ways of securing marriage to Frank, and once she is married, however, she can stop the game:

> This wasn't the soft, sweet, feminine person he [Frank] had taken to wife. In the brief period of the courtship, he thought he had never known a woman more attractively feminine in her reactions to life, ignorant, timid and helpless. Now her reactions were all masculine. Despite her pink cheeks and dimples and pretty smiles, she talked and acted like a man. Her voice was brisk and decisive and she made up her mind instantly and with no girlish shilly-shallying. She knew what she wanted and she went after it by the shortest route, like a man, not by the hidden and circuitous routes peculiar to women (890-1).

Yet, these self-transformations are acceptable only to the extent that it serves to refocus the male gaze upon a consciously constructed image of femininity instead of the real self" (Craft

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(1981): 391-411.

[324] Virginia Woolf, <u>A Room of One's Own</u> (1929; rpt. San Diego, CA: Harcourt & Brace, 1981).

830).[325] After all, masquerade, as Luce Irigaray explains, has to be understood as what women do to participate in man's desire. They are there as objects for sexual enjoyments, not as those who enjoy (133-4).[326] Here is precisely the source of Scarlett's damnation, for Scarlett's behavior—which openly recognizes the value of aesthetics in the domain of love—can hardly be accepted. Whereas Rhett's aesthetics of courtship lead (at least momentarily) to sensual satisfaction, in Scarlett these are subverted to purely social satisfaction: she is ultimately the one who enjoys, and profit calls upon Scarlett to leave aside "romance" whenever she needs to return to purely realistic business consideration. Scarlett's unforgivable sin is that she has adopted disguises, not necessarily for the gratification of the male gaze, but for the gratification of her own material pleasures. Understandably, femininity as portrayed through Scarlett is apprehended as highly problematic, admired as much as it is feared. As Rhett explains her:

> They [the other women] aren't successful and so they aren't affronting the hot
> Southern pride of their men folks. The men can still say, 'Poor sweet sillies,
> how hard they try! Well, I'll let them think they're helping.' And besides, [. . .]
> they let it be known that they are only doing it until some man comes along to
> relieve them of their unwomanly burdens. And so everybody feels sorry for
> them (947).

Mitchell's problematization of gender-bound representation is itself problematic in that it stops short of contesting a system of values that accords less privilege to the depiction of these domestic spheres that women are supposed to inhabit than to the male sphere of business, financial interests, and war. Yet, despite the implicit endorsement of the ideology

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[325] Catherine A. Craft, "Reworking Male Models: Aphra Behn's 'Fair Vow-Breaker,' Eliza Haywood's 'Fantomina,' and Charlotte Lennox's 'The Female Quixote'." The Modern Language Review 86.4 (Oct. 1991): 821-838.

[326] Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).

that attaches more value to male rather than female power, despite the explicit privileging of men's definition of worthy or limited womanhood, the visualization of the Southern gentleman in <u>Gone with the Wind</u> is itself incredibly shattered, as if Mitchell refused to support a representational system so intimately bound up with male narcissism. Instead of coalescing around the themes of honor, self-control and mastery that characterize the hegemonic masculinities of the Old South, Southern masculinity seems increasingly unanchored and susceptible to multiple interpretations and critiques (Friend xviii).[327]

5.3. Morselizing the Masculine Imago.

The figure of the "shadow" probably best describes the paradoxical situation in which Southern men find themselves in the novel. Ashley Wilkes, for instance, because of war, has become clearly embodied, by covering up his body in the uniform of the Confederate forces. Scarlett's infatuation for Ashley is, on that note, clearly linked to his departure for war and his wearing the uniform, as she sees him "dressed in gray broadcloth with a wide black cravat setting off his frilled shirt to perfection" (34). By fitting into the suit (that Rhett Butler disavows), Ashley's performance supports and reassures long-established ideas about what and who is "manly" in Southern culture. The uniformed Ashley is a figure at the core of a static cultural system based on the assumption of reliable patterns of signification. In such a system, the principle of honor supposedly ensures correspondence of appearance and true character and postulates the identity of ethical valor and social status. Because he has joined the army, Ashley communicates not only the male-dominated institution of the Army, thus contributing to a homogenized masculine gender identity, but also an image of traditional masculinity, which requires the same suppression of self to exist within its narrowly-defined boundaries. As Melanie reminds Scarlett: "Betray his [Ashley's] own Confederacy by taking that vile oath and then betray his word to the Yankees! I would rather know he was dead at

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[327] Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., <u>Southern Masculinity, Perspectives on Manhood in the South</u>

Rock Island than hear he had taken that oath. I'd be proud of him if he died in prison. But if he did *that*, I would never look on his face again. Never! Of course, he refused" (396).

In describing the most gentlemanly of all of Mitchell's characters, I am not implying that he is naïve. Like Rhett, Ashley knows too well the duplicity of human behavior. He, himself, compromises his integrity in his behavior with the poker night. Even then, however, Ashley is forced into duplicity and hypocrisy, for he is incapable of deciding for himself: being shot, he has passed out and the other men, including Rhett, validate a story of his having drunk too much. Nevertheless, as opposed to the "others," at the moment of ultimate decisions (that of going to war to fight for a cause he knows is lost) he upholds the ideal of absolute integrity. When Scarlett asks Rhett: "If it were you, wouldn't you enlist with the Yankees to keep from dying in that place and then desert?" Rhett answers "Of course," and explains that a man like Ashley would never do it, precisely because "He's a gentleman" (396). As Melanie and Rhett underscore, Ashley's deeds must match his promise and the ideal of the South. Sacrificing his own doubts for the cause, Ashley is, in this sense, a failed Rhett because he seems frozen in an image of "perfect" manhood that he cannot and will not compromise. The hero (in the purely structural sense of the "major role") is a monomaniac who is seen valuing honesty, forthrightness, integrity over the deceitful pretense of compromising oneself through play-acting. And so, there are two sides of Ashley's character apparently saying the opposite: Ashley performing a socially instituted masculinity—by wearing the uniform of the confederate forces and thus dissimulating masculine dependence and weakness—while being paradoxically utterly divorced from the ideas of pretense, faking, hypocrisy, and ultimately with associations of weakness and fragility.

Like Melanie, Scarlett is simply unwilling or unable to see that Ashley is nothing more than "a gentleman caught in a world he doesn't belong in, trying to make a poor best of it by

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since Reconstruction (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

the rules of the world that's gone" (1435). She may be simply too much of a narcissist to allow for the introspection necessary to "see" the real Ashley and the evidence of his ennui, his lack of character and weakness. In her eyes, Ashley becomes the romantic exaggeration of the Old South, "the perfect knight, the living embodiment of stability" (Silber 345). As Scarlett is later forced to admit: "I made a pretty suit of clothes and fell in love with it. And when Ashley came riding along, so handsome, so different, I put that suit on him and made him wear it whether it fitted him or not. And I wouldn't see what he really was. I kept on loving the pretty clothes—and not him at all" (1419). Ultimately, the narrative's focus becomes the musings of these women who take for granted Ashley's centrality. As if reflecting on a more profound level a masculine search for authenticity, Rhett provokes to uncover the "real" man behind the social mask, which means digging up unpalatable truths. He thus pits Scarlett against the realization that she "must see him as he really is, see him straight" (1435). The plot, in this instance, offers two symbols of masculinity of significance: Rhett (and Scarlett) acknowledging that society is committed to a discrepancy between appearance and reality, intention and deeds, while Ashley is saying that the correspondence between intention and deed is possible only in a social, political (and historical) void. Ashley has become invisible behind the Yankees, behind the underdogs who have taken center-stage and behind the suit that Scarlett, as she admits later, "made him wear whether it fitted him or not" (1419); Yet, Ashley is also highly visible, in his uniform, as the "enemy" of change and Yankee annexation. Southern Gentlemen have become a shadowy presence on the public as well as the private scene.

The novel actually takes great pain to place Ashley in a disempowered position. The novel almost revels in Ashley's impotence in the face of a world which seems to have stripped him of his privilege: his wife dies, leaving him a son and tying him even further to domesticity. He finds himself impotent with women, cannot protect his home nor his pastoral

order, and from the very first appearance of Ashley, the novel actually works its representation of Southern male bodies as bland, bleached out and trapped. Ashley, "in his faded, patched uniform, his blond hair bleached by summer suns [. . .] and the long golden mustache drooping about his mouth, cavalry style" (365) pales in contrast to Rhett who is "dark of face, swarthy as a pirate and [with] eyes … as bold and black as any pirate's appraising a galleon to be scuttled or a maiden to be ravished" (135). Ashley, in this case, is clearly meant to be seen as weak and feminine in contrast with Butler's brusque masculinity and vitality: powerful, erotic, vital, unmistakably heterosexual, Rhett stands as a foil to the aristocratic, honorable and educated Ashley Wilkes, for "a man with such wide shoulders, so heavy with muscles [was] almost too heavy for gentility" (135).

What the juxtaposition of Rhett's body and Ashley's body accomplishes here is also to make whiteness visible in contrast to Rhett's blackness. In its momentary visibility, it is whiteness which shows itself to be unfinished and unformed: Rhett's body seems more natural than Ashley's and it also comes to suggest that it has more life, emotion, sensuality and spirituality: life is linked to Rhett's black, animalistic masculinity and death with soft, white, blond, blue-eyed masculinity.[328] The projection of a primitive natural masculinity onto

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[328] The struggle between a "soft" and a "hard" masculinity had already been the subject of growing concern in the 1920s and 1930s. During these times, Michael Kreyling explains that: "Grant and Lee gravitated in the national mind toward irreconcilable poles in a cultural debate over which would be our national hero, the model for our male youth (and for the suitors of our daughters) and the bonding figure in our narratives" (52). Complementing Kreyling's analysis, John Cooke adds that: "Lee is the model cavalier of the great Anglo-Norman race. His figure is tall and erect; his seat in the saddle perfect. His uniform is plain but neat; his equipment beyond criticism. Stately, thorough-bred, graceful in every movement, there is something in his glance, in the very carriage of his person that is illustrious and imposing. He has the army-leader look. There is not the remotest particle of ostentation, much less of arrogance, in his bearing. This man was a gentleman you can see, before he was a soldier" (155). Grant, on the contrary, is depicted as having no connection whatsoever to the heroic. He is nothing more than form, an arm of muscle: "one course alone was left to him to take the sledge-hammer in both hands, and leaving tricks of fence aside, advance straight-forward and smash the rapier in pieces, blow by blow, shattering the arm that wielded it, to the shoulder blade" (Cooke 230.) As Cooke emphasized in his writing, "two clear alternatives stood before the merging American historic consciousness in the decades of national psychic reconstruction. One was the figure of the antique hero, before the war a staple of southern narrative, now reified in the person of Lee. This heroic figure, echoed his origins in classical, Christian, feudal ages. He defined men as individuals within a limited range: most were beneath him in blood and rank, and only a few could rightly claim "the stubborn blood of a race of thoroughbreds [. . .] The other figure was faceless [. . .] He was cut off from the idiom of former American heroes. He spoke and thought with dignity and lacked any resonance beyond the vulgate. He was mechanized man, recognizing no

Rhett (who is white) also articulates an appreciation of the black body as aesthetically more appealing than the white body, since Rhett's body is likened to a work of art, as it is tuned, muscular, and strong. The fact that the white body cannot hold up to black suggests that what has been the privilege of white masculinity—its closeness to a disembodied norm—has now become a liability.

Rhett's and Ashley's representations correspond to the images of masculinity that Peter Lehman describes in his essay Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture:

> images of men and the male body [that] are caught within a polarity, not
> unlike the mother/whore dichotomy which structures so many
> representations of women. At one pole, we have the powerful, awesome
> spectacle of phallic masculinity, and at the other hand, its vulnerable,
> pitiable, and frequently comic collapse (26).[329]

Rhett and Ashley are essentially marginalized figures who are heavily coded in terms of gentle vs. bestial, of refined vs. brute, of defender of the cause vs. money-maker, only to serve deliberate functions within the South's semiotic of maleness. The text stages a conflict of genres, not only as a conflict of representational modes, but as a dramatic conflict between individual characters, between a hard, virile masculinity and a softer version of the male. Actually, most men in Gone with the Wind (as Nina Silber has remarked) are indeed often associated either with dogs and calves (Scarlett first marries Charles Hamilton who possesses

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individuals and acknowledging quantity only. He was force merely; he could not rise above the scum" (Kreyling 57); John Esten Cooke, Hammer and Rapier (1870; rpt. New York: G. W. Dillingham Co., 1898); Michael, Kreyling, Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative (Baton Rouge, La.: LSU Press, 1987); On American masculinity, see E. Anthony Rotundo, American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Michael Kimmel, Manhood in America: A Cultural History (New York: Free Press, 1996); Elizabeth Pleck and Joseph Pleck, eds., The American Man (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980); Peter Filene, Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); Joe L. Dubbert, A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979); See also Arnaldo Testi, "The Gender of Reform Politics: Theodore Roosevelt and the Culture of Masculinity." Journal of American History 81 (March 1995): 1509–33.

"calf" eyes) and asexuality, or with horses, panthers, leopards, and sexuality (The Romance of Reunion 345). Soft vs. hard masculinity, home vs. battle front, here are some of the divisions that maintain the rightful order of Southern society.

Yet, to the extent that this order prevailed, it did not so because God created everything in its right place. There are, on the contrary, obvious ways of being accepted as a gentleman: men adopt, act out, or take on some of the imaginary characteristics conventionally associated with hegemonic masculinity—becoming a member of the Ku Klux Klan, protecting women from black rapists, etc. For instance, the one activity that gives Frank Kennedy, Scarlett's second husband, a sense of masculinity and hence dignity—and the one activity from which Scarlett herself is utterly excluded—is violence, the violence of the Ku Klux Klan (Silber 346). In the manner of General Archbald in The Sheltered Life or even Ned Hazard in Swallow Barn, Gerald O'Hara in Gone with the Wind embodies another example of a man who adopts and imitates the codes of Southern gentility in order to be accepted as a gentleman. Coming from Ireland "with the clothes he [Gerald] had on his back, two shillings above his passage money and a price on his head that he felt was larger than his misdeed warranted," this man with "no education" and "five feet and four and a half inches tall, [. . .] soon became, in his opinion, a Southerner" (57). The presentation continues as follows:

> There was much about the South—and Southerners—that he would never comprehend—but. . . he adopted its ideas and customs . . . poker and horse racing, red-hot politics and the code duello, States' Rights and damnation to all Yankees, slavery and King Cotton, contempt for white trash and exaggerated courtesy to women. He even learned to chew tobacco. There was no need for him to acquire a good head for whiskey, he had been born with one (57-60).

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[329] Peter Lehman, "Crying over the Melodramatic Penis: melodrama and Male Nudity in Film of the 90s," Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture (New York&London: Routledge, 2001).

As the word "adopt" underlines in the description of General Archbald, at a time when class (and race) was configured as an always obvious, inherent, and readable faction of the body, Gerald presents Southern white masculinity as a "to-be-written" body. In a similar manner, Rhett deliberately chooses to embrace the self-proclaimed identity of a "rascal." As he tells Scarlett: "[c]ertainly I'm a rascal, and why not? It's a free country and a man may be a rascal if he chooses (309). In inventing himself so, Rhett is seen assimilating new critiques while taking the weapons of his enemies and making them his own, and in asserting his self-created identity, Rhett also achieves what Gerald O'Hara has already started, a type of male liberation movement proceeding the transformation of Southern nobility from a given to a process. The problem here is that Gerald O'Hara's performance represents an imitation, a copy, inspired by the class of gentlemen he wants to join. As such, Gone with the Wind actually fails to ignore the exploitative aspect of gender, for indeed "the planters' ladies and the planters' slaves could not overlook the fact that [Mr. O'Hara] was not born a gentleman, even if their men folks could" (25). The "processed" gentility of Gerald in this case is but another "identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (191).[330] Consequently, the Southern model of gentility is portrayed as inclusive and exclusive at the same time.

Contradictions necessarily result from the confrontations between the largely abstract discourse which identifies the "natural" superiority of such gentlemen and the cost of maintaining that superiority. As Mitchell reveals, this façade can be of short duration: when death approaches, when the Southern Gentlemen may be accused of being involved in the Ku Klux Klan, they all agree to play drunk. And it is Rhett who helps out the men who have taken part in a Ku Klux Klan raid, providing a false alibi for these men and keeping Ashley from being hung. In this scene, the fact that the gentlemen need Rhett to heal their endangered

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[330] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990).

masculinity indicates that white masculinity can only know its power through the mediation of the "other"—be it black, feminine, or as Rhett exemplifies, a rascal, a lesser man. The price to be paid, however, is also the knowledge that the white hegemonic model of Southern masculinity is dependent and fragile since it must maintain an inter-dependent link with other masculine regimes, showing the narrative of Southern gentility to be depending upon the very narratives (of blackness, for instance) that it tries to erase/overwrite. Gone with the Wind offers a space of true revolution, in which a master narrative of masculinity is no longer valued as the most valid one.

Georges Mosse, in his analysis of modern virility, goes so far as to view the formation of a countertype as intrinsic to the model's function. Countertypes, he explains, are thus "enemies against which the masculine ideal sharpened his image" (Mosse 12).[331] Ashley's countertype, Rhett Butler, appears as a very interesting hero, for he may not be as visibly "sharp" as might be expected. As opposed to Ashley and even Scarlett, Rhett is not anchored to the soil—be it Tara, the plantation, or the culture and manners attached to life as a plantation owner. Cast out without a penny and "even stricken his name from the family Bible," Rhett has "wandered to California in the gold rush of 1849 and thence to South America and Cuba" (311). If "the reports of his activities in these parts were none too savory," (311) Rhett, however, travels freely across the world, and seemingly appears and disappears at will, as his first appearance at Tara reveals: secretly listening to Scarlett's profession of love to Ashley Wilkes in the library of the plantation, Rhett is seen hiding, then rising from the sofa. First believed to be a specter, Scarlett is forced to recognize that "he was real. He wasn't a ghost" (15). As the third invisible person in the room and trained, as he

[330] Teresa de Lauretis, "Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema" (Bloomington: Indiana University
[331] George L. Mosse, The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

willingly acknowledges, "from a long experience in eavesdropping," Rhett can listen secretly while remaining unseen and uncensored.

The thread of the shadow motif is set in motion again through Scarlett's dreams. Scarlett has purposefully (as she herself admits) confused fact and fiction, referent and sign, matter and representation, literal and typological readings of history, and her confusion reaches its climax in her foggy nightmares: "now she knew [that] the haven she had sought in dreams, the place of warm safety which had always been hidden from her in the mist [. . .] was not Ashley [but] … It was Rhett—Rhett who had strong arms to hold her, a broad chest to pillow her tired head, jeering laughter to pull her affairs into proper perspective" (1425). Soon after, Rhett walks way into the fog. The dream, the ideal, has become materially and physically real and yet, the opposition of ideality and actuality cannot be mediated in this scene. The apparent interest in the disembodied-embodied posturing of these men in Gone with the Wind can be characterized as a desire to unmask, to reveal the truth, in a desire to deconstruct masculine performance for the non-gratification of the female gaze.

Because she presents Rhett as the son of a landed aristocrat but also grandson of a sea captain that deserves the title of "pirate," Mitchell even transforms the (un)certainty of his being and origin into the source of his unrestrained autonomy: Rhett stands between civilization and wilderness, the savage and the refined, the domesticated private confined rooms and the public arena. Not surprisingly maybe, Rhett's visualization throughout the novel is actually incredibly morselized and multiple. The painting of the masculine body in this case suggests a sort of protean mutation, endlessly adapting to new circumstances and changing social environments.[332] This "dashing figure" who "spent money freely, rode a wild black stallion, and wore clothes which were always the height of style and tailoring" becomes

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[332] This idea is developed by Rowena Chapman in "The Great Pretender: Variations on the New Man Theme," Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity, eds. Chapman R. and Rutherford J. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988).

the center of attention everywhere he goes, one "that people turned to look at" (308). There is also "something breathtaking in the grace of his big body which made his very entrance into a room like an abrupt physical impact, something in the impertinence and bland mockery of his dark eyes that challenged her spirit to subdue him" (306). Aunt Pitty, in particular, feels the strong hold of Rhett's "complete masculinity" (306). Through different accounts, different eyes, and interpreted by Melanie, Scarlett, and numerous other female spectators, Rhett is seen from different vantage points, as if able to escape all definition. Portrayed as a heartless brute, as a blockade runner interested in money by the men who criticize his disavowing the uniform, he is also portrayed as a protecting and loving father, by the very "women who had heretofore believed that no woman was safe with him [. . .] Even the strictest old ladies felt that a man who could discuss the ailments and problems of childhood as well as he did could not be altogether bad" (1276). Melanie even feels "indignation at what she fancied was a gross injustice done to him" (307). Multiplication, disfiguration, proliferation, disguise, here are some of the operations to which the male image is subjected in <u>Gone with the Wind</u>.

At the heart of <u>Gone with the Wind</u>, and as best seen through the fragmentation of the Southern male-figure, stands a critique and a deconstruction of masculine performance. This, of course, does not help the paradox of manhood in the novel, rather it deepens it. Even more problematic maybe is the fact that Rhett and Ashley, instead of standing as clear opposites, do share many characteristics. As Scarlett herself needs to admit:

> It shocked her (Scarlett) to realize that anyone as absolutely perfect as Ashley could have any thought in common with such a reprobate as Rhett Butler. She thought: "They both see the truth of this war, but Ashley is willing to die about it and Rhett isn't. I think that shows Rhett's good sense." She paused a moment, horror struck that she could have such a thought about Ashley. "They both see the same unpleasant truth, but Rhett likes to look it in the face

and enrage people by talking about it—and Ashley can hardly bear to face it

(325).

Rhett is also "non masculine" in many aspects and as such, comes to resemble Ashley, if not in a different way. As the narrator reveals: "Had he [Rhett] been less obviously masculine, his ability to recall details of dresses, bonnets and coiffures would have been put down as the rankest effeminacy" (314). Moreover, in the way he takes care of Scarlett's children and his own daughter Bonnie, Rhett is portrayed as a much better parent to Scarlett's children from her previous marriages than she is herself. As Scarlett remarks, "it was all very well for a man to love his child, but she felt there was something unmanly in the display of such love. He should be offhand and careless, as other men were" (1242). He has a particular affinity with her son Wade, even before Wade is his stepson. Later, when their daughter, Bonnie, falls off a pony and dies, Rhett mourns and cries, and is overcome with his own feelings, thus challenging the common sense notion that what is "masculine or normal" and what is "not masculine" are opposites. In this scene, Rhett Butler projects his conscious struggle with the "other" generally gender-coded as the "feminine" within himself, i.e. the good father who is not afraid of showing his love and pain when his loved one dies. For the gentle Ashley, also, participating in a war he does not believe in makes him become "othered" in the process, thus aligning himself with Rhett, as he says: "neither of us believed in the war [. . .] we both knew the war was all wrong. We both knew it was a losing fight" (1287).

The making of men, Mitchell suggests, is a process (highly dependent on the female audience for validation) that is never straight-forward or even consistent. Traditional Southern masculinity is in crisis. Rhett and Ashley, two models of manhood, reveal that deep, irresolvable tensions persist in the novel's representations of that process, for when examined closely, the gentlemanly kindness and the anxious sensibility of the refined almost effeminate Southern man reveal an ideal of masculinity founded on fundamental contradictions: the

southern heroic ideal must be both dominant and deferential, gentle and violent, self-contained yet sensitive, practical yet idealistic, individualist but conformist, bridging two worlds coded as feminine and masculine.[333] Scarlett herself witnesses the tensions inherent to Southern masculinity:

> She had seen Southern men, soft voiced and dangerous in the days before the war, reckless and hard in the last despairing days of the fighting. But in the faces of the two men who stared at each other across the candle flame so short a while ago there had been something that was different, something that heartened her but frightened her--fury which could find no words, determination which would stop at nothing [. . .] Violent blood was in them all, perilously close to the surface, lurking just beneath the kindly courteous exteriors. All of them, all the men she knew, even the drowsy-eyed Ashley and fidgety old Frank, were like that underneath--murderous, violent if the need arose. Even Rhett, conscienceless scamp that he was, had killed a negro for being 'uppity to a lady' (904-5).

Whereas Gone with the Wind narrates all the contradictions involved in what it means to be a man and reveals how contemporary versions of Southern Manhood are achieved, the novel, however, does not seem committed to resolving these incompatible, anxiety-generating tensions. As a result, my concern is less with the confusion implicit in these scenes than with the possibilities of masculinity that these scenes open up and close off.

5.4. New Performances of Gender.

Remaining unseen or transparent, Ashley remains, throughout the novel, the prisoner of Scarlett's romantic conception of his own manhood, as she invests romance with event-

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[333] I am indebted to Mitchell's discussion of Westerns' representations of the cowboy hero for this comment. Lee Clark Mitchell, Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) 27.

producing power: she believes that Ashley's words or her reading of Ashley's facial expressions can produce an ideal future union between them. For instance, when he comes home during the war, Scarlett has spent weeks remembering moments with Ashley "from which she could extract every morsel of comfort [. . .] dance, sing, laugh, fetch and carry for Ashley, anticipate his wants, smile when he smiles, be silent when he talks, follow him with your eyes so that each line of his erect body… will be indelibly printed on your mind" (374-5).[334] With her ability to decide for Ashley, to transform her reality into desires, Scarlett seems to preempt his conventional masculine prerogatives. Ashley, in other words, has become suspended in his own masculinity.

To complicate matters even further, Ashley seems to be the one who even willingly accepts to suspend his own masculinity. When Scarlett, for instance, begs him to leave with her, Ashley rejects her invitation:

"let's run away—leave them all! I'm tired of working for the folks. Somebody will take care of them. There's always somebody who takes care of people who can't take care of themselves. Oh, Ashley, let's run away, you and I. We could go to Mexico—they want officers in the Mexican Army and we could be so happy there. I'd work for you, Ashley. I'd do anything for you. You know you don't love Melanie—" . . .

"There's only one way you can help me," she said dully, "and that's to take me away from here and give us a new start somewhere, with a chance for happiness. There's nothing to keep us here."

"Nothing," he said quietly, "nothing—except honor" (738).

In rejecting Scarlett's proposal, Ashley rejects one masculine role (that of lover or husband to Melanie) to play another (the widower and bachelor). If it could be expected that strong

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[334] Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, 1945. Rpt. Markham Ont: Penguin, 1955.

women could indeed liberate men, (having been given the license to be strong and independent, men could thus abandon the onerous tasks and ways of being that patriarchal culture has forced upon them), one does realize that the analysis shifts ground: men become the victims, not of strong women (or feminists), but of a vaguely sketched society that forces men to take up certain positions deemed "manly." Even while lamenting the fact that men are not allowed to be "real," <u>Gone with the Wind</u> constructs Ashley as the passive recipient of a gender ideology in which he seems to be denied the freedom to experience and express his emotions in all but narrow channels. In both roles—that of the husband and that of the bachelor/widower—Ashley indeed aligns himself with depersonalized icons in history. Actually, as a married man, he had already embraced the status of bachelor—at least "technically" or sexually since Melanie should never get pregnant. Ashley thus emerges as the wounded and surprisingly passive victim of his own self-control. What may a man become when he refuses masculinity or sexuality? The text opens here a space of alternative masculinity, and the end reveals that Ashley seems likely to play the bachelor for the rest of his life: refusing or unable to engage in his work, refusing to engage sexually in emotional relationships, refusing to engage in society or to accept responsibilities, Ashley is thus portrayed as putting off the business of being a man.

In doing so, the unmanned Ashley converts his manhood into a mythic and disembodied status; that of the untouched, uncorrupted, and even unsexed gentleman (Ashley is already, as his feminine/masculine name suggests, androgynous). Yet, <u>Gone with the Wind</u> interrogates the assumption that the "dominant," as Sally Robinson names it, only has interest in remaining unmarked and invisible, for Ashley's desire for unmarkedness in this case undermines the representation of strong, responsible, dominant masculinity. The return to "invisibility" plunges Ashley back into the crisis of identity that the distanciation from strong

women, from the business of becoming a man, and from responsibilities, was supposedly meant to resolve.

In fact, it is the women who often act the chivalrous even masculine part of guarding Ashley's reputation or defending their lover's mythical stature. By offering Ashley the possibility to flee from the Old South, Scarlett takes charge of the meeting. Melanie herself takes charge of Ashley, by asking Scarlett to take care of him, once she is dead. Yet, Melanie plans to have Scarlett protect Ashley while keeping him ignorant of the protection, for the sake of his "masculine pride." Melanie and Scarlett, indeed, "sealed the bargain that the protection of Ashley Wilkes from a too harsh world was passing from one woman to another and that Ashley's masculine pride should never be humbled by this knowledge" (1411). And however much they might insist upon Ashley's primary role as a soldier fighting for the cause of confederacy, the perspective remains theirs. Ashley, for example, can never be pinned down to a single identity, for "[h]e was courteous always, but aloof, remote. No one could ever tell what he was thinking about, Scarlett least of all" (35). If no one can actually enter Ashley's consciousness, readers do enter the consciousness of Melanie or Scarlett who concern themselves with Ashley's heroic stature. Scarlett, for instance, almost convincingly argues:

> Of course, he wasn't any good as a farmer. Ashley was bred for better things,
> she thought proudly. He was born to rule, to live in a large house, ride fine
> horses, read books of poetry and tell negroes what to do. That there were no
> more mansions and horses and negroes and few books did not alter matters.
> Ashley wasn't bred to plow and split rails. No wonder he wanted to leave Tara
> (969).

As Silber concludes, "because the code insists that manliness is a product and result of woman's weaknesses and childishness, men are excruciatingly vulnerable to women who are

strong" (349). Not surprisingly, these women entertain Ashley's scruples rather for him than for themselves. In The Sheltered Life, it is General Archbald who guards Eva Birdsong's reputation. Indeed, wondering, "[w]as it conceivable, as Cora suspected, that Eva knew the truth, and was merely preserving appearances?," the General immediately rejects this alternative and fixes Eva Birdsong in a disembodied icon: "No, he could not believe this" (The Sheltered Life 148). In Gone with the Wind, it is Scarlett who refuses to imagine that the Southern beau may be more than mere appearances, as she ponders:

> Was Rhett right? Should Ashley have known her mind? Swiftly she put the disloyal thought from her. Of course, he didn't suspect. Ashley would never suspect that she would even think of doing anything so immoral. Ashley was too fine to have such thoughts. Rhett was just trying to spoil her love. He was trying to tear down what was most precious to her. Some day, she thought viciously, when the store was on its feet and the mill doing nicely and she had money, she would make Rhett Butler pay for the misery and humiliation he was causing her (884).

In the above passages, it is Scarlett (like Melanie) who appropriates male identity by being more masculine and hegemonic than her male lovers and by simply refusing (or closing off) the multiplicity of male roles. Scarlett "had always thought that only common vulgar men visited such women. Before this moment, it had never occurred to her that nice men—that is, men she met at nice homes and with whom she danced—could possibly do such things" (346). However, she is forced to realize that "[p]erhaps all men did this! It was bad enough that they forced their wives to go through such indecent performances but to actually seek out low women and pay them for such accommodation!" (346). To recognize the possibility that white male authority may only be a performance raises profound questions about authority and subordination, about the assumed differences between masculinity and femininity. To a

startling degree, Scarlett discovers what Judith Butler calls "gender trouble," the undermining of masculine and feminine categories taken to be foundational and unchanging (almost deterministic). Scarlett has, for a moment, caught a glimpse of the stylization that Butler argues reveals "the highly rigid regulatory frame" governing definitions of masculinity and femininity (33).[335] In that discovery, Scarlett also detects the possibility that even the Southern men exist in a world of repressed alternatives—or alternative notions of authority, of gender, and of family. Scarlett, however, refuses that possibility, by simply reasserting that "men were so vile, and Rhett Butler was the worst of them all!" (346).

On a similar note, the repetition of "of course" (found in Melanie's, Rhett's and Scarlett's discourses whenever they mention Ashley) that resonates throughout the text suggests a need to mobilize a discourse resisting the apparent inessentiality of the masculine model while at the same time reinforcing this inessentiality. Indeed, and as seen through the lens of J. L. Austin's discussion of performative utterance, Ashey becomes a gentleman because of the "secure" discourse of those who view him and describe him as such. Sentences about Ashley's centrality make themselves true, bringing about their own truths, but not simply asserting a pre-existing identity or circumstance and thus creating an entirely new social reality. Speaking the "gentleman" (through the voices of Melanie, the Tarleton Twins, or even Scarlett) entails a transformative power of Ashley in a gentleman: "Of course," in these instances, does not simply validate the gentleman but performs it at the same time.[336]

The result is not just a portrait of a strong matriarchal world but an oddly inverted masculine narrative, one that appears to reverse the gendered conventions of western quest myths and narratives that Teresa de Lauretis probes in <u>Alice Doesn't</u> (143, qtd. in

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[335] Judith Butler, <u>Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity</u> (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[336] John L. Austin, "Performative Utterance," <u>How To Do Things with Words</u>, eds. J.O.Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

Donaldson).[337] In traditional narrative, Lauretis argues, the hero is almost inevitably constructed as masculine whereas the objects and/or obstacles marking heroic quests, and even the backdrop itself, for that matter, are more often than not defined as female. It is the Sphinx, after all, that lies in Oedipus' way on the road to Thebes, just as the Medusa is presented as the antagonist of Perseus. In the story, the male hero of history—Ashley— retreats to the back of the stage, while those figures who would ordinarily serve as his supporting players—his wife, Scarlett, etc.—his background, step to the front. Combined with the multiple and often contradictory representations of the male body, such reversal works to unsettle man's secure relationships to his own image, and thus to the representation (i.e. hegemonic) system it underwrites. In bringing about this reversal between hero and supporting players and/or backdrop, the narrative highlights and problematizes the relationship between public and private, the world of historical action and the world of domesticity, or, one might say, the frontlines and the homefront. Thus doing, Gone with the Wind demonstrates the inherent instability and anxiety that results from maintaining a discourse of gendered difference and hierarchy. One risks, Mitchell suggests, reifying the formula in which the subject is always male, the object/other necessarily female, a gendered dyad which, as the novel exemplifies (and as seen in The Sound and the Fury), may reveal a deeper suspicion that the model itself may be merely functional rather than descriptive of inherent truth.

De Lauretis' mention of the Medusa as possibly constitutive of heroic narrative is actually rather interesting, for when Ashley is departing for the battlefield, Scarlett recalls "each detail of his dress, how brightly his boots shone, the head of a Medusa in cameo in his cravat pin" (34). The mythical reference to the Medusa is here akin to a masculine fear of

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[337] Teresa de Lauretis, "Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema" (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 143; Susan V. Donaldson, "Gender and History in Eudora Welty's 'Delta Wedding,'" South Central Review 14.2 (1997): 3-14.

castration and to the shield of Perseus, which was a mirror in which he could safely regard the face that otherwise turned men to stone.[338] That it is Scarlett who notes this is significant, especially since the opening words of the novel are "Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful" (3). According to the legend, the Medusa, a devotee to Athene and serving in her temple, was raped by Poseidon. For this reason, the angered Athene made this beautiful maiden into the strange figure with the snakes for hairlocks whose gaze turned men to stone.[339] The ensuing result is positive, since both Ashley—turned into Perseus through reference to the Medusa—and Rhett—by escaping all imprisoning gaze—become able to escape the fixity of the gender definitions that have been clearly stated by the Tarleton twins from the beginning of the novel. Ashley can be seen attempting to recuperate his own image—one that could resist Scarlett's imprisoning gaze.

Yet, even if Ashley ought to be hero and even if Ashley is given the possibility to envision new ways of performing gender, he is less an actor than the cause of action. His sense of honor is obviously the hallmark of aristocracy and Ashley's character is so essentially aristocratic that, despite all his inactivity, he is still a kind of hero. However, his primarily role is an almost messianic sufferer, and although he represents the values at the heart of the South, this symbolic function paradoxically condemns him to inaction. Stuck in inaction, dreams of poetry and music, he'd rather leave the fight to women, for as Rhett explains, he is "as helpless as a turtle on his back. If the Wilkes family pulls through these

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[338] On this aspect, we can read: Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head," <u>The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud</u>, ed. and trans. James Strachey Vol 18 (London: Hogarth, 1955): 273-74.

[339] Since Rhett is the captain of a blockade runner—a ship evading the Union Navy's cordon of ships sealing off Charleston from supplies of any kind, including medicine, food, etc—we might associate him with Poseidon and he does effectively "rape" Scarlett though they are married at the time. Another association is the way the Medusa figure was apparently important to seamen, again because of Poseidon's role—but in this case, supposedly calming dangerous seas. One of the most important shipwrecks of the 19th century was "the Wreck of the Medusa," a French ship. The painter Gericault did a massive painting of the "Raft of the Medusa" that the shipwrecked sailors were on and one assumes that the ship was so named in hope of calming the seas—

hard times, it'll be Melly who pulls them through. Not Ashley" (1002). The self-defeated Ashley witnesses enemies of the Southern pastoral order everywhere as he admits being "out of place in this new life, and [. . .] afraid of facing life without the slow beauty of our old world that is gone" (735), but the difference is that Ashley seems to welcome these "enemies," for he knows well that "there's no going back" to life in the Old South and "this which is facing all of us now," as he recognizes, "is worse than war and worse than prison—and to [him] worse than death" (736). By choosing to retreat in a sort of metaphysical desert, Ashley entertains the possibility that the normalizing power of white masculinity is no longer secure (even less self-evident) in a culture that has made "gentlemen" visible and visibly lacking.

Rhett, on the contrary, possesses, it seems, all the necessary elements to heal a wounded (and disempowered) Southern masculinity after the Civil War. Even more telling, his position as a drifter and a universal outcast makes him able to play the gentleman at will. Rhett, defined as one of these "scoundrels who masquerade under the cloak of the blockader for their own selfish gains," one of "these human vultures who bring in satins and laces when [Confederate] men are dying for want of quinine, who load their boats with tea and wines when [Confederate] heroes are writhing for lack of morphia," one of these very "vampires who are sucking the lifeblood of the men who follow Robert Lee" (327-8) is nonetheless perfectly able to fashion himself as a gentleman when needed, if not for him, for Bonnie's interest. As he tells Scarlett:

> The O'Haras might have been kings of Ireland once but your father was
> nothing but a smart Mick on the make. And you are no better—But then, I'm
> at fault too. I've gone through life like a bat out of hell, never caring what I
> did, because nothing ever mattered to me. But Bonnie matters [. . .] If I have

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obviously it did not work. We can find irony in the way that the cameo would better apply to Rhett, the

to crawl on my belly to every fat old cat who hates me, I'll do it. I'll be meek under their coldness and repentant of my evil ways. I'll contribute to their damned charities and I'll go to their damned churches. I'll admit and brag about my services to the Confederacy and, if worst comes to worst, I'll join their damned Klan—though a merciful God could hardly lay so heavy a penance on my shoulders as that. And I shall not hesitate to remind the fools whose necks I saved that they owe me a debt (1258).

As a straddler of worlds and a deceitful gentleman, Rhett stands as a foil to the newer aristocrats of Clayton County, Georgia, defenders of the Old South, to whom he dares address the now famous line: "I seem to have ruined everybody's brandy and cigars and dreams of victory" (316). Rhett indeed "bore an impersonal contempt for everyone and everything in the South, the Confederacy in particular, and took no pains to conceal it. It was his remarks about the Confederacy that made Atlanta look at him first in bewilderment, then coolly and then with hot rage" (315). Even worse, Rhett is sure that the South cannot win a war with the North and even condemns the futile dreams of Southerners in a system that, he believes, is already doomed:

Why should I fight to uphold the system that cast me out? I shall take pleasure in seeing it smashed [. . .] Well, why am I the black sheep of the Butler family? For this reason and no other—I didn't conform to Charleston and I couldn't. And Charleston is the South, only intensified. I wonder if you realize yet what a bore it is? So many things that one must do because they've always been done. So many things, quite harmless, that one must not do for the same reason. So many things that annoyed me by their senselessness. Not marrying the young lady, of whom you have probably

seaman blockade runner and a man who is not afraid of powerful women.

heard, was merely the last straw. Why should I marry a boring fool, simply because an accident prevented me from getting her home before dark? And why permit her wild-eyed brother to shoot and kill me, when I could shoot straighter? If I had been a gentleman, of course, I would have let him kill me and that would have wiped the blot from the Butler escutcheon. But—I like to live. And so I've lived and I've had a good time. . . . When I think of my brother, living among the sacred cows of Charleston, and most reverent toward them, and remember his stodgy wife and his Saint Cecilia Balls and his everlasting rice fields—then I know the compensation for breaking with the system (332-3).

Rhett Butler establishes here a certain continuity with General Archbald in The Sheltered Life who was condemned to marry a girl he did not love because of a sleigh incident that kept them out all night. Here, Rhett openly rebels against a social construction of masculinity in a society that accepts marriage, dueling, and honor as the only acceptable tokens of southern gentility.

Rhett, it is true, eventually marries Scarlett, yet even then, while other males—Scarlett's former husbands, for example—worship women as objects of chivalric adoration (like Melanie) on the one hand and the women's role as chattel to be married off for social or political alliances (like Ellen Robillard) on the other. Rhett truly admits his motives as well as Scarlett's motives.[340] As a matter of fact, it is Rhett who speaks truthfully to her about her motives for marrying, her willingness to sell her body if necessary and her disregard for other people. Rhett thus appears as the liberator who frees the heroine from her outdated role and undermines the feudal order and supplants it with his own chivalry by liberating the heroine from this bondage. The institution of marriage is described here not simply in the rhetoric of

political conquest, as might be expected, but in the language of political collaboration, the language of desire. Marriage is therefore voluntarily chosen, rather than forcibly imposed. As a consequence, Rhett becomes the liberator of Scarlett, and his love for Scarlett, for her untamed and untouched wilderness corresponds, to some extent, to his love for the untouched, original Old South that he wishes to retrieve in the end:

> I wanted to take care of you, to pet you, to give you everything you wanted. I wanted to marry you and protect you and give you a free rein in anything that would make you happy—just as I did Bonnie… I wanted you to stop fighting and let me fight for you. I wanted you to play like a child—for you were a child, a brave, frightened, bull-headed child. I think you are still a child... I liked to think that Bonnie was you, a little girl again, before the war and poverty had done things to you. She was like you…and I could pet her and spoil her—just as I wanted to pet you (1437).

As Kaplan explains, the typical chivalric hero of the newly-revitalized romances at the turn of the century is

> usually a disinherited or 'natural' aristocrat, [who] both saves the kingdom from falling to its barbaric enemies and thereby modernizes it and liberates the heroine from outdated class constraints by marrying her. The heroine of the novel, an athletically daring New Woman [. . .] actively abets her own liberation, by embracing the hero in marriage (666). [341]

Read in this light, such a hero can be found in Rhett Butler, who eventually relinquishes all political power of the realm he has saved. The return home, however, does not mean, in this case, taking his bride with him. By denying the possibility of the marriage-ending, Mitchell

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[340] I am indebted to Amy Kaplan's analysis of the historical romance <u>Soldiers of Fortune</u>

[341] Amy Kaplan, "Romancing the Empire: The Embodiment of American Masculinity in the Popular Historical Novel of the 1890s." <u>American Literary History</u> 2.4 (1990): 659-690.

makes it clear that union to the true Southern beau Ashley Wilkes, or to her true love Rhett, is not to be wished. Thus, the absence of a marriage-ending is not retributive and cancels out the celebration of Scarlett: matrimony is not, nor should it be, the proper resolution of Scarlett's story. The novel here may allude to the fact that, for a generation of men stifled by women, another woman—or marriage—is not really what men need, especially since women are metaphorically linked to the culture that emasculates men in the first place.

Rhett's admiration for the grand-father of the pirate in his family, which he "tried to copy … far more than [he] ever did [his] father" (950) represents, in this sense, the type of masculinity sought by those emasculated men, for he has no familial obligation, is unmarried, has few possessions to tie him down, and can sustain a nomadic existence, consistently feeling his desire for the new. The end of the novel (with Rhett leaving Atlanta, family, and society behind) suggests that Rhett the private man and outlaw will ultimately be much more dangerous than Rhett the Southerner cloaked in a minor gentleman or warrior role. Indeed, the "grandfather on the Butler side who was a pirate [. . .] made people walk the plank if there was any money to be made that way. At any rate, he made enough money to leave my father quite wealthy. But the family always referred to him carefully as a 'sea captain'" (950). The mention of the pirate in his family—said to be a sea captain—suggests that the "proper" title of sea captain may be a mask, like the title of gentleman, worn by an intricately subversive character.

By releasing himself from domestic, cultural or political bounds, Rhett embodies a masculinity freed of the gender binaries sustaining the hegemonic system. Rhett's precarious position in between all fronts, the feminine and the masculine, the savaged and the civilized, the gentleman and the rascal, is also a prerequisite for his role as the founder of a new society that fuses old oppositions into a new vision. As Hernan Vera noted:

The division [in the novel] is coded not so much as North versus South but rather as Old South versus New [. . .] Melanie and Ashley Wilkes are the epitome of the old white Southern self, or rather, of the sincere fiction of the white plantation owner--generous, honorable, courteous, kind, calm, monogamous, sedate in their lovemaking, but also rather passive and sickly-- whereas Scarlett and Rhett Butler are their opposites in every respect, the embodiments of the new white Southern self: selfish, dishonorable, rule breakers, ruthless, lively, polygamous, passionate in their lovemaking, and active and healthy. Scarlett and Rhett are profiteers, perfect capitalists, although Scarlett is far more childish and self-centered and less self-aware than Rhett. So we are presented with two sincere fictions of the white Southern self: the old cavalier versus the new entrepreneur.[342]

Most importantly, the plurality of gender identification—Rhett is at the same time pirate, rascal, father, husband—may allow men, as Mitchell suggests, to suspend traditional masculinity in favor of an improvisitional freedom to (re)construct a male self from a range of possibilities, thus escaping the fixity of gender definition.[343] Moreover, by releasing himself from domestic bounds, Rhett actually moves from an embodied masculine identity, i.e. an identity cultivated in the muscular robust physique offered as a sight to look at for women, to a disembodied masculine identity that is divorced from collective (i.e. feminine) annexation.[344] The morselizing of Rhett's visualization also contributes to his remaining

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[342] Hernan Vera and Andrew Gordon, "Sincere Fictions of the White Self in the American Cinema: The Divided White Self in Civil War Films." Web. 20 Oct. 2009. <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/agordon/white.htm>.

[343] I owe this remark to Leland S Person's article, "James, George Sand, and the Suspense of Masculinity." PMLA 106.3 (May 1991): 250.

[344] Of course, the question of the female gaze in Gone with the Wind may be confronted to another outsider gaze in the film adaptation, as we may wonder if Clark Gable in the movie is able to find refuge in a space of alternative manhood retreated from female gratification when thousands of viewers are watching the obvious performance of Gable's highly sexualized masculinity. This question however simply reinforces the interrogation of Southern masculinity as essence or performance.

mostly unsupported by an adoring female gaze. Melanie, for instance, stepping in the room of Rhett's little girl, Bonnie, registers Rhett's hairy and muscular arms in the following fashion:

> The afternoon sun streamed in through the open window and suddenly she saw, as for the first time, how large and brown and strong his hands were and how thickly the black hairs grew along the backs of them. Involuntarily, she recoiled from them. They seemed so predatory, so ruthless and yet, twined in her skirt, so broken, so helpless [. . .] He was so very large and male, and excessively male creatures always discomposed her. They seem to radiate a force and vitality that made her feel smaller and weaker even than she was. He looked so swarthy and formidable and the heavy muscles in his shoulders swelled against his white linen coat in a way that frightened her. It seemed impossible that she had seen all this strength and insolence brought low. And she had held that black head in her lap! (1347-51).

In this portrayal of Rhett, it is no longer the visual that is registered here but the tactile. In doing so, Mitchell deconstructs traditional modes of masculine representation, by calling into question what Nancy K. Miller has described as "the subject in power ['s] fascination" with his "own representation" (46).[345] Because as Schor remarks, "the promotion of the tactile in the arts leads inevitably to an end of mastery," the male figure, in this case, appears as "its un- or-de idealized form, in its all-too human contingency" (129). The traditional representation of masculinity as expected in the unproblematized images of antebellum narratives—is in

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[345] Nancy K. Miller, "Parables and Politics: Feminist Criticism in 1986." Paragraph 8 (October 1986). Rhett's gaze reveals the crisis of representation of women to their own image, for Scarlett, we learn, "still felt unclothed every time his eyes ran up and down her figure. It was not that he ever said anything. Then she could have scorched him with hot words. It was the bold way his eyes looked out of his swarthy face with a displeasing air of insolence, as if all women were his property to be enjoyed in his own good time. Only with Melanie was this look absent. There was never that cool look of appraisal, never mockery in his eyes, when he looked at Melanie; and there was an especial note in his voice when he spoke to her, courteous, respectful, anxious to be of service" (308). However, since women have always remained the invisible one in the literary tradition, Rhett's attack on female narcissism—or representation—bears less importance than the women's attack on the male image.

crisis, since the morcelizing of the masculine imago works here to undermine "the uniqueness of the phallus and to undermine its infinite substitutability" (Schor 123). This disembodied body becomes the site of revisionist gender possibilities, for the strategy of proliferating images, Schor explains, not only sets out "to ruin the foundation of man's relationship to his own image" (123), but also, in attacking male representation, procceds to an "attack patriarchy and its distributions of power." (126)[346] Far from being disempowering, the fragmented body is also the site, Rhett suggests, where you can recover the autonomy denied by increasing domestication and feminization, but also by the hegemonic model of masculinity that men like Ashley have been forced to follow.

Understandably, the Rhett, pictured by Mitchell, does not resemble Robert Lee, the chronicler and prophet of national fate. Rather, he portrays himself as ordinary citizen, a professional gambler, and contented family father who gets up at night, checks the light in his daughter's room, and revisits the scene of his daily family bliss. The "romance" produced by such an author will be a private "romance" (like that of Ned Hazard). It will not open up a public space, like Melanie's home, where the tribe may gather, and where "[t]he young people came, as young people always come, simply because they had a good time at her home and met there the friends they wanted to meet" (1023). Rhett's romance will turn inward, not outward, whereas:

Around Melanie's tactful and self-effacing person, there rapidly grew up a clique of young and old who represented what was left of the best of Atlanta's ante-bellum society, all poor in purse, all proud in family, die-hards of the stoutest variety. It was as if Atlanta society, scattered and wrecked by war,

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[346] Naomi Schor, "Portrait of a Gentleman: Representing Men in (French) Women's Writing." Representations 20 (1987): 113-133; Brian Wallis, "What's Wrong with This Picture: An Introduction," in Brian Wallis, ed., Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation (New York: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), xv. A central theme is the politics of representation, its complicities with all forms of power, especially the patriarchal.

depleted by death, bewildered by change, had found in her an unyielding nucleus about which it could re-form (1022-23).

As opposed to Melanie's society, Rhett, being a constant drifter and a world traveler, chooses to reap the financial benefits of the war, accepts the duplicity of society, plays the role when needed, yet, remains uncompromised and independent, for he remains essentially uninvolved in the political (or cultural) talks of the southerners. On the contrary, Rhett chooses to deconstruct these talks by exposing the venality of those men and "tricking the dignified citizenry into embarrassing situations" (317). Rhett,

could no more resist pricking the conceits, the hypocrisies and the flamboyant patriotism of those about him than a small boy can resist putting a pin into a balloon. He neatly deflated the pompous and exposed the ignorant and the bigoted, and he did it in such subtle ways, drawing his victims out by his seemingly courteous interest, that they never were quite certain what had happened until they stood exposed as windy, high flown and slightly ridiculous (317).

In doing so, Rhett, the non-gentleman, becomes a "gallant" in the traditional sense of the term (derived from the Old French Galer), which means to play and more precisely to play tricks, to make a show of cunningness and deceit. Traditionally, as Vala explains, the gallant is first of all an individual lacking in seriousness, perhaps even a swindler, a thief, or a seducer, or more specifically one who robs his victims of virtue.[347]

Seen in this light, Rhett's act of withdrawal from Atlanta and the political talks of these Atlantans, at the end of the novel, shed light on Rhett's virtue: his refusal to deceive himself, his intention to present himself on every occasion only for what he is. Scarlett remarks that "[i]t had been her experience that the liar was the hottest to defend his veracity,

the coward his courage, the ill-bred his gentlemanliness, and the cad his honor. But not Rhett. He admitted everything and laughed and dared her to say more" (310). Nor is this virtue simply moral in character—vertu. It is also virtu, the manliness of a brave man, as is clearly evident in his rescue of Ashley and the other men who "would get [themselves] mixed up in the hot-headed doings of the Klan" (1117). Thus, Rhett becomes, in the French Cornelian mold, a "généreux;" that is, a gentleman who refuses to accept any compromise of his ideal of self-assertion.[348] Whereas Ashley, from the very beginning of the novel, has been dressed to serve the interests of a model of masculinity that is essentially sociable, becoming, in turn (yet even unwillingly) a "worldly" man—one serving a cause that he does not even believe in, Rhett inflects the meaning of Southern gentleman with a desire for masculine authenticity, returning the definition of gentility to its original sense. Gentility, for Rhett, is transformed into a moral sense of uprightness and justice, in opposition to the quality of "worldly" man. Even more telling maybe is the fact that Rhett does actually correspond to the definition provided by the <u>Oxford English Dictionary</u>, in which the term "Beau" (derived from the old French "Beau") refers to a dandy, someone privileging attention to the self, to dress and etiquette. The term also refers to an escort, a suitor—not a husband.[349] Accused of not being a gentleman, of lacking gallantry, Rhett—by standing outside the chivalrous Southern aristocracy—ironically proceeds to his own redefinition of the word.[350] In doing so, Rhett

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[347] Alain Viala, "Les Signes Galants: A Historical Reevaluation of Galanterie." <u>Yale French Studies</u> 92 (1997):11-29.

[348] The idea of the "généreux" vs. the "hypocrite" is developed in Robert J. Nelson's article, "The Unreconstructed Heroes of Moliere," <u>The Tulane Drama Review</u>, 4.3 (1960): 14-37.

[349] <u>OED</u>. 1803 (Taylor): "If not a husband, then a beau for you?"

[350] Inheritors of Castiglione's Cortegiano model of Italian gAlantry and of the French ideal of "honnêteté," the Southern gentleman was to become the ultimate gAlant; yet, a historical analysis of the term does reveal some inner contradictions. Furetière's <u>Dictionnaire</u> for instance, insists that GALANT "is also said insultingly of one who entertains a woman or a young lady with whom he has some illicit relation." When one says "that's a galante," the feminine form always indicates a courtesan. By such standards, then, Rhett Butler could well belong to the old French tradition of the galant man. However, and at the same time, another meaning of gentility develops. Viala, in his article <u>Signes Galants</u>, adds that "the initial semantic cluster "gAlant" contained the sememe of play, and secondarily that of pleasing: these two facets move progressively to the fore of the eighteenth century to designate a mode of civility. It becomes a means of describing in positive terms an attitude that includes not only propriety, but also politeness and something more, distinction and the

suggests that the power of the male in this society is not in performing but in abrogating a social function, not in his identification with society but in his alienation from it.

Rhett's famous line "I don't give a damn," supports this view: indifference, Rhett seems to suggest, is precisely the way to salvation. Yet, salvation is nothing more than the absence of loss. As he bluntly admits, Southerners "can lick [them]selves by longing too hard for things [they] haven't got any more—and by remembering too much" (999). Paradise absent, as Rhett emphasizes, is different from paradise lost: "Scarlett, our Southern way of living is as antiquated as the feudal system of the Middle Ages. The wonder is that it's lasted as long as it has. It had to go and it's going now" (333). Rhett echoes in his assertion a loss that loses itself, precisely because "it may not be seen as annihilated only to be regained in some hoped for, apocalyptic future or sublimely blank utopia that, through a kind of creation ex nihilo, will bring total renewal, salvation, or redemption" (LaCapra 57).[351] Thus doing, Rhett destroys all standard against which salvation can reveal itself, and among other standards, this Old South that has become Scarlett's and Ashley's standards of salvation. In a sort of metaphysical desert, Ashley indeed regrets "the loss of the beauty of the old life [. . .] [because] [t]here was a glamor to it, a perfection and a completeness and a symmetry to it like Grecian art. … living at Twelve Oaks, there was a real beauty to living" (735). Without standard, there can be no salvation, and there is no condemnation. There is not even loss. Rhett becomes the ideal *gentle*man by virtue of his homelessness.

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art de plaire. Dictionaries of the time define it thus: GALANT: Honnête, civil, sociable, offering good company, and pleasant conversation (Dictionnaire de l'Académie, 1694). GALANT: Possessing graciousness, wit, sound judgment, civility, and gaiety, all without affectation (Furetière's Dictionnaire of 1690). GALANT is also said of a man who has the air of the Court, agreeable manners, who seeks to please, particularly the fair sex. In this sense, one speaks of an esprit gAlant, one whose every move has a gAlant turn, and who writes gAlant love letters and gAlant verse (Richelet's Dictionnaire of 1680). Gentility becomes valued as the "distinctive mark of a savoir-vivre displayed as a guarantee of a way of being. Aesthetics as a sign-system assumes ethical value" (Viala 21). By such standards, the Tarleton twins and Ashley do belong to this model, according to which exterior signs presuppose a certain quality of the mind, perhaps even of being. References taken from Alain Viala, "Les Signes Galants: A Historical Reevaluation of Galanterie." Yale French Studies 92 (1997):11-29.

[351] Dominick LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

5.5. The Return to Romance.

Rhett's redefinition or recuperation of gentility, however—by reasserting the centrality of the gentleman model—does not suggest progressive performances of gender, but rather what could be called a retrenchment of older models of hegemonic masculinity in a new disguise. However genuine the desire for authenticity, another performance arises (that is not so different from Ashley's performance). And whereas the marking of the white gentleman as a specifically gendered (and even racialized) subject functions as an attack on male narcissism, the responses it produces range from the acceptance and welcoming of vulnerability (Ashley) to defiant reassertions of abstraction (Rhett). The two responses, however, work in tandem to produce a masculinity perpetually in crisis: by revealing the fundamental performativity of masculinity, these responses do not flout accepted norms and codes but simply uncover their constructedness. In turn, these responses shelter the collective (the patriarchal order) from the discourses of social or political transformation that these men could possibly voice. This marks the necessity to produce new models of social postures disenfranchised from conventional models. But such a radical intervention in the institution of masculinity requires that it be defamiliarized and destabilized to allow of some elbow room to play.[352]

In addition, the destabilization, rejection, or the healing of an inherited essentialist masculinity is not necessarily either the goal or the effect of the masculine representations in Gone with the Wind. The sheer volume of words in Rhett's discourse (like Ashley's)—expressing what he wanted and failed to obtain from Scarlett—suggests that the woundings themselves, rather than the healing, serve a particular purpose. Rhett does not even wish to retool masculinity as bigger or better. As a matter of fact, the Rhett that Scarlett meets in the

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[352] I owe this formulation to Gilbert Pham-Thanh, "Male After a Fashion: Post-Genital Masculinity in Question." Proc. of Paper for Performing the Invisible: Masculinities in the English-Speaking World, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris.

post-war years is found in a Yankee military prison, judged by these very men he had been cultivating a friendship with for the killing of an "uppity lady who had insulted a white woman" (552). As Rhett freely admits, "I did kill the nigger. He was uppity to a lady, and what else could a Southern gentleman do?" (614). Rhett who, from the very first appearance, had prided himself on not being a gentleman, is in this instance utterly disempowered yet (re)claiming his status as a gentleman: gentility and disempowered masculinity have become closely intertwined.

It is also Charleston that he wants to retrieve, the place where he might "make peace with [his] people" (957). As he tells Scarlett, "It just doesn't interest me. I'm going to hunt in old towns and old countries where some of the old times must still linger. I'm that sentimental. Atlanta's too raw for me, too new" (957). It is the romance that he had nonetheless condemned to irretrievable destruction more than a renewed or retooled masculinity that Rhett wishes to recapture in the end. As if confident that the world of Atlanta will not intrude upon the world of Charleston, Rhett's project is to reshape the history of the South without paying attention to historical truth.

In the way Rhett deals with the trauma of realization, there is what may be called a disengagement from reality and history, and by wishing to find a usable past, Rhett announces his desire to retrieve what has been lost in time and space (much like Tom in The Glass Menagerie), an action which actually identifies him less as a pragmatic than Ashley who is aware that this retrieval is utterly impossible. Retreating to a metaphorical desert, Rhett indulges in a sort of fanciful rewriting of the past, as if history could be rewritten and started anew. Yet, Gone with the Wind—as Rhett himself had voiced earlier—is nothing if not a novel about change, however much the Southerners might resist that possibility. No matter how hard Melanie "refused to change, refused even to admit that there was any reason to change in a changing world" (1022-3), no matter how many "Tomorrows" Scarlett might be

contemplating as though chanting a mantra to hold at bay the possible repercussions of her losses, history, tomorrow, is just a step away. Mitchell seems to suggest that the boundaries between history and the domestic, the public and the private, are not nearly as impenetrable as these Southerners would like to assume, reminding also that the dichotomies defining the world of Gone with the Wind, the historical and the domestic, the masculine and the feminine, hero and backdrop—can be destabilized and reversed all too quickly. Categories like public and private might have actually a good deal more to do with "wishes and dreams" than with "recorded historical experience" (Steedman 296).[353]

In failing the possible reconstruction of a wounded masculinity, Mitchell may purposefully miss the lesson taught by Walter Scott's Waverley in which the hero, having been separated from the withdrawing army of the Pretender, feels "entitled to say firmly, though perhaps with a sigh, that the romance of his life has ended, and that its real history had now commenced" (283).[354] In Scott's novels, Ackermann argues,

> Romance is generally regarded as an artifact that has the power to work in history (not outside of history), and to reestablish social coherence. The dangers inherent in attempts to read romance as real history or transform real history according to a supposed original text are the themes of Waverley and its hero, Edward [. . .] Edward's mistake lies in his attempt to returning and perpetuating an original past, because he disregards the factuality, the irreversibility of history as a process that long ago opened a gap between romance and history (32-33).[355]

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[353] Carolyn Steedman, ""Public" and "Private" in Women's Lives," Journal of Historical Sociology 3 (1990): 294-304.

[354] Walter Scott, Waverley: Or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since 1814, ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986). Its hero, Edward, shares a name with John P. Kennedy's "Ned" Hazard.

[355] Zeno Ackermann, Working At Romance. Poetics and Ideology in Novels of the Antebellum American South 1824-1854 (Diss. Regensburg, 2004).

Seen in that light, Rhett fails because he prefers to live the "romance" and tries to rewrite the "history." Rhett retreats to Charleston wishing that the past were different, hoping to find something left. Yet, new masculine identities can be achieved, Ackermann explains, only if men follow "Waverley's conversion from 'romance' to 'real history' [which] signals a change of strategies," for "the hero eventually realizes that (modern) history has completely torn loose from the script of 'romance,' and that 'romance' has been reduced to the status of fiction. From now on, he will observe the difference between the two worlds [. . .] Instead of living the 'romance' and trying to rewrite the history, he now lives the history and adapts the 'romance' (33), a strategy that our men have not yet embraced: Ashley recognizes the irretrievability of romance, yet renounces the desire for action or heroism, that is the desire to live in history. Rhett knows well that romance cannot be retrieved, yet stills attempts to return to an original past.[356] Rhett's exile emphasizes that Gone with the Wind (and Southern romance) remains confined to extremes—either total mastery or the shattering effect of an endless repetition compulsion or impossible healing—extremes that attest to the predominance of an all-or-nothing logic, leaving to white Southern masculinity only two possible options: either gather its strength or die by inches.

Such a reading, however, seems to eliminate or obscure the role of problematic intermediary or transitional processes. Scarlett, for instance, in the way she claims "tomorrow is another day" reveals a tendency to enshroud losses, perhaps even to etherealize them, in a generalized discourse of absence:

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[356] Here, we could argue that Mitchell rewrites Walter Scott's Waverley. Yet, in Scott's romance, the Jacobite rising of 1745/46 and Edward's participation in it are interpreted as (mistaken) attempts at recreating the original "romance" in the face of "real history," efforts of returning to an earlier state of society which seems to be preserved in fictional representations. Even though the hero's infantile escapism is ridiculed, the contrast between "romance" and "real history" is not simply one between fiction and fact, between the inventions of fancy and a sober recognition of reality. Ultimately, it is a contrast between the vanishing letter of the original text and the reality of an alienated history. The dangers inherent in attempts to read romance as real history or transform real history according to a supposed original text are the themes of Waverley and its hero, Edward. The mistake of Rhett can be read like Edward's participation in the Jacobite uprising. Edward's mistake lies in

I won't think of it now," she thought grimly, summoning up her old charm.

"I'll go crazy if I think about losing him now. I'll think of it tomorrow [. . .]

She stood for a moment remembering small things, the avenue of dark cedars

leading to Tara, the banks of cape jessamine bushes, vivid green against the

white walls, the fluttering white curtains. And Mammy would be there.

Suddenly she wanted Mammy desperately, as she had wanted her when she

was a little girl, wanted the broad bosom on which to lay her head, the gnarled

black hand on her hair. Mammy, the last link with the old days (1447).

Of course, when she had faced the ruins of Twelve Oaks, Scarlett had realized that "[w]hat was past was past," that "those who were dead were dead" and that "the lazy luxury of the old days was gone, never to return [. . .] There was no going back and she was going forward. Throughout the South for fifty years there would be bitter-eyed women who looked backward, to dead times, to dead men [. . .] But Scarlett was never to look back (593). On several occasions, she also blames Melanie for not being able to look forward. Indeed, "listen[ing] with flesh crawling as Melanie told tales of Tara," Scarlett, "took no pleasure or pride in the memory of these things," and wonders: "Oh, why can't they forget? Why can't they look forward and not back? We were fools to fight that war. And the sooner we forget it, the better we'll be" (1033). Scarlett blames Ashley because "[h]e can't look forward any more. He can't see the present, he fears the future, and so he looks back" (1290). Yet, Scarlett's mistake is that she has replaced one romance for another. The "lost" object—and specifically Tara or Ashley—is specified, thereby conflating in her mind absence and loss.[357]

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his attempt at returning and perpetuating an original past, and can be explained as the result of the hero's unguided youthful reading of "romances" (Ackermann 31-32).

[357] For Freud, anxiety had the quality of indefiniteness and absence or indeterminacy of an object. For Kierkegaard and Heidegger, anxiety was the fear of something that is nothing. If indeed, anxiety is the fear that is nothing (what Scarlett is afraid of), then, a crucial way of attempting to allay anxiety is to locate a particular or specific thing that could be feared and thus enable one to find ways of eliminating or mastering that fear. This idea is exposed in Lisa Hinrichse's article, "A Defensive Eye: Anxiety, Fear and Form in the Poetry of Robert Frost," Journal of Modern Literature. 31. 3 (Spring 2008): 44-57. Hinrichse argues that the

By rejecting the damage to "Tomorrow," Scarlett places herself in an eternal present, making conversion even more difficult, for hardly attainable. Scarlett, for instance, always imagines her future in terms of redemption for her past sins. If Rhett hopes that one day she may grow "tired of imitation gentry and shoddy manners and cheap emotions," he admits, "I doubt it. I think you'll always be more attracted by glister than by gold. Anyway, I can't wait that long to see. And I have no desire to wait. It just doesn't interest me" (1445). Scarlett—remaining unconverted and inconvertible—appears as the deconstructed Southern Belle (or rebel) who has just been taught a lesson whose point she cannot see. She is, in La Capra's light, living in a *recherche du temps perdu*—unwilling to let go of the plantation, as she says "[t]his whole section, this whole state can go back to woods if it wants to, but I won't let Tara go" (689).

Of course, in Scarlett's case, the conflation of loss and absence has to do with coming to terms with anxiety, for mourning is only possible when "[o]ne is able to distinguish between past and present and to recognize something as having happened to one (or one's people) back then that is related to, but not identical with, here and now [. . .] On the contrary, the anxiety attendant upon absence may never be entirely eliminated or overcome but must be lived with in various ways" (LaCapra 66).[358] For La Capra, "there is a sense in which such narrative—at least in conventional forms—must be reductive, based on misrecognition, and even close to myth" (49)–which may explain why the Belle is desired: because she can maintain the myth, by transforming absence into loss and therefore into desire. In this sense,

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resulting conversion of absence into loss gives anxiety an identifiable object—the lost object—and generates the hope that anxiety may be eliminated or overcome.

[358] Dominick LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); On that subject, read also Lisa Hinrichsen, "A Defensive Eye: Anxiety, Fear and Form in the Poetry of Robert Frost." Journal of Modern Literature 31.3 (Spring 2008): 44-57. Another way to master this anxiety is to project the blame for a putative loss onto identifiable others, thereby inviting the generation of scapegoating or sacrificial scenarios. In converting absence into loss, one assumes that there was (or at least could be) some original unity, wholeness, security, or identity which others have ruined, polluted, or contaminated and thus made "us" lose. Therefore, to regain it one must somehow get rid of or eliminate those others—or perhaps that sinful other in oneself.

the absence, as interpreted by the Belle, is the absence of an absolute that becomes an object of fixation and absorbs, mystifies, and downgrades the significance of particular historical losses.

Read in this light, Gone with the Wind suggests that Scarlett's "Tomorrow" as well as Rhett's "old days" therefore need to be employed not only as a means of critique but also as a way of understanding the considerable resilience—the strategies of containment, re-circulation, re-appropriation—of an hegemonic system in constant defense of its privileges. If it interrogates the hegemonic model of masculinity, Gone with the Wind does not give way to other, viable marginalized forms of masculinity. Even though the masculine image of Rhett or Ashley outwardly presents itself as different from the ideology of the dominant man and makes for a revisionist view of manhood, the novel still sets a form of dominant masculinity as the ultimate goal. If Gone with the Wind opens some space for alternative (resisting) ways of performing gender, the novel ultimately brings about the notion of recuperation of masculinity. As a matter of fact, disempowerment—as best exemplified by the fates of Ashley, Rhett, Melanie and Scarlett—is so endemic to Gone with the Wind that the issue becomes not so much its identification but rather an analysis of the discourses that respond to it, the compensatory or transferential strategies operating behind its representation(s).

CHAPTER 6

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' THE GLASS MENAGERIE (1946)

In his introduction to The 1940s: Profile of a Nation in Crisis, Chester Eisinger defines the mood of that decade as "one of fear, terror, uncertainty, and violence, mingled with sad satisfactions and a relief at victory" (xiv, qtd in Adler 1).[359] The effect upon citizenry was a "regimentation and depersonalization not only within the military during the war but within business and labor in the postwar years. Corporations demanded conformity for their organization men, and even the unions fostered an atmosphere of impersonality that was inhospitable to [. . .] the idiosyncratic self" (xviii, qtd. in Adler 1). Not surprisingly, as Eisinger remarks, the literature of the period is "obsessed" with themes of quest for identity and the alienation of man from the self and from society, as well as "the resulting search for belonging and connection [leading] them to look to the past to discover some stability" (Einsinger, qtd. in Adler 2). And most specifically, many plays in the twenties, thirties, and forties were concerned with

> an aspect of the national past that gives [the characters] a strong emotional lever against the depressing present and the failure of the American dream [. . .] The characters cling to their dreams tenaciously. [. . .] Their dreams are never fulfilled except in the fantasies of nostalgic romances and operettas. The sterner statements insist that the thrust of American materialism has destroyed all such dreams and left man destitute in a soulless world, a wasteland (Bogard 62-3).[360]

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[359] Chester, E. Eisinger, ed., The 1940s: Profile of a Nation in Crisis (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1969); Thomas P. Adler, A Streetcar Named Desire: the Moth and the Lantern (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1990).

[360] Clifford Leech, Thomas Wallace Craik, Travis Bogard, Richard Moody, Walter Joseph Meserve, eds., The Revels History of Drama in English, vol 8 (London: Methuen, 1977).

6.1. The Southern Male Caught in Motion and in Time.

That the narrator of <u>The Glass Menagerie</u>, Tom Wingfield mentions this pessimistic and anxious period of history—a period marked by profound economic, social, and political reorientation—should hardly come as a surprise, for in a world which was witnessing the rise of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, any prospect for the future of humanity seemed rather bleak. At home, in America, as Tom remarks, "disturbances of labor, sometimes pretty violent, in otherwise peaceful cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Saint Louis" (144-5) signified the economic difficulties which had already been burgeoning across the nation. As Delma E. Presley explains:

> In Detroit nearly 130,000 people received salaries from the Ford Motor Company in early 1929. By August 1931 fewer than 40,000 were on the payroll. The trend nationwide was not encouraging. Between 1929 and 1932 the national income fell from $81 billion to $41 billion. Wages declined by 60 percent. [. . .] For rural America in 1933 there was the dustbowl blues, as go the lyrics of a popular song by Woody Guthrie. Wind storms ravaged farmlands in the West; the unclouded skies that followed were darkened by waves of grasshoppers that destroyed any crops the winds had spared. By the mid-thirties over 350,000 farmers had left their fields and were moving in search of work (2).[361]

Before 1929, during the administration of Calvin Coolidge in particular, the country's economy was vigorous and prosperous. The country now gradually became more wary of identifying its interests with the interests of big business, learning the tough lesson of austerity and failure, as the Stock Market Crash of 1929 plunged the country into the Great Depression, an economic crisis that affected millions of Americans. For most, the 1920s and the 1930s represented a time of crass materialism and declining values, so much that, in 1924, President

Coolidge had declared that "the chief business of the American people is business," a philosophy which has dominated the country's political and social agendas since then.[362] Not surprisingly, many authors during this period responded to the 1920s with disillusionment. F. Scott Fitzgerald considered the consequences of American affluence in his novel The Great Gatsby (1925); Sinclair Lewis criticized social conformity and small-town hypocrisy in novels like Babbitt (1922) and Dodsworth (1929). Turning to what many critics have defined as a civilization in collapse, Tennessee Williams joined in the refrain, by asserting: "[t]he South once had a way of life that I am just old enough to remember—a culture that had grace, elegance [. . .] and inbred culture [. . .] not a society based on money, as in the North. I write out of a regret for that" (qtd. in Devlin 43).[363]

By setting The Glass Menagerie (1946) in the 1930s—what Tom Wingfield remembers as "a quaint period" of American history—Tennessee Williams not only revisits past (and troubled) history to make it present (which Margaret Mitchell also does with Gone with the Wind), but clearly plagues the US South (and the country as a whole) with a crisis of masculine possibilities: "[t]he huge middle-class of America," as Tom explains, is now "matriculating in a school for the blind. Their eyes had failed them or they had failed their eyes, and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy" (144-5). Having lost sight of its future, America is dissatisfied with its present, only sure of its past—a past which every day reminded Americans that the promised land was slowly failing them.

In his quarter of Saint Louis, people may indeed gather at the Paradise Dance Alley and dance to the tune of "[A]ll the World is Waiting for the Sunrise," but as Tom explains: "[a]ll the world was waiting for bombardments" (30). The mention of bombardment and of

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[361] Delma E. Presley, The Glass Menagerie: An American Memory (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990).
[362] Calvin Coolidge, "To the Society of Newspaper Editors." Plymouth. 1925. Address.

the war signifies, of course, a passage into manhood, since war has always been traditionally associated with masculinity, a rite of passage marking men from children and distinguishing the male's terrain from the female's. If Faulkner's men never truly look ahead, Tom—on the contrary—like most men of his generation seems to be forever expecting a chance to test and prove his missing manhood, looking toward a future that is announced as possibly redemptive: if here (in Saint Louis), "there was only shouting and confusion," Tom looks to Spain where "there was revolution [. . .] In Spain there was Guernica" (144-5).

Yet, revolution has not arrived yet, and the present, by contrast, shows what critics have identified as "the spectacle of a dying culture in which all share the experience of discontinuity between a meaningful and integrative past and a commodified present, and all suffer the social atomization that inevitably accompanies that commodification" (Savran 89).[364] Like most men of his generation, Tom Wingfield, the narrator of this "memory play," has not been sheltered from this meaningless existence. He works in a warehouse, living a dreadful existence and temporarily forgets the banality and boredom of every day life in front of movie screens. The sense of "social atomization" is nowhere better exemplified than in the description of Tom's family home. In the play, not a word of dialogue has been uttered before the author gives a very specific picture of the setting of the play. This world is "rather dim and poetic," marked by desperation. The homes are depicted as "hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths," and from the very first scene, as Paller remarks: "[w]e don't need knowledge of the [entire] play to understand Williams' attitude toward this world and the conformity it imposes on its citizens. It is a world to escape," one of

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[363] Louise Davis, "That Baby Doll Man: Part I." Tennessean Magazine 3 (1957): 12-13, 30-31; rpt. in Albert J. Devlin, ed., Conversations with Tennessee Williams (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 43-49.

[364] David Savran, Taking It Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998).

suffocating closeness and stultification (37).[365] The interior of the apartment, in particular, shows little hope:

> Nearest the audience is the living room, which also serves as a sleeping room for Laura, the sofa unfolding to make her bed. Just beyond, separated from the living room by a wide arch or second proscenium with transparent faded portieres (or second curtain), is the dining room. In an old-fashioned what-not in the living-room are seen scores of transparent glass animals. A blown-up photograph of the father hangs on the wall of the living-room, to the left of the archway. It is the face of a very handsome young man in a doughboy's First World War cap. He is gallantly smiling, ineluctably smiling, as if to say "I will be smiling forever" (2).

Also hanging on the wall, near the photograph, are the typewriter keyboard chart and a Gregg shorthand diagram. An upright typewriter on a small table stands beneath the charts.

If for Rhett Butler the final return to the family home seems to provide the hope needed in times of social and cultural anxiety, Tom's family structure reveals that the popular image of the US in the 1950s as "a land of prosperous and happy families in their comfortable suburban homes, of domesticated sexuality and stable gender roles" is far from accurate (Savran 5). According to this image, "at the center of this family is a hardworking husband father and wife mother for whom the most important commission is the propagation and education of children who grow up to be like their parents—property-owning husbands and housewives living a life of affluence and abundance" (Savran 6). Additionally, as Elaine Tyler May explains, this fantasized image of the nuclear family was to provide a refuge, the one sphere in which "people could control their destinies and perhaps even shape the future" (May

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[365] Michael Paller, Gentleman Callers, Tennessee Williams, Homosexuality, and Mid-Twentieth Century Broadway Drama (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

24).[366] Within these walls, May continues, "potentially dangerous forces [. . .] might be tamed, where they could contribute to the secure and fulfilling life to which postwar women and men aspired" (24). At the heart of this domestic ideal was the strict prescription of masculine and feminine roles, according to which "the cult of the warm, giving 'Mom' [stood] in contrast to the 'capable', 'competent' and 'go-getting' male" (24). Of course, and as May also points out, these normative models put severe and often impossible pressures on men, on women, and on the nuclear family as an institution, in part because the society as family was the ideal toward which Southern society should strive. Richard H. King adds: "individual and regional identity, self-worth, and status were determined by family relationships. The actual family was destiny and the region was conceived as a vast metaphorical family" (4).[367] In Tom's case, the head of the house is a single mother whose husband left her long ago and whose life symbolizes, in this case, "the impersonal nature of city life that bothered the Amandas of this time [who] also were disillusioned by shifting attitudes toward marriage, the family, and sex" (Presley 6).[368] Moreover, the walls of the apartment enclose rather than protect from dangerous forces, and in their midst, characters like Tom hardly control their destiny.

6.2. The Overwhelming Presence of Women.

Tom's home, far from providing men with relief and comfort, is a place that Tom has needed to escape from, not merely because of the "scrutiny of a demanding parent" (Paller 37), but also because of the existence of his helpless sister Laura. In this regard, the women in The Glass Menagerie (and Tom's mother in particular) are not different from the ones who absorb General Archbald in The Sheltered Life. Scene three for example portrays Tom and Amanda fighting violently because Amanda has interrupted Tom's writing. According to

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[366] Elaine Tyler May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War (New York: Basic Books, 1988).
[367] Richard H. King, "A Southern Renaissance," A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 3-38.

Paller, she has, "invaded his privacy by peering over his shoulder as he types. He is furious at this trespass, at her attempt to see what he is writing. Perhaps the trespass alone is enough to set him off, or perhaps he specifically wants to keep his work secret from her" (Paller 40). Constantly telling him how to chew his food or when to get up to go to work, the mother—from the very beginning of the play—is clearly associated as the villain who insists on turning the son into the responsible man that his father was not, i.e. into a figure of dominant masculinity that runs counter to the man he claims to be—the magician who "[has] tricks in [his] pocket, [. . .] things up [his]sleeve [. . .] [giving] truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion" (144).

Like Ashley Wilkes in <u>Gone with the Wind</u>, Tom is therefore represented as an artist condemned by history and circumstances to become a worker for a job he is not even good at. To make matters worse, Tom shares with Ashley Wilkes in <u>Gone with the Wind</u> a castrating mother-figure: Scarlett becomes Ashley's "symbolic" mother, by being summoned to take care of him when his wife, Melanie, dies; Tom is castrated by a "true" mother who constantly corrects him, urging him to masticate his food and sit up straight: "Chew your food, don't gulp it," she interjects, "Eat like a human being and not like a dog!" (139-40). Unsettling to Tom, in this instance, is the experience of a new and unaccustomed embodiment: Amanda's power does not simply come from her threatening motherhood, but she is also monstruous because she forces Tom to live, not in mind and spirit, but in his body and thus forces onto him a crisis of gender identity. Tom, the artist, is reduced to bodily materiality and his gender crisis is mapped onto what could be called the crisis of a white male authorship under siege. Tom's frustration is felt clearly when he exclaims:

> Listen! You think I'm crazy about the warehouse? (He bends fiercely toward
>
> her slight figure). You think I'm in love with the Continental Shoemakers? You

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[368] Delma E. Presley, <u>The Glass Menagerie: An American Memory</u> (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990).

think I want to spend fifty-five years down there in that—celotex, interior! With fluorescent—tubes! Look! I'd rather somebody picked up a crowbar and battered out my brains—than go back mornings! I go! Everytime you come in yelling that God damn "Rise and Shine!" "Rise and Shine!" I say to myself "How lucky dead people are!" But I get up. I go! For sixty-five dollars a month I give up all that I dream of doing and being ever! And you say self—self's all I ever think of. Why, listen if self is what I thought of, Mother, I'd be where he is—GONE! (pointing to father's picture). As far as the system of transportation reaches! (Scene 3).

Amanda's anxieties, as Stein has remarked, are "in large part economic and there is money behind many of her illusions: her mythical suitors were all wealthy men, as are her magazine heroes; she computes the money Tom would save by giving up smoking" (38). And when Amanda accepts a demeaning job at Famous and Barr's department store demonstrating ladies' undergarments in order to pay for Laura's tuition, she reduces herself even further. Of course, here lies the core of the problem for Tom: in suggesting how her son should behave, when he should get up, and where he should work, Amanda dishonors the artist by locating him as an economic actor in a market place rather than as a creative spirit. The vulnerability of the masculine is fully evident from the first pages of <u>The Glass Menagerie</u>, separating the poet/artist from the debased cultural form provided by the consumer/magazine salesperson. Horrified by this prospect, Tom retreats into the position of wounded spirit fighting against the domination of women. He refuses, in other words, to be the inauthentic man that Amanda would like to produce of him. Tom here voices the concerns of some of the cultural commentators of the time period who suggested that "conformity signals not only an abandonment of masculinity understood as uniqueness and

individual will but also capitulation to the imperatives of a mass, mechanized culture"
(Robinson 92).[369]

Also, mother's constant surveillance over her son is reminiscent of Steinmann and
Fox's reference to feminism as "the avalanche of words by or about women" when these
explain that "man [is] told that he must move over, but no one has bothered to tell him where
or how. Like the establishment, he has become a symbol, a shadow" (9).[370] In turn, this
avalanche of words—in mother's case, the avalanche of commands—threatens "to suffocate
men, who are thus not only silenced, but also at risk of injury" (Robinson 24). The male body
is here threatened by a woman who is engaged in victimizing the white male author and
mutilating the cultural sphere by selling magazine subscriptions by telephone. Seen in this
light, the play initially poses authorship, creativity and masculinity against femininity,
domesticity, and commercialism.

Understandably, David Savran explains that "The Glass Menagerie does not center on
Tom [. . .]. Instead, Tom remains, in Williams' words, 'in the background,' constantly
deferring to the 'leading characters,' Amanda and Laura, the two figures in the play who
undergo demonstrable transformations" (93). Despite her fragility, Laura—like Eva Birdsong
in The Sheltered Life or even Ellen Robillard in Gone with the Wind—has become a leading
character in the play, mainly because she represents "the kind of person for whom the
romantics of the early 19th century felt an increasing sympathy: the fragile almost unearthly
ego brutalized by life in the industrialized, overpopulated depersonalized cities of the western

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[369] Sally Robinson, Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); On
that note, and for analyses of conflicts within hegemonic masculinity in the 1940s and 1950s, refer to: David
Savran, Taking it Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Barbara Ehrenreich, The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and
the Flight from Commitment (New York: Anchor Books, 1983); Robert J. Corber, Homosexuality in Cold
War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

[370] Anne Steinmann and David J. Fox, The Male Dilemma: How to Survive the Sexual Revolution (New York:
Jason Aronson, 1974).

world" (Cardullo 81).[371] Going daily to the art museum and the birdhouses at the zoo, Laura admits: "lately I've been spending most of my afternoons in the Jewel Box, that big glass house where they raise tropical flowers" (33). Like a romantic, Laura has a love for nature that is absent from the Wingfield apartment. In this neighborhood, "cellular living units" have replaced nature since they "flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centers of lower middle-class population" (21). Laura's name itself places her in a strong communion with nature. For Brett Cardullo it "signifies her affinity for the natural together with the transcendent" since Laura is "somewhat ironically derived from the laurel shrub or tree, a wreath of which was conferred as a mark of honor in ancient times upon dramatic poets, military heroes, and athletic victors; and "Wingfield" brings to mind the flight of birds across a meadow and on up into the sky" (82).

Laura's love for nature does not truly come as a surprise. Her extreme sensibility and frailty render her closer to the vegetal and even the animal world. Compared with Tom and even Jim, the communion with nature of the southern female represents what the southern males have lost (what the father possibly attempted to retrieve). The mother has an excessive communion with nature. When outdoors with her young callers, she would gather too many jonquils. Tom and Jim have been placed indoors and perform like machines their factory duties. Cardullo remarks that in "his aspiration to become a television engineer [Jim] identifies himself with the utilitarian world of mathematics and machines" (82). Displaced from nature, sent to new urban places like St. Louis and set behind desks or machines, Tom dreams of wide open spaces, of a nature that he can only enjoy indoors, at the movie theater. Laura, too, remains indoors. Yet like her mother who brings jonquils to the inside of her home, Laura subverts her imprisonment by bringing nature into her world. As Bachelard would say, such spaces grow out of a kind of "topophilia," a mapping of space we love, space

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[371] Brett Cardullo, "The Blue Rose of St Louis: Laura, Romanticism, and The Glass Menagerie." <u>The Tennessee</u>

"that may be defended against adverse forces" but also may be "eulogized" and therefore "poeticized" (xxxi).[372] And Laura, like Tennessee Williams, seems to find more kindness in nature than in her fellow man. If she is no man, she possesses however a man's ability to read nature. This secret space offers Laura a kind of nest and has much to do with her character. Indeed, as critics have noted, her character as the virgin Belle patiently waiting for Gentleman Callers did offer a kind of nest to a society that had become prey to the rampant changes of the New South. Not surprisingly, Savran explains, the term "blue roses" reveals Laura as "a self-contradictory icon—simultaneously natural and unnatural, beautiful and grotesque, picture and spoken text—it does not belong to any one subject but, as a kind of collective hallucination, hovers above subjectivity and, indeed, above private property" (94).[373]

Whereas Laura entertains her illusions through her glass menagerie, Amanda her mother entertains a false reverie of the Old South. As a consequence, Joseph Wood Krutch, in the line of many other critics, defines this mother-figure in the play as "an absurd and pathetic widow," who "is defeated by a crude and pushing modernity which neither understands nor respects her dream of gentility" (326, qtd. in Presley 36-37).[374] On that note, The Glass Menagerie has often been regarded as a nice play, "so pacific as to barely reveal a pulse" (Paller 33). In her desire for another life as exemplified by her preparing her daughter Laura, for possible gentleman callers, Amanda compares to Blanche Dubois in A Streetcar Named Desire or Eva Birdsong in The Sheltered Life, another faded belle trapped (like a canary) in a hostile urban setting. In this sense, Amanda would "belong to [this] long line of faded

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Williams Review (1998): 81-92.

[372] Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); qtd. in John Lowe, "The Construction and Deconstruction of Masculinity in The Yearling." Mississippi Quarterly 57 (Spring 2004): 231-46.

[373] David Savran, Communists, Cowboys, and Queers; the Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

[374] Joseph Wood Krutch, American Drama since 1918 (New York: George Brazallier, 1957).

Southern belles who live in the past [. . .] fragile, passive, dependent, alienated, helpless, and rather pathetic (Paller 34).

Like Blanche Dubois, certainly, Amanda does feel the strong hold of the past, as she remembers her gentleman callers and happier times among oak trees of large plantations and the refined manners of old southern stock. Yet, Amanda (like Blanche Dubois) suggests a critical discourse on the past and such discourse seems to represent the women's way to salvation. This is particularly true of <u>Gone with the Wind</u>. Scarlett, by repeating "Tomorrow is another day," remembers to remember the future. In <u>The Glass Menagerie</u>, Amanda, like Scarlett, cherishes the childhood of her past but she is essentially concerned with the future, as she repeatedly wishes on the moon, as she says: "Success and happiness for my precious children! I wish for that whenever there's a moon and when there isn't a moon, I wish for it too" (40).

By opening this play with a return to the past while waiting for future bombardments, Tom himself is caught between two time frames, as if unable to close the past definitely, which, in turn, may underline a certain fondness for this past or at least a past experience that is not closed and might need to be reassessed. Like Tom, Amanda is caught between two periods of history, when she revisits her past and admits to Jim O'Connor: "I wasn't prepared for what the future brought me" (49). Yet, if they are both looking toward the past from their vantage points, Amanda does it with one essential difference: in remembering her past, she begs to consider how the future has failed its promise, how her past and the Old South have become a lost cause. She is, as Paller explains, "a shrewd, pragmatic woman who knows exactly what the world is like, even as she wishes it were more like the one in which she spent her sheltered childhood" (36). Amanda, particularly, is not completely out of touch with reality, for "while [she] recalls experiencing many moments of elegance as a belle, she also

acknowledges that the past has left her empty-handed as she attempts to cope with the present" (Presley 5).

Here, her approach to the past is one of "active forgetting," what Nietzsche described as the selective remembering, the recognition that not all past forms of knowledge and not all experiences are beneficial for present and future life. Ramadanovic explains that "the call for active forgetting is thus the call for a difficult break in the opposition between past and future, presence and absence, remembering and forgetting, being and not being, thinking and acting" (11). There is here what Nietzsche refers to when calling for an abandonment of the Past. The inability to do so, Nietzsche argues, will make the past "return as a ghost and disturb the peace of a later moment" (61).[375] Only cows, for Nietzsche, can live happily without boredom and pain, because they do not remember. Nietzsche thus advises one to become "immersed in forgetting, [for] one withdraws not only the subject's claim on objects but also the claim on the subject's unity, self-sufficiency, and groundedness" (11). Ultimately, forgetting "enables the human to step outside of history" (Ramadanovic 1).

Ultimately, Amanda's approach and Laura's retreat into the illusory world of her glass menagerie reveal that these women are attentive to the needs of the past and present yet able to distinguish between what in the past is advantageous and what is disadvantageous for life, as she works tirelessly to safeguard her children: she struggles to train her daughter for a profession, not to raise her as a belle, and she tries to find her a husband so that she doesn't end up a destitute old maid trailing from one unwelcoming relative's home to another (Paller 35). She is also aware of her son's unhappiness, of his desire to leave home. There is, in Amanda's willingness to fight against adversity, a strength typical of Tennessee Williams' female characters. As McGlinn explains: "[i]n seven plays written in a twenty year period,

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[375] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History in Life," Untimely Meditations, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1983); Petar Ramadanovic's article, "From Haunting to Trauma: Nietzsche's Active Forgetting and Blanchot's Writing of the Disaster," treats of this subject.

Williams uses essentially the same dramatic situation. A woman is presented at a moment when frustration has led to a crisis. She has only two possible ways of acting: to face reality or to retreat into illusion" (511).[376]

If Amanda is that concerned about Tom's and even Laura's daily (hourly?) activities, it is because she knows too well that her children's lives, in this small-crowded apartment in a Midwestern city, have contradicted her memories and the promises of the South—its Gentleman Callers, Amanda's childhood in Mississippi, a land of chivalry and romance comparable to the one described in Gone with the Wind (Amanda mentions the novel in one of her telephone conversations)—are replaced by the absent husband and the typewriter featured prominently in the apartment's decor. Yet, forced out of her romantic illusions by the reality of her life, Amanda in The Glass Menagerie becomes less a pitiful sheltered woman and more fully a tragic heroine. "If we did not laugh at Amanda," Da Ponte argues "I suspect we should cry, for there is a certain pathetic heroism in her efforts to provide for her children" (54). A measure of her refusal to face actuality appears in her attitude toward Laura—the cotton wads she makes her stuff into her blouse ("gay deceivers," she calls them) her shrill denial that Laura is crippled: "Don't say crippled! You know that I never allow that word to be used!" Amanda, Da Ponte adds, is a "curious combination of exaggerated gentility on one hand and exasperating practicality on the other" (54). "You be the lady this time and I'll be the darky," she tells Laura at the dinner table; "Resume your seat, little sister—I want

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[376] Jeanne M. McGlinn, "Tennessee Williams' Women: Illusion and Reality, Sexuality and Love," Tennessee Williams: a Tribute, ed. Jack Tharpe (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977) 510-11; On that note, it is interesting to observe that the surviving Belles that we have are all mothers or mothers-to-be. Amanda and Stella (in A Streetcar Named Desire) share the same energy to survive, at least to give life to the next generation, whereas the vanishing or fading belles are ones like Blanche, Eva Birdsong, or Jennie Blair's aunt; sort of androgynous figures forced by history to assume the role of their fathers or their husbands (or both) while forced by their culture and society to uphold their femininity. Women, in a time of crisis, were given the choice to face reality and adapt, or retreat into illusion.

you to stay fresh and pretty—for gentleman callers" (54). [377] Forced out of her conventional (passive) gender role by necessity, the mother becomes, like Scarlett, self-reliant not by choice alone. The way these women appropriate the staples of masculinity (the work sphere, nature, etc) also reveals how women may engage in the sexualized space of the males, turning the gender binaries on their heads.

The reference to Villon's line of poetry supports this point. Brett Cardullo explains that Williams' reference to the French poet François Villon with the line "Où sont les neiges," allows him to connect "the humble Laura and the humbled Southern belle of a mother with the great but departed women of Villon's part historical, part legendary ballad, among them Joan of Arc" (85). Cardullo adds: "Villon uses snow here as a symbol of worldly life's evanescence as well as its natural provenance-cum-dissolution, its inevitably lost innocence or tarnished purity" (85). And yet, Tennessee Williams does not only underline the loss of a time of legendary innocence and purity. Considering Villon's reference as a lament for the innocence of the South would contribute to a misreading comparable to Jim's mishearing of Laura's pleurosis for the innocence and fragility of "Blue Roses." By referring to Villon, Williams links the death of an order to the death of great women, thus placing Laura, the "crippled," and Amanda, the "dreamer," as the only protectors of a decaying order. The reference to the "snows of yesteryear" recurs when the gentleman callers of the past are mentioned. Amanda does not only mention her beaux; she specifies if these beaux have been married or not and if they have left any widow, an interesting detail since Amanda is left without these women's status—neither married nor a widow. She is, to that extent, a sort of androgynous figure, transcending the boundaries of life and death and also the boundaries of father and mother, that is, of gender categorization or arbitrary differentiation. By placing the

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[377] Durant Da Ponte, "Tennessee Williams' Gallery of Feminine Characters." Tennessee Studies in Literature 10 (1965): 7-26; rpt. in Jordan Y. Miller, ed., Twentieth Century of Interpretations of A Streetcar Named Desire, A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

Southern Belles centre-stage, Tennessee Williams clearly identifies the heroism of present times with the Southern women, not with the southern heroes.

The result, in a manner echoing the dynamics of <u>Gone with the Wind</u>, becomes an oddly inverted heroic narrative, as redemption in the novel is not to be found in the male sphere of war but rather in the women who have now come to the center of the stage. As Leverich remarks, "rare is the main character in a Williams play who doesn't seek out hostility, who doesn't go out of his or her way to court it. Williams imbued his characters with the "fighting blood" of his father's Tennessee family [. . .] There are no fading belles in his plays—including <u>The Glass Menagerie</u>" (174).[378]

The play is thus caught in a sort of double-bind pattern, asserting, on the one hand, the strength of the female characters in the play and on the other hand, calling for some initiation into the male combat collective. In scene 6, Tom complains that "Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them" (61). "Until there's a war," he adds, "that's when adventure becomes available to the masses" (61). Yet, war has not arrived and, no man, it seems, has remained immune from the hellish atmosphere of Saint Louis. At home and at work, the men's position as patriarch, bread-winner, or figure of authority has been weakened. If there are no fading belles in <u>The Glass Menagerie</u>, as Leverich points out, one is forced to witness that Williams' plays are all filled with fading beaux—if any beau at all!

This absence is clear from the opening lines of <u>The Glass Menagerie</u>: Tom, his father, and even Jim O'Connor—the Gentleman Caller of the play—fail as heroes, lovers, husbands, narrators and even visionaries.[379] While claiming that he is a magician, Tom is nevertheless

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[378] Lyle Leverich, <u>Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams</u> (New York: Crown, 1995); Robert Rice, "A Man Named Tennessee." <u>New York Post</u> [May 4. 1958] M-2.

[379] Interestingly enough, this valorization of failure draws on a tradition within the modern novel as exemplified later by figures like William Faulkner and Samuel Beckett.

condemned to find 'magic' in the movies. Whereas mother is portrayed as the force who plans and builds, Tom seems rather purely passive, comfortably watching the creation in motion as a mere spectator. In a world which has absorbed—it seems—all opportunity for fighting and has let the women of this world become the defenders of hearth, home, and nature, Tom, has become in George Ross Ridge's definition, an anti-hero, "the antithesis of the romantic hero in every respect":

> The anti-hero is weak, vacillating, often absurd; he is the hero of what might have been but never in fact became. Yet his roots are the same as the romantic hero's. Both are the products of romantic self-consciousness and hypersensibility; both are potentially titans of thought, action, feeling. But whereas the romantic hero becomes in fact a "titan," the anti-hero fails because he turns an ironic, debilitating analysis upon himself. The anti-hero is abortive. He is abortive because he is too sophisticated to be a romantic hero or because he is a weakling who cannot act though he retains an immense capacity to feel. In either case the anti-hero is a pathetic figure who despises his weakness. He is no more satisfactory, at length, than his antipode, the romantic hero (428).[380]

Returning to the old apartment every night after the movies, he seems stuck in a world of possibilities yet never able to make these possibilities become real. Tom has become one of the "characters almost devoid of volition," in a world in which, as Roger Boxill says, "nothing much happens" (69).[381] Tom remains crippled just like General Archbald, ready to move, it seems, yet never seen in "motion." Of course, the above judgment is an important consideration in the investigation of the Southern Belle's alleged cohort: If Tom is crippled (emotionally as well as physically), what of Jim O'Connor who is expected to be a beau?

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[380] George Ross Ridge, "The Anti-Hero in Musset's Drama." French Review 32 (April 1959): 428-434.
[381] Roger Boxill, Tennessee Williams (New York: St Martin's Press, 1988).

6.3. Jim, the Narcissistic Redeemer.

Jim O'Connor, Laura's Gentleman Caller, is a nice, ordinary young man, ideally portrayed as "a leader of his class, a hero in athletics, a star in the senior operetta, and a champion debater. His very aspect is forward looking" (Presley 60), for he is, as Williams says, "running or bounding, never just walking" (61). Gender—and Jim's masculinity—here is (once again) constructed on a desire to stage a typically masculine performance and on the ability to assume "roles" that distort or mirror (in Jim's case) their sense of themselves as individuals who embody a specific class or gender. Repeatedly, Jim's gestures are depicted as "extravagant gallantry," with "flourish," and "a discreetly dashing effect" (that are not without recalling Swansdown's own artificial gestures in John P. Kennedy's <u>Swallow Barn</u>). The following passage is worth quoting in full:

(His voice becomes low and husky. Laura turns away, nearly faint with the novelty of her emotions)…

(He suddenly turns her about and kisses her on the lips.) (When he releases her, LAURA sinks on the sofa with a bright, dazed look) (JIM backs away and fishes in his pocket for a cigarette.) . . . . (He lights the cigarette, avoiding her look.) … (He coughs decorously and moves a little farther aside as he considers the situation and senses her feelings, dimly, with perturbation.) … (He pops a mint in his mouth. Then gulps and decides to make a clean breast of it. He speaks slowly and gingerly.) . . . (LAURA sways slightly forward and grips the arm of the sofa. He fails to notice, now enrapt in his own comfortable being) . . . (Leaning swiftly forward, clutching the arm of the sofa, LAURA struggles visibly with her storm. But JIM is oblivious, she is a long way off.) . . . (He crosses deliberately to pick up his hat. The band at the Paradise Dance Hall goes into a tender waltz.) . . .

(He stops at the oval mirror to put on his hat. He carefully shapes the brim and

the crown to give a discreetly dashing effect.)

The scene is particularly telling as the rhetoric associated with Jim's movement points to the

failure of the gentleman to be anything else than mere appearance. Jim "fails to notice;" he is

"oblivious," while "avoiding" Laura's look. He also disguises his breath. Moreover, if Jim

avoids the gazes that may reveal his shallowness (a little further on, Tom describes Jim as

having "the scrubbed and polished look of white chinaware" (61), he also fails to be a true

gentleman because he has not been able to become, as McGlinn would suggest, "concerned

and compassionate or at least ready for unselfish love" (511).[382]

Announced as Gentleman Caller, Jim however is far from being a messiah. To use

Delma Presley's words: "this man of appearances belongs to a world of mirrors that only

reflect one's surface appearance. Even if Jim were not engaged he could not rescue Laura"

(49).[383] If he is not the traditional romantic hero—as could have been expected from the

introduction as gentleman caller—Jim cannot even become a tragic hero or a fallen hero:

absorbed with himself and with mirrors, Jim could never be a beau even if the world was still

a land of knights and princesses.[384] In light of this obsession, Jim becomes an effeminate

character with no other purpose than self-gratification; and the parody of the traditional

southern hero of romance has reached its climax. Like General Archbald, his title of

"Gentleman Caller" is only honorific.

In the above scene, Tom actually plays with the conventionality of the female

spectator, for it is not the female gaze that registers the chivalry (or lack thereof) of the

Southern beau in this scene, but it is the narrator and runaway Tom who registers (and

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[382] Jeanne M. McGlinn, "Tennessee Williams' Women: Illusion and Reality, Sexuality and Love," Tennessee Williams: A Tribute, ed. Jack Tharpe (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977) 510-11.
[383] Delma E. Presley, The Glass Menagerie: An American Memory (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990).

validates) the construction of Jim's masculinity as a southern beau. Noticeably, there never a clue as to what Laura "sees." We may even wonder if she "sees" Jim. By appropriating the traditional female gaze (the spectator), Williams subverts the conventional construction of gender as performance, for here Jim is not meant for Laura (he avoids her look) but for the male self (in the mirror) and for the male gaze of the narrator of the scene (Tom). If as André Bleikasten explains, "the work of art had been defined in psychoanalytic terms as a transnarcissistic object, meant to establish a connection between the narcissism of its producer and that of its consumer" (qtd. in Norton's The Sound and the Fury 414),[385] then Tom's perversion of the connection between producer and consumer in this scene deserves further attention. Indeed, in The Glass Menagerie, the creative impulse seems to be rather intranarcissistic to say the least: Tom's memory play serves no other purpose than self-gratification. In this scene Tom, the narrator, is trying to write not the female subject (the Southern belle that is portrayed from the very first line of Gone with the Wind or in The Sheltered Life, for example) but the "male" subject through a male consciousness, thereby creating bisexual tensions that are essential to the play since they contribute to the subversion of the whole idea of a unified male subject. In this case, the beau, the "ideal male" as seen from another male position deconstructs the standards of normative masculinity imagined and sustained by Amanda, the mother. If male identity, as the play emphasizes, appears as a female construct, Jim becomes the space for interrogating the female's creation of the gentleman mythical ideal. Tom has thus turned Amanda, the arbitrator of acceptable masculinity, on her head.

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[384] Jim has certainly a hubris, an excessive pride, which—for the tragic hero—could lead to his downfall. Yet, the tragic hero is able to evoke pity and sympathy. We feel that if life had been different, if the evil world in which he must live had been different, the tragic hero could have been a true hero. This is not the case for Jim.

[385] André Bleikasten, The Most Splendid Failure: Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

In its own way, Jim's performance is intranarcissistic, for it is driven by his own narrative of hyperbolic virility, as he brags to Laura that, when he was in school, "I was beleaguered by females in those days" (218) and when he reminisces that with his manly voice he "sang the lead baritone in that operetta," *The Pirates of Penzance*. However, as Kolin remarks, he is not "sensing the incongruity between the diminutive operetta and his sexual self-importance" (158).[386] Jim also performs his masculinity before Laura in the candlelit room, as he boasts "look how big my shadow is when I stretch" (225). Jim is a failed beau, and his self-proclaimed sexuality is further devalued in "his (un)intentionally parodying courting rituals, all of which point to a disabling interruption of love" (Kolin 159). For Kolin in particular, and because Williams often situates Jim within a context of failed light and power, Jim underwrites his "self-announced manly expertise in electro-dynamics" because it proves "futile when it comes to restoring the lights in the Wingfield apartment" (159). He is out of place in a romantic setting of shadows, candlelight, music, and dancing (he claims that he is as "comfortable as a cow" and "he moves about the room in a clumsy waltz" (212)) and if he claims expertise about the technical world, Jim knows little about wooing, for "as a courtier, he is clumsy, awkward, gauche, he is a poseur in love" (Kolin 159). Of course, one of the most blatant attacks on Jim's virility comes from his own lips, for "he twice refers to himself as a 'stumblejohn' after inappropriately kissing Laura. Jim is indeed the inept, stumbling john or man in search of sex" (Kolin 160). Stein adds: "the flickering candlelight of Jim's scene with Laura is not enough to sustain the illusion; at the end of their scene this illusion collapses and we are left in darkness" (37).

More than a performer on the stage of Southern gentility, Jim is also announced as the redeemer of this fallen world, a new Christ who will save the lost garden and its fallen

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[386] Philip C. Kolin, "The Family of Mitch: (Un)suitable Suitors in Tennessee Williams," Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Streetcar Named Desire, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Jordan Y. Miller (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

angels.[387] Jim is indeed presented as "the long-delayed but always expected something that we live for" (23), Williams's playing on a familiar subject of modern drama from Maeterlinck's The Intruder to Odet's Waiting for Lefty to Beckett's Waiting for Godot, that is, the anticipated arrival of someone or something that will provide a form of religious, political, or even existential salvation and release to those who await him (or it). By stressing that Jim O'Connor is precisely the "something we've been waiting for," Tom, the narrator, empties Jim of all signification since what the South (and its belles) need(ed) is not so much a gentleman caller as it is the expected redeemer of a world of decay and despair. If Laura becomes the screen onto which romantics could project their expectations, then Jim's appearance in the play seems to further exemplify the desire for a collective and normative model of Southern masculinity. The scene where Tom tells his mother that a Gentleman Caller will appear is (appropriately) entitled "Annunciation," and in the annunciation scene, when Amanda learns that his last name is O'Connor, mother says "that, of course, means fish—Tomorrow is Friday!" As Stein notes, "the remark functions not only literally, since Jim is Irish Catholic, but also figuratively, for the fish is the traditional symbol of Christ. In a very real sense, both Amanda and Laura are searching for a Savior who will come to help them, to save them, to give their drab lives meaning" (40).[388] Seen in this light, the role of magician in the play is not limited to Tom as a kind of Malvolio, who uses the "tricks he carries in his pockets," but is performed, in a similar manner, by Jim O'Connor, the gentleman caller, who must possess the ability to fulfill the expectations of those who have been waiting for so long and to bring the redemption of this society. Like Ned Hazard, Jim is subjected to the fancies of mother and Laura in this order, becoming a construction of abstract collectivism; yet Jim is

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[387] Stein remarks: "we are told by Amanda that the candelabrum 'used to be on the altar at the Church of the Heavenly Rest. It was melted a little out of shape when the church burnt down'" (39).

[388] Roger B. Stein, "'The Glass Menagerie' Revisited: Catastrophe without Violence," Tennessee Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Stephen S. Stanton (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977) 36-45.

also a construction of male narration and in this "male" narration, Jim the Southern beau imagined by Tom's memories through his mother's, suffers from focal ambiguity. If readers (or spectators) come to know what he represents and means to mother or Laura, they never discover who he actually is. Hence his contradictory and fragmented faces: savior, factory worker, pirate, opera singer, being at the same time symbol of nostalgia for a past innocence and a call to corruption, the promise of life and death. Jim becomes what Caddy symbolizes for the Compson brothers: a disembodied provider, a blank screen onto which to project one's desires and one's fears. Jim belongs, in other words, to the novel's utopia, becoming—like Caddy in The Sound and the Fury—the pathetic emblem of that desired "other" life. The Southern play features here a new romantic hero, not only the Southern beau, but a larger than life almost divine hero who, by some act of magic, is expected to transform the dreadful reality of this Saint Louis quarter. Here the play underlines that man's potency is measured not by its pure masculinity but its success in appropriating and emulating the maternal.

As Cardullo remarks, although ironically the "expected something" usually does not arrive, the Gentleman Caller's appearance in The Glass Menagerie is tellingly heralded by Tom's annunciation of his upcoming visit, by Jim's association with a traditional symbol of Christ—the fish—and by Laura's mentioning of her high-school yearbook picture right after she refers to the picture of Jesus' mother in the local art museum" (87). In this instance, Tennessee Williams will destroy any hope for this god-like figure by subverting the traditional symbol; it is Jim's departure and not his arrival that provides a (final) solution to Laura's problems, for "in intensifying her desperation and isolation, Jim's permanent disappearance after Scene 7 [. . .] could be said to hasten her physical and mental deterioration to the point of death," promising a better life in a true heaven that cannot be found on this earth (Cardullo 87). The parallel suggests an obvious attack on the biblical notion of hope and on the Bible and Christ as the very foundations of patriarchy. If Laura, the

angel, requires a God-figure to guarantee her happiness and redeem her, the redeemer has turned into a self-centered and ultimately ineffectual male figure. For Amanda, for Laura, and for Blanche, there is no redeemer, and as Stein explains, "the social catastrophe inherent in The Glass Menagerie lies precisely in the fact that Laura is not Cinderella: the silver slipper finally does not fit, and Jim is not Prince Charming but one of the innumerable Americans who would soon be moving overseas in troop ships" (39).

Jim thus splendidly represents what David Riesman has defined as the other-directed man who operates as though he were controlled by radar, constantly sending out signals and adjusting his movement to conform to his environment. Riesman finds that this type of individual characterizes especially the American middle class for much of the twentieth century: "shallower, freer with his money, friendlier, more uncertain of himself and his values, more demanding of approval" (19).[389] By referring to the outer character as a friendly individual in need of approval, Riesman indirectly presents the construction of such masculinity as one dependent on male bonding. This bonding, in turn, sustains the principles of undifferentiation and hierarchy found in the conventional construction of masculine selfhood that the women/mother experience often tries to unsettle (this, for Susan Jeffords, would explain misogyny).[390] Riesman, thus, suggests that the mechanism for the generation of a collective manhood (one performed for others and approved by other males) is one of masculine bond.[391]   Jim's need for mirrors does betray a sense of uncertainty, and his friendliness, it is true, is uncommon. Yet, Williams parodies Jim's possible construction of masculinity (whether it is inner or outer directed) because, if the male needs approval from his peers, male bonding here is jeopardized by the very absence of non-effeminate (i.e. "true")

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[389] David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney, The Lonely Crowd (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).
[390] Susan Jeffords, The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989).

males. Jim can only find male bonding in mirrors. Jim is not offered as a masculine alternative for realizing a successful reconstruction of masculinity in the quaint period of the 1930s.

When Jim, for instance, mentions that Betty, his girlfriend, "has strings on [him]" and that what calls him away from Laura's company is not "work but Betty," Jim emphasizes that he has become a puppet almost clocked to perfection. The mention of the clock every time he has to meet with Betty is symbolic here: Jim's role as a Southern Cavalier has become nothing more than a timed performance. Of course, and because he measures his self-worth against the standards of money and power, Jim's dialogue is reflective "of a mindset that is set on adhering to the principles of the masculine ethos and its attendant mythologies" (Vorlicky 33).[392] Ironically, in The Glass Menagerie, the matriarchal microcosm has replaced the patriarchal microcosm, thereby aligning Jim's ethos of masculine individual worth with the traditional "other." The Southern Beau has been divested of all privilege.

On closer analysis, however, Jim's failure can be ironically regarded as empowering, for if gender is indeed a performance for Jim (and Tom indirectly), each performance needs a specific arrangement—a director, an actor, and a spectator. And for Southern white hegemonic masculinity to hold power on stage, it needs—as exemplified in traditional southern narratives like Kennedy's Swallow Barn, for instance—a female spectator (Bel Tracy), a patriarchal director (Bel's father), and a male performer (Ned Hazard). In The Glass Menagerie, there is a similar arrangement since Jim is Tom's actor, and like many other southern beaux, he is fully conscious that he plays a role. Addressing Laura, he explains:

> I have a friend who says I can analyze people better than doctors that make a
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> profession of it. I don't claim that to be necessarily true, but I can sure guess a

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[391] Jeffords presents a similar argument in her discussion of the novel In Country. Susan Jeffords, The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989).

person's psychology, Laura! . . . Yep—that's what I judge to be your principal trouble. A lack of confidence in yourself as a person. You don't have the proper amount of faith in yourself.

Believing that Laura suffers from an inferiority complex, he goes on: "you know what my strong advice to you is? Think of yourself as superior in some way" (103). Quoting his own superiority in "electrodynamics," he believes that Laura can surely cultivate something. Of course, in this scene, Jim the emissary from reality becomes "the chief spokesman for the American dream" (Stein 38). Stein notes: "the lecture on self-confidence which he reads to Laura is part of the equipment of the future executive. He is awed by the fortune made in chewing gum and rhapsodizes on the theme of the future material progress of America [. . .] Full steam—Knowledge—Zzzzzp! Money—Zzzzzp! Power!" (38). The conversation, then, as Delma Presley notes, "focuses not on Laura but on Jim who, according to the stage directions, "unconsciously glances at himself in the mirror" before describing his night course in "public speaking" (61). It is not, therefore, in the prospect of her marriage to Jim that Laura gets a chance to gain individuality and a life separate from her mother. It is at that moment, I would argue, when Laura is offered the opportunity to join Jim on the stage of gender performativity; at that moment when the Belle-to-be is given the chance not only to witness the performativity of gender roles but also to take part in the drama (or melodrama) of Southern chivalry.

By inviting Laura to "think [herself] superior in some way," Jim not only admits that his masculine superiority is indeed a performance, but he also asks Laura to step up onto the stage with him. By doing so, Jim offers to displace the Belle from her traditional role of faithful spectator for the one of player—a move that Williams was to develop also in A Streetcar Named Desire (a move that Rhett Butler has effected when marrying Scarlett). It is

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[392] Robert Vorlicky, Act Like a Man. Challenging Masculinities in American Drama (Ann Arbor: University of

at this very moment that Laura is given the possibility to become the director of her own drama, leaving men to become actors only. Laura is already a strong character in the sense that she has managed to create a world of illusions to protect herself from too harsh a reality. Yet, she is not an independent woman. Like Scarlett O'Hara, however, there is the idea that—if given free license—such women could then turn into the independent rebels of the South. Brett Cardullo, for instance, argues that Jim's "oxymoronic mishearing" of "pleurosis" for "Blue Roses" "is similar to Williams' own incorrect hearing of glass menagerie for grass menagerie the enclosure where a collection of live wild animals is kept" (84). The mishearing is hinted at in the production notes when Williams writes that a recurring tune is like "circus music [. . .] the most delicate music in the world and perhaps the saddest" (9). If the glass menagerie were indeed misheard for grass menagerie, our Belle would become the amazon of a live safari.

In A Streetcar Named Desire, Blanche Dubois, for instance, makes it clear that it is the southern cavalier figure who has the capacity to maintain illusions and to keep the magic alive (and also, like her father, the ability to destroy that magic). In the same way, Stella stresses that it is the man, her "new" beau, who makes the lights go around, thus keeping the illusion alive. Amanda herself wishes upon a Gentleman Caller, for the latter has the ability to create or destroy the magic. It is true that Ned Hazard himself, in Swallow Barn, becomes the "victim" of Bel Tracy's romantic fantasies to maintain her illusions of romance. Yet if Laura could only pretend to be "superior" without the need of a gentleman caller, she would then be able to maintain illusions for herself and, thus, empty the gentleman caller of all signification. By subverting the representation of the gentleman caller and hinting at the possible "direction" of women, Tom revisits and deconstructs—through Jim's performance of gender—the traditional dynamics of southern roles as established by patriarchy.

Michigan Press, 1994).

To reverse the traditional roles contributes to the fragmentation and deconstruction of the traditional pattern of gender performativity, opening a space for interrogating the centrality of Southern masculinity and the way it has traditionally been constructed (i.e. against femininity and the "other"), thus pointing at the artificiality of the whole idea of women's need for protection and men's engrained, fixed masculinity. The essentiality of masculinity as a force of nature is further denied as Tom seems to suggest that Laura could be or could have been the director of her own performance, whereas Jim is not—and cannot be—the director of his own drama, for Jim is first and foremost a symbol, who relies for his existence on his narrator/director (and birth-giver) Tom. Jim is therefore primarily an actor, both a romantic exaggeration and an empty signifier.

As a matter of fact, in this world deprived of father-figures and of God, (i.e. the ultimate model of ideal masculinity), the gentleman caller himself has disappeared, being replaced by this 'something' that possesses all the looks attached to the southern ideal of masculinity, but that uses them to better deceive the people (women in particular) who do not look beyond appearances. It would be a hasty generalization to argue that in Williams' world, all the "real" gentleman callers or beaux are dead. Amanda, for example, does mention the gentleman callers of her youth; of course, one can only rely on her words for their existence, and at any rate, these beaux have become remnants of a fantasy romance doomed to failure and extinction. However, it is important to note that, among the gentleman callers she alludes to, only the one who left the South in order to go to Wall-Street managed to "redeem" himself. There is no room left for the "innocent" Gentleman Callers of Amanda's past: the ones who remained in the South have all been condemned to violent death, and only the displaced beaux—it seems—have been able to avoid this tragic end. The demise of the romantic hero is complete: the description of the "beaux" in this scene—pictured carrying a picture of their platonic love when they die—follows what Catherine Creft calls a"Don

Quixote gender reversal," for it is men who take over the traditional roles of women; they are "silent," "devoted," and "allowed a single passion for their lifetimes" (Craft 834). In this world—as Tennessee Williams suggests—if the romantic or tragic hero did exist, he would then become a laughable figure. [393]

Obviously, Saint Louis is no Wall Street, and here the only hope seems to lie for the Jim O'Connors of the period, those "fake" beaux who have become more obsessed with materialism and technology than with the manners and the chivalry of the traditional archetype. As Delma Presley notes, Jim embodies almost perfectly Carnegie's description of a man with a future, for "he has technical knowledge and it happens to be in the area of the media—radio engineering and television" (Presley 60).[394] Read in this light, Jim's attitude matches perfectly Dale Carnegie's view of the ideal man, as outlined in How to Win Friends and Influence People, a best-seller since 1936: "the man who has technical knowledge plus the ability to express his ideas, to assume leadership, and to arouse enthusiasm among men— that man is headed for higher earning power" (33). Yet, Jim's opportunistic dream of material success, his "coldly rationalistic strategy for achieving monetary gain" may point, as Cardullo remarks, to the direction the American-led, postwar world was to take (92). The failure of electric power after dinner leads to Amanda's question: "[w]here was Moses when the lights went off?" According to Stein, such a question suggests the need for "another savior who would lead his people from the desert into the Promised Land, but the answer to her question is '[i]n the dark'" (41).

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[393] On the influence of Don Quixote in Southern American Literature, we can read: Montserrat Ginès, The Southern Inheritors of Don Quixote (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000). My reflection, in this paragraph, is informed by: Catherine A. Craft, "Reworking Male Models: Aphra Behn's 'Fair Vow-Breaker,' Eliza Haywood's "'Fantomina' and Charlotte Lennox's 'The Female Quixote'." The Modern Language Review 86.4 (Oct.1991): 821-838.

[394] Dale Carnegie, How to Win Friends and Influence People (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1936).

6.4. The Failure of the Epic.

As if trying to find an outer direction away from home, from the savage embodiment of the male artist, and from normative masculinity, Tom, in his admiration for Malvolio, the magician, in his frequent allusions to his absent father, and in his final departure for war, undertakes to complete what could be called a quest for the father, the quest for an ideal of manhood that has been jeopardized by a world of female bonding and control. In the manner of Rhett Butler, Ashley Wilkes, or General Archbald, who arrogate to themselves a space outside of struggles over identity and cultural value by laying claim to a universalized and seemingly disembodied creative or intellectual tradition, The Glass Menagerie attempts to erase the marks scripted by mother, sister, and the past onto the body of the white male author.

Tom's fascination with Malvolio, the magician, in particular serves the purpose. It is no accident that the play begins with a crisis of paternal metaphor. Stein even considers Malvolio as "the modern Christ [who] performs the miracle of turning water into wine and then goes on to blasphemy by turning the wine into beer and then whiskey" (41). Most important, maybe, is the fact that Malvolio escapes from a nailed coffin. As Tom exclaims, "you know it don't take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed-up coffin, Laura. But who in hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail?" (Scene 4). The illumination of the father's photograph at this point suggests one answer to this question, yet as Stein remarks, Tom does not see it (41).[395] Tom's reunion with the father is needed and desired (for he wishes to go where his father has been 'gone') and yet, at the same time, announced as utterly impossible. "Gone" is not a place that can be found. In fact, Tom's deliberate rendering of his father's photograph (with the mention of "I will be smiling

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[395] Roger B. Stein, "'The Glass Menagerie' Revisited: Catastrophe without Violence." Tennessee Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Stephen S. Stanton. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977.

forever") confirms that the father in the World War I uniform has long since been divested of his cultural mystique and authority.

In his desire to retrieve what was lost in 'long distance,' a lost real masculinity, a 'wholeness,' Tom's narrative calls here for a parallel with the epic, since the epic hero usually participates in a cyclical journey or quest that will ultimately heal a wounded masculinity. As the story of Tom (or even Jim) plays itself out, it may be expected that this man should recoup the power he has lost. Yet, Tom never really recoups—nor even wishes to recoup—a typically masculine power. Indeed, Tom's quest to search for what was lost in space and in time does not celebrate the feats nor the exploits of a legendary or traditional hero, even less that of a father-figure who has valued long distances over family. Rather, The Glass Menagerie is a mock epic or an anti-epic that celebrates instead the anti-heroism and failures of the Southern beau, the traditional hero of the South.

By searching for what was lost in space (and in time), Tom's narrative attempts to trace an absolute history beyond history, as an effort of returning to (and ultimately putting away) an earlier state of society which seems to be preserved in fictional representations (which Rhett Butler seems ready to do). Yet, attempts to live "romance" in real life are bound to fail: mother and Laura risen out of the past are not mother and Laura recaptured. Memory only serves to further exacerbate a sense of loss and the sense that the past is never a shelter. If Tom's memory—as he admits—"takes much poetic license," moving freely from the past (the 1930s) and the present (1944-45), the past however is still too much influential on this undesirable present. Tom indeed is the one who is ultimately unable to abandon actively a past measure and to reconstitute a new measure as the basis for new experiences. Tom, it is true, does make a choice and does break away without making certain that Laura is cared for (an act that does indeed require will and energy), but the "break is not total. Every night after escaping the prison of home and warehouse he sees his sister, his jailer" (Paller 36). Even

after leaving St Louis, the bright color of the cities he finds remind him of leaves "torn away from the branches," and on traveling (that is through space), Tom always remembers a moment from his past: "I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow" (124). And because the character who leaves at the end of the play is the same one who writes and thus initiates the play, Tom's work also calls into question the very possibility of ending. The end of Tom's therapeutic memory play, as a result, does not talk cure: the loss of memory cannot and will not be offered as a viable option. Time in The Glass Menagerie is therefore not redemptive. Caught in space and caught in time, Tom suffers, much like Quentin Compson in The Sound and the Fury, from a crisis of masculine possibilities.

The description of the play as a "memory play" also conveys the assumption that Tom's (and Williams') historical reflection is a process best done in the present, in archives that, if given time, will reveal an historical and a literary past as finally over, waiting for explication, or to use Leonard Barkan's term, ready for "unearthing."[396] More than a simple reenactment of nostalgia, or the inability to deal with the trauma of childhood, the narrator is here placed in a conflation between past, present, and future, as if Tom wanted to answer the question that Rhett sets to resolve when leaving at the end of Gone with the Wind: How did I get there? And the South that is being described in front of our eyes, the "quaint period of the 1930s," thus becomes exposed as if its narrator wished to return to a period (the only period, maybe) of imaginary mastery, to impose, in a Nietzchean approach, a certain horizon of

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[396] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Unearthing the Past: Archeology and Aesthetics" in The Making of Renaissance Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). Nietzsche, himself, argued that to construct history, it is necessarily to impose a certain horizon of meaning. According to him, historians do not see the event when it happened, but rather narrate it, reconstructing it in the historical present. In doing so they make the past event happens (as a discrete past event). So, the time appears to be ripe not only once for each event (8); Petar Ramadanovic, "From Haunting to Trauma: Nietzsche's Active Forgetting and Blanchot's Writing of the Disaster." Postmodern Culture 11.2 (2001) 11 March 2001.
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/pmc/v011/11.2ramadanovic.html>

meaning. Yet, because the past, in a pre-Faulknerian approach, is not even past, Tom's historical imagination does battle with the memory of a traumatic past that insistently presses its claim on the present—there is no fading belle in <u>The Glass Menagerie</u> because the Southern Belle has refused to fade in a more literal sense.

The residual demand of history in Tom's case not only threatens Tom's sanity, but it also threatens "the redemptive narrative with penetration from events [and people] that it cannot overcome or move beyond" (Anderson 1).[397] Tom invites the audience and his family to participate in his imagination. In doing so, the narrator rejects the claim to establish a single unified way of representing his "own" subject. His narrative, as a consequence, stages the impossibility of transparently recovering the past; instead, the past must be reconstituted through a process of retelling and interpretation. In this way, the story becomes a collective rather than personal property: mother's voice (like Laura's) dissolves the boundary between presence and absence and creates the unconscious discourse between the conscious and unconscious in Tom's tortured thoughts. His voice as a man becomes "othered" because he speaks from the (cross-gendered) position of the mother. These voices thus call into question the "phallic illusions of authority" of Tom's narrative (Gallop 20).[398] It also authorizes woman's entry into male§dominated realms of cultural production. Also, because Tom increasingly foregrounds his dependence on members of his past for the composition of his memory play, he announces the subjectivity and fallibility of the narrator—elements that are traditionally effaced within the genre of the epic. As John J. Su analyzes, "the rejection of narrative authority comes as a natural consequence of the rejection of epic heroes and political demagoguery, for traditional narrative conventions allow claims to an omniscient

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[397] Thomas Page Anderson, <u>Performing Early Modern Trauma from Shakespeare to Milton</u> (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006).

[398] Jane Gallop, <u>Reading Lacan</u> (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

and unitary vision" (557).[399] As a consequence, any narrative form seeking to impose (like mother) a unified narrative of gender roles can do so only through metaphorical and literal violence.

Tom's father himself, by preferring long distances to the family unit, marks his resistance to the epic-hero ideal, for he has refused to sacrifice his individual self for the sake of his family. Ultimately, the rejection of the traditional epic represents a rejection of the longing for a homogeneous (historical) identity—either male or southern. The uncoupling of the hero, on the one hand, and the South, on the other hand, rejects here the ideals associated with the traditional epic (where hegemonic masculinity or the leading male figure and the nation, in this case the South, have become equated). By rejecting its claims to establish a single way of representing the Southern subject, Tom's failures to meet any of the expectations of the epic hero not only undermine the claim that males are representative figures of the South but also rejects efforts to embody the South more generally.

The same can be argued for Rhett Butler in Gone with the Wind or General Archbald in Glasgow's The Sheltered Life. Even the most idealized embodiments of "epic communities"—like Ashley Wilkes in Gone with the Wind or Mitch in A Streetcar Named Desire—fail because their destinies seem too closely associated with the fate of their communities or nation, or leaders. The leader or epic hero in southern romance is traditionally seen as the sole force for effective positive social change. Yet neither Jim, Tom, nor his father can bring progress, only failure. The figures in the play who succeed in shaping the South as a 'lost cause' and their future by force of their will or imagination are Laura and Amanda, the southern belles of the play. As Williams and other authors underline it, however, the equation of leader and nation, of masculine figures like Robert E. Lee and the South, is dangerous, for the fates of Tom, Mitch, or Ashley have become so closely associated with the fate of their

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[399] John J. Su, "Epic of Failure: Disappointment as Utopian Fantasy in Midnight's Children." Twentieth Century

leaders that it will lead to inevitable disappointments. In a world like <u>The Glass Menagerie</u>, a strong matriarchy has replaced the traditional patriarchy. Old codes, the old equation of leader and nation no longer applies, and the male figure does not (and cannot) recognize himself in a matriarchal figure like Amanda or in the materialistic Jim O'Connor, both of whom have come to replace the Robert E. Lees and the strong father 'symbols' of ideal southern masculinity.

Tom's flight, in the end, then, is not to be understood as homage to his father's experience or as an inadequate attempt to reenact invisibility and cultural unmarking, but it is to be understood as a bitter parody of it. For Tom, certainly, his dreams to escape to the sea or else to join the cowboy space he watches on screen may be, of course, read as Tom's individual search for masculine or even patriarchal direction. Tom's numerous allusions to the Jolly Roger, for example, may allude to a dream of collective mechanism in which the male can bond within an all male community (composed of 'bachelors'), living a roving predatory life in the fashion of a Rhett Butler as blockade runner. Yet, unlike the sacralized remains (and accounts) of the gentleman callers of Amanda's youth, the reality of the beau— as exemplified by Tom's father—has revealed itself to be inglorious and sad.

Not surprisingly maybe, Tom becomes a mock-pirate whose Jolly Roger turns into a merchant ship on which Tom merely "will be furnishing food, clothing, and arms to other men and ships, not stealing such resources from them, as murderous pirates would do" (Cardullo 91). Tom's failure, in that sense, will leave the world with other mock-pirates, the Jim Connors of the Gilbert and Sullivan comic operetta, whose adventures are limited to "accumulating—or dreaming of accumulating—knowledge, money, and power in that order" (Cardullo 91). Tom's emphasis on the male need for war also betrays a southern and human experience that is another enacted dream of undifferentiation—one of human solidarity

beyond (or before) ideological, linguistic, and sexual division, faced with the daily reality of extinction or enforced action. The mention of the war as a required necessity hints at what is required for the reconstruction of Southern masculinity in a time marked by the failure of the senses ("[t]heir eyes had failed them or they had failed their eyes"). War, of course, will effect a convergence between selfhood and otherness, rather than sustain their constitutive opposition. Specifically, it offers and threatens to identify American warriors with their opponents and with the other values of mystery, aggressive masculinity, and communalism. In that sense, the battlefield elicits for at least some of these Southern men, like Tom, a utopian possibility previously unimagined by them and radically at odds with the terms of their own cultural construction—a realm of collective or transpersonal id, rather than private, competitive individualism and of nonrestrictive gender roles.[400] The step toward recuperation or remasculinization of a wounded masculinity ironically functions to perpetuate Tom's crisis: not only is Tom's departure compromised by the fact that he remains haunted by his sister and mother, unable to erase them from his memory literally; but Tom is marked by his encounter with a construction of mass culture, war, that necessarily compromises his individuality. The authority of the white male author is not restored. Moreover, because the "Beau" remains unable to step outside of the myth of masculinity—whether white hegemonic southern masculinity or pirate/superman/seaman masculinity, from Beau to Pirate, or Dale Carnegie's success man—the Southern male (be it Jim or Tom) has not yet been able to find the direction that will enable him to live as a human being, not simply as an archetype. Tom's attempts irresistibly plunge the male back into the crisis that the erasure from home, from work, and from Saint Louis, was meant to resolve.

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[400] I am indebted to Evan Carton's article, "Vietnam and the Limits of Masculinity," for this remark; Evan Carton, "Vietnam and the Limits of Masculinity." American Literary History 3.2 (1991): 294-318.

6.5. Tom's Masochistic Desire.

Tom's exile from Saint Louis, however, leads me to ask another question: Is The Glass Menagerie confined to static, timeless gender archetypes of masculinity, be it the Gentleman, the adventurer, the epic hero, or the warrior? Tom, "the poet-narrator and author's surrogate, called Shakespeare in the warehouse" (Stein 36),[401] says he is a magician whose tricks are words, memories, and movies. Amanda herself, perhaps intentionally, "makes another connection between the disembodied figure of the magician and Tom when she tells him at the end of the play: "You live in a dream; you manufacture illusions!". Retreating into the world of the non-physical—that of words, movies, magicians, and tricks of all sorts—Tom thus epitomizes the artist as a self-styled hero immersed in a deeply individualistic and solitary ordeal, the aesthetic analogue of the cowboy or the father who preferred long-distance to physical contact. In that sense, Tom fits the new type of personality that Riesman sees on the horizon, the autonomous man (like Rhett Butler in Gone with the Wind) (Presley 59).[402]

Yet, by claiming "I'm a magician," Tom also reveals his relationship to the culture's coding of the "foreign," the non-gentleman, and to his own identity as subject. Tom, by calling himself a magician, not only claims his culturally-coded "otherness" but accepts and exploits it in order to reveal the hegemonic culture's fantasy of the exotic 'other.' Tom has understood that gender is performance and fully exploits it. There is an obvious correlation between Tom the narrator and Tennessee Williams the author who would often say: "I am a compulsive writer, because what I am doing is creating imaginary worlds into which I can retreat from the real world because … I've never made any kind of adjustment to the real

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[401] Roger B. Stein, "'The Glass Menagerie' Revisited: Catastrophe without Violence," Tennessee Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Stephen S. Stanton, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1977) 36-45.

[402] Delma E. Presley, The Glass Menagerie: An American Memory (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990).

world" (Miller 54).[403] Here quite clearly is a major clue to understanding some of Williams'

characters, for "many of the personages he has created would seem to be projections of his

own disoriented personality, frightened, timid, groping, highly sensitive, somewhat neurotic

dreamers who, like their creator, are unable to adjust to the harsh realities of a world of crass

materialism and brute strength" (Miller 54). Laura is a perfect illustration of the above. By

creating an imaginary world around the images of her glass menagerie, she lives in a world of

illusion. Her existence revolves around her collection of transparent glass animals, which she

can order and control. The menagerie is her means of escaping from family tensions and her

own sense of futility. Her menagerie "embodies the fragility of Laura's world, her search for

beauty; it registers sensitively changes in lighting and stands in vivid contrast to the

harshness of the outer world which can (and does) shatter it so easily" (Stein 36). So is the

Victrola "she plays whenever she wants to forget the unpleasantness of her life in the

apartment" (Presley 40). The fragile animals and modern forms of entertainment like movies

and the Victrola are distractions from reality for both Laura and Tom.

In Tom's case, the retreat to the world of disembodied artistry leads to an important

consideration on the issue of masculinity in the play. His self-engineering of male identity, by

declaring "I'm a magician" borrows from the props of conventional gender construction, but

in a creatively detached, expressively playful fashion. Because Tom rejects the fixed identity

society allots to him, he puts himself in a position to re-create a social person at will. Taking

advantage of the constructedness of social individuals, he harvests the components of their

identification both in feminine and masculine conventional characteristics. The result may

seem perplexingly hermaphroditic or androgynous to the common eye: Tom identifies with

the magician which at the same time refers to masculinity but conveys no connotation relative

to sexuality, and combines characteristics from both genders, which it processes into fluid

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[403] Jordan Y. Miller, ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations of "A Streetcar Named Desire" (Englewood Cliffs,

combinations. As a hollow structure, the category of masculinity remains, but relieved of the patriarch's hegemonic definition.

> As Sally Robinson has remarked:
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> masculinity and power retain their power as signifiers and as social practices because they are opaque to analysis [and] the argument goes: one cannot question, let alone dismantle what remains hidden from view [. . .] what is invisible escapes surveillance and regulation, and, perhaps less obviously, also evades the cultural marking that distances the subject from universalizing constructions of identity and narratives of experience (1).

Seen in this light, Tom's assertion of himself as an artist could be interpreted as a crisis of the unmarking, as the necessary attempt to remain a disembodied figure and to recuperate a fiction of abstract individualism and unmarkedness against a fiction of collective hallucination and normative masculinity (Jim stands for the embodied expectations of mother and Laura). By deliberately endorsing a stagy part (the magician), Tom indicates that he chose and selected this masqueraded malehood, fit with customing and special "tricks in his pockets," in order to create an impression. In contrast with the dress codes of the uniform whose conformity carried to the point of unremarkable drabness is meant to inspire respect in everyone, the magician opts for a colourful sartorial composition. Tom thus invests the world with a sort of carnival scenario and reconciles masculinity with flamboyance.[404] The artist becomes a potent figure who can "[work] to transform ideological construction by working within them [. . .] and can shatter constructs and escape ideology through the sheer power of

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NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

[404] I owe this remark to Gilbert Pham-Thanh, "Male After a Fashion: Post-Genital Masculinity in Question," Proc. of Paper for Performing the Invisible: Masculinities in the English-Speaking World, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris.

his imagination" (Caminero-Santangelo 141).[405] In this sense, Tom's struggle, more than a struggle of masculinity has become a struggle of authority. His wish to claim individuation through art and magic signifies a "struggle between a seemingly disembodied masculine individualism [magician and artist] and a fiercely materialist feminine collectivism" (Robinson 102).

Yet to a certain extent, Tom's trouble also comes with his own artistic vocation, because, as Robinson points out "the artistic realm has long been associated, somewhat illogically with femininity" and, as a consequence, Tom's "opting for a less normative form of patriarchal power places his own masculinity at risk" (92). As May explains: "[t]he more expressive type of male, as a matter of fact, is regarded as "effeminate" and has too much fat on the inner side of his thigh (24). The position of the artist, that is of "[h]eroic alienation from bourgeois culture," requires that the male artist take up what Robinson defines as a "'feminine' position vis-à-vis the dominant culture" (92). As a consequence, the rebellious literary male, Savran notes:

> [b]oth identifies with and is possessed by a feminine other, an "invader." But insofar as he also self-identifies as a man, he must continually do battle with the femininity that has invaded him and inheres within. For a subject, he is always split into a masculine—and sadistic—half that delights in displaying his prowess and marksmanship, and a feminine—and masochistic—half that delights in being used as a target. His (impossible) project, as man and as writer, is to master the femininity at which he aims and does not aim to write his 'way out' (45).

Tom, of course, corresponds to the above profile and doubly so, since his position as an artist places him in a non-normative masculinity, but also because his own narrative originates from the memories of his mother and sister. In his ineffectual but perpetual rebellion against the

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[405] Marta Caminero-Santangelo, "The Madwoman Can't Speak: Postwar Culture, Feminist Criticism, and

conventional wisdom that his mother instills in him and that requires him to "act like a man," Tom is thus humiliated by his failure to be a man but gratified by the "freedom from normative masculinity that humiliation announces" (Robinson 94).

In his claims to artistic singularity, Tom's masculinity thus hinges on an impossible positioning: being master of the house and the marginalized victim/artist. Seen in this light, Tom's individuation allows him to occupy "the space of difference," by positioning himself as the "wounded, oppressed, marked victim whose refusal to 'be a man' makes him both masochistic and heroic" (Robinson 96). Thus doing, and to use Robinson's terminology, Tom sets in motion a clash "between two ways of being a man, or perhaps more precisely, two socially constructed masculinities that are each against men's interests" (96). Being a "man"—in the normative image of mother and as exemplified by Jim—is entirely at odds with being an artist while being a "man" in the normative image of a remasculinized (undifferentiated) battlefield is offered as a parody of heterosexual healing that will sacrifice the uniqueness and individuality of men like Tom. Only the position of artist enables Tom to critique a normative masculinity ruled by imperatives of domesticity, productivity, violence and, as Jim embodies, timed performance for the gratification of women.

Read in this light, Tom's crisis seems to be characterized by the fact that it cannot be resolved: if Tom wishes to retain his singularity and resist a normative hegemonic model of manhood, he needs to claim artistry, and in turn, be less than a man. The novel thus exhibits a pull between two contradictory directions competing between desired power and/or vulnerability, simultaneously dwelling on what might be called "a feminizing disempowerment of the masculine," and moving toward "a recuperation of fully phallic masculinity" (Robinson 26).

Welty's 'June Recital'," <u>Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature</u> 15.1 (Spring 1996): 123-146.

Not surprisingly, the release that Tom seeks and the resolution that might be found is always deferred. Because the war is announced but not there yet, Tom's narrative defers closure thereby performing the function of focusing attention not on the resolution to the male crisis but on the wounds of males: competing constructions of masculinity paralyze men and produce a male body that is, in Tom's case, stuck in motion as evidence of that paralysis. In a sort of masochistic fantasy, Tom's narrative illustrates what Kaja Silverman calls "the endless postponement of the moment at which suffering yields to reward, and victory to defeat" (Silverman 199).[406] Tom does not see the interest in work, self-discipline or gentility. Reaching the ideal is not even desirable, because as it appears through Jim, it is unattainable, but also because it would mean the end of the quest itself. The space of the quest thus becomes a space of temporary resistance against the traditional codes of gender performance.

Moreover, if as Tischler interprets it, the separation from the mother-figure parallels "the separation from society and its values" (166),[407] Tom's reunion with the memories of mother and Laura throughout the play serves to perpetuate a sense of crisis, keeping its resolution in suspension and keeping Tom in a sort of perpetual (and genderless) adolescence, since war—and thus manhood—remain unrealized and the necessity to meet the standards of masculine conformity (and sacrifice of the personal) forever postponed. In turn, the failure to archive the past as well as Tom's failure to cut the umbilical cord thus preserves the possibility of alternative aesthetic and political visions even if Tom does not specify what these alternatives might be like.

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[406] Kaja Silverman, Male Subjectivity at the Margins (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).

[407] Nancy M. Tischler, "The Distorted Mirror: Tennessee Williams' Self-Portraits." Tennessee Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Stephen S. Stanton. Englewood Cliffs, (NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977).

CHAPTER 7

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE (1947)

As seen in the previous chapter, in The Glass Menagerie Tom Wingfield forfeits his claims to masculinity because masculinity, he finds, can only be regained through archetypes and/or collective appropriation, and he cannot be very inspired by his mother's account of all the gentleman callers who visited her without making proposals of marriage. Instead of a "caller," she married a telephone worker who fell in love with long distance and abandoned her and the two children. A man in crisis, Tom not only deconstructs the idea of a unified male subject but also rejects all claims at remasculinization through alliance with the father figure. Seen through the lens of gender, the play also reflects the cultural tensions that pervaded the changing nation, during and after the Great Depression.

What makes Williams and his work of particular interest to studies of Southern masculinities is not only the writer himself, but also the expression of an alternative masculinity at a time when a much different one was "encouraged"—the breadwinner, the patriot, the father, the head of the family. The persona of Tennessee Williams itself has raised many questions, and most critics—it seems—have tried to "fix" his gender problem. For Thomas P. Adler, "Williams can be viewed as an androgynous artist in whom the masculine and feminine sensibilities are almost perfectly poised—or some would claim tipped in favor of the feminine" (77). While Williams has been praised for his feminine sensibility, at times he has been accused of "sexual stereotyping his characters, of presenting women as naturally more sensitive, feeling, and humane than their male counterparts" (Adler 77). He has been criticized for his confused, weak masculinity and troubled sexuality; his representations of highly aggressive males like Stanley in front of emasculated Mitches attracting criticism about his homosexual panic. Taken simply, of course, each of these critical viewpoints engenders only a partial portrait of Williams, these assessments depending on gender binarism

(male-female, homosexual-heterosexual, masculine-feminine, etc) with Williams (and most of his male characters) either assigned to one position or considered as the battleground between the two. Taken together, they are often said to depict an artist whose gender identification is confused and contradictory.

Discussing the "alternative" male figure of Williams, many historians have noticed that indeed, and whether it be the aggressive soldier returning from war or the homosexual, the latter had become "a much more feared enemy than the Negro" (Riesman and Glazer 119).[408] As Adler explains, in this decade of war and its aftermath, the returning soldier/veteran was to be reintegrated into the workforce and into the traditional family structures (3). In an era of accelerated social change in which male writers were chafing against the prescribed male role and all that came with it—the constraints of breadwinning, family life, and the togetherness ethos, the conformity induced by the organization or overly demanding women—it is not entirely surprising that the image of the ineffectual male loomed over the manhood discourse. The homosexual also, at once a figure of terrifying fear, buried envy, and loathing, appeared to have what many male critics (not yet attuned to the cultural trends that would later sanction a male flight from commitment) seemed ultimately to desire: freedom from marital commitment, ease of sexual relations, and a kind of power over his life that conventional male roles precluded (532).[409]

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[408] David Riesman and Nathan Glazer, "The Intellectuals and the Discontented Classes," The Radical Right: The New American Right Expanded and Updated, ed. Daniel Bell (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964); See also Michael Rogin, Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

[409] Kyle A. Cuordileone. ""Politics in an Age of Anxiety": Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949–1960." The Journal of American History 87.2 (Sep 2000): 515-545; In that aspect, the homosexual man resembles closely Rhett Butler who is free from marital commitment, easy in his sexual relations and in control of his destiny. Yet, contrary to the homosexual man, Rhett does not forfeit claims to masculinity, for he eventually repairs his breach of patriarchal law, by eventually preferring an older model of manhood. An interesting analysis of the homosexual man and his prominent role in defining the culture of mid-20th-century America (with such icons as Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Aaron Copland, Samuel Barber, Montgomery Clift, and Rock Hudson) is found in Michael S. Sherry, Gay Artists in Modern American Culture: An Imagined Conspiracy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

Building on the portrayal of male (im)potency, Tennessee Williams' representation of a boy-man-artist like Tom contributes and expands on the discussions of male performance so pivotal to the message of a strong virile masculinity that the United States now embraced and even more so after the recent involvement in World War Two.[410] An idealistic and ambitious American nation had attempted to—and succeeded in—proving its superiority by squashing the threat of Nazi Germany. The country had also battled through the Great Depression of the 1930s; yet, suddenly the spotlight focused no longer on the Southern Gentleman/Veteran but on the middle and lower classes as the true bearers of the heroic American spirit. Their work ethic and ambitions characterized them as true Americans.

It is probably no surprise to find Stanley Kowalski, the vigorous "new male" in <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u>, presented as "the child of immigrants, [. . .] the new, untamed pioneer, who brings to the South, Williams seems to be saying, a power more exuberant than destructive, a sort of power that the South may have lost" (Adler 41).[411] Young men now returned to their families, ready to settle down, thus embracing the "old-fashioned" values of family and home. Returning after the war to live on a New Orleans street named Elysian Fields,[412] Stanley is one of these men who, in coming back to the States as successful soldiers and having proved their masculinity on the battlefield, were now ready to assert their manhood within the home. And since the country was now experiencing one of the biggest economic booms in history—both in the production and in the consumption of goods—these men were also ready to make a name for themselves on their home soil, thus replacing the old Southern charm, where aristocracy and chivalry reigned, by an air of industry and efficiency.

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[410] Mark E. Kann, <u>On the Man Question: Gender and Civic Virtue in America</u> (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

[411] Jack H. Adler, in <u>Tennessee Williams: a Tribute,</u> ed. J. Tharpe (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977).

[412] Elysian Fields refers to the place that ancient Greeks believed served as a home for the dead. After victorious soldiers died in battle, they went to Elysian Fields for eternity, to celebrate their lives, their courage, and their accomplishments.

In the same way, the polarization that is embodied through Mitch and Stanley seems to echo sociologist Daniel Bell's concern with the "polarization of images" to which much of 1950s political discourse in America had succumbed. For Bell and for Cuordileone in his article "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949–1960," the polarization of images between "hard" and "soft" men reflected "a political culture that put a new premium on hard masculine toughness and rendered anything less than that soft and feminine and, as such, a real or potential threat to the security of the nation" (Cuordileone 517).[413] The staging of the male body in Williams' plays thus prompts me to focus on the attention given to masculine behavior, and the representation of Southern masculinities that has retained its conceptual affiliation with the concept of honor and, thus, with notions of virility, fearlessness, moral strength, and structured authority.

7.1. The Relic of the Old South vs. The Gaudy Seed Bearer of Foreign Origin.

In A Streetcar Named Desire, the waning of the old Southern charm in the face of "the crude forces of violence, insensibility, and vulgarity" is illustrated by the "critical tension between [two different] ways of life" (Kazan as qtd. in Jones 144).[414] The old civilization vested in Blanche Dubois, a fading relic of the Old South now a disgraced schoolteacher from Laurel, Mississippi, arrives at the two-room apartment of her sister Stella Kowalski in New Orleans and Stella's husband Stanley, an autoparts supply man of Polish descent, referred to as the "dark" gaudy seed bearer of foreign origin.[415] After the suicide of Blanche's homosexual husband, Alan, and the loss of the family plantation, Belle-Reve, Blanche seeks refuge at her sister's. The arrival of Blanche upsets her sister and brother-in-law's system of mutual dependence, infuriates Stanley, and eventually leads to multiple conflict—conflict

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[413] Daniel Bell, The Radical Right. The New American Right expanded and updated (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964).

[414] David R. Jones,Great Directors at Work: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Kazan, Brook (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1986).

between Stanley and his wife, conflict between Stanley and Blanche that will culminate in the final confrontation of the rape scene, and conflict between Stanley and his friend Mitch whom Blanche has in her imagination turned into her would-be-suitor. Tennessee Williams depicts a "tranche de vie" that exposes a new South with a new code of living as a faded Southern Belle who has lost the plantation in part because of the profligacy of the corrupted male figures who naturally dominated its past—fornicators and gamblers who ran it into the ground. Blanche is stripped of her environment and faced with a disturbing new reality at her sister's place. Blanche is eventually pushed into insanity by Stanley and his brutal rejection of her pretensions and expectations. For critic Thomas Porter, the play's lack of final resolution—with Blanche's more-stable sister Stella's return to Stanley—exemplifies Tom Wingfield's ambiguous "return" to peer into the shabby apartment where his mother and sister continue to struggle within a faded illusion. Tom tells—perhaps makes up—the story from his position on the fire escape, narrating the story of being "caught between two worlds, one Gone with the Wind, the other barely worth having" (176).[416] One difference between The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire is that Blanche is the bearer of memory and cultural treasure, not only a faded belle.

The reasons for Blanche's slow descent into insanity have been thoroughly discussed in the critical literature on the play. Studying the character of Blanche, Porter defines her both as the alien, an "intruder" upon "an established way of life" achieved by her sister, as well as the traditional "heroine of romance," polarities that cannot be reconciled. For the film-adaptation director Elia Kazan, Blanche's problem is precisely attributed to her expectation of the tradition of the Old South, establishing that her need for protection must be through another person and her problem arises from "her [Southern] notion of what a woman should

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[415] Esther M Jackson, "The Anti-Hero in the Plays of Tennessee Williams," Tennessee Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Stephen S. Stanton (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977).

[416] Thomas E. Porter, Myth and Modern American Drama (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969).

be [. . .] Because this image of herself cannot be accomplished in reality, certainly not in the South of our day and time, it is her effort and practice to accomplish it in fantasy. Everything she does in reality is colored by this necessity, this compulsion to be special" (Miller 22).[417] For other critics, Blanche's mental alienation results essentially from the guilt that devours her after she has confronted her husband with his homosexuality and he kills himself. Biljana Oklopcic states that "Blanche's cruel exposure of her husband becomes the origin of guilt that has to be expiated and redeemed by her own system of illusions" (6).[418] The climax comes when the thing that Blanche has fled from corners her, and as Donald Pease recognizes: "<u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u> makes it clear that for Williams the act of fleeing always becomes the act of reliving the past. Flight forces the presence of the past on his characters as the presence of what they attempted to flee" (840).[419] And what Blanche is fleeing is not just the "effeminacy" of her young husband but the negative male values of her plantation forebears— both images for the absence of the ideal of the Southern Beau, the courtly and chivalric gentleman hero.

In fact, it is probably hard to surpass the plot of <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u> in its relentless insistence on total catastrophe in the modern South: Blanche Dubois moves from the plantation to the city, heading for Elysian Fields on a streetcar named Desire. However, as the stop at "Cemeteries" suggests, all hopes for recovery are destroyed. Belonging to an old planter family threatened and eventually destroyed by economic (and mostly moral) decline, she encapsulates—from her first appearance—the physical decline (the aging and crippling) that embodies the "disembodied" Belle figure who has finally succumbed completely to the absence of the long-imagined male counterpoint. In <u>The Glass Menagerie,</u> Amanda was, at

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[417] Jordan Y. Miller, ed., <u>Twentieth Century Interpretations of "A Streetcar Named Desire"</u> (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

[418] Biljana Oklopcic, "Southern Bellehood (De)Constructed: A Case Study of Blanche DuBois," <u>Americana</u> 4.2 (2008) <http://americanaejournal.hu/vol4no2/oklopcic>

least, struggling, however vain her hopes, and she ironically kept the "heroic" picture of the departed husband, in military uniform, on the wall of the shabby apartment. In the equally austere New Orleans apartment of her more practical sister, the entrance of Blanche "incongruous[ly] and daintily dressed," suggests a tale of attempted regeneration and mediation between old and new. Thomas P. Adler reads Blanche's arrival as follows: "an emissary from a past world of plantations and 'white columns' [. . .] has endured much trauma before her entrance, but she comes hoping that the trauma is past, and that salvation of some kind awaits her" (26).[420] Yet "romance" (the romance carried by Blanche Dubois in her veins), as Williams specifies, can be transferred into the new order only as a spurious fiction, while the real thing must necessarily perish under the conditions of modern life. For most critics, therefore, <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u> is a story about change that tackles the pervasive process of transformation by which traditional societies and economies were reorganized into a more complex system regulated by individualism and the principle of profit. In this intermediate region, old and new, planter and freeholder, American and non-American come into contact. The East (the Polish Stanley Kowalski) encounters the West and the South encounters the North all seemingly fusing into one social settlement. Yet, because the play bemoans the decline of the old elite and of a Southern Belle tragically doomed to failure, Williams refuses to represent this post Civil War society as the happy (at least, peaceful) conciliation of old values and new principles of social organization.

When reading the play, indeed, one is struck by the constant juxtaposition of two seemingly opposed, antithetical worlds. On the one hand, the disreputable world of New Orleans, that of Stanley—one of "crude jokes and vulgar behavior, beer and poker parties [. . .] a practical universe in which fantasies are only destructive lies that have no potential for

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[419] Donald Pease, "Reflections on Moon Lake: The Presences of the Playwright," <u>Tennessee Williams: a Tribute</u>, ed. Jack Tharpe (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977).

revealing truths of the heart and spirit" (Adler 32). On the other hand, the civilized and refined society of Blanche, that of music, manners, and art is already apparently defeated. Both worlds function according to established codes. In the world of Stanley, lawlessness, rude behavior and violence over women prevail but there is still a hierarchy of power and authority and rules to respect. Stanley, for instance, abides by the Napoleonic code and, as the scene of the Poker night emphasizes, the hierarchy is clearly one established on the grounds of masculinity/virility. Stanley, for instance, patronizes Mitch by saying he will fix him a "sugar tit" because Mitch needs to go home to be with his mother. Behaviors are under control and here too conventions are respected. Adler explains: "the game, like most locker-room assertions of masculinity, offers these men both a moment of bonding in which they can sublimate their otherwise unmet emotional needs and also a proof of their manliness: competition, aggressiveness, and finally domination are the rules" (58). In <u>Between Men</u>, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains that these homosocial bonds between men—also called male bonding—contain elements of homophobia within them. As if to to "protect" men from the very potential of homosexual desire often denied, yet inherent in such bonds, the play obsessively masculinizes the poker game: women are excluded from the room and the conveyers of music and enchantment (the radio) are shattered.[421]

By way of contrast, Blanche, whose history of eratic behavior suggests that she despairingly knows better, pretends that life is regulated by the code of chivalry/gentility. Blanche's portrayal as a "moth" is emblematic of the folly of her weak claims for privileged status as the Southern lady reverentially placed on a pedestal by what remains of a code of chivalry (a code to which Mitch, for instance, gives allegiance). As long as the two worlds of Blanche and Stanley remain distinct and apart, a semblance of order can be maintained. When

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[420] Thomas P. Adler, <u>A Streetcar Named Desire: the Moth and the Lantern</u> (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1990).

Blanche arrives, "she poses no threat to Stanley and Stella's world, which has its own rules of behavior far different from hers" (Adler 26). But when they collide—Stanley does not regard Blanche's coquetry as a legitimate game—the stability is upset and the clash between the values and codes of each is productive of violence and conflict. In sexual terms, the clash becomes that of "the old world associated with febrile femininity and the new with a charismatic, but brutal masculinity" (Hern xxiv).[422]

A substantial number of critics have referred to the play as a "social drama;" yet, few critics—it seems—have agreed in defining what kind of social drama Williams' play most resembles (Bak 3).[423] One school of criticism has focused on the human relationships at work in the play. From this perspective, A Streetcar Named Desire is believed to be a socio-historical drama, and "Blanche and Stanley represent archetypes of culture or species" (Bak 4). A second school of thought considers Blanche and Stanley as "unique individuals, not as types, with the audience acting as voyeurs of their unique personal war" (Bak 4). Such critics often pit Blanche against Stanley, as victim against villain, hero against anti-hero. Accordingly, in their individual struggle, Blanche and Stanley embody a larger clash between the Old South and the New South, i.e., the decline of one aristocratic culture and the subsequent rise of another one (Bak 5). From this stance, A Streetcar Named Desire becomes "the conflict between two versions of history struggling for authority" (Vlasopolos 151).[424] In other words, the Old South has fallen victim to a natural evolution. According to critic Jacob Adler:

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[421] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

[422] Patricia Hern, ed. A Streetcar Named Desire, with Commentary and Notes (London: Methuen Drama, 1990).

[423] John S. Bak, "Criticism on A Streetcar Named Desire: A Bibliographic Survey, 1947-2003." Cercles 10 (2004): 3-32.

[424] Anca Vlasopolos, "Authoritative History: Victimization in A Streetcar Named Desire," Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama, ed. June Schlueter (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989).

What is primary is story and people as they are, as they inevitably are; what is secondary is Blanche and the others as representative of the culture-power dichotomy and the southern dilemma; what is tertiary [. . .] is Blanche as representative of the sensitive individual lost in the complex interpersonal modern world.[425]

Another school of thought prefers to focus on Blanche and Stanley as real persons, not only "representations of a moribund culture and a thriving socioeconomic middle class" (Bak 6). Seen in this light, Stanley is not fighting for the natural evolution of the Old South into the New South, but Stanley is trying to keep things his way, and must therefore "fight off the destructive intrusions of Blanche who would wreck his home" (Bak 6). As Vlasopolos further explains, Blanche's victimization thus has "less to do with the history of the South as we now have it than with gender-determined exclusion from the larger discourse" (Vlasopolos 152). In raping Blanche and in excluding her from his environment, Stanley is not only re-establishing order, but essentially "victimizing a woman" (Bak 12). At that point, Vlasopolos, like Bak, is touching on the issue of masculinity vs. femininity in the play, yet indirectly. The social drama—as these critics underscore—may also be the drama of gender, of a society in which Belles have been deprived of their Beaux and in which the spectator is left to witness the ensuing disaster. It is therefore with special attention to the idea of gender-determined exclusion (and the anxieties it characterizes) that I will read the social drama imagined by Tennessee Williams, since for Brustein, "the conflict between Blanche and Stanley allegorizes the struggle between effeminate culture and masculine libido" (9).[426]

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[425] Jacob H. Adler, "The Rose and the Fox: Notes on the Southern Drama," South: Modern Southern Literature and Its Cultural Setting, eds. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1961) 349-375; qtd in Jack Tharpe, ed., Tennessee Williams: a Tribute (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977).

[426] Robert Brustein, "America's New Culture Hero: Feelings without Words," Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea, 1988) 7-16.

The clash between the two characters is emblematic of the breakdown of communication that becomes a motif throughout the play. On that note, it is interesting to notice how the means of communication in the different texts here do not serve their purpose. Tramways in <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u>, roads in <u>Gone with the Wind</u>, telegraph poles in <u>The Sheltered Life</u>, or the telephone in <u>The Glass Menagerie</u> rarely help our characters to communicate in an effective way and to get closer to each other. On the contrary, they often serve to separate the characters. Here too, lack of communication characterizes the relationships between the world of Blanche and that of Stanley, the passing world of the Old South and the coming of a new order. Blanche's arrival at Elysian Fields, a poor section of New Orleans, is the source of a chain of events leading to a final tragedy. She steps out of her own world (the old order with its code of gentlemanhood, curtains, politeness, proper eating…) and crosses boundaries into a world she is alien to and whose laws she transgresses. She brings music to the poker game, refinement and intimacy to the open apartment, puts china on the table, poetry and the poems of her dead husband in a world of pragmatic reality and reading. In a chaotic environment, Blanche brings the order of the Old South, and to maintain stability, she resorts to illusion and seduction, dreams over reality. In men, particularly, she seeks confirmation of herself. If her coquetry is understood and somewhat acceptable within the context of her plantation life, here in this quarter of New Orleans, her social and privileged status and manners offer no protection because they do not function as control mechanisms of social behavior in a world of raw sexuality that does not acknowledge the code of gentility. She is thus seen as an agent of disruption. In an analogy to the American Civil War, the rhetorical conflict between genres—between Blanche's "romance" and the rhetoric of the "Yankee," which is a genre of its own—finally turns into a physical conflict of violence.

Stanley, the "foreigner" or "Yankee" (if Yankee is referred to as non-Southern) is portrayed as processing to an "undermining and demystification of inherited narrative paradigms" and thus, causing a breakdown in the narrativity of the South (Jameson 152).[427] Debunking Blanche's lies and illusions as well as the rhetoric of chivalry, he unveils the prerequisites of "romance" and thus destroys (like the artist) the genre from within. As McGlinn esplains, "Stanley, in his ignorance and insensitivity, destroys both Blanche's hope and her illusion. He sees through her pose without understanding why she needs one. He thinks merely that she feels superior to him and he wishes to destroy her composure to make her recognise that she is the same as he, a sexual animal" (514).[428]

Stanley follows simple rules and values: in his view, the relationship between men and women is supposed to be productive financially, spiritually, and physically. He is also portrayed as a literal reader who wants proof, wants to read the papers concerning the lost plantation, Belle Reve, and seeks incontrovertible evidence in documents. Stanley is inscribed in a system of reality that is modeled by numbers and words. Steve, for example, comments that a friend "hit the old-weather bird for 300 bucks." Mitch adds, "Don't tell those things ... he'll believe it" (57). Because Stanley invariably values form over substance, the fixed and quantifiable over the unfixed fiction, Stanley obeys a system of values that rejects any other reality or meaning than his. Logically, he discards or destroys whatever conflicts with his simplistic assumptions.

One of his chief rules derives from the Napoleonic code, a set of laws devised and implemented by the French when they ruled the region of Louisiana. The Code—that continued to operate in Louisiana—is based on inheritance law: any property belonging to a spouse prior to marriage becomes the property of both spouses once they are married. Stanley

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[427] Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative As a Socially Symbolic Act (New York: Routledge, 1983).

thus must do the financial planning for them both. Understandably, Stanley distrusts Blanche to the extent that he suspects her of having cheated Stella (therefore himself) out of her share of the family inheritance. Stanley—when asking for the papers of Belle Reve—is shown resurrecting history from the archives, for if Blanche mismanaged it or used proceeds from the plantation improperly, then she mismanaged or misused property he could rightfully claim his own. In demanding strong and concrete evidence, Stanley practices here a cult of the facts: History is the empirical sort based on archival research.[429] The process of decoding and recoding according to the Napoleonic code in particular clearly reprograms this society and rejects the ideals of romance. Adler remarks that "through these rituals [that debunk romance] Williams paints "a picture of what might be termed "The New Man" [. . .] his crudeness, commonness, and lack of moral discrimination finally renders him animal-like in more than just his stealth and grease-stained look, and culminate in Stanley as a rapist and violator" (58). What Williams also emphasizes is that if Stanley took over the world, this would mean "a universal coarsening and diminishment. Stanley is like Caliban in Shakespeare's The Tempest: he would destroy the books—the civilizing agents—in Prospero's library" (Adler 58).

It is here the difference between truth and invention, between history and poetry that is emphasized in the encounter of Blanche and Stanley, a distinction that Aristotle has developed in Chapter 9 of his Poetics, when saying that "the one [historian] tells what has happened, the other [poet] the kind of things that can happen" (qtd. in Potts 29).[430] On that note, it is important to perceive that Stanley is the maker of history in the play, the one who

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[428] Jeanne M. McGlinn, "Tennessee Williams' Women: Illusion and Reality, Sexuality and Love," Tennessee Williams: A Tribute, ed. Jack Tharpe (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977).

[429] By the time the American Historical Association was founded, in 1884, the "cult of the fact" (as the intellectual historian Peter Novick has called it) had achieved ascendancy; See Peter Novick, That Noble Dream: the "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[430] Leonard. J. Potts, Aristotle on the Art of Fiction: an English Translation of Aristotle's Poetics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

not only provides the "seeds" necessary for the building of a future (a baby conciliating "foreign" and "southern" influences) but also the one who writes the future. The rape scene, in particular, does not only claim authority over Blanche, but it also claims a version of history which debunks the art of imagination and romance and which rationalizes the act of rape by this famous line: "We've had this date with each other from the beginning" (130). Stanley places himself as the historian, and subjects romance to his own version of history, one that is pre-determined, empirical, and supposedly uncontested.

Blanche, of course, is no fool. She may be an illusionist, but she does know that her romantic ideals have been emptied of all countenance, since she openly acknowledges that the romance of the Old South and her fathers have failed her. As Blanche explains, her ancestral southern plantation, Belle Reve (approximately translated from French as "beautiful dream") in Laurel, Mississippi, has been "lost" due to the "epic fornications" of her male ancestors, which in turn caused them financial losses:

> There are thousands of papers, stretching back over hundreds of years, affecting Belle Reve as, piece by piece, our improvident grandfathers, and father and uncles and brothers, exchanged land for their epic fornications—to put it plainly!...The four-letter word deprived us of our plantation, till finally all that was left—and Stella can verify that!—was the house itself and about twenty acres of ground, including a graveyard, to which now all but Stella and I have retreated (Scene 2).

Yet, despite her father's unrestrained passions, she recognizes the salvational power of the rhetoric of romance since, like Tom in The Glass Menagerie, she claims "magic" to be her ultimate tool for protection and uses her "poetic and imaginative faculties to re-create a charmed world" (Adler 31). Stanley's language is destructive precisely because it is devoid of utopian potential. Stanley emphasizes the futile yearning for a "romance" that seemed to have

become, or always to have been, impossible. Blanche, it is true, emphasizes that the beauty of the South has declined, that "its moral blindness has led to decadence, the guilt from the horror of slavery on which the plantation system was built and thrived has sapped its strength" (Adler 31) but Stanley goes one step further. Adler notes that "a present like Stanley's is totally devoid of roots in the past [and] can be emptied of all moral and physical beauty" (31). Thus doing, the (anti)hero of the modern capitalist society eradicates the rhetoric of chivalry by eradicating chivalry itself. Mitch's clumsy attempts at chivalry, for instance, are immediately repressed, for Mitch, though associated with Stanley's world, is seen as an agent of disruption who is blamed for not staying in his place and disobeying the rules of his own code when wishing to follow Blanche in her make-believe. Recognizing Blanche's make-believe and her illusions as potentially dangerous invaders of his territory, Stanley must ignore anything anomalous if he wishes to secure a territory, a home, and defend it against intruders.[431]

7.2. The Myth of Evil Womanhood.

Something is indeed "rotten" in the Old South of Blanche and threatens to destabilize Stanley's claim to authority and power. In fact, there is something corrupt in Blanche, for she recognizes that after she lost the Dubois mansion, she had to move into a fleabag motel from which she was eventually evicted because of her numerous sexual liaisons. Also, she was fired from her job as a schoolteacher because the principal discovered that she was having an affair with a seventeen-year old student: "I had many intimacies with strangers. After the death of Alan—intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with. … I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection—here and there, in the most—unlikely places—even, at last, in a seventeen-year-old boy…" (100). She also deliberately flirts with her own brother-in-law, spraying perfume

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[431] Konrad Lorenz, <u>On Aggression</u> (London: Methuen, 1966).

on Stanley. In a "sexually seductive behavior," Blanches takes a drag on Stanley's cigarette, playfully sprays him with the perfume from an "atomizer," while standing revealed in silk bra and slip in the light and moving suggestively to the music (Adler 43). The Southern Belle is thus presented as sex-crazed, waiting eagerly at the gate for lovers and romantic liaisons.

Despite appearances, and as embodied in the character of Blanche, the "respectable" world and the disreputable world thus appear as equally corrupted worlds. No sanctuary (though Elysian Fields refers to a pagan heaven) can be found in either world—"gentility" being non-existent in the New South and parodied in the Old South. The blame for such dysfunction rests largely on the claimants to privileged status—the fathers and the Southern gentlemen who are supposed to support the code. The influence of Ibsen's dramas may be recognized, for the action often shows the eruption of some guilt, thought to be safely buried in the past, into the carefully constructed respectability of middle-class family life.[432] As Patricia Hern explains, "the dramatic tension becomes more powerful as the audience grows more aware of the degree of pretense involved in the characters' image of themselves and senses the gradual but relentless revelation of a once-submerged horror" (xxiii).[433] The Old South (whose only remnants are carried along in the trunk of Blanche) is shown to be rooted in appearances, dependent on false beliefs and fake ideals (just like Blanche's fake accessories), indifferent to truth and moral responsibility, and also indifferent to this soil that Gerald O'Hara defended with so much vigor in Gone with the Wind.

Alan, husband in name but not in action, embodies the perversion of the gallant knight errant. Failed by her own fathers, Blanche has tried to preserve the past by marrying "the urbane and civilized, the 'light and culture' of the South in the form of Alan Gray" (Bigsby 64) who presents "a logical extension of her desire to aestheticise experience, her preference

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[432] Informing Williams' writing was, among others, the works of Russian playwright and story-writer Chekhov (1860-1904), the Swedish dramatist Strindberg (1849-1912), and the Norwegian playwright Ibsen (1828-1906).

for style over function" (Bigsby 43).[434] Shocked and disgusted by the discovery of her husband's homosexuality, Blanche publicly exposes him and he commits suicide. In turn, she "discovers the corruption, or, at the very least, the profound deceit which lies behind the veneer of that side of the Southern past" (Bigsby 64). Cornered by a past that cannot offer redemption and that cannot be put away, Blanche does confess her complicity in Alan's death, what Adler defines as "her violation of Williams' first commandment, [that is] to accept what is human about the other" (45). When she talks of Alan, Blanche also recognizes her inability to answer his unspoken call for help, saying that she had failed him in some mysterious way.

Of course, Blanche's shallow coquetry, promiscuity, and indifference to her dates (they are referred to as "strangers") represent a perversion of the chaste womanhood of Southern society. But Blanche also serves to reveal the perversion of those codes by mirroring them. Through Blanche's destiny, the play actually builds on the stereotype of evil womanhood. Confident that his readers would be familiar with the pattern, Williams structures the plot for recognition, the working out of predetermined and foreshadowed events, as he begins the play with Blanche arriving on a streetcar named "desire" through the cemeteries to the Elysian Fields, once the mythic Greek city of the dead. And as Williams himself remarked, "the play is about the 'ravishment of the tender, the sensitive, the delicate by the savage and brutal forces of modern society'" (qtd. in Higham 58).[435] As if embarked in some Aristotelian tragedy, Blanche is doomed, for her fate has embarked her on a road to suffering. And death does surround her, for Blanche is associated with death, the death of her relatives, the death of the dream, the suicide of her husband. Reminders of Death—through the poem engraved on Mitch's cigarette case, the carousel music that Blanche hears whenever

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[433] Patricia Hern, A Streetcar Named Desire, with Commentary and Notes (London: Methuen Drama, 1990).
[434] C.W. E. Bigsby, Modern American Drama, 1945-2000 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[435] Charles Higham, Brando: The Unauthorized Biography (New York: New American Library, 1987).

she remembers her dead husband, or the Mexican woman who sells flowers for the 'muertos' outside the cemetery—keep popping up throughout the play.

In this context, it is important to realize that if <u>Gone with the Wind</u> still allowed the presence of the Southern beau-type, <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u>, on the contrary, refuses that possibility. Through Ashley Wilkes, or Gerald O'Hara, Mitchell seems to analyze the becoming of these Southern beaux who have been deprived of their Southern Belles. Here, Tennessee Williams turns the problem upside down: what happens to the Southern Belle when the latter has been deprived of beau-type heroes who, like Ned Hazard, were willing to maintain the Belle's chivalric fancies? In the context of Mitchell's conclusion, one may also ask: "if women were sacred—as Ellen Robillard was—could they also be sexual? If they were on a pedestal, could they be taken down (or could they deliberately choose to leave it) without degrading them?" In <u>Gone with the Wind</u>, there can be no conclusive answer to these questions. In <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u>, we find these embodied in the "monstrous and evil" character of Blanche Dubois and seemingly answered in the eviction from the play of this Southern Belle become crazy.

What the play ultimately offers is utter confusion, dislocation, and sterility. The "codes" of the Old South collapse because they have been emptied of their substance and reduced to appearances or because they have fed on diseased assumptions (fake Belle). Blanche's last appearance (paralleling Temple Drake's appearance in the courthouse and then in Paris in Faulkner's <u>Sanctuary</u>) shows that the spirit behind the codes is gone—Blanche is dehumanized, soulless, empty. What such collapse questions is evidently the meaning of the codes themselves when their sole purpose is to maintain a formal relationship with the ideals they support. Both Mitch, duped by a woman he thought would be of the innocent and chaste type, when accusing her, "I knew you weren't 16 anymore. But I was fool enough to believe you was straight" (99) and Blanche, duped by men she thought would protect her from

financial and human loss, discover the shattering truth of a society living on diseased assumptions, the discovery that, after all, the code may have been empty from the beginning.

Yet while busying themselves with the question of whether or not Blanche is a fallen woman, critics, I believe, have missed the subversive elements in Williams' work, for Blanche's attitude toward males, in the play, openly criticizes male behavior and male norms—that of her ancestors, that of Stanley, and even that of Alan. Blanche is a liar, yet her lying (or her hypocrisy by pretending to be the Belle she is not) is justified (at least to some extent) by the necessity for survival and by the dire nature of Blanche's circumstances. On closer analysis, by contrast, the epic fornications—be it that of uncles, brothers, etc, or that of Alan—were not justified by financial necessity. Williams reverses the model of Eve and Adam and insists that it is men, not women, who are the source of deceit and evil. Eve, according to the Myth of the Fall, brought chaos into the world with her lust for the forbidden. She caused man's recognition of sexuality, his knowledge of death, and his loss of innocence. Women, being Eve's daughters, are (all) dangerous temptresses who seduce men and lead them to irrationality, immorality, and even death.

In the mention of her ancestors' epic fornications, Blanche shows that she plays by the rules set down for her by men, and although she plays to her own economic advantage, her transformations are undertaken for the males' sexual pleasure, not her own. The sexual desire of Blanche does control the action of the play, and it is a desire born of tragedy and desperation, of missed opportunities and opportunities that were never there in the first place. Blanche's sexuality is legendary and larger-than-life because it is the "only component of her identity that has been allowed free expression. She uses it as a commodity to barter for better living conditions and a measure of the only sort of power available to her" (Brigham 299).

Blanche thus adopts a succession of shifting social roles or masks, what Stanley himself underscores when saying that she "puts on her act" (121). Undone by the men around

her, Blanche must therefore engineer self-transformations in order to remain on the market: caretaker, nurse, belle, teacher, prostitute, etc. She has become, in other words, subject to collective appropriation. To follow her "progressive masking and unmasking" is, according to Adler, "to see Blanche playing the demure lady, offended by any open display of sensuality (scene 1), the carefree flirt (Kazan's "Gay Miss Devil-may-care" ["Notebook" 369] of scene 2), [and] the more determined seductress (scene 3)" (36). What Blanche does here call to mind Luce Irigaray's description of masquerade:

> the masquerade has to be understood as what women do in order to recuperate some element of desire, to participate in man's desire, but at the price of renouncing their own. In the masquerade, they submit to the dominant economy of desire in an attempt to remain 'on the market' in spite of everything […] The masquerade of femininity […] is woman's entry into a system of values that is not hers, and in which she can 'appear' and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely, men (133-34).[436]

These positions conform to male fantasies: the prostitute who is genteel, hard-to-get, actually virginal (Stanley takes great pride in having taken Stella down from her pedestal); the widow who must be easily and quickly consoled for her loss; the aristocratic beauty who remains mysterious yet far from being accessible; and the country girl who is innocent and must be captured. Whatever her immorality, her responsibility, she is also what her society made her. And, as such, she gives back to society what it has given her. Because she is forced into her own recesses or into her own desert, Blanche does attempt—in the manner of Ashley

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[436] Luce Irigaray, <u>This Sex Which is Not One</u>, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985). Original edition: Luce Irigaray, <u>Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un</u> (Paris, Éditions. de Minuit, 1997).

Wilkes or General Archbald—to retrieve romance in any way she can. Blanche, in the words of Thomas P. Adler,

> is an actress portraying the central character in a play which she first authors and then produces and directs. She treats the Kowalski's apartment as her theater, altering the décor to make it "almost dainty" [. . .] When Mitch joins her at the flat after their disappointing evening on Lake Pontchartrain, she becomes the set decorator, lighting a candle in a wine bottle to foster the make-believe that they are sitting in a romantic bohemian café on the Parisian Left Bank—even that they are Camille and Armand from Alexander Dumas's famous play named after its heroine (37-8).

Most importantly, "as the central character in a play of her own devising, Blanche carries her own costume and props in her trunk, including the makeup powder and the "gossamer scarf" that cause her 'to shimmer and glow'" (Adler 38). Blanche's protectors are not the collective romance offered by the Southern men but her own private romance, that of makeup, dim lights, paper lanterns, bathing, and heavy drinking that she tries to conceal from her brother-in-law and her sister—the tricks that the Belle uses to maintain her magic. Thus doing, Blanche becomes a perverted version of the Victorian Angel of the House.

Blanche is thus seen appropriating the men's romance—that of the fallen woman and that of the Angel of the House—and rewriting it in her own terms and using it for her own interests. In Swallow Barn, Bel Tracy embodies what Charlotte Lennox described as an eighteenth-century maxim in The Female Quixote, or the Adventures of Arabella: reading romances is a silly activity that will turn a woman's head.' [437] Because Bel has been reared in a retreat, isolated from the realities of life, she thinks (as Ned regrets) that the events of romances have occurred, and expects them to recur in her own life, until she is finally

brought to reason, in the end. No conservative reader could possibly object to such an explicit rendering of female error and subsequent submission. <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u>, however, tells another story: that of a woman who strives to alter history and fate and to change her present world for the better. In that regard, Blanche resembles Miguel de Cervantes's Knight of the Rueful Countenance, Don Quixote, whose idealized, romantic visions are often finer, more just, and nobler than the reality of the world that surrounds him.

As Ginès remarks, drawing a parallel between the Lost Cause embodied in characters like Blanche and Don Quixote is an easy thing, since "the reluctance to confront reality and the tragicomic results of seeking to assert one's individuality in the face of the hostile world are traits readily associated with Don Quixote, but certain writers of the American South have shown themselves particularly sensitive to these same attitudes" (xiii). The Quixotic, anti-heroic character is not unique to Tennessee Williams' plays. It may be found in the plays of Tolstoy, Ibsen, and Chekhov as well as in the masterpieces of some expressionist artists or existentialists such as Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. In the American South, in particular, the influence of Don Quixote—the mock epic—has held great power since, as Ginès remarks:

> it is in the literature of the American South where, from the end of the nineteenth century, the clash between the ideal and the mundane world that so exemplifies the Manchegian knight has most consistently arisen. Certain southern writers have been particularly sensitive to the fundamental themes of Cervantes' novel: the insoluble discord between the real and the ideal and the attempt, at once grotesque and dignified, to affirm one's individuality in complete disregard of common sense and against all the demands of historical reality.(3)[438]

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[437] Charlotte Lennox, <u>The Female Quixote</u>, ed. Margaret Dalziel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[438] Montserrat Ginès, <u>The Southern Inheritors of Don Quixote</u> (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Ginès adds "many southern writers showed an innate sympathy toward the essentially quixotic attitude

Blanche's fate in the defeated South closely parallels Quixote's adventure, for

> the historical background for Don Quixote's follies is furnished by an autocratic
>
> Spain sunk in economic and social decline, but still absorbed in its dreams of
>
> grandeur [. . .] Cervantes sends his derided knight on a journey through the
>
> coarse inns and taverns of La Mancha, where he encounters a plain and
>
> unadorned reality, divested of heroism and romanticism.(Ginès 2) [439]

Analyzing the Quixotic anti-heroic characters of Tennessee Williams, Jackson complements

Ginès' remark by adding that "the anti-hero [in Williams] searches for a mode of healing [but]

he does not expect to find it. That which forbids his immediate salvation is himself [. . .]

Williams reveals his flawed image of man by showing his relationship to archetypal patterns

(90).[440]

Close to the anti-heroic character of Quixote, Blanche—it can be argued—is embarked

on a path to self-discovery. About Don Quixote, J. J. Allen has explained that by the end of

the novel, Don Quixote has recognized his errors, confessed his sins, and become repentant:

"both Sancho and Don Quixote, then, have lived through a process beginning with pride and

presumption as a consequent awareness of their limitations, moving toward self-discovery,

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of tilting against windmills, of upholding concepts of honor and chivalry, however outmoded they appeared to be in a makeshift, materialistic, and secular world. This attitude stemmed from the conflict between an inherited tradition and the values of the modern society in which those writers were brought up. The inherited tradition was based on a patriarchal ethic in which the individual's sense of honor and his worth in the community were the very touchstone. Modern values ushered in the democratization of society and cultural uniformity, both consequences of the South's incorporation into the world of industrial capitalism" (5).

[439] Ginès explains that, "In Cervantes' Spain an old hidalgo could very well be living in penury while still preserving the bearing and air of breeding of the person he had once been" (2). Don Quixote yearns for a heroic and knightly order of things that "Cervantes mockingly reflects through the mad hidalgo's dress, his grandiloquent speech, his self-proclaimed mission to right all wrongs, his vain nostalgia for a golden age—in short, his idealized, one track vision of the world" (2).

[440] Esther M Jackson, "The Anti-Hero in the Plays of Tennessee Williams," <u>Tennessee Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays</u>, ed. Stephen S. Stanton (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977) 87-99. Seen in this light, an anti-hero, like Ned Hazard, searches for a mode of healing, and he ultimately finds his salvation in the family and the surrounding "validators" of masculinity: the beau needs not only to be convinced he is worthy of his masculine entitlement but he must also find approval in the eyes of those he must exert power over: slaves, woman, family… An anti-hero like Ashley does not hope for healing or does not expect to find it. The fault is the original sin in man, the destructive life-process which leaves human beings as fragmented debris within the course of history. Rhett Butler is an anti-hero who searches for healing for his own transgression. In the end, he tries to understand his own power, responsibility, and complicity in the evil of the universe.

through suffering and culminating in confession and repentance" (34).[441] More than a simple search for healing, as Jackson sees it, "the drama of Williams is concerned not merely with defining the nature of sin; it seeks to find a human answer to suffering" (93). Blanche, for instance, comes to the realization of her own responsibility for suffering; she becomes aware that she ultimately suffers more for her own transgressions than for the actions of her guilty ancestors [and] suggests that she is the effective cause of her husband's death, when she says: "[h]e'd stuck the revolver into his mouth, and fired—so that the back of his head had been—blown away! It was because—on the dance floor—unable to stop myself—I'd suddenly said—'I saw! I know! You disgust me'…And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this—kitchen—candle" (Scene VI).

And it is precisely this search for healing that places Blanche at the center of the play. In the first part of <u>Don Quixote</u>, the women are weak-willed, subservient creatures who rely on their husbands as masters, and men revere women for their beauty and their chastity. The women may be central characters but they essentially remain mere objects over whom men fight or drive themselves insane. If there are women of great stature in the novel, these "were invented to serve as subjects for verses" (Chapter XXV). The use of passive construction in this phrase renders women nearly inanimate, and the words "serve" and "subject" reinforce the idea of women as abstract ideals, who rely on their husbands as masters and who are seen as being important as motivators, but who fail to be granted any consciousness as fully-embodied individuals.

Unlike the chivalrous delusions of Don Quixote that intensify male activity and keep women at the periphery, Blanche's retellings of events, on the contrary, put women at the center and offer them more important roles than they would actually have. In Blanche's

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[441] J. J. Allen, <u>Don Quixote, Hero or Fool? Part 2</u> (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999).

exposition of the fall of Belle Reve, or in her intrusion into Stanley's world, she rewrites the roles established by traditional patriarchal models: women are not left sighing and languishing. They are active, burying the dead, and actively making up for (or at least trying to) their financial losses. Blanche, unlike Don Quixote's women, is not silent. She wishes to command, she wishes to control, and does not want to be forgotten. Her story exemplifies what Eva has been denied in The Sheltered Life and exemplifies also a crucial component of Cixous' "écriture feminine." It "returns," as Cixous puts it, "to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display—the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions" (Laugh 250).[442] Blanche's quest for cleansing and sexual pleasure with younger men is a quest to reclaim her body from the same commodity culture that Tom resists in his identity quest. By stopping to conform to society's expectations (instead of behaving like a proper widow), Blanche's personal case (like Caddy's) becomes a matter of political/universal implications. As Stanley puts it, "the town was too small for this to go on for ever! And as the time went by she became a town character. Regarded as not just different but downright loco—nuts" (81). While Blanche, however, is *totally* uncommon, as Stanley claims: "so much for her being such a refined and particular type of girl" (81), Stanley is *individually* common, a case of monstruosity by Blanche only: "that girl calls me uncommon" (80).

Blanche, however, can actually never fit any given category. As Judith J. Thompson explains,

> Her romantic attempt to achieve an idyllic union with Allan Grey is reenacted
> in a diminished version with Harold Mitchell, or "Mitch;" in a fairy-tale
> version with another "young man;" in a demonic version with the animalistic

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[442] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cixous. Signs 1 (1976); rpt. in

Stanley Kowalski; in an imaginatively transcendent version with the fantasized "Shep Huntleigh," and, finally, in a tragically ironic version with the Doctor who escorts her to the mental institution (33).[443]

When Stanley opens Blanche's trunk, for instance, (the only thing that she has saved from her past life), he is unable to distinguish between what is of value and what is fake. He refuses to believe Stella's assertions that furs, dresses, etc., are worthless and that indeed, as Blanche herself announces at the beginning, she has "nothing to hide." This scene of violation is of utmost importance since Blanche represents the ultimate challenge to Stanley's system of values, because of her illusions, or—to quote Blanche—"magic (…), misrepresent[s] things (…), tell[ing] what ought to be truth" (Williams 117). She also challenges his inability to read papers that are beyond his physical and intellectual grasp, and she becomes (or wishes to become) the master of meaning explaining words to a "little boy." Blanche echoes here the words of the English writer William Godwin who pleaded in "Of History and Romance," that there is not and never can be any such thing as true history, for: "[n]othing is more uncertain, more contradictory, more unsatisfactory than the evidence of facts" (297).[444] Every history is incomplete, for every historian relies on what is unreliable—documents written by people who were not under oath and cannot be cross-examined. Before his imperfect sources, the historian is powerless: "He must take what they choose to tell, the broken fragments, and the scattered ruins of evidence" (qtd. in Lepore).[445]

If Blanche is effectively silenced at the end of the play, she has nevertheless forced this point of nonsynchronism, where the past is no longer past and also, in this case, not

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New French Feminisms, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Shocken, 1981) 245-64.

[443] Judith J. Thompson, Tennessee Williams' Plays: Memory, Myth, and Symbol (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

[444] William Godwin, "Of History and Romance," Political and Philosophical Writings, ed. Pamela Clemit, vol. 5 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993).

[445] Jill Lepore, "Just the Facts, Ma'am. Fake Memoirs, Factual Fictions, and the History of History." The New Yorker 24 Mar. 2008. 18 Mar. 2009

ordered, archived, settled, or silenced. Blanche's attempt, in that sense, constitutes nothing more than an attempt to take back family history, social history, women's history, cultural history, and southern history that the Old South forfeited to historians like Stanley. Most male historians (like Stanley) dismiss these women as intemperate and unchaste. But Blanche reclaims the women of antiquity (the fallen women) and tries to establish them as virtuous yet powerful. She not only questions the truth of historians like Stanley and she not only refashions history (fighting against aging)—she tries to rewrite the stories of the women around her. For instance, she transforms Stella into a persecuted maiden, trying to force Stella back into a childhood role, by calling her "Precious lamb" or "Blessed baby" and ordering: "You hear me? I said stand up! (Stella complies reluctantly.) You messy child, you, you've spilt something on that pretty white lace collar" (15). Blanche follows here a logic of free appropriation and consumption, while Stella (even if making her own living) has followed a logic of renunciation. The end further reveals Stella's renunciation where she justifies her acceptance of Stanley's lie over Blanche's truth with the rationalization, "I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley" (133). As Kazan explains:

> Stella is a refined girl who has found a kind of salvation or realization but at a terrific price. She keeps her eyes closed, even stays in bed as much as possible so that she won't realize, won't feel the pain of this terrific price [. . .] She's waiting for the dark where Stanley makes her feel only him and she has no reminder of the price she is paying. She wants no intrusion from the other world (Kazan 25).[446]

<http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2008/03/24/080324crat_atlarge_lepore>.

[446] Elia Kazan qtd. in Jordan Y. Miller, ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations of "A Streetcar Named Desire (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

Blanche, on the contrary, refuses to respond to or be controlled by male authority, and even suggests that it is from men's teachings and their actions that she learned to practice falseness and baseness. Achieving a sort of Don Quixote reversal, she rewrites the myth of evil womanhood, and in turn, refuses the truth of the most patriarchal text of all, the Bible. Williams, here, seems to suggest that women like Blanche can only defeat men by taking their own weapons, beginning a certain type of postmodernism, characterized by Toril Moi's position that "we can only destroy the mythical and mystifying constructions of patriarchy by using its own weapons. We have no others" (198).[447]

Mitch, in his faithfulness to his dead love, perfectly exemplifies the reversal devised by Blanche. Blanche snares him. She toys with his lack of intelligence—for example, when she teases him in French, with "voulez-vous coucher avec moi?," because she knows he will not understand. A coquettish Blanche explains her name for him: "It's a French name. It means woods, and Blanche means white, so the two together mean white woods. Like an orchard in spring. You can remember it by that, if you care to" (59). The importance of Blanche's name has been best analyzed by Bert Cardullo in his paper "Scene 11 of <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u>," where the duality of Blanche's name is explained with the help of the New Testament symbolism. Cardullo thus argues that "her name links her not only to the purity of the Virgin Mary, but also to the reclaimed innocence of Mary Magdalene, who was cured of her sexual waywardness by Jesus (just as Blanche was suddenly cured of hers when she remarked to Mitch, 'Sometimes – there is God – so quickly!'"(96)).[448] Of course, such an analysis suggests what Oklopcic has described as

> the duality of Blanche's personality, indicated by the linguistic polysemy of
>
> her name, [that] continues by opening a discursive space on the possible

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[447] Toril Moi, "Representation of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's Dora," <u>Dora's Case: Freud – Hysteria – Feminism,</u> eds. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

existence of two Blanches: the one is the 'passive-submissive' Blanche who,

as such, is the embodiment, and the symbol, of the Southern bellehood; the

other is the 'victimized' Blanche who, by subverting the each and every trait

of the Southern bellehood, becomes its antithesis (3).

The process of naming in this scene is particularly powerful, since to name oneself—as

Blanche does—is essentially to proceed to self-identification, an identity that is chosen, not

passively accepted. By positioning herself socially as white orchard, Blanche "becomes" one

and places herself as the master of her own identity. As Brenda Marshall suggests in Teaching

the Postmodern: "Naming must occur from a position 'outside' of a moment, and it always

indicates an attempt to control" (3).[449] Since reality depends on the ability to name, the scene

here offers a strong rupture between words and meaning, between names and identity.

Tennessee Williams (much like Cervantes) calls attention to the power of naming by creating

doubt over the "real" name of his fictional character. By introducing this moment of doubt,

Tennessee Williams even suggests that he has less control over his story and especially over

his heroine than one might think.[450] To use Brenda Marshall's words, here, "the traditional

process of naming—a belief in the identity of things with names, so that 'reality' may be

known absolutely—provides a space of interrogation, which asks: whose 'reality' is to be

represented through the process of naming?" (5). Through naming, Blanche reinterprets the

privileged status of the "father" and her own fathers, asserting in the manner of Paul Ricoeur

that "because [the father] is the name giver, he is the name problem" (542).[451]

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[448] Bert Cardullo, "Scene 11 of A Streetcar Named Desire." ANQ 10.4 (1997): 34-38.

[449] Brenda K. Marshall, Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory (New York: Routledge, 1992).

[450] I owe this reference to Diane Andrews Henningfeld's analysis of Cervantes who creates doubt over the name of his fictional character: "It's said his family name was Quijada, or maybe Quesada: there's some disagreement among the writers who've discussed the matter. But more than likely his name was really Quejana." Diane Andrews Henningfeld, "Critical Essay on 'Don Quixote as Postmodern'," Short Stories for Students (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005).

[451] Paul Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970).

In this scene, Blanche goes even further as she appropriates the male discourse, by making questions and answers and turning it to her own use, while directing Mitch's gestures, for instance. Adler argues that "the good manners [of Mitch] are also a pose that Blanche demands he exhibit, as when at the close of scene 5 he must "bow" and play her "Rosenkavalier" (69). Mitch is depicted as being most impressed by Blanche and behaving like a gallant gentleman, putting a protective "adorable little paper lantern" on one of the bare light bulbs at her request to soften the glare: "I can't stand a naked light bulb any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action" (60). With the paper lampshade and the proper atmosphere of subdued lighting, Blanche creates a soft, exotic, romantic dream-like world in the room: "We've made enchantment," she says (60). Thus doing, she encodes the female discourse with masculine undertones and with elements of female mastery contradictory to and critical of the ideology which formed the standards and boundaries prescribed by centuries of male literary tradition. In controlling Mitch's actions to play enchantment, Blanche becomes the director of a drama of illusions, and thus doing, she (like Mitch's mother) suspends Mitch in his own masculinity. And she attempts to do the same thing with Stanley.

Blanche, by finding additional support for her point of view in biology, anthropology, history, verbalizes Stanley's total inadequacy as a man (and even less as a possible suitor):

He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something – sub-human – something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something – ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in – anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is – Stanley Kowalski – survivor of the stone age! Bearing the raw meat from the kill in the jungle! And you – you here – waiting for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt

and kiss you! That is, if kisses have been discovered yet! Night falls and the other apes gather! There in front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking! His poker night! – you call it – this party of apes! Somebody growls – some creature snatches at something – the fight is on! God! Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella – my sister – there has been some progress since then! Such things as art – as poetry and music – such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tender feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching … Don't – don't hang back with the brutes! (83).

In Blanche's definition, gentility, the subsidiary for humanity, if it is not a thing, not even concrete (since its embodied representatives, the gentlemen, have been erased from the text) appears as a theological direction, a heuristic category turned toward the perfection of the human species.

Whereas Oklopcic finds that Stella is often regarded as "the prize between warring parts" over which Blanche and Stanley fight for possession—when Blanche, for instance, "attempts to split up the Kowalskis even after she learns that Stella is pregnant and makes plans to take Stella away from Stanley" (5)—in this exchange, however, Stanley is oppressively positioned between two women. As Clum remarks:

in Williams' work, there is from the outset a different formulation. Instead of the woman being the apex of a triangle, with a bond between two men at its poles, a man is the apex, with a tentative bond or conflict between two women negotiated by them in order to establish a bond with the man. We see this in the scenes between Blanche and Stella in A Streetcar Named Desire. There the

two sisters argue about Stanley. His sexual attractiveness is not questioned, but

his worthiness as a marriage partner is (28).

Stanley's excessive masculine body is scrutinized by and subjected to the female gaze that is denying him agency. If, in "The Uncanny," Freud theorized on the male gaze as a phallic activity linked to the male desire for sadistic mastery of the object, casting the object as its passive, masochistic, feminine victim,[452] in this instance, it is Blanche the active/victimizer, Stanley the passive/victim. In subverting the female position as the conventional desired and passive object of male gaze, Blanche empties out the woman's position and installs the man within it. The excess of surveillance of the male body, in turn, functions to divert attention away from male bodies as phallic weapons and from male privilege, for Blanche's discourse situates man outside representation (Blanche sees and judges): the man is absence, negativity, the dark continent, a freak. The masculine as such is repressed; it returns only in its acceptable form as the female's specularized other. A perceived loss of male power precipitates an exploration of a sort of symbolic rape of the male body. Animalizing Stanley symbolically represents an even more drastic turn than reversing the traditional codes of seer/masculine, seen/feminine as it dramatically deploys women's power to name and classify in a punitive way, so as to keep immaculate the sanctity of the masculinity such women defend and cherish. The animalistic paradigm locates the unrepresentative embodiment of masculinity a rung or two down the scale of beings.

Blanche, in this instance, also reduces Stanley to the lowest common denominator of his bodily existence: his grunting, his growling, his eating and most importantly (even if not directly voiced), his sperm. The play, in a quite similar manner, mourns the absence of the father-figures because of their sexual fornications. By reducing the father to a sperm delivery system, Blanche reduces Stanley and her father or uncles to a biological essence unfortunately

necessary for the production of children, but not significant in any other way. The bestiary incarnates human flaws and in return, drags down Stanley and the father-figure to the drags of creation.

In this line of reasoning, it looks manifest that Stanley's common means of defence to maintain and protect his patriarchal and hierarchical structure may be achieved through a reassertion of his sexual power. Blanche is dangerous and destructive, and because "she would soon have [Stanley] and Stella fighting, [h]e's got things the way he wants them around there and he does not want them upset by a phony, corrupt, sick, destructive woman;" violence is therefore the only solution to reclaim lost territory (Cole and Chinoy 375).[453] The reconstruction of the Southern family is thus achieved through violence, "the illogical consequence of insecurity, anger, the need for control, the need to assert to demonstrate manliness" (Kimmel 408). In this view, male power asserted through physical means allows for a re-classification of the "fearsome female other" into non-identity (Burkman 12).[454] As Kazan explains, rape becomes Stanley's revengeful vehicle:

> [Stanley] wants to know no-one down. He only doesn't want to be taken advantage of. His code is simple and simple-minded. He is adjusted now… later, as his sexual powers die so will he: the trouble will come later, the "problems" [. . .] Why does he want to bring Blanche and, before her, Stella down to his level? … It's the hoodlum aristocrat. He's deeply dissatisfied, deeply hopeless, deeply cynical. [. . .] But Blanche he can't seem to do anything with. She can't come down to his level so he levels her with his sex [. . .] Stanley is supremely indifferent to everything except his own pleasure and

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[452] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Ed. and trans. James Strachey. Vol. 17 (London: Hogarth, 1955): 219-52.
[453] Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, eds., Directors on Directing: A Source Book of the Modern Theatre. 2nd rev. (New York: Macmillan, 1988).

comfort. He is marvelously selfish, a miracle of sensuous self-centeredness

(27).[455]

In the Kowaslki apartment, there is no room for Blanche and there is no room for tempting alternative stories of women like Blanche who live in the shadows and corners of Stanley's world. Hers is a story that must remain untold—unsettling and disruptive to be sure, but nevertheless marginalized. If the discarding of Blanche reasserts a community governed by strictly structured divisions—with the powerful male at its center—and if the fragments and hints contained in Blanche's disenfranchised and belittled narrative may indeed be kept on the margins of society, they are nonetheless disturbing enough to suggest that the New South of the Kowalskis is a domestic refuge ringed by madwomen, another caricature of feminity.[456] After all, if Alan Grey, like Skipper in <u>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</u>, remains very dead, Blanche is still a survivor. Bronski writes, "the truth is that the majority of his women characters are survivors. Williams himself saw Blanche as a survivor. He claimed, 'I am Blanche DuBois.' It was Williams's life as a gay man that enabled him to create a character who survives by rejecting the sordidness of this world and creating a better one of her own (115).[457]

7.3. What is it that Makes a Man?

In subverting the weapons of phallic authority and centrality, Blanche has turned the staples of Southern masculinity on their heads, for she denaturalizes gender as a naturalized invisible entity. Her reconfiguration of the traditional place of woman as well as the Don Quixote gender reversal that she operates recall the Cult of True Womanhood, an ideological and discursive apparatus according to which, "[w]omen were not to be excluded from

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[454] Katherine H. Burkman and Judith Roof, eds., <u>Staging the Rage: the Web of Misogyny in Modern Drama</u> (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998).

[455] Elia Kazan, qtd. in <u>Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Streetcar Named Desire, A Collection of Critical Essays</u>, ed. by Jordan Y. Miller (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

[456] On this aspect, read: Paul Chodoff, "Hysteria and Women." <u>American Journal of Psychiatry</u> 139 (May 1982): 545-51.

[457] Michael Bronski, <u>Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility</u> (Boston, MA:South End Press, 1984).

participation in the public sphere as much as exempted from participation in such a competitive and ugly world. Delicate and fragile, women were not subversient but 'chosen vessels' requiring protection from the world," said Henry Harrington in Ladies Companion in 1838 (qtd. in Kimmel 37). Whereas the performance of masculinity requires a performance of femininity that suits the model of gender relations, the separation between private and public spheres in A Streetcar Named Desire is disrupted by the unfolding of Blanche's melodramatic presence in the play. Most importantly, in her evaluating, sanctioning, and grading the males around her according to degrees of gentility or animality, Blanche displays what part of "masculinity" should be eradicated, or at least remain invisible. Whereas Swallow Barn portrays the way of apprenticeship of seduction as the marker of (gentle)manhood, in A Streetcar Named Desire, by way of apprenticeship of gentility, it is actually the acquisition of masculinity that is at play.

For Blanche indeed, feminism means both the masculinization of women (Blanche and Stanley fight over Stella) and women's appropriation of the masculine (Blanche conquers Stanley's territory and names herself). Blanche also appropriates the masculine, as "there exists," Adler explains, "a Stanley-side to Blanche's character, as her satin red robe suggests, there also seems to be a Blanche-side to Stanley. Stanley's sobs of anguish over the fear that Stella has left are inklings of a softer element, though they may only show he is aware of just how precarious his hold on her is" (54). What strong women like Blanche (or Scarlett in Gone with the Wind) may portend is a change in men, and more importantly, a change in the male's conception of himself as a man, for the dramatic performance of masculinity (by both sexes as it seems) brings out the very arbitrariness of standard, naturalized masculinity. It is Blanche, after all, who assumes the task of defending her lover's reputation, by claiming her own guilt and by saying "he was just a boy." In a similar manner, in Scene 3, when Stella is leading Stanley to call it a night and to send his poker friends home and when, in a drunken fit,

Stanley strikes his pregnant wife, Stella explains the incident to her sister, by saying "in the first place, when men are drinking and playing poker, anything can happen. It's always a powder-keg. He didn't know what he was doing" (72). Stella here defends Stanley's behavior on the grounds of incontrollable violence and irresponsibility, thus indirectly reinforcing his outing from gentlemanhood. In Blanche's case, however, the word "boy"—more than a simple reassertion of clearly delineated gender-lines—may also underscore Blanche's desire to suspend masculinity by refusing to acknowledge Alan's "manhood."[458] As George-Claude Guilbert ponders: "Why does Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire (1947) constantly refer to herself as a maid, a single woman, an unmarried woman, when in fact she was married to Allan Grey?" (6)[459] and why, we can wonder, when Stanley asks her to confirm that she was once married, does she reply: "the boy—the boy died" (28). Stella tells Stanley that the boy Blanche married " wrote poetry… He was extremely good-looking. I think Blanche didn't just love him but worshipped the ground he walked on! Adored him and thought him almost too fine to be human! But then she found out […] this beautiful and talented young man was a degenerate" (124). What the Southern Belle does is challenging here the very concept of gendered human identity, foreshadowing more than androgyny, more than a union of opposed gender constructs, but simply maybe just the end of what makes a man, a man—not an "ape," not a "boy," not just a bodily essence.

To proceed in the exploration of what makes a man a man in A Streetcar Named Desire may reveal straightforward complexity: particularly unsettling indeed is the fact the play is characterized by the conspicuous absence of the chivalric hero. There is no monolithic masculinity, not among the living—since Stanley and Mitch do collide as different models of

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[458] The obsession with boyhood is not unique to Alan, since Stanley is referred to as a "little boy" and Mitch is literally a mama's boy. The word "boy" also indicates a childhood paradise, the nostalgic world to return to, that Blanche can only imagine through fantasy.

[459] Guilbert, Georges-Claude. "Queering and Dequeering the Text: Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire." Cercles 10 (2004): 85-116.

masculinity—at least momentarily—as the beast and the surrogate beau, and not among the dead, since the departed beaux or gentlemen (owners of Belle Reve) hint through their hidden sexual activities at the possibility of a plurality of masculinities, subordinate to the traditional gentleman model. Neither Stanley described as a "survivor of the Stone Age," nor male ancestors—patriarchal fathers of the South—nor her husband Alan are offered as protectors of women's virtue. Blanche was, Adler explains, "attracted to him [Alan] both because he was different, with a softness and tenderness opposite to the kind of man the cavalier South would favor for a woman, and because of his unarticulated need of her" (44-45). In this world, the damsel in distress will not be rescued by a heroic white knight, and as if to signify the complete abandonment of chivalric codes, Blanche herself—though an illusionary and self-deceptive woman—can hardly be described as an ailing princess or a damsel in distress.

As Philip Kolin remarks, Williams' plays are indeed filled with unsuitable men, "failed gentleman callers, if you will, [who] are obsessively persistent in Williams' imagination" (157). Some of these ill-fated suitors are embodied, be it Stanley or Mitch. Some of these ill-fated suitors are spectral: Alan Grey, the young poet whom Blanche married as a teenager, is long dead by the time of the play's action and never appears onstage. Shep Huntleigh is a former suitor of Blanche's whom she met again a year before her arrival in New Orleans. She dreams that Shep is coming to sweep her away but he never appears onstage.[460] All these beaux, however, have one thing in common: none of them can provide comfort to the last of the Southern Belles, Blanche Dubois. If Ned Hazard in Swallow Barn accepts the chivalric fancies of Bel Tracy, it is first and foremost for the sake of romance and to protect the Southern Belle's illusions. Yet, as opposed to this type of Southern gentleman who traditionally contributed to preserving appearances of honor, virility, and gentility, the men in Williams' play are unable or simply unwilling to play such a role.

The most famous of unsuitable suitors belongs to what Philip Kolin has termed the "family of Mitch" (158). These unsuitable suitors, he explains, "share a repertoire of similarities, chief among which is that their narratives of self compete with and become emasculated in the plays in which they appear. These unsuitable suitors suffer from interrupted/incomplete sexuality branding them as representatives of a desire that is fathomable, disappointing" (158). Mitch, in particular, embodies "an incomplete/interrupted sexuality in word and act, the hallmark of the unsuitable suitor" (Kolin 160). As Elia Kazan rightly pegged him in his Streetcar "Notebook" Mitch's "spine" is that of a "mamma's boy," neither man nor boy, "caught somewhere in between, incomplete" (qtd. in Kolin 160). During the poker game, for instance, Mitch twice says, "Deal me out," separating himself from male sport (59). Mitch's body, combining all the trappings of an external spectacle, is presented as suffering from heavy perspiration (when he says, for example, "My clothes're stickin' to me. Do you mind if I make myself comfortable?"(26)), and fighting against getting soft in his belly. Among his male friends, also, Mitch is constantly harangued for his unmanly ways, as he needs a "sugar tit" And thus he is baby, a mother's boy, not a man's man. All the references to Mitch, in the play, allude to his sexual impotency. Blanche, singling him out among the crowd of players, stops him on his way to "The Little Boy's Room" as she calls it. And domestically, it is true that he is still a little boy, caught in his mother's apron strings, metonymically represented in the Kazan film of 1931 by his leaving the washroom (Blanche's domain) holding a towel, something literally left out that should have been left in. The incompetent wooer, Mitch, is suspended between the worlds of desire and dependence, trapped in diminishment. He is, for instance, accused of saving his poker winnings in a piggy bank for his mother (Kolin 160). Occupationally, his sexual incompleteness is suggested by

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[460] We have found the same fantasy for "absent" beaux in The Glass Menagerie; this time Amanda's gentleman callers.

his work in the "spare parts department" at Stanley's plant. Mitch, himself, on occasion seems to willingly distance himself from traditional definitions of masculinity.

Of course, when compared with the other men in the play, Mitch appears as the only one who could possibly become a surrogate-beau. Mitch is, indeed, "something of a misfit among Stanley's friends: he is older, without a woman, and though only halfheartedly interested in drinking and card playing, participates because it makes him part of the group" (Adler 69). Possessing "a code of honor and a diffidence about women that make him a little awed before the seemingly aristocratic Blanche," Mitch appears as the one who has replaced Bel Tracy in the antiquated symbology of romance, as he entertains Blanche's staging of romantic evening (Falk 99).[461] Mitch's awkward imitation of the romantic gestures of Blanche is further shown in the stage direction of a scene when, with the radio playing waltz music, Blanche dances while gesturing romantically in the air, and when Mitch moves next to her like a dancing bear. Mitch is, in Blanche's words, "capable of great devotion."

With Blanche, he shares the cherished memory of a loved one and a certain love for poetry, especially that of Browning, inscribed in Mitch's silver cigarette case given to him by a dying girl: "And if God choose, I shall but love thee better - after - death" (57). Devotion, gentleness and the reading of poetry are actually presented as Mitch's commodities. In his devotion to a dead love, Mitch "take[s] over the traditional roles of women; for it is [he] who [is] obedient, it is [he] who [is] chaste and devoted, it is [he] who [is] allowed a single passion for [his] lifetime" (Craft 834).[462] The demise of the chivalric hero is complete. By masculinizing poetry and framing it as a privileged expression of heterosexual courtship, the

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[461] Signi Falk, "The Southern Gentlewoman," <u>Tennessee Williams, Twayne's United States Authors Series</u> (New York, Twayne Publishers, Inc. 1962); rpt. in <u>Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Streetcar Named Desire, A Collection of Critical Essays,</u> ed. by Jordan Y. Miller (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

[462] We found the same Quixotic reversal in the portrayal of Amanda's lovers in <u>The Glass Menagerie</u>; Catherine A. Craft, "Reworking Male Models: Aphra Behn's 'Fair Vow-Breaker,' Eliza Haywood's 'Fantomina,' and Charlotte Lennox's 'Female Quixote'." <u>The Modern Language Review</u> 86.4 (Oct.1991): 821-838.

play manages to ward off the threat that the play irresistibly invites (through Alan's homosexuality in particular); yet only with difficulty.

Scene 6, which might be entitled "The Date's Over," contains two pejorative symbols of Mitch's inadequacy as a Gentleman. Coming home from his date with Blanche on Lake Pontchartrain, Mitch "is bearing, upside down, a plaster statue of Mae West, the sort of prize won at shooting galleries or carnival games of chance" (85). As Kolin explains:

> Williams could not have found a more salient reminder of Mitch' sexual inaptitude than the shabby relic of the queen of burlesque, the boastful, domineering woman of the statue; all of Mitch's sexual ardor and sexual plans are upside down, an icon of his failures. He has not won a prize of merit at the shooting gallery (phallic implications noted). Instead, his upside-down Mae West suggests that Mitch does not know how to shoot and that his shot is limp, sexually (162).

The symbolism of the keys in the same scene is adequate. Here, as Kolin continues, "Williams broadcasts to an attentive audience that Blanche is out with a man who cannot find a key and cannot carry a woman (Mae West) the right way because he is forever trapped by/in spare parts, held captive in a castrating matriarchy [and] when Mitch does attempt physical intimacy, he is a fumbling clown whose actions are repeatedly interrupted, at first comically but then tragically for him and for Blanche. Mitch's desire is severed from sexual competence" (163). Of course, it could be argued that Mitch stands as the opposite of Stanley. It is true that in their differences (mainly physical ones) Stanley and Mitch do appear as opposites. Yet, as Adler remarks, these polarities are not divisive since there is something of Stanley in Mitch. Demanding, in scene 9, "what [he has] been missing all summer," Mitch, in his physical abuse, foreshadows Stanley's rape of Blanche that same night. Also, by tearing the paper lantern off the light bulb, he does violence to Blanche. The literal physical act that

he attempts is the same one that Stanley will accomplish (Adler 70). Of course, the remorse he experiences at the end pleads in his favor, and at least momentarily separates him from the most unlikely beau of all, Stanley.

Scene 9, however, opens ground for Williams' questioning of the construction of manliness. Manliness, long thought to be contingent upon control and self-restraint (Robinson 169) is in crisis for Mitch's self-restraint—closely emphasized as the only mark of civilization in the play—is also a symptom of his effeminacy while Stanley's "release" of passionate and primitive masculinity becomes a sign of his virility. The juxtaposition of the two rape scenes—Mitch's failed attempt in scene 9 and Stanley's successful abuse in scene 11—draws heavily on what Gail Bederman has identified as the "neurasthenic paradox":

> According to Victorian doctrine, only civilized white men had the manly strength to restrain their powerful masculine passions. But what if civilized, manly self-restraint was not a source of power, but merely a symptom of nerve-exhaustion and effeminacy? What if civilized advancement led merely to delicacy and weakness? Then the male body becomes not a strong storage battery, highly charged with tightly leashed masculine sexuality, but a decadent wreck, an undercharged battery with a dangerous scarcity of nerve force (88).[463]

This paradox is never solved and Williams—echoing Bederman—suggests that the conflict between manly self-restraint and a masculine expression of primitivism or savagery remains the hallmark of manhood and that this conflict still structures masculinity.

The "mise en image" of masculinity in A Streetcar Named Desire actually points out what makes the complexity of an actual understanding of what defines a man in Williams' play. Lynn Segal's emblematic definition can still serve as a starting point: "to be 'masculine' is not to be 'feminine,' not to be 'gay,' not to be tainted with any marks of 'inferiority'" (x).

On this ground, it would stand to uncontroversial evidence that Stanley's performance is overwhelmingly masculine.

Invoking Darwinism, natural selection, and a sexualized discourse of male power, the play negotiates the primal, brutish, and sensual Stanley into the strongest embodiment of assertive masculinity: he dominates Stella in every way and is physically abusive. Their love and relationship is based on animalistic sexual chemistry, something that Blanche finds impossible to understand. Unlike Tom, for whom masculinity is forever out of reach (on the horizon but never there), Stanley need not await the acquisition of charismatic power, authority, and virility. He already possesses them. For Adler, "his power and his pride as a man rest in his virility: he is the 'gaudy seed-bearer' whose be-all and end-all is the 'giving and taking' of physical pleasure" (51). In other words, Stanley defines himself by his ability to bring about female orgasm. He interprets desire and pleasure as a commodity "that must be traded in, with accreditation of masculinity as the pay-off of the transaction" (Brigham 299).[464]

Stanley's permanent display of muscular force and sexual prowess verges on a demonstration of masculinity akin to caricature (an aspect that the film adaptation will fully exploit with Marlon Brando's muscular body being surexposed for the gratification of the audience's gaze). In the first scene of the play, Stanley makes his entrance carrying a package of bloody meat as if bringing it fresh from the kill. Stanley's violence is repeatedly feared, seen (he beats his wife and rapes Blanche), or remembered as when Stella, for instance, recalls his smashing the light bulbs on their honeymoon night with his wife's slipper. Stanley's body, as an external signifier, comes to represent all the conventions traditionally linked to the assumption of male power and masculinity. Stanley's almost-obsessively

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[463] Gail Bederman, Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

masculinized body verges on a demonstration of masculinity most outrageously to the point of caricature, in a way that makes him actually closer to Mitch than would initially be expected. Indeed, besides poetry, Mitch repeatedly relates to his own body as an external signifier, a tool for seduction. When courting Blanche in Scene 6 and while Blanche exposes the story of her husband, Alan, Mitch surexposes himself by saying, "I weigh two hundred and seventy pounds and I'm six feet and one half inches tall in my bare feet, without shoes on. And that is what I weigh stripped" (71). Mitch's and Stanley's bodies are bodies on display, calling into question the aesthetics of masculinity for, one can wonder: how can you quantify something (a masculine model of Southern gentility) that is qualititative only? Or, as Singal puts it, ""the closer we come to uncovering some form of exemplary masculinity, a masculinity which is solid and sure of itself, the clearer it becomes that masculinity is structured through contradiction: the more it asserts itself, the more it calls itself into question" (123).[465]

The visualization of the central male characters (central, not by virtue of their gentility but because they appear as the only remnants of manliness left in the play), if it does not question normative gender relations, paradoxically, points to the limits of the masculine strength it is meant to emulate, as it threatens to demasculinize the world these men live in. Whether it is a "strong" body like Stanley's or a "soft" body like Mitch's, both appear as dangerously unstable, and the most frequent reaction of other (i.e. female) characters is revealing of the mixture of awe, disgust, and utter rejection, encapsulated maybe best by the denomination of "Ape" in Stanley's case. If the word, in its performative capacity, deprives the recipient of any form of humanity, it also makes explicit the problem of a materially, physically and symbolically challenged masculinity in the play.

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[464] Cathy Brigham, "Identity, Masculinity, and Desire in David Bradley's Fiction." Contemporary Literature 36.2 (1995): 289-316.

[465] Lynne Segal, Slow motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men (London: Virago press, 1990).

Though it may draw on empirical experience, the pictorial language of A Streetcar Named Desire seems to focus on a relatively fixed set of attributes, all of which appear to stem from the male body. The centrality of Stanley is essentially taken for granted because of his force and that of Mitch because of his weakness. In order to draw a picture of masculinity that is not as one-dimensional as it may appear at first glance, Lee Clark Mitchell proposes to define masculinity following another direction: "[it] is not simply a blunt biological fact but it is as well a cultural fiction that must be created" (155).[466] Certainly, the notion of creation in A Streetcar Named Desire is of paramount importance.

7.4. Following the Script of Patriarchy.

In the context of the New South, Stanley, the dark gaudy seed-bearer, is indeed a creation, mostly a projection of Southern men's fears, for Stanley does not only represent the darkness of the sexual rapist but also the darkness of the European immigrant performer who regards himself as American. Stanley is described as being dark, and according to one critic, the "marginality of Stanley becomes a conduit for Williams' own fantasies of the dark Africanist other" (Van Duyvenbode 204).[467] Stanley's body, as Van Duyvenbode adds, also belongs to "[t]hese masqueraded or signified bodies of racial others [that] play an instrumental role in defining white 'Americanness' through divorcing it from what is not" (204).

If he is of foreign origin, Stanley also represents a sexual threat because he shows that masculinity can be performed, disguised, or passed through. The last scene in particular, in which Stanley is shown sobbing like a baby, reveals a different man, and "rather than granting the reader or spectator with a single locus of empathetic identification, [the play] offers

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[466] Lee Clark Mitchell, Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[467] Rachel Van Duyvenbode, "Darkness Made Visible: Miscegenation, Masquerade and the Signified Racial Other in Tennessee Williams' Baby Doll and A Streetcar Named Desire." Journal of American Studies 35.2 (2001): 203-215.

multiple, and sometimes contradictory, points of interpellation" (Savran 98). Williams, to quote Savran "seems to delight in keeping his interpreters, like his characters, deliciously off balance, never quite sure to respond to a situation or where to position themselves" (99).[468] And there may be disconcerting implications in this masqueraded male. As Marion Magid ponders, "it is hard to know what is more unpleasant in [Stanley's] image: the overt sentimentality it expresses, or the latent brutality it masks: a fascination with the image of the helpless creature under the physical domination of another, accepting his favors with tears of gratitude" (78).[469] In Irigaray's terms, Stanley thus submits to the dominant economy of desire in an attempt to remain "on the market," and in turn, has become femininized. His soldier uniform, at the beginning of the play, also suggests (only to be quickly denied) that during his courtship of Stella, Stanley's lack of refinement and his forcefulness was disguised, or perhaps, made to seem acceptable by his Master Sergeant's uniform (Hern xxxvii).[470] Not surprisingly, Van Duyvenbode sees that "[t]he dark designs of [. . .] Stanley illustrate the fear of predatory dark others who, disguised and shadowed, threaten to destabilize Southern sexual and social relations" (214).[471] The outfit, however, as a sign and source of power not only provides a means to show and legitimize the function of the soldier but also signals his belonging to a group. Tellingly, the production of masculinity, to render visible an identity through a recognizable suit becomes a matter of anxiety for the bearer of masculinity who must reject his belonging to a different group, that of the Polacks. Transgressive, uncontrollable, alternative bodies are sources of disruption and such marginal beings pose an

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[468] David Savran, Communists, Cowboys, and Queers; the Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

[469] Marion Magid, "The Innocence of TW." Commentary 35 (Jan. 1963): 34-43; rpt. in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Tennessee Williams.

[470] Patricia Hern, A Streetcar Named Desire, with Commentary and Notes (London: Methuen Drama, 1990).

[471] Rachel Van Duyvenbode, "Darkness Made Visible: Miscegenation, Masquerade and the Signified Racial Other," in Tennessee Williams' Baby Doll and A Streetcar Named Desire." Journal of American Studies 35.2 (2001): 203-215. In doing so, Willliams "conflates the image of the foreign other with that of the racial marginal in order to censor his discourse of his profoundly "closed" Southern society" (Van Duyvenbode

interrogation and a threat to the social body, which must somehow reincorporate this ambiguous male or brand it as monstruous or taboo. Therefore, if Stanley wants to achieve integration, he must deny his ethnic heritage and claim "whiteness." Not surprisingly, the latter forcefully protects his reputation against the attempted renaming fashioned by Blanche: "I am not a Polack. People from Poland are Poles, not Polacks. But what I am is a one hundred per cent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don't ever call me a Polack" (43). Stanley is thus forced to forfeit his identity as a man (he is an ape) and as a foreigner (a polack). Nevery fully an American citizen, nor fully dispossessed, it is little wonder that Stanley may feel the need to belong to a state-institutionalized group, a corporation, a fraternity, a family.

In fact, Stanley cannot achieve true masculinity if he has not gone through the process of being restored. What The Sheltered Life, The Glass Menagerie, and Gone with the Wind emphasize is that by participating in an organized and orderly community, men can retrieve a voice and their proper place. With Ned, the fatherly-sanctioned union to Bel Tracy shows how unruly young men could be channeled into predictable, productive adults who could be trusted to exercise individual rights without fostering anarchy or tyranny in society. With Kennedy, the preoccupation becomes how to control men's fickle nature and foolish adventures, restless desires and impulses. The passion for fatherhood and filial deference—for Mitchell—are able to subdue men's destructive passions, reinforce male bonds, and legitimate the rule of nursing fathers.[472] Women like Melanie as mothers and wives instill filial duty in

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214). "The racial metaphor (…) suggests that racial signification remains a consistent feature of white American self-definition and the masquerade of Southern discourses" (Van Duyvenbode 214).

[472] For Thomas Mann (qtd. in Kimmel's article), American history is a constant vigil to restrain men's passions. On that subject, read Michael S. Kimmel, "Reading Men: Men, Masculinity, and Publishing." Contemporary Sociology, 21.2 (1992): 162-171; In his article, Kimmel reviews the following works: Robert Bly, Iron John: A Book about Men (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1990); Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America; Kenneth Clatterbaugh, Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity: Men, Women, and Politics in Modern Society; Christine DiStefano, Configurations of Masculinity: A Feminist Perspective on Modern Political Theory; David Gilmore, Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity; Mark E. Kann, On the Man Question: Gender and

sons and husbands and it is participation in war (as seen in <u>The Glass Menagerie</u>, <u>The Sheltered Life</u>, and <u>Gone with the Wind</u>) which would cure the young man "of excessive selfishness and the attractions of effete urban life" (Mann 17, qtd in Kimmel). Joining the war, for Rhett, Ashley, and Tom, becomes the way to leave behind the individual battles, those without meaning because fought in isolation for petty corrupt reasons. As Eva Carton explains, "the process [of joining the ranks] typically replaces the arbitrary sign of individual identity with one that is in some way physically embodied and that assumes meaning only within the dynamics of the group" (302).[473] The war, in a way, represents "a dream of a realm of pure and undifferentiated being that was founded from the start upon a series of categorical divisions"—the division of field from world, of men from women, of war from peace. Men bear arms and women bear children (308).[474] This stands opposed to the chaos and disorder that the society—as <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u> reveals—could ultimately face if the former elite of Southern gentlemen refused to become self-disciplined subjects.

The fear of the homosexual—or rather the man freed from all commitment—serves the purpose, as Alan's private romance threatens to disrupt the collective utopia of Southern manhood. Alan forfeits his claim to masculinity—or rather to individual singularity—because he would rather commit suicide than repair his breach of patriarchal law. His homosexuality poses a threat to patriarchal law because Blanche and Alan will not produce an heir. Even worse, if the fear of the homosexual does represent a challenge to patriarchy, <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u> also represents a masculinity that must be reconstructed in the aftermath of a

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<u>Civic Virtue in America</u>; Sam Keen, <u>Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man</u>; Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, <u>King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine</u>; Ted Ownby, <u>Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920</u>; Victor J. Seidler, <u>Recreating Sexual Politics: Men, Feminism and Politicss</u>;Victor J. Seidler, <u>Rediscovering Masculinity: Reason, Language, and Sexuality</u>; Victor J. Seidler, <u>The Achilles Heel Reader: Men, Sexual Politics and Socialism</u>; Keith Thompson, <u>To Be a Man: In Search of the Deep Masculine.</u>
[473] Evan Carton, "Vietnam and the Limits of Masculinity." <u>American Literary History</u> 3.2 (1991): 294-318.
[474] William Broyles Jr., <u>Brothers in Arms: A Journey from War to Peace</u> (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1986).

woman's challenge, and the solution seems to be putting a woman back in her place in order to reestablish the masculine identity she has put in jeopardy. After raping Blanche, Stanley can thus return with his masculinity at least tentatively and imaginatively in place. He gets for himself an independent, unaffiliated, uncompromised manhood. Stanley achieves what Alan, or Blanche's father(s)—overtly sexual and thus undisciplined and uncontrolled—could not achieve.

As Adler remarks, Stanley's language of power, "though impoverished, embodies the dominant discourse of patriarchy. Blanche poses a threat to this interpretive authority by actions that are subversive of the traditional social order that victimizes and tries to render her powerless" (Adler 14). Stanley's allegiance to the collective and the state is also reinforced when, eventually, Stanley uses the authoritative word of the male doctors at the end of the play to "solve" Blanche's annexation of male identity. Stanley remasculinizes himself by invoking the doctor's authoritative word and transmuting Blanche not into a feminine man but a repellent loony; no longer masculine nor feminine but utterly deprived of identity. This non-identity is reinforced in this scene by the appearance of the heavy matron, the nurse who is "accompanied by … lurid reflections and noises of the jungle" and "divested of all the softer properties of womanhood." Blanche is diagnosed as irrational, neurotic, and hysterical, and as a consequence, the existence of the Southern belle stereotype remains primarily based on a fear that women "might escape the rule of the patriarchy that the oppositions of white/black, master/slave, lady/whore, even male/female might collapse into an anarchic conflagration threatening to bring down the symbolic order" (Roberts xii). In the end, Blanche's rebellion (or sanction of an order that would not be based on the destructive polarities mentioned above) is not allowed.

William Broyles argues that, "war was an initiation into the power of life and death. Women touch that power at the moment of birth: men on the edge of death. It is like lifting off the corner of the universe and peeking at what's underneath" (201).

She is finally institutionalized in an asylym, by a science—psychiatry—that, Adler notes, is itself "patriarchal in its definition of woman as lacking that which is man's by nature" (79). As a consequence, more than seeking "to authenticate woman's traditional place" or to retrieve "a natural sexual identity" for Blanche and Southern female rebels, Williams countermands one masculine authority (Stanley) with another (the doctor, the ultimate authority, the father of us all). After the rape, Blanche is driven further into herself and her dreams, not released, and is handed to Williams' modern priest, the psychoanalyst, for care. There is an unclear mingling of themes here: Blanche, at first, withdraws from the doctor—stereotyped, masculinized symbol of institution—only to capitulate to the doctor when he personifies himself by removing his professional appearance. As Joseph N. Riddell has argued, "Williams offers, as he does elsewhere, the psychoanalyst as surrogate artist-priest, who must reconstruct the fragments of personality by absolving conflict and its attendant guilt" (88).[475]

In front of a liberated woman (what the South itself was experiencing after the war), Stanley exemplifies the ability to remasculinize himself, by placing his allegiance in the state institutions—i.e. doctors, or army. Unlike Alan, he does not breach patriarchal law. Uncompromised manhood is also restored through uncompromised fatherhood. In A Streetcar Named Desire, Stanley's concern is to create a progressive, positive, and modern family space devoid of pressures from other kin, friends, and relatives on reproductive or familial decisions, and devoid of notions of honor, respectability, politeness (as emphasized by Blanche) and "savoir-vivre" (essentially matters of the public eye that have led—even if indirectly—to Blanche's husband's suicide). In Stanley and Stella's mind, there is an

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[475] Joseph N. Riddell, "A Streetcar Named Desire—Nietzsche descending." Modern Drama 5 (Feb 1963): 421-30; rpt. in Jordan Y. Miller, ed., Twentieth Century of Interpretations of A Streetcar Named Desire, a Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

assumption, therefore, for the household to be a decision-making unit that is free and the sole locus of social respectability. As Kamran Asdar Ali explains, in such a case

> family is regarded the natural basis of civil life. As a location of biological ties and affective emotions among its members, it may, however, stand opposed to the working of the liberal state. Family can be thus simultaneously the foundation of the modern state and antagonistic to it. Hence, the family needs to be reconstituted on modern grounds [for] its allegiance has to reside with the state (326).[476]

The New South, as Williams demonstrates, may still need the father as the head of the household yet now, a new kind of patriarch is desired, responsible about his civil duties and subservient to the state. Michel Foucault argues that the father is not the representative of the sovereign or the state and the latter are not projections of the father, either. Yet, the reconstruction of the father's role within the family is necessary to accomplish transformative requirements of the modern state. [477] Stanley mentions the Napoleonic code, calling himself an American, while Blanche's trespassing of government restraint by flirting with one of her students may underline a fear of libertine excesses and human passions that was already present in her fathers. As a result, Stanley is portrayed seizing on legality—another institution—to get even with Blanche. Stanley, in other words, mobilizes the discourse of patriarchy, of marriage, of legality to become powerful, thus turning attention to the way the invisible patriarchal order becomes legibl, even through iconoclastic streaks. Moreover, the portrayal of Blanche as a crazy woman corresponds to the fear "that the hysterical woman ceased to function within the family. No longer did she devote herself to the need of others, acting as self-sacrificing wife, mother, or daughter, though her hysteria she could find and, in

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[476] Ali Kamran Asdar, "Myths, Lies, and Impotence: Structural Adjustment and Male Voice in Egypt." Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 23.1-2 (2003): 321-334.

[477] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality (New York: New York Vintage Books, 1980).

fact, force others to assume these functions. Consciously or unconsciously, [she] had thus opted out of [her] traditional role" (Smith-Rosenberg 208).[478]

By constructing such an alternative social order, the categorical mistake (Stanley) is resituated as a fundamental force of social cohesion: because Stanley reinforces his allegiance to the state and to the family structure (while, at the same time remaining the visible "other" or monster) he can voice the regeneration of patriarchal models, by establishing an inviolable "living space," a protected realm where women and men could do their most important work as wives, mothers, fathers, etc, but also by discovering new types of men, loving fathers and sons for whom dominant institutions, not man's sexual nature, came first. The idea that the individual soldier must be cleansed before he can return home is an acknowledgement "not only of the risks run through the presence in the home of men trained in violence but also of the risks to structures of authority posed by men who have been given license to challenge an enemy's authority" (Jeffords 166).[479]

As the fornications of Blanche's fathers underscore, male sexuality must be channeled, schooled, and domesticated if men are to participate in the family. This belief is precisely premised in a system based upon the need to reestablish clearly demarcated gender roles and celebrate the right sort of man, one who is able to take up arms, protect women, but also serve the state. Authority, in this formulation, falls to those who are not encumbered by racial or gender visibility. It is in this sense that Donna Haraway speaks of the privilege of inhabiting an unmarked body: "those inhabiting these marked bodies [of woman, the colonized or enslaved, and the worker] have been symbolically other to the fictive rational self of

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[478] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, <u>Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); qtd. in Marta Caminero-Santangelo, "The Madwoman Can't Speak: Postwar Culture, Feminist Criticism, and Welty's 'June Recital'." <u>Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature</u> 15.1 (1996): 123-146.

[479] Susan Jeffords, "The 'Remasculinization' of Germany in the 1950s: Discussion." <u>Signs</u> 21.1 (Autumn 1998): 163-169.

universal, and so unmarked [and uncontested], species man, a coherent subject" (210).[480] A "normal woman" is, as Luce Irigaray notes, "a man minus the possibility of (re)presenting oneself as a man" (27).[481]

In a system of sexual difference premised on an uncontested male norm, Blanche must therefore become dramatically othered. The homosexuality of Blanche's husband and her own madness reinforce that same fear, for Blanche's "madness has connections to the unmentionable [that] society seeks to suppress;" i.e. failing codes of gentility and chivalry (O'Connor 17).[482] Blanche has revealed how patriarchy has abandoned its children at a crucial moment. Representative of the values of their culture, Blanche's fathers are also—and like Alan—transgressors of these values. Therefore, the absence of these "beaux"—as emphasized by Blanche—hints at the diminishing or displacement of fatherhood itself—the absence of fatherhood as signifier and signified. For Jacqueline O'Connor, viewed this way, "madness becomes the social category created for dealing with these rebels; the confinement which results from this labeling provides a method for insuring their silence" (18). In the end, Blanche leaves the stage on the doctor's arm, depending on the gallantry of this surrogate "beau" whose gentility contrasts with the bestiality of Stanley, yet who validates Blanche's madness. Seen in this light, Stanley the beast and the doctor—surrogate gentleman—have become allies in the eviction of Blanche from the play. As O'Connor asserts: "[Blanche] has been effectively silenced and removed from the group. Blanche's dialogue during the last scene has led progressively toward this final muteness, for her speeches are substantially shorter and less frequent here than elsewhere in the play" (12).[483] Acting as a defense of

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[480] Donna Haraway, <u>Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature</u> (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).

[481] Luce Irigaray, <u>Speculum of the Other Woman,</u> trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

[482] Blanche has become a quixotic hero: "in creating characters who persist, despite great difficulty, in proclaiming true stories of our time and the world we live in, Williams demonstrates his conviction that American society seeks to silence those who shock and outrage with stories of the unmentionable" (O'Connor 25).

[483] Jacqueline O'Connor, "Babbling Lunatics: Language and Madness," <u>20th Century Interpretations of ASND</u>.

patriarchal, masculine ideals, Stanley imitates a "dominant regulatory fiction authorizing the continued representation of certain types of gender performances for men (like the breadwinner), marginalizing others (like the momma's boy), and forbidding others (like the homosexual)" (Cohan 24).[484] Such achievements transcend class, race, and gender limitations to reach some form of hypnotic universality.

At worst, however, engineering consent over what is supposed to form a culture of masculinity borders on the caricatural: the visible organization of patriarchal society, based on perpetuation through mating assisted by social controls, is demonstrated to be an artificial set up, alienating men by forcing them to construct an identity in the perspective of socially sanctioned heteronormativity. Yet, in the perspective of social control, Stanley the misogynist rapist would be condemnable, subject to the same type of alienation as Blanche (if not the asylum, the prison). By showing Stanley as the visible monster—and therefore as subject to censure—Tennessee Williams (and Blanche indirectly) thus reworks the invisible one (or "absent" one)—the Southern man—to whiteness, non-censure, and therefore hegemony. Using the "new" man as a vehicle for Blanche's damnation, the Southern beau—present only spectrally throughout the play—avoids such damnation and all possible accusation of misogyny. And because the presence of these "failed" beaux is only spectral and submitted to the folly of Blanche's interpretations, one can never be sure of the true failings of patriarchs who have been removed from censure and visibility. The absence of monolithic masculinity serves as a kind of over-arching presence, a frame of masculine authority—visible only through the unobstrusive enforcements of state-instituted laws. Whereas he (a man or a he-woman) seems to be absent from the play, he is performatively incorporated as the source of linguistic representation.

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[484] Steven Cohan, "The Spy in the Gray Flannel Suit," Marked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

In fact, instead of promoting new gender performances, the play actually works to reinforce resilient gender asymmetries. Stella and Blanche remain constructed into character foils, i.e. on one side female power and on the other side female sexuality. By dividing them into breeders and non-breeders, Williams provides ominous warning feminine caricatures of what happens to women who use their energy for anything other than bearing children. The fate of the former belle—Blanche—argues that the alternative to being with a man is indeed the cold comfort of a grave.

In a similar manner, Blanche remains conditioned, clearly behaving to Stanley as "the aristocrat who condescends to the plebeian when she is not actually scorning him. This is compulsive conduct on her part, because she must feel superior to her sister's husband if she is not to feel inferior in view of her helplessness" (Gassner 375).[485] The father-figure in the play has become deposed fathers, stripped of authority. Yet, what the daughters reveal is that the power of the absent father stands both as the hated figure and the ideal model. Indeed, in the absence of the "father" and his patriarchal representatives (Beaux, for instance), Blanche (and Stella to a certain extent) assumes the masculine role of defending gentility in the face of the brutish Stanley and defending the oppression of Stella whom she wishes to keep in infancy. Read in this light, the father, the absent "beau," remains hidden behind a historical and social structure which has repudiated gentlemen at the same time as it guarantees the rule of the gentlemen's codes (Rosenfeldt 135).[486] Stella, by the end, also (re)establishes the domestication of Stanley and his allegiance to family, state, and children. Thus doing, "patriarchy can assure its ideological repression of women by turning them into doubles of the patriarchal oppressors" (Rosenfeldt 128).

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[485] John Gassner, "A Streetcar Named Desire: A Study in Ambiguity," <u>Modern Drama: Essays in Criticism</u>, eds. Travis Bogard and William I. Oliver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) 374-384.

[486] Paul Rosenfeldt, <u>The Absent Father in Modern Drama</u> (New York: P. Lang, 1995).

In fact, the rebel of the South, the Belle, is never represented as an effective agent of rebellion, i.e., as the builder of a new order. She must however remain as the reader of a lost and fictional truth, the one who resurrects history from the archives and counteracts the version of history imposed by the evil Stanley. The melodrama of good versus evil is played out against the discourse of Blanche, the victim, and Stanley, the victimizer, and the discourse, as critics have noticed, focuses on Blanche's injuries, madness, and personal experience. "The language of experience and personal suffering," as Joan Scott notes, (intersecting with the therapeutic discourse of victimization) replaces the "language of rights," in which victims could demand their due (297).[487] To speak of victims, as opposed to oppressions, thus contributes to lifting "difference" out of the realm of the institutional to place it in the realm of the individual: in other words, if one gets to know about how women like Blanche relate to their "oppressors," the text avoids looking at the "oppressors" themselves. By focusing on Blanche's injured body and mind, the play thus facilitates a slide from a discourse of patriarchal oppression and patriarchal failure to a discourse of victimization. The turn toward the personal shows that the invisible dominant in Southern culture has indeed a vast armory of discursive strategies at its disposal.[488]

In Stanley's case, because life—as exemplified by the apartment of the Kowalskis and embodied in the different characters of New Orleans—is clearly depicted as a chaotic, violent order, the death of the Southern gentlemen, or rather their disembodied, invisible presence, hovers behind the material world in a way that is probably even stronger than what could be (and was) in real life. There is a case here of what Freud described when talking about patriarchal power: "rather than dissolving his power, death magnifies and perpetuates it. His death in nature produces his life in culture as symbol, as source of the law as the subject of a

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[487] Joan Scott, "The Rhetoric of Crisis in High Education," Higher Education Under Fire. Eds. Michael Bérubé and Cary Nelson (New York&London: Routledge, 1995) 293-304.
[488] This point is developed in Sally Robinson's Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis.

seemingly unresolvable ambivalence, oscillating between hatred and veneration" (qtd. in Cook 143).[489] It is true that Stella registers the shift of power away from the heroic hegemonic male order. Indeed, as Oklopcic explains, "marriage w[as] considered to be the highest aspirations of [the Belle's] life, the belle's energies and skills were mainly directed to finding and marrying real Southern gentleman" (1). Stella, however, by settling for Stanley, has turned her back on the past and compromised her moral stature.

The last scene is painted as a sort of "pieta" tableau that underscores Stella's possible dismantling of the new heroic order embodied by men like Stanley. If Stella does surrender in the end, it is not so much to Stanley but to "crying," and there is "something luxurious in her complete *surrender to crying*" (93, emphasis mine). As for Stanley, he "kneels beside her and his fingers find the opening of her blouse" (93).[490] The man—new hero of the South—having forfeited his sexually and socially declarative vigor and arrogance, is reduced to the dependent status of the child who leaves his card game to seek reassurance that Stella is still bound to him. In this scene, the woman he once assumed to be his to control is now the authority. Also, it should not be forgotten that because of the failings of her own "disembodied fathers," Stella was taken down from the pillars of her plantation, to later carry the child of the only "embodied father" in the play. During the night of the delivery, Blanche will be raped by the new father. There is therefore an obvious link between the two types of fathers and the two symbolical orders: out of the ashes of the first springs Stella's desire to make her own living with Stanley and in turn, a baby which will bear the name of Kowalski, thus marking the definite waning of the Old South. The same absent father is behind the social

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[489] Sigmund Freud, et al., "Totem and Taboo and Other Works," The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 19531974) quoted in John E. Cook, "Fictional Fathers," Sweet Dreams: Sexuality, Gender, and Popular Fiction, ed. Susan Radstone (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988) 137-164.

[490] The idea has been made explicit in several articles, such as Joan Wylie Hall, "The Stork and the Reaper, the Madonna and the Stud: Procreation and Mothering in Tennessee Williams's Plays." The Mississippi Quarterly 48 (1995): 677-701; Glasgow herself uses a variant of the Pieta in The Descendant, The Deliverance and The Romance of a Plain Man.

welfare of Stanley and Stella, but also behind its corruption. The absent father again stands between the ideal and its perversion—always present in its disincarnate absence. Of course, it could be argued that Stanley represents the new current of political and social force. The male also represents his gender by the force and vigor he directs upon the female, seeking her as the object of his active desire.

Yet, since Stanley is outside the heroic order by virtue of his low social position (and foreign position), the male's desire is not sanctioned by tradition and therefore can be seen without the muted sentimental glow of the heroic and without the risk of validating this subordinate masculine desire, and rightly so. His birthright makes him to exist outside the normative. Iconoclastic streaks are neutralized through the equation of Stanley with totally different classes of beings, none of which even remotely competes with dominant masculinity for precedence, prestige, or predominance. Stanley's low social position removes him from the heroic order and thus from the sanctioning of the new dominant masculinity he embodies. In the representation of Stanley, the text presents masculinity and race as subsidiaries for gentility: the way this man runs his household and treats women becomes a trope of civilization in <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u>. It also reveals how the discourse of gentility can be mobilized to justify the domination of one model of masculinity (and one race). His misogyny, however, enables the dialogue of patriarchy to continue in the absence of its embodied representatives. Indeed, as Burkman explains, misogyny may appear in different guises—be it negative portrayals of women, physical and psychological punishment of women, or women's exclusion and degradation. But the purpose of misogyny goes further than pure exclusion of women. The purpose is, acoording to Burkman, to "negotiate and perpetuate cultural forms" (12).[491]

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[491] Katherine H. Burkman and Judith Roof, eds., <u>Staging the Rage: the Web of Misogyny in Modern Drama</u> (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998).

For Robert Vorlicky, if one wishes to understand better how patriarchal models can maintain their hegemony (even if those supposed to enforce this model are physically absent), one needs to ask the following question: "whether men—in the absence of women—replicate a gendered language system, one in which the voices of male and female, masculine and feminine, self and other remain, albeit coming exclusively from the mouths of (hegemonic) men" (9).[492] Actually, in the absence of her beaux, Blanche engages in a dialogue that is aristocratic, therefore ensuring the archetype of the Southern Cavalier to continue, even though it has failed to sustain its Belle. In the absence of the Belle, the beaux—as emphasized by the fragmented allusions to Alan or Blanche's fathers—do not sustain a dialogue that would ensure the continuity of patriarchal models: as with General Archbald, Alan, or Blanche's fathers, the men's "private" romances often shed light on the failings of the system and the refusal to play the role of masters, husbands, etc—i.e. fixed models of manhood. Yet, their absence from the play prevents their damnation. Moreover, since the actions of these "invisible" ones are filtered through Blanche's view-point, their failures remain largely "invisible," subjected to the folly of Blanche. Alan, for instance, as a character, only exists in the gaps or margins of the dramatic present, in a liminal space between absence and presence. He cannot explain his actions nor can he contradict the representation of others. His actions are always filtered through Blanche's point of view.

For the men who are left—the "New Men" of Stanley's kind—social dialogue is safe: it guarantees cooperative communication. The male characters are fully aligned with the patriarchal ethos that creates the individual and collective power—political, economic, domestic, and sexual power—conscious of its role in constructing their public image. Inevitably and pointedly, their power at this level is over women, the "Other." Finally, this

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[492] Robert Vorlicky, Act Like a Man. Challenging Masculinities in American Drama (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

ethos is amorphous: it is a rigidly ordered discourse, that is, a structured thematic consisting of certain specific topics. During the social dialogue, the characters engage the topics of families, women, the south, and their own active identification with the cultural ideal of male virility.[493] Seen in this light, New South and Old South become allies and Blanche can be regarded as the spectacular object of a commodity exchange in the reiteration of patriarchal familial models (Burkman 13). What is deemed unfit is assimilated (or blended) as a truly component form of masculinity: Stanley's dramatic performance, like Blanche's, brings out the very arbitrariness of standard, naturalized masculinity and reveals its fundamental performativity. If Stanley does unveil the construction of masculinity. Yet, his performance primarily serves to reassert hegemonic masculinity instead of opening the way to other forms of masculinity. If masculinity is regenerated or renewed in Stanley's social order, it seems that it is only through the return to previously-known instances of masculinity instead of creating new forms or exploring marginalized masculinities. The end, by silencing Blanche and by invalidating the order sanctioned by Stanley, favors the position of those who are absent from the narrative and, therefore, not submitted to censure. Paul Rosenfeldt explains, after all, that "patriarchy itself is based on an ideology that has privileged the absent and uncertain position of the father" (6). Ultimately, because the dominant images of hegemonic masculinity in the margins of the text exemplify what Abigail Solomon-Godeau defines as the capacity of "masculinity, however defined" to "restructure, refurbish, and resurrect themselves for the next historical turn" (70), Stanley—the marginal other—does not escape the rule of patriarchy and neither does Blanche.[494] If one does not see and does not know what a Southern gentleman is in such plays, at least one may know what he is not. And if one does

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[493] For Vorlicky, the dialogue of war, in particular, reinforces the power of hegemonic masculine models because veterans engage in a dialogue of social and masculine cooperation, which can be summarized as follows: "I've been there." We find this dialogue of masculine (and social) cooperation in The Sheltered Life and also in Gone with the Wind.

not know what makes a gentleman powerful, one can witness how his power is exerted/performed, on whom and by whom. These embodiments of counter-hegemonic models of gender performance do not enable difference but rather another form of cooptation. The recuperation of the marginal nonetheless dissolves itself into another insecure discourse, as it may be asked if the prevalence of mainstream gentility does indeed make resisting alternatives or subversions less powerful: does whitewashing, one can ask, lessen the power of the marginal?

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[494] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Male Trouble," <u>Constructing Masculinity.</u> Eds. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Solomon Watson (London: Routledge, 1995).

CONCLUSION

Trying to "define" the foundational and essential Southern Gentleman, John Mayfield explains that "the patriarchal society of the South" established a "power" which "was institutionalized through the male and the dominant codes of behavior [that] apparently sprang from the battlefield and the clan" (478).[495] Reading the collective epics of Southern romance, Mayfield argues that William Gilmore Simms' "primary male heroes supposedly embody the qualities of what can be called the patrician paradigm of manliness" (479), a paradigm that David Leverenz defined as one founded on property, patriarchy, and citizenship: "it was the ideology of a narrow elite: merchants, gentry, large landowners, lawyers—in old English as well as Marxist perspective, the upper bourgeoisie" (78).[496] As the manly expression of power, this paradigm stressed stability. As an expression of behavior, it stressed decorum, "placing particular importance on place and defining manhood in Jeffersonian terms, as 'an autonomous self-sufficiency'" (Mayfield 479). Understandably, Simms' heroes—in the manner of other Southern heroes—"struggle to keep the forces of mobility—often known as Yankees—in their place" (479).

In his book Cavalier and Yankee, William R. Taylor suggests a quite different explanation for the South's attachment to Southern romance. According to him, these Southerners "grasped at symbols of stability and order to stem their feelings of drift and uncertainty and to quiet their uneasiness about the inequalities within Southern society" (146).[497] A closer scrutiny of the cavalier and genteel ethos of William Gilmore Simms's time reveals indeed that disruption is the key to much of the writing. As early as the 1830s and as J. P. Kennedy already makes clear, the ideal of the southern gentleman is showing a few cracks.

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[495] John Mayfield, "'The Soul of a Man!' William Gilmore Simms and the Myths of Southern Manhood." Journal of the Early Republic 15.3 (1995): 477-500.

[496] David Leverenz, Manhood and the American Renaissance (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

[497] William R. Taylor, Cavalier & Yankee: The Old South and the American National Character (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

Mayfield notes: "a hierarchically static South did not exist [for] [t]he pull of the market economy was everywhere [. . .] the hierarchies that resulted from such mobility were real but centered more on wealth and shrewdness than on family and name" (482). For the white male, "it produced cross currents of expectations that were confusing and destabilizing" (Mayfield 482). This uncertainty echoes throughout the literature of the South and the models of manhood that are portrayed and predominate in the representative pages analyzed here, reflect it too well.

What the texts emphasize is that there is a marked tendency to view the Southern planter critically or satirically and see his world as tragically flawed or at least seriously threatened by disruptive forces in its very midst. If the Southern gentleman is—as the southern myth tended to show—this cavalier characterized by virility, by a mastery of his environment, and if white Southern masculinity is "a self-evident standard against which all differences are measured" (Robinson 1), the most striking characteristic in fiction is not the foregrounding but the remoteness from this ideal, a tension existing from the outset between the ideal of the Southern gentleman and the capacities he exhibited in fiction. If these writers have anything to say about the place of the cavalier gentleman in the 19th century south, it is to call his usefulness and his existence into question. Despite a broad and powerful discourse that assume a natural, divinely ordained basis for authority based on gender and status, signs of anxiety among those whose privilege might have seemed inviolable are widespread and, once identified, the gentleman figure appears—as Breitenberg writes about English masculinity in his book Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England—anything but a static and orderly picture (1).[498] The Southern plantation appears as a world grey and ambivalent, rather than clear and categorizable and Southern masculinity as inherently anxious. Of course, patrician heroes can with difficulty be

made interesting or instructive because they must serve an ideal rather than challenge it. They are actors in a public drama and as idealized representatives of the planter elite [writers] must deny them any inner conflicts that would reflect poorly on that class [. . .] To have the hero question authority or struggle against his conscience was to admit that the abolitionists, especially H.B. Stowe, were right [. . .] historians may interpret manliness as a cultural structuring of authority; southern men regarded it as a set of expectations. These expectations were demanding and elaborate but not simple (Mayfield 481).

Complementing the view established by Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Eugene Genovese, Dickson D. Bruce, and Steven Stowe,[499] Mayfield adds that, for this leasure class, reputation and honor counted for everything:

The male was supposed to be either restrained or violent as the situation required according to highly ritualized codes. Life became a series of public displays in which the male literally performed—through hunting, treating, conspicuous consumption, a little learning for good measure, and so forth—for the approval of his peers [. . .] it is little wonder that so many southern men lost themselves in military posturing, gambling, and spouse abuse (481).

The fears of critical questioning and disruption that were already expressed at the beginning of the century acquire full meaning in the postbellum South, as the gentleman's mistrust of the 'carpetbagger,' the 'northerner,' the 'non-genteel,' the 'foreigner,' the 'other' becomes an

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[498] Mark Breitenberg, Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[499] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) ; Eugene Fox-Genovese, The Slaveholders' Dilemma : Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860 (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1992); Steven M. Stowe, Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Dickson D. Bruce Jr., Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); Ted Ownby, Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Richard Slotkin,

obsession, which is at once the index of a 'new' or an 'other' masculine order of success and power, yet also the indicator of a problematic 'de-masculinization' of the Southern character which reduced the possibilities for 'heroic' or 'chivalric' action. In these novels, the Southern Beau is portrayed as the consciousness and the conscience of the South who is paralyzed by his knowledge. Like Quentin Compson in The Sound and the Fury, he is a sort of Hamlet, introspective, given to brooding. His strings of action have become impaired. The result is confusion, indecision and a kind of growing dispiritedness. Talking about the males of Southern literature, Michael O'Brien writes, "they are not a happy crew on the whole and the predominant tone of antebellum [and postbellum] southern romanticism is melancholy … Certainly few cultures have been better prepared ideologically for the disaster of war" (51).[500]

The necessity for unreconstructed heroism is the basis of a reconstruction of masculinity in the appearance of the 'Lost Cause' myth. Fictions of the after-civil war period encode the necessity for heroic masculine action and masculine sacrifice as ideological underpinnings of the renewal of the South as a whole. Fictions which focus on the trials of old age and encode a nostalgia for the invisible, self-evident, untroubled, and unquestioned heroism of the Cavalier masculinity, as Glasgow's The Sheltered Life demonstrates, dramatize how glorifying civil war warriors and southern gentlemen is tied up with nostalgia—not merely for the mighty cavalier himself, but for a simpler, manly alternative to civilized complexities, an alternative always already lost. The gentleman seemed to embody a conception of excellence whose historical moment, for better or for worse, had already passed. Such a realization also suggested the frightening possibility that if the Belle done gone, therefore, perhaps the Beau just never was.

Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860 (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983)

[500] Michael O'Brien, Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

Not surprisingly, the literary context of the time is as diverse as the Southern men themselves. Mayfield explains: "alongside a dreadfully derivative cavalier strain in southern letters lay a vigorous streak of, some say, realism" (485). In the line of Edgar A. Poe, Augustus B. Longstreet, or Johnson Jones Hooper, John Pendleton Kennedy, William Faulkner, Margaret Mitchell, and Tennessee Wiliams, in various ways, demonstrate what Mayfield names an uneasiness with the petrified world of the southern gentleman. For Jesse Bier, these writers—like their male heroes—"were split men and had to live an interior life in a nether world" of comic books and grotesque fantasies (63, qtd. in Mayfield 485).[501] Since gender is always performative (Judith Butler), these novels can (and do) reveal the struggles over Southern manliness and the ideals upon which it rested even though the South thought of gender categories as much more stable, granted, engrained, and fixed than they actually were. As David Savran notes, "masculinity and femininity are always historically contingent, always in the process of being reimagined and redefined according to changing material conditions" (8). Accordingly, he adds, gendered identity, precisely because it is so susceptible to change, is "of all identifications the one most subject to intensive social pressures, the most anxiety-ridden, the most consistently inebricated in social, political, and economic negotiations, and thus the most sensitive barometer of culture" (8).[502]

An important defining element of the gentleman's identity concerns what is perceived as particular "feminine" or "masculine" roles within the constraints of the hegemonic order. Within each novel or play, male-female interactions affect the performance and understanding of gender by each character, and one is able to view how and which gendered expectations remain dominant and one can also see that subordinate, deviant gender roles act in complicity, defiance, or vacillation between the two. The vacillation is further echoed by a polarity in the

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[501] Jesse Bier, The Rise and Fall of American Humor (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).
[502] David Savran, Taking It Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998).

images of masculinity. In this polarization of images, there is a sort of gradation from heroic masculinities (the soldier, the veteran, etc) as Halberstam calls them, to the marginal which are pitted against each other in order to reinforce hegemonic masculinity.[503] In between these two poles, there are numerous usurpers (such as those who pass for gentlemen versus those who are singled out as freaks or monsters) who disrupt the masculine model.

Also, the matters of race, class, and gender not only add to one another but intersect with one another, and in both categories, these roles can be further broken down into generational demands: as most novels in this analysis exemplify, the gender roles of the fathers and the mothers, for instance, have important bearings on the rest of personalities and consciousnesses. The most significant defamiliarization, for instance, comes from the exchange between Scarlett and her father in Gone with the Wind: she is truly the toughest plantation manager, the only one who gets through war with her wits intact and her money safe, preserving a social order that is supposedly capped by men (Mayfield 495). Given what is expected of the hero in Southern Romance, the novel is a devastating satire on patrician values: Scarlett should have been born a man. Scarlett brings the threat of not only assuming a man's role but also usurping other roles that would reaffirm men of their masculinity. If masculinity is indeed a sign and an instrument of men's power, then women like Scarlett, Amanda in The Glass Menagerie, Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire, or even Eva Birdsong in The Sheltered Life demonstrate that the connection between masculinity and male biology is not natural or inevitable and that men's power—flaunted through a dominant, virile masculinity—is, therefore, an artifice.[504] These women often "colonize" the territories traditionally occupied by men, showing that the phallus is fundamentally transferable (Butler,

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[503] Judith Halberstam, Female Masculinity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

1993).[505] The threat presented by these women lies in the exposure of the "failure" of the regulator system that the authority of heterogender has no foundation and needs to be secured through an accumulation of repetitions (Butler, 1997).[506] In their display of masculine power, these women also demonstrate that masculinity is not the exclusive domain of men and reveal that the naturalized connection between masculinity and men's body is up for renegotiation. For the characters who are explicitly given consciousness, this possibility for renegotiation proves to be useful in observing the "doing" of gender.[507]

Another crucial component of the gentleman's formation as a man (and of its crisis) is the problematic role of often distant or enigmatic parental figures. All the male characters in this corpus (almost without exception) have either absent or, most commonly, dead parents. This absence is usually accountable for the character's relation to violence but also their being dedicated to continual, unsatisfied movement as if lauching themselves into an insatiable (sometimes fruitless) search was a means to forever mourn the (original, lost) father, the masculine ideal with which to identify. As a result of these imperilments, the masculine hero acquires a heightened sense of isolation. Fathers absent or fathers who fail their sons abound in these novels and plays and from this absence come feminized societies, in which women are left to fend for themselves and take care of their children. This very fact underlines the crisis of masculinity, for the South has traditionally been pictured as a quintessentially patriarchal place, with the protection of pure, innocent womanhood at its center. This discussion has thus allowed to explore the crucial part that boyhood plays in understanding constructions of identity.

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[504] J. K. Gardiner, "Introduction," <u>Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions,</u> J. K. Gardiner, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 1-29.

[505] Judith Butler, <u>Bodies that Matter</u> (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[506] Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," <u>Playing with Fire: Queer Politics, Queer Theories,</u> ed. S. Phelan (New York: Routledge, 1997) 11-29.

[507] This method has been adopted by Shumeyko in her own analysis of the stream of consciousness technique in Faulkner.

In <u>The Glass Menagerie</u>, Tom Wingfield for instance is portrayed in a state of in-betweeness, stuck between the female world of his demanding mother and the imaginary world of his father, between a bleak present and a promising future. In such a context, Tom attempts to separate from the mother to participate in a virile mitilaristic masculinity and engage in the economic demands of society. Yet these endeavors prove insufficient to establish manhood, at least a fruitful one. In fact, it is Stanley's submission to these same demands that makes him aggressive, insensitive to violence, indifferent to the needs of others. He acts as a family man, bonds with other men in drinking and eating, but this model of manhood results in a wasteland.[508]

If Tom needs to separate from the mother in order to "make a break and become a man," the male world offers a problematic and unstable self (Pollack xxiv).[509] In <u>National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men</u>, Dana D. Nelson says that "[n]ational manhood promised its citizen/ representatives the right to stand for (the authority of) the F/father, but it effectively left them in the space of the son, vulnerable and anxious" (22).[510] It is this anxiety, caused by the inability to enter cultural constructions of manhood, that materializes into a desire to return to the womb, to the maternal space before male identity (Pollack 158). If Alan, Blanche's boy and husband, does embody the threats of men who flee from feminine and heterosexual demands by retreating to a homosexual bond, men like Tom offer more promising alternatives, creating a sexual identity in terms of men and women simultaneously, floating in and out of feminine and masculine worlds while entrenched in neither and, thus, promising to undermine any fixed psychological or cultural patterns of gender determination (Miles170).

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[508] I am indebted to Miles' reading of Faulkner's "Barn Burning" for this formulation.
[509] William Pollack, <u>Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood</u> (New York: Holt, 1998).
[510] Dana D. Nelson, <u>National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men</u> (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1998).

The young General Archbald in The Sheltered Life, like Tom, is the victim of a society that expects boys to act like men but at the same time does not allow them access to real dignified manhood. The young Archbald must accept one of two choices: take his place in society as a disembodied male or reject society altogether. In revisiting his past, the main male figure, General Archbald (who is also a grandfather), diminishes into a boy who has taken up the garments of his own grandfather to dress up as a soldier, a performing little boy. In this portrayal, Southern manhood "collapses into boyhood, and the only distinction between boyhood and manhood manifests itself as performance that can end or get interrupted at any moment" when Archbald's narrative moves from past to present (Miles 162). Once again, male identity exists as a social performance rather than as something natural and inevitable. Of course, the attention to the boys in these Southern novels opens out the question of masculinity. Paraphrasing Caroline Miles in her analysis of Faulkner's "Barn Burning," I may cite Jay Martin who explains that, according to the psychological theory of male development, boys will undergo a traumatic period in which they separate from the mother, identify with the father, and finally participate in relations with other women, and all before the age of four. These novels challenge such a theory and suggest that male sexual and gender development constitute an "ongoing cultural and psychological process for men far beyond the age of four, a process that looks far more complex and multiple than Freud could ever have imagined" (Miles 170).

The individual expressions of this masculine crisis are numerous. The (would-be) gentleman may simply fade away in the face of adversity or change: this is the case of men like Ashley Wilkes, the Compson brothers, or Blanche's husband, among others. In other cases, the Southern Gentleman may also confess that he was just play-acting, as is the case in The Sheltered Life or in Swallow Barn. In Tom Wingfield's case, the would-be gentleman, in a failed attempt to recover his senses, abandons his books of chivalry and returns among his

friends in a no-woman zone.[511] These failed Southern Gentlemen personify—to use Suzanne Clark's words—a deep instability, a narcissism under threat, a crisis in belief, not at all the triumphant figures of masculinity depicted by Victorian advocates (19).[512] Southern gentlemen or gentlemen in the becoming are revealed to be more vulnerable than they seem, undercut by their own exaggerated and too rigid portrayal of the masculine ideal or by the presence of the Other, be it the powerful women around them or the uncontrollable, emotional inadequacies, or animal forces which erupt inside the male bodies. Under the appearance of a united masculinity, the Southern man actually embodies fragmented selves, insecure or dual personalities, and the male body appears as a symptom where the Southern (or national) discourse of remasculinization is being played out. The notion of fragmented Southern masculinities can also be found with the idea of the opposition between public spheres (masculine selves as soldiers,veterans, redeemers) and the private sphere of a more domestic and also more ordinary masculinity (fathers, husbands, ordinary citizens); so much that the mythical or epic masculine ideal seems to be infused with other modes of narration, such as the pastoral, the memory play, the melodrama, i.e. alternative, less traditionally "masculine" modes of representation.

Optimistic feminists would find pleasure in the fragmented Southerner that is depicted here for, to a certain extent, it signifies "a trembling of the edifice of white and male power" (Robinson 9). At the same time, and as Mark Masterson warns, "the discovery of masculine ego incoherence also has the possibility of supporting the myopia that sees men merely as the victims of masculinity" (3).[513] Seen in the light of victimization indeed, the way to eliminate

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[511] I am indebted to A.G. Lo Ré's article for this formulation. A.G. Lo Ré, "The Three Deaths of Don Quixote: Comments in Favor of the Romantic Critical Approach." <u>Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America</u> 9.2 (1989): 21-41.

[512] Suzanne Clark, <u>Cold Warriors: Manliness on Trial in the Rhetoric of the West</u> (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

[513] Mark Masterson, "Occluding (?) Lens: The Turn to Masculinity in Roman Studies." <u>The Stoa Consortium</u>. FEMINISM AND CLASSICS IV. Web. 18 Oct. 2009.
<http://www.stoa.org/diotima/essays/fc04/Masterson.html>.

men's misery might be to eliminate the source itself, to become an independent man, to find refuge into a sort of metaphorical desert, or to retreat from gendered bodies (through castration or male-nullified identification) in favor of personhood. Yet, if there is a crisis as some critics may argue, the crisis seems to be masculinity itself, one that is not preparing men for the world (as Rhett Butler emphasizes), one that is not even constructed against childhood but also against femininity. The source of anxiety might also be whiteness which is, itself, unattainable and thus, another source of frustration.[514] More than being "outbuilt," the crisis actually appears to be inbuilt. As a consequence, when men resort to solve one crisis or one aspect of their crisis (such as distancing themselves from women), they create another.

Added to the frustration, it is also the case that masculinity must be validated, becoming therefore incredibly performative and visible, a problematic position since it has been traditionally reserved for the categorical other; so much that one can ask: how is it to be performed and for whom? Peer-recognition obviously plays an important role, suggesting that Southern gentility is not only a social creation but a social performance and that hegemonic masculinity is sustained in a collective environment.

More problematic maybe is the fact that these novels and plays forcefully, it seems, distance themselves from the social, political, or economic contexts of their individual periods of creation, the crisis of Southern manhood thus being almost utterly divorced from purely "outside" factors (that is, historicity). This move also serves to circumvent the issue of race and politics all together and to recenter "men" (more than the masculinity of a given period) to the center of discussions, which may also explain why novels like Gone with the Wind have traversed the boundaries of time and been so popular even to modern audiences. The most visible difference between the different gentlemen in these novels and plays seems to be

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[514] On this aspect, read Thomas DiPiero, White Men Aren't (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002); Robyn Wiegman, American Anatomies:Theorizing Race and Gender (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995).

of the regional kind, with male characters coming from New Orleans, Saint Louis, Atlanta and travelling freely to Europe, South America, etc; yet, fated with an overwhelming mother and/or an enigmatic or absent father-figure. The most salient differences between these male characters seem to lie in the way they perform their masculinity. It is an indication of what is at stake in these novels: not only deconstructing the unproblematized images of Southern masculinity as found in antebellum (and sometimes postbellum) narratives, not only ascertaining the causes of these men's anxieties, failures or inadequacies as gentlemen, but attending to the consequences of the presence of these counter-hegemonic models within the texts.

This study has thus attempted to push beyond the "victims" and without talking cure, to look at how Southern men (and Southern patriarchy) respond to such a crisis. Feminists might sneer at a supremacist patriarchy under attack; yet the effects of this crisis are more complicated than this. As Sally Robinson notes, "[w]hile most scholars of masculinity have assumed that crisis leads to a resurgence of old models of masculinity, the idea of crisis in no way requires a singular outcome or, indeed, any outcome at all" (10). As a consequence, I have not envisaged the performance of masculinity as the dramatic performance of a pre-existing form of masculinity. In her assertion, Robinson concurs here with Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of writing as a dialogical process—wherein the author of a work may set up conflicting voices, each of them representing an ideology. Bahktin comes to a very similar conclusion, by finding that:

> [d]idactic (and usually dull) writing simply allows one voice to overwhelm the
> others, but where the voices compete, speak back to each other, and subvert
> each other's positions, a dialogue appears within the text itself. No winner, no

clear conclusion one way or the other, needs to appear (qtd. in Mayfield 485).[515]

Similarly, Robinson continues,

> some historians have complained that the crisis model constructs masculinity as a necessarily defensive, reactive identity formation, always looking to recoup its power, and men to remasculinize themselves in traditional ways. Both crises produce both retrenchments and recodings, and while new models of masculinity might share some features with old, assuming that history is comprised of a struggle between 'traditional' and 'alternative' constructions of masculinity misses the dynamism of shifts in gender meanings (10).

With these assumptions in mind and focusing on the dialogue between the normative and the personal, the collective and the individual, the traditional and the alternative, the myth and the reality, this study has examined Southern masculinity by testing it against its own constructedness, focusing not only on the causes of the crisis but also the possible effects and shifts in gender meanings that could arise from such identification, or, by contrast, focusing on how the discourse of refined manhood or Southern gentlemanhood could be (re)mobilized during identity-shattering moments to justify the domination of one model of masculinity in Southern literature.

Read in this light, the analysis of <u>Swallow Barn</u> has explored, through the voice of an outsider, the rhetoric of "crisis" surrounding Ned Hazard. Using multiple perspectives, the novel supplies expressions of gender identity and role in the dominant public sphere as well as the suppressed private workings of a character's mind. Ned is an anxious male who defines himself according to cultural codings of the South—honor, courtship rituals, duels, etc. Not

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[515] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel." <u>The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays</u>. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. University of Texas Press Slavic Studies 1. 1975 (Russian). Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. 259-422.

surprisingly, the favored site in this fiction is the plantation. The preference reflects the concerns of a privileged class that is invested in perpetuating images of cultural power. The appeal of these images—in Ned and in Swansdown's case—rests in their ability to capture the inner desires for social recognition and influence. Situated far from working-class environments, seemingly insulated from the changes brought by history, and representing men's interaction in a hierarchical context, the plantation helps systematize male dominance over subordinate individuals. The novel, in turn, confirms the culture's investment in the idea of authority. It is precisely when these men are in institutional settings of confinement that the likelihood of their self-expression—or self-disclosure—increases. By self-disclosure, I mean something almost wholly contained within the realm of language, an individuation that overcomes the restrictions of cultural codings, in particular the powerful masculine ethos, but individualization wholly manifested in the character's articulation of personal truths. Ned's personal truth underlines a profound anxiety at being regarded as a "fool" (by Bel Tracy and her father), signifying that gender is performance and that masculinity can be manipulated for collective approval—Swansdown has understood this aspect perfectly. Ned, on the contrary, and when given the opportunity to privately express his male problem (to explore his personalist terrain) reveals his fear that he might just be a rankless child and the ineffectual beau of Bel's fancies. He also suffers from a fear of domestication, of emasculation, of being invisible on the social and cultural stage, for he constantly "perceives" himself as threatened by the powerful influence of women and by the fear that he is not living up to an idea of manliness seen as stronger in a previous age or generation. He develops feelings of doubt, self-hatred, and guilt, showing what happens to any man who has internalized all that society says a "real" man should be and yet, is denied the opportunity to become that man. Ultimate manliness (at least in the answer provided by Kennedy) seems to be some long-gone

expectations located in some obscure origin, an origin that is perceived (as the last words of the novel emphasize) as constantly receding from each generation.

In John P. Kennedy's <u>Swallow Barn</u>, Ned Hazard seems to question the validity of his masculinity, or the validity of his "private" performance in the masculine "drama" that has been set up according to the fantasies of his main spectator, i.e. Miss Bel Tracy. In <u>Swallow Barn</u>, Ned and the Northern narrator are both questioning the honesty and the integrity of Southern manhood: Will Ned have to play a role in order to be accepted as a man and as the future Southern planter? Will he have to be a travesty of the charming yet artificial Swansdown? Will Ned succumb to the impetus for change? What are the forces that Southern men can find within themselves—or within their community for that matter—if they want to resist when change lies ahead? The deceptions, such as cross-dressing, may be useful tools in the competition of politics and love but are these manly? The answer Kennedy gives is rather ambiguous.

As John Mayfield remarks: "an expanding commercializing economy could not operate on gentlemanly poise and absolute frankness. Kennedy may not have approved of the shift but at least, he had the candor to admit that the Southern gentleman was an anachronism" (64).[516] In the end, Kennedy's romance tries to reassert the idea that true men of integrity will continue to exist, and that only these men will be making Southern history. Ultimately, it is the attachment of the individual to place that gives him definition. Ned might indeed start as being unsure about his own value as a man, but family, kinship, and marriage are values that give him a whole, and define him as a gentleman. The novel ends with a wedding, thereby empowering Ned's masculine performance as socially cohesive and announcing Ned's masculinity as possibly regenerative, for the wedding forecasts hopes for future children and generations to be born into the South. Detachment from place—literally or metaphorically—is

a factor diminishing human integrity, echoing Lacy Buchan's remark in Allen Tate's The Fathers (1938) that "the individual quality of man was bound up with his kin and the places where they lived" (135).[517]

Because the narrative constructs an opposition of ironic and idyllic impulses, of real and ideal, past and present, the ideological heterogeneity of the narrative has been interpreted as the expression of an ideological crisis. As this chapter has emphasized, this heterogeneity can also be seen as the very strategy by which the text seeks to overcome crisis as a strategy of negotiation and conciliation of past and present, ideal and real. The narrator, by choosing "romance" as a textual medium, builds a bridge between the old and the new, between a backwards Virginia and a modernizing United States. The ideological ambiguity that is expressed in the portrayal of the Southern gentleman may reflect the tensions and unresolved conflicts which eventually split the nation—tensions between the commitment to the status quo and the commitment to progress, between slavery and abolition, between past- and future-oriented time perspectives. In a similar manner, this position of victim and the symptoms of Ned's anxiety become possibly the cure for his anxiety: Ned is indeed liberated from these cultural codings that would define him as a Southern man, in the sense that he is nameless, rankless, homeless, i.e. selfless. His performance in the play—in which he stages himself as a black man—also emphasizes his capacity to create a self that could be "other," not solely through gender codings or racial codings.

Kennedy however does not resolve these tensions and does not seem ready to explore these possibilities. He is more intent, it seems, on rescuing an (already) inherently anxious manhood from a society that had begun to increasingly celebrate external status symbols. This uncertainty clearly influences the protagonist's self-conscious and often unconventional

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[516] John Mayfield, Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South. New Perspectives on the History of the South (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).

[517] Allan Tate, The Fathers (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1938).

conduct towards women. Kennedy reacts to this imposing phenomenon by insisting upon the unchanging qualities of "true men" and also implying that, no matter how the world may change, perceptive observers will still recognize such men. Despite the rise of the commercial sphere, and the subsequent pressure on men to "make a name" for themselves in this realm, Kennedy seeks to affirm that his timeless and autonomous men are not reliant on this stage to affirm their identities. Because the plantation ultimately contains the threats to the hegemonic order, the end also reasserts the essential idea that marriage to the Belle is the position to claim, and that the Southern gentleman cannot be dissociated from time and space. Ned's boyish fears of inadequacy must be schooled, channeled, and domesticated. Ned might be a victim, yet—Kennedy underlines—he is essentially the victim of his own folly, his own self-doubts of inefficacity on the male scene, and of Bel's fancies. He is, in other words, more a victim of his own making than a victim of social or even patriarchal oppression.

In its most dramatic conclusion, Ned's crisis has also worked "to divert attention away from the wide-ranging social and institutional changes" that could be seen lurking on the horizon, and "toward the individual white man's experience of them" (Robinson 5). It has also served to divert attention from Abe, the slave who is also the real embodiment of manhood in the novel. The result is that Kennedy's novel seems to dismiss masculine anxiety as a ploy to recast men like Ned as the anguished, emotionally-stunted, and helpless victims of a situation of their own making, one over which they claim they have little control. Masculine anxiety (or disempowerment) has only served to reinforce the code of ideal manhood. However, Kennedy's concern that manhood may be a social construction presents a new perspective from which to view and consider later works.

John Pendleton Kennedy's Swallow Barn may be seen as what Mikhail Bakhtin would call Prüfungsromance—the fundamental organizing idea of which is the testing of the hero against a norm or ideal: Ned Hazard undergoes a series of trials, a rite of passage, probing his

fidelity to the code of the Southern gentleman and the society's ability to function humanely

is seen as dependent on the hero's success in the trial. Faulkner's <u>The Sound and the Fury</u>

(and the subsequent novels in this dissertation), by contrast, can be compared to what Bakhtin

defines as Entwicklungsroman.[518] Unlike Ned, the Compson brothers and their father are not

measured against the preexisting normative code of gentlemanly conduct, but the relationship

is reversed: the norm, code (or myth) is, in this figuration, being tested against the hero's

humanity. The hero's ability to function in society is thus seen as dependent on his ability to

recognize the dehumanizing effects of the normative code.

The men in Faulkner's <u>The Sound and the Fury</u>—like those in <u>Swallow Barn</u>—are

shown elaborating on what exactly is considered appropriate or inappropriate, desirable or

undesirable and what interests were commonly or not commonly shared within their groups.

Topics of sports, duels, female virginity, "having a sister," and male competition are

commonly specified as desirable and universal to the Southern beau. There is here a

formalized assertion of masculinity through gender-bound codes. For Donaldson,

being an elite white man in the nineteenth-century South meant asserting

aggressive behavior and authority at an early age, knowing one's place in the

midst of an elaborate hierarchy of inferiors and superiors, venerating one's

father, defending one's family and taking violent revenge for offenses, and

guarding the reputation of one's mother, sister, wife, and daughter. Being a man

of honor also meant loving and fearing women, with whose moral uprightness

and standing in the community male honor was intimately bound (64).[519]

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[518] Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, <u>The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,</u> trans. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

[519] Susan Donaldson, "Keeping Quentin Compson Alive: The Last Gentleman, The Second Coming, and the Problems of Masculinity," <u>Walker Percy's Feminine Characters</u>, eds. Lewis A. Lawson & Elzbieta H. Oleksy (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 1995).

Noting the violent response to phrases like "son of a bitch," Wyatt-Brown declares: "[t]he intensity of feeling arose from the social fact that a male's moral bearing resided not in him alone, but also in his women's standing. To attack his wife, mother, or sister was to assault the man himself" (154).[520] Yet, in the rapidly changing landscape of the twentieth century, traditional modes of masculinity could no longer be taken for granted (Donaldson 65). As historians Peter Filene and Joe Dubbert have argued, these men "were finding it acutely difficult to 'be a man'" (11), for Filene "[t]he concept of manliness was suffering strain in all its dimensions—in work and success, in familial patriarchy, and in the dimensions that Victorian Americans did not often discuss aloud, sexuality" (104).[521] Male anxiety, of course, had to do with changing roles of women and the rise of feminism, because men, as Filene further explains, "depended on women to mark the ambivalences in their definition of manliness. The patriarchal economy of sex was disintegrating because 'the better half' seemed willing to be only equally good" (104, qtd. in Donaldson 65).

The resulting heightened uncertainty about masculinity characterized numerous twentieth-century male writers, for whom, in Virginia Woolf's words, "virility [had] now become self-conscious" (101).[522] Commenting on Peter Schwenger's remarks, Donaldson explains that

> twentieth-century male writers often found themselves pondering the notion of masculinity from a self-conscious perspective antithetical to the more traditional notion of male authority as "natural" and inherent. Self-conscious musings tended to weigh intellect against physicality, thought against action, hesitation against self-assurance. Above all, those musings threatened to

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[520] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, <u>Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South</u> (New York: Oxford UP, 1982).

[521] Peter Gabriel Filene, <u>Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America</u> (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975); See also Joe L. Dubbert, <u>A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition</u> (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979).

expose gender definitions as cultural, artificial constructions rather than as "natural" and unchanging modes of being (65).[523]

In this context, the organization of <u>The Sound and the Fury</u> is informed by two parallel levels of action, a public quest for an ideal of masculinity (the business ethic vs. the gentleman's code of honor) and a private, self-conscious quest for a corresponding ideal of femininity. The Southern woman—in these constructions—has turned into a universal referent, one onto which masculine desires have been projected. Not surprisingly, Jay Martin argues that "male identity is more fragile" and needs more of an "arsenal of defenses" than female identity in Faulkner's novels (143).[524]

The plot is also informed, however, by a more "private" search for an ideal of masculinity, as the stream-of-consciousness technique used by Faulkner allows the reader to explore the individual terrain of the three Compson brothers. In their multiple ways of looking at one single event, the three brothers embody the variations that existed (and could exist) within a single class, in the construction of masculinity. The discourse of masculinity is also inscribed in generational demands. A character like Quentin Compson, for instance, finds himself to be "less than a man" in the sense that being a man is inherited from family and regional tradition. These variations provide a critical space for interrogating traditional masculine patterns as uniform, self-evident, and constant. Here, Faulkner depicts the ambiguous nature of manhood, its noble potential but frequent failures. The suicidal Quentin, the castrated Benjy, or the all-too-logical Jason embody the images of men who have been robbed of their individual beings, immobilized by their (un)certainties; male bodies that

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[522] Virginia Woolf, <u>A Room of One's Own</u> (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957).

[523] Peter Schwenger, <u>Phallic Critiques: Masculinity and Twentieth-Century Literature</u> (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 9; Susan Donaldson, "Keeping Quentin Compson Alive: The Last Gentleman, The Second Coming, and the Problems of Masculinity," <u>Walker Percy's Feminine Characters</u>, eds. Lewis A. Lawson & Elzbieta H. Oleksy (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 1995).

[524] Jay Martin, "Faulkner's 'Male Commedia': The Triumph of Manly Grief," <u>Faulkner and Psychology</u>. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha 1991, eds. Kartiganer, Donald M., and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994) 123-64.

eventually neither fit the "masculine" nor the aristocratic frame invented by Southern culture. In this context, "[t]he moral order of the South," to quote Rubin, "the old notions of certainty and belief, have ceased to suffice as a sufficient explanation and an adequate basis for human experience" (7).[525] Faulkner depicts a Southern world in which the Upper Classes (starting with the grandfather) have "forfeited the logic of their modus-vivendi—their rationale for life at the top—[and] the entire social structure is in danger of crumbling" (Yaeger 292).[526] Quentin Compson (like Jason), for example, personifies what Donaldson has termed a "Southern masculinity under siege" (62).[527] Quentin yearns for escape but feels duty-bound to a code of honor that "requires a fierce allegiance to family and a determination to defend the moral reputation of one's womenfolk, whose moral standing symbolizes that very sense of honor" (Donaldson 64). Yet, Quentin confronts a world resistant to the very notion of male honor:

> Quentin represents the traditional white male aristocrat whose sense of honor is
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> betrayed by time, change, and most tellingly by women and black subordinates
>
> to whom his status is indeniably linked. Significantly, suicide emerges as the
>
> only recourse through which Quentin can finally assert what remains of male
>
> honor as defined by his family and his region (62).

Bound to his store, to his mother and to his niece, Jason is hemmed in by the same responsibilities of patriarchy that have doomed Quentin, without any of its privileges. As for the castrated Benjy, by deconstructing knowledge, power, and sexuality, the third brother contributes to a politics of the body that is fragmented and no longer subjected to dualistic

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[525] Louis D. Rubin, Jr., The Faraway Country: Writers of the Modern South (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963).

[526] Patricia Yaeger, Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[527] Susan Donaldson, "Keeping Quentin Compson Alive: The Last Gentleman, The Second Coming, and the Problems of Masculinity," Walker Percy's Feminine Characters, eds. Lewis A. Lawson & Elzbieta H. Oleksy (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 1995).

hierarchical opposition between male/female divisions. Yet, since the phallus (sexuality) is considered the foundation of gender identities, Benjy's therapeutic case dismantles the very possibility of renewed gender identities through male-nullified identification. As a consequence, and if they have anything to say about hegemonic masculinity, the male anxieties are eventually contained through their pathology and solved into invisibility. These failing beaux cannot (and luckily so) find a place in the hegemonic discourse due to their unhegemonic nature. The sons' disempowerment in <u>The Sound and the Fury</u> has also become—and ironically so—the source, it seems, of patriarchal (re)empowerment.

The discussion of Ellen Glasgow's <u>The Sheltered Life</u> has been an attempt to move away from the widely accepted view that the center of Glasgow's novels from where all emerges and finally converges is the violated, wounded body of the Southern belle figure and to draw attention to what lies beyond the discourse of female victimization in the novel: what I have identified as the discourse of masculine victimization that is voiced through General Archbald, the aging patriarch living on Washington Street.

In this South disfigured by telephone poles, the reader is left with the exploration of Southern masculinity, or rather masculine trauma, as it has been traditionally established through the codings of honor, mastery, violence, and the idealized counterpart, his mirroring image the Southern belle. In this context, culture works to rob men (and women alike) of an instinctual life by forcing them to perform normative gender roles. Read in this light, General Archbald's grandfather, for instance—like Bel Tracy's father—embodies Foucault's "privileged locus of realization" (29).[528] With his seemingly "permanent gaze," the father controls "his prisoners regardless of his presence or absence: he punishes, denies, permits, or encourages behaviors that mirror the patriarchal mechanism of subject-object authority" (Foucault 250). In this construct, stigmatized are the emotions and behaviors associated with

feminine expressions: expressing emotion signifies weakness and is devalued, whereas emotional detachment signifies strength.

Understandably, Archbald's rhetoric of masculinity—a rhetoric of masculine crisis—is not an unaltered imitation of masculinity where imitation would be regarded as the greatest form of flattery, but rather the way he portrays masculinity reveals that it sits in an awkward and antagonistic relation to hegemonic models. General Archbald is a patriarch who does not even want the title of patriarch, not an absent father but a father who would like to be absent and who revisits his past in order to revisit the ideals of manhood that have been transmitted to him from previous generations. Eva Birdsong herself refuses—it seems—to remain limited to a surface as she dreams of running outside of herself. And the more closely one examines the prevailing dynamics of gender definition in the novel, the less securely they hold.

The Sheltered Life, therefore, in exploring the crises of femininity and masculinity, promises to interrogate traditional codes and operate a shift in meanings, calling for a recognition of their woes and revealing how hegemonic manhood is recognized, acknowledged by the self, and internalized by men. If George is "recuperated" at the end of the narrative (and John also), General Archbald personifies the pleasures derived, not from resolution to the masculine crisis, but in the decentering of white masculinity and the incorporation of these anxieties. By accepting fluid and multiple identities, by accepting aging and body limitation, General Archbald's perception offers what Farrell defined as the "awareness of alternative ways of overcoming the limitations on our lives that have evolved from our view of ourselves as masculine or feminine," i.e. weak or strong, passive or active,

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[528] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish (New York: Random House, 1979).

etc (217).[529] Seen in this light, Archbald's explorations of his "male problem" also become evidence of his heroism.

At the same time, by declaring that they have been victims and vulnerable and thus by focusing attention on the male problem, men like George or General Archbald fail to acknowledge the sufferings of the Southern Belles, Eva Birdsong specifically. While the struggle between the rhetoric of manliness and realism (Mayfield) displaces male subjects, their trauma—what Nina Baym calls "Melodramas of Beset Manhood"—serve to repress attention to the trauma of others (Clark 21).[530] In turn, rather than re-imagining a social construction of gender that is dehumanizing at best, men are encouraged to express their affliction and thus, focus on self—rather than social or cultural—transformation.

General Archbald and George Birdsong's growing sense of male self-doubt is echoed in Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind (1936). By revisiting "past" history as it was archived, Mitchell presents various models of Southern masculinity and deconstrusts the either/or, feminine/masculine, new man/old man of the plantation South binaries, these binaries that have served as the grounds upon which hegemonic models of manhood have relied. On closer analysis, Ashley and Rhett, for instance, are far more complicated than initially imagined and the polarities they embody far less divisive than expected. Instead of exploring these men with ready-to-use cultural codings (blackness, rapist, violent assertive masculinity vs. effeminate, delicate femininity), Mitchell reconsiders the discourses of individuation of these men against collective discourses of masculine normativity (the planter, honor, mastery, etc).

Gone with the Wind lists various masculinities: Will, the lower-class man, who becomes the real authority on the plantation; the slave who presents the beneficial side of the

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[529] Warren Farrell, The Liberated Man: Beyond Masculinity—Freeing Men and Their Relationships with Women (New York: Random House, 1974).

[530] Nina Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood." American Quarterly 33.2 (1981): 123-39.

planter's power; Ashley Wilkes caught in Scarlett's gaze and in a world he refuses to face; Rhett Butler who aspires to a masculine model that questions the status quo and who shuns a ready-made patriarchal identity. The masculine model Rhett chooses possesses a long history in Southern American Literature: the depraved and emancipated male figure whose cultural production responds directly to white society's fear of those it oppresses and who revisits the myth of male privilege. Rhett, in other words, presents a fearless and frightening image of "black" maleness, turning the white-produced stereotype of the dishonest, violent, oversexed, overembodied brutish black man upon its inventors (Brigham 295). Initially portrayed like Ned Hazard—outside of society with his back to his home—Rhett has rejected the demands of Southern masculinity and represents what Estelle Freedman calls "society's threat, drifter, and psychopath, who lives beyond boundaries of familial and social controls" (89).[531]

Mitchell, however, is shrewd enough to avoid pitfalls in the stereotypes of masculinity. Through the Tarleton Twins, Rhett Butler, and Ashley Wilkes, she constructs and subsequently deconstructs masculinity (and femininity), performing what John Lowe calls "statement and erasure" (231).[532] Men may discuss, embody or regret models of masculine behavior—involving bravery, stoicism, silence, and war—yet these scenes of male talk mostly parallel scenes that move into personal dialogue and provide for the acknowledgement of male inadequacy, self-defeat, weakness, and doubt. Mitchell, more than any other author in this study, appears to understand the ambiguous nature and dehumanizing demands of Southern manhood—how society insists on one quality one minute and its opposite the next.

Arthur M. Schlesinger attributes the masculinity crisis that so many men were experiencing at the time—evidenced by a growing male self-doubt and hysteria and by novelists' depictions of the male hero as "increasingly preoccupied with proving his virility"

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[531] Estelle Freedman, "'Uncontrolled Desires: The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960." Journal of American History 74.1-2 (1987): 83-105.

(292)—to a conformist mass society and the sexual ambiguity it bred. [533] If indeed, for a long time, the American male "seemed utterly confident in his manhood [. . .] easy and definite in his sense of sexual identity," by the midcentury, and increased by the Civil War, there were "multiplying signs [. . .] that something ha[d] gone badly wrong with [his] conception of himself" (244). In Schlesinger's conclusion, man's only recourse is to "visualize" himself apart from the group, since "[th]e key to the recovery of masculinity lies [. . .] in the problem of identity; [only] [w]hen a person begins to find out who he is, he is likely to find out rather soon what sex he is" (301). By the end of the novel, Rhett Butler has apparently decided to follow Schlesinger's advice. In the last chapters, indeed, Rhett asserts that he is no longer a "fated" man, but rather someone who begins to take responsibility to define himself truthfully and to make his own history. Rhett therefore reinscribes his own personal history as one that is about choice and change—the choice that one has to change, to come out, and embrace otherness as an empowering source of self-identification. In Rhett's departure from the "raw" life of Atlanta, the novel still encompasses the romantic quest for a lost Eden at the same time as it reaches toward an uncertain future.

Yet Rhett's visualization apart from the group is not validated as a personal rebellion but rather as a necessary return to loftier ideals—ideals that have become perverted in modern society—and as such that reinforce a hegemonic model of manhood. Men have been forced into their own recesses because the society they live in no longer validates older forms of chivalry. Men have realized that the performance of gender has become a "theatrical

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[532] John Lowe, "The Construction and Deconstruction of Masculinity in The Yearling." Mississippi Quarterly 57 (Spring 2004): 231-246.

[533] Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., The Politics of Hope (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963) 237–46. Echoing the conformity critics, Schlesinger blamed the "unmanning of American men" on mass society's "sinister" doctrine of "togetherness," which compelled men to yield to an all-consuming group whose effect was to crush men's sense of self and thus to obliterate their manhood. In fact, mass society threatened all gender differences: "How can masculinity, femininity, or anything else survive in a homogenized society, which seeks steadily and benignly to eradicate all differences between the individuals who compose it?"

spectacle" associated with corruption and that Southern Belles are no longer found to visualize and validate Southern manhood.

Southern Belles actually complicate the matter: if not physically absent as spectators of Southern masculinity, women—like Scarlett and even Melanie—further morselize man's relation to himself. Men's withdrawal from visibility (and therefore from "theatricality"), to a large degree, subscribes to idealized and hegemonic notions of masculinity and reveals the anxiety inherent to the building and continuity of this specific model of masculinity.[534] In the end, Rhett's subversive discourse—his initial questioning of patriarchal authority—is finally contained. Scarlett, visibly portrayed as a rebel and a hypocrite, comes to bear the weight of damnation while Rhett's refusal to play the hypocrite any more leads him to estrange himself from subordinate forms of masculinities—the carpetbagger, the individualistic, the capitalist "new man" of the era—in search of an untouched masculinity, that of his Charleston forebears. Seen in this light, Ashley and Rhett both agree that older models of manhood were better; they simply diverge as to whether that was because men were more mature (Rhett's search for an order resisting Scarlett's immaturity) or more immature (Ashley's vision of a past innocence isolated from everything that was too real).

In both cases, the search for an authentic and uncorrupted manhood is therefore closely linked to a search for a lost boyhood or "bachelorhood," an effort to turn back the clock to the moment before the Civil War and before the loss of innocence. Ashley and Rhett

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[534] For books on Southern honor and hegemonic masculinity: Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Elliott J. Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch": the Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry." American Historical Review 90 (1985): 38-42; Kenneth S. Greenberg, Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Steven M. Stowe, Intimacy and Power in the Old South (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Kenneth S. Greenberg, Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Edward L. Ayers, Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Gail Bederman, "Manly Civilizations/Primitive Masculinity: Race, Gender, and Evolutions of Middle-Class American Manhood" (Diss. Brown University,

exploit here a supposedly "lost' inner child, stealing innocence and replacing it by a mythical innocence, presenting images and ideas about the South in such a way that even people who were not yet born seem to remember these good old times. The lessons taught by these stoic survivors is an opportunity to rebuild society in a better, purer form in which mistakes of the past can be avoided. For General Archbald, also, the need to revisit the past—as a time before domestication and marital commitment—is closely linked to a need to revirilize a man who has become femininized by modern life. The search for an authentic, untouched masculinity is thus the search for a lost boyhood, a genderless space and time before work and family responsibilities.

This return to a lost adolescence, however, seems impossible for most southern women. A woman like Scarlett, for instance, has seen too much of the war to return to the docile role of the innocent and naïve lady. Above all things, there is no childhood paradise she can return to, for even when she returns to Tara and Mammy, she returns as a double of her father, as the master of the plantation, no longer as the innocent and flirty young belle of her innocent years. Childhood has definitely been left behind. Yet for these characters attempting to rebuild a society in a post-apocalyptic landscape, they are missing the point that General Archbald, George Birdsong, or even Ashley saw—that society and life as Southerners recognize it has been wiped out. As General Archbald acknowledges it, the rebuilding of a civilization is a pointless and backward idea. The new environment provides the survivor the place where he or she can and should evolve and explore new or repressed unconscious desires, what Ballard calls "inner space," what Chaudhuri refers to as the "difference within." Scarlett is left with the illusion that something like the Arcadian walled-in space of the plantation garden is recoverable through heroic conquest and can exist in a future without slave labor, but Ashley looks ahead to a Quentin Compson, for whom that space itself is no

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1992); Joanne B. Freeman, <u>Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic</u> (New Haven: Yale

longer available, or even, as <u>Absalom, Absalom!</u> shows, imaginable and who is left with only the obsession for stasis, stopping universal progress (Homberger 101).

Eventually, <u>Gone with the Wind</u> presents masculinity as fluid, diverse, and multiple, and the masculine imageries are always tentative, under debate and never fixed. Femininity, however, (as seen in the ideal of Ellen O'Hara as the central figure and as <u>The Sheltered Life</u> also underlines) appears as a more fixed identity which ensures the continuity of the Belle as an archetype. The feminine, like Scarlett, may be plural: Scarlett is feminine, the opposite sex, the "other" but she is also strongly "phallic" in her mastery of business matters, for example. Yet she is damned for it. In the end, Mitchell seems to assert that the pluralization of masculine identities is not—contrary to the Belle's attempts—dangerous. The men in <u>Gone with the Wind</u> are finally brought "back to reason": they talk about government-regulated institutions—family, marriage, or war—engaging in social discourse that is safe and that does not represent a threat for society. Choosing one masculinity over other possibilities, the distanciation from geopolitics, and the refusal to be plural (Rhett chooses to marry and chooses to return to the romance of his ancestors) ensures the continuity (at least in imagination) of traditional masculinity, its stay in place as hegemonic. Rhett's resolution enacts a flight from civilization into a space where, as Henry Nash Smith said, "fidelity to the uncoerced self" is possible (<u>Mark Twain</u> 122).[535]

What should not be missed from these male-cast novels is, of course, the characters' sense of history. Novels like <u>Gone with the Wind</u> or <u>The Sheltered Life</u> (and even <u>Swallow Barn</u>) present characters who educate their readers on the history of the people who inhabit these fictional truths. In revisiting the "wrongs" of the past as an attempt to reclaim "rights," these men are offered the capacity to revisit the destructive versions of tradition that the father—real or metaphorical—represents. According to Susan Donaldson, "such a

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University Press, 2001).

confrontation, though, offers its own peculiar dangers, in particular the possibility of reaffirming as well as questioning; regional traditions and their peculiar notions of manhood" (63).[536]

In The Glass Menagerie (1946), Tom makes it very clear. From the onset of the play, Tennessee Williams presents a catalog of manly positions: the father who has left the stage in search of open spaces to the West, Malvolio the magician, and Jim O'Connor who has strong ties to the past and tradition. Yet, behind the smooth surface of appearances, this Gentleman Caller underscores the emptiness of the mirror, a signified dissociated from its signifier. Another of these positions is offered by Tom, a young man yearning to break free from the dependence of his sister Laura and from the authority of his mother whose world of beaux, belles, and happy days in the old plantation south is inimical to the world of St Louis.

Of course, the Southern Belle figure in The Glass Menagerie is peripheral to the play, in the sense that it is not about her, or rather the play is about her only to the extent that it is about her role in Tom's identity quest or the resolution of Tom's personal conflict with his past. Mother (and Laura) seems to exist largely for the purpose of making the male protagonist's life unbearable by constant interrogation of his motives and his passage into manhood/adulthood impossible. The power of the mother to influence a man's thoughts and actions remain central to the play, even if not unique to The Glass Menagerie. It also serves to underline the essential paradox at the core of Tennessee Williams' gender relations. On the one hand, the power of the absent woman depends on the woman's erasure, since she is not a "real" body in the play (but rather a memory); she is to some extent—as in Tom's case—a fantasy of male need. On the other hand, the "absent" woman is embodied through her

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[535] Henry Nash Smith, Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

[536] Susan Donaldson, "Keeping Quentin Compson Alive: The Last Gentleman, The Second Coming, and the Problems of Masculinity," Walker Percy's Feminine Characters, eds. Lewis A. Lawson & Elzbieta H. Oleksy (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 1995).

dramatically present, real offstage voice (in the manner of Bel Tracy) and its actual influence on the "real" onstage male voice.

Feeling Tom's annoyance, the reader even begins to wish that she were more peripheral, non-existent to Tom's narrative. But mother, like other females who occupy the margins of the works under discussion, is peripheral in a sense other than not central, ornamental, or unimportant: she is always present, influencing the way Tom sees the world and revisits history. His mother and sister occupy the outer reaches of Tom's field of vision whether he likes or not. As a consequence, in having an heterosexual male express his (dis)agreement with an absent woman's desire—be it Laura's need for protection or mother's need for financial or moral support—Tennessee Williams creates not only a male in crisis, but also a male character whose life is informed by an emerging feminist consciousness.

Tom speaks also about these women not only as objects but for them as subjects, and this emerging feminist male voice is unique to Tennessee Williams' revision of traditional gender codings. Tom appropriates the voice of the "other," of the absent woman as a way to explore his "own" other voices—not as an attempt to unite with her but rather as a device from which he can learn from her as well as try to separate from her. He also explores his own "other" voice through his self-proclaiming he is a "magician." In his attempt at retrieving his own history and reconstructing a sense of self and his blueprint for maleness, Tom progresses from the contrived mimesis of the magician he sees on screen or the father he sees on the portrait and whom he wishes to imitate to a "self-created" construction of maleness, through joining the war in the end. Yet war is not a self-created enterprise but rather another mimesis of masculinity. Even as Tom seemingly finds a remasculinized identity that is a woman-free zone—one of power (navy)—he is inextricably drawn to his mother and sister—a zone of vulnerability. In looking to male archetypes, Tom has sought his identity by looking backward, tracing his male descent (father) and identifying with him. In other words, the play

follows a distinctively male literary tradition, a tradition based on the search for the father, be he real or metaphorical (Brigham 309). Ellen Friedman sees this tradition as grounded "in the profoundly nostalgic conviction that the past has explanatory or redemptive powers. This belief is expressed as the futile desire to stop time or to understand, recoup, or re-create the past, summoning it into the present" (241).[537]

The same oscillation between masculine and feminine zones, between past ideals and realism, is found in the portrayal of Jim O'Connor, the Gentleman-Caller of mother's dreams. In his presence, Jim O'Connor resurrects the traditional opposition between feminine being and masculine doing. Despite the play's claims to historical specificity—St Louis before World War II—the portrayal of this Southern Gentleman nonetheless relies on static, timeless gender categories and draws on outmoded notions of masculinity (values of social utility and work). Yet, Jim, like Tom, fails the realization of a reimagined Southern masculinity because both have created their own identity in images and performances.

In its final segments, The Glass Menagerie veers away from the masculine yearning for the patriarchal past and enters a tradition that Ellen Friedman associates with female-authored modern and post-modern texts: "the search for individuality, for selfhood, in the context of the cultural construction of identity" (263). With it comes a shift in perspective: in his recovery of history, Tom solicits mother's assistance, and the "process of recovering history becomes analogous to the process of writing the text, and both of these merge into the process of [Tom's] reinventing his identity" (Brigham 310). Tom, in other words, is unable to conclude his story, to "reconcile his history and his present, until he brings a heroic female figure in from the periphery to the center of history" (Brigham 311). In addition, through its focus on "men in families," Williams (like most authors in this dissertation) helps to

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[537] Ellen G. Friedman, "Where Are the Missing Contents? (Post)Modernism, Gender, and the Canon." PMLA 108 (1993): 240-252.

understand the family as an interactive group, instead of as a zone cordoned off for women and children.

By choosing to represent his marginalized status as other—a term borrowed from <u>Act like a Man</u>—Tom also activates a traditionally feminine function, seeking the pain rather than the privilege of being and exploring a way beyond the traditional coded "masculine" and "feminine" sex-roles. Tom's reality is no longer straightforwardly binary, it has become essentially ironic. <u>The Glass Menagerie</u> is thus characterized by competing interests: through war and bombardments (and as seen also in <u>Gone with the Wind</u> or in <u>The Sheltered Life</u>), a desire to heal a wounded masculinity, and thus remasculinize America, but also a desire to "dwell in the space of crisis, and thus [possibly] reimagine the dominant meanings of white masculinity" in terms other than the traditional either/or dichotomy of feminine vs. masculine (Robinson 11). Seen through Tom's perspective and Tom's creation (Jim O'Connor), the drive toward resolution and closure, the very idea of remasculinization (the grounds for so much work on masculinity) needs to be placed into question.

Obviously, a challenge to gender categories—the one envisioned by Tom—would seem unreadable without broader cultural change. Keeping Tom's masochistic crisis alive (to pun on the title of Donaldson's article) is far from possible.[538] <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u> (1947) confirms this idea as the most prominent feature of male individuation in the play is the degree to which a man embodies "masculine" (aggressive, independent) or "feminine" (passive, dependent) characteristics. Mitch and Stanley, in this sense, establish their difference according to traditional gender codings, but neither explores their difference within.[539]

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[538] Susan Donaldson, "Keeping Quentin Compson Alive: The Last Gentleman, The Second Coming, and the Problems of Masculinity," <u>Walker Percy's Feminine Characters</u>, eds. Lewis A. Lawson & Elzbieta H. Oleksy (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 1995).

[539] On this aspect, we can read: Una Chaudhuri, "The Future of the Hyphen: Interculturalism, Textuality, and the Difference Within," <u>Interculturalism and Performance</u>, eds., Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1991) 197-207. Chaudhuri's ultimate goal is to pose two kinds of difference: difference between and difference within (196-197).

Identities in <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u> remain encoded: Stanley, aggressive, self-assured, and on the prowl, while Mitch is passive, sensitive, and a bit fearful. Their male interaction evolves into a masculine/feminine model of behavior, one that assumes the existence of an "encoded" female presence within the male-male interaction. The reference to "mamma's boy," for instance, serves that purpose. From this perspective, Mitch becomes more womanly, and Mitch, the son, takes on several conventional codes attributed to the female "other": he expresses his affinity for a domestic life, his preference for women's traditional role and his willingness to privilege other men's authority over his own. He consciously chooses to become what his mother would have wanted. Mitch is therefore the coded object who becomes fully defined by his relationship to the female object and her needs, the play making an argument that men like Mitch—contrary to Stanley—are robbed of their manhood by a culture that elevates "the accessorisation of their identity" (what Robinson decries as the feminine characteristic par excellence) over the masculine values of social utility. If Tom in <u>The Glass Menagerie</u> seems to address the pleasurable non-identity and genderless possibility offered by the vulnerability of men in crisis, Stanley refuses to hear of this possibility.

Peripheral to the play are the voices of the failed beaux (fathers, Alan) who become embodied only through their weakness and the vulnerability to their passions (in both cases, sexual) that have led to their failing as patriarchal models. Their vulnerability is, of course (and not surprisingly) kept on the margins of the narrative, brought to light through hints and in bits and pieces, demanding in turn that the reader put together the pieces of a past hidden from sight and resurrected from the archives. By doing this, Tennessee Williams opens a space for interrogating Southern masculinity by dissociating Southern "historicism" from Southern masculinity. Southern masculinity is in crisis and if women like Blanche are indeed victims, claiming recognition on the grounds of past victimization, these Southern men—as

Alan emphasizes—seem to assert that they also have been wounded. They are not social oppressors but individual victims of social oppression too.[540] The fact that these men remain invisible (i.e. unmarked and outside the hegemonic sphere of manhood) brings "masculinity" (i.e. the norm, the category) out of the center of attention (and therefore leaves it uncensored) to bring the "sick" men and women (the representatives) to the center of the play.

Moreover, because Blanche's beaux are absent from the play, the discussion has used Vorlicky's approach. In Act like A Man, the author wonders "whether men, in the absence of women, or whether women in the absence of men, replicate a gendered language system, one in which the voices of male and female, masculine and feminine, self and other remain, albeit coming exclusively from the mouths of men" (9).[541] Read in this light, the women in A Streetcar Named Desire often take upon themselves a language that reasserts the gender discourse of hegemony. While openly rebelling against the hypocrisy of the Old South, Blanche Dubois replicates a language that is not liberating, but annihilating, as she remains— even though she rebels against it—dependent on male protection. When men, on the contrary, move into personal dialogue; when these find themselves in plays or situations in which women (and Southern Belles specifically) are absent or in which their own patriarchal models are absent, they disclose a language often characterized by the location of a male "other," a presence (often coded as feminine) wishing to distance oneself from the dominant, impersonal masculine ethos. In the light of a hegemonic power that is exercised by, contested by or occasionally shared by Southern men, one discovers how the Belle could replicate a language

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[540] On that note, and commenting on the last "Survivor" game—into which a male millionaire out-manipulates a rival woman in the competitive community of a game show—Judith Kegan Gardiner remarks: "the woman who played the "Survivor" game most like men [using men's instruments] with collusion and betrayals rather than cooperation for the common good, was rejected as a vicious "snake." In contrast, the corporate white man who did the same appeared as a master strategist. He had struggled, put his male body on the line, and therefore deserved his million-dollar prize" (Anxiety Attacks). A similar case appears in our play through the survivor game played by Blanche and Stanley; Judith Kegan Gardiner, Anxiety Attacks (Review). Feb 01, 2001; Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis by Sally Robinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

that does not challenge, but further validates, traditional norms. While the semantics of the female body assumes the cultural significance of a dangerous social construct, and thus needs to be eliminated in a more definite way, even Stanley—the ape, the half man—who is clearly challenged in his masculinity contributes to hegemonic masculinity, not just from the biological category and psychological category but also from the social, cultural, and economic context. At the same time, the hyper-masculine, by contrast, makes invisible the visible crisis of those who have remained in the shadows. These step out of history, yet contrary to Blanche, keeping their honor (almost) intact. Hegemonic manliness, as Williams recognizes, remains performed powerfully and invisibly.

With the conviction that history and ideology constrain what one can say and how one can say it, I have therefore examined different texts announcing and exploring the New South to see how (and if) they renegotiated the situation of these Southern men, how they both repeated and deviated from the consensus discourse and the historical myths (of the mythical Old South, the Lost cause, the Cavalier, etc) that constrained them—the ultimate goal being to examine the complexities of a gendered masculine struggle. The spectrum used for this dissertation is of course limited. Yet, from the perspective traced from the "first" antebellum period to the ultimate "post-bellum" period of World War II, the thread running through these novels or plays reveals that, as both national and individual identities became obviously challenged, the old realities of the gentleman threatened to dissolve. If in the 1830s, the spectacle of gentility supports the myth of the Old South, it also threatens at every moment to undermine it by revealing its increasingly evident theatricality. In the 1940s, however, if it is no longer the spectacle of gentility that is at stake, it is the very essence of manhood that is being threatened.

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[541] Robert Vorlicky, Act Like a Man: Challenging Masculinities in American Drama (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

If the dissertation has looked within the plantation South and its still contemporary antitheses (as memory in <u>The Glass Menagerie</u> and <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u>, finally), trying to complement the dialogue between the masculine self and society imagined by Stephen Berry, this analysis—I hope—adds a stone to the edifice of the study of the Southern gentleman but also offers new perspectives from which to revisit other Southern authors, even more recent texts that could be considered in bringing the investigation into what was a completely different era, that is, post World War II when hordes of men returned, crowding colleges on the G.I Bill and pushing the women who had worked in a great many jobs quite successfully out of the workplace and into the new little kitchens of subdivisions all across the continent, including the South. The plantations mechanized, and in many cases even more of them became part of corporate agri-business. Faulkner's post-war novels <u>Intruder in the Dust</u> (1948), <u>The Town</u> (1957), and <u>The Mansion</u> (1959) variously dramatize an ineffective small town "beau" in the person of the bachelor Gavin Stephens, who has a Mississippi law degree and a Heidelberg Ph.D. and is usually talking a lot and not capable of action. In the same vein, novels by Stark Young, an older gay Mississippian whom Faulkner knew; by Robert Penn Warren, a Kentuckian, in whose <u>All the King's Men</u> (first published 1946). The hero is a red-neck politician based on Louisiana Governor Huey Long and his adversary is a "gentleman" lawyer, all observed by Jack Burden, a southerner of good family who, in his search for the meaningful, goes all the way to California to find out that all you can do is turn around and come back; novels by Walker Percy such as <u>The Last Gentleman</u> (1966) and <u>The Second Coming</u> (1980) that explore Williston Bibb Barret, a man born in the Mississippi Delta who has since moved to New York City and who suffers from a "nervous condition" that causes him to experience fits of déjà vu and amnesiac fugues; finally maybe, novels by Peter Taylor of Tennessee, who was a not uncritical friend of many of the so-called "Agrarians"; or by the post-modernist John Barth, <u>The Floating Opera</u> (1957), coming all the way up to the recently

deceased Barry Hannah, a kind of post-post-modern Mississippian who also problematizes old images of southern masculinity and honor in a place where, as Walker Percy ironically writes, the South had become Republican and Happy, and people live in golf-course communities instead of on plantations, and make money as lawyers, new car dealers, and investment counsellers, though still plagued with the "gentleman beau" heritage, perhaps, because of a still general doubt about how to act within a spurious and invented tradition of masculinity.

Identifying a Southern beau "gone bad" (to pun on the title of Entzminger's The Belle Gone Bad) leads to focus on the wounds of these males and no longer approach Southern white masculinity as a force of nature, an approach that subtly revises the history of male dominance as it has been written by feminism. It also allows for instability, and as such permits to rethink set definitions and explore the mechanisms of resistance or the counter-hegemonic models who (re)appropriate fixed set of rules (the self-narrative, the self-made man, the dandy, the artist, the evil woman, the monstruous) to play with outside rules and envision a new coding of masculinity in the South.

As the study of the Southern plantation male canon has demonstrated, identifying a gentleman in crisis, and making the Southern problem an object of scholarly and popular gaze does produce a number of rewards, one of which is that it serves to pinpoint the fissures in the patriarchal system and in the myth of the Southern Cavalier. According to Sally Robinson, it also tends to wrestle attention away from women and recenter it on men, thus focusing on the male problem rather than the Southern Belle problem that has been the object of so many studies.

At the same time, the "recentering" of white masculinity is a term that must be used with caution. If the novels under analysis have anything to say about Southern masculinity and if the Lost Cause ideology was characterized by a wish to remasculinize the South—as

the celebration of the Veteran embodied—it is also the case that the masculinity it promotes is increasingly distant from the putative (yet already faulty), stable, restrained gentility that "preexisted" the crisis. As this study has shown, it is by representing themselves as wounded and victimized, but somehow unfallen, that these Southern men come to reoccupy the center of cultural priority, value, and interest. They are, perhaps, one with self-doubting men everywhere.

Added to this, self-consciousness does not itself guarantee subversion of dominant representations of masculinity or any change in existing power relations. As Tania Modleski points out, self-consciousness and self-criticism can actually serve an "inoculating" function that allows "business to proceed as usual" (6). These novels seem to perform this inoculating function since Southern men, as identified through these texts, were indeed waging a kind of war with themselves, but they eventually stepped off the stage of history; yet, contrary to the Southern Belle, keeping their honour. On that note Tania Modleski justly remarks: "however much masculine subjectivity may currently be 'in crisis,' as certain optimistic feminists are now declaring, we need to consider the extent to which male power is actually consolidated through cycles of crisis and resolution" (7). As emphasized throughout this study, resolution to the crisis of masculinity often entails that meanings that correspond to a model of hegemonic masculinity are maintained and meanings that do not correspond to hegemonic masculinity are suppressed or silenced, so much so that the deconstructive insights about the ways in which patriarchy is divided against itself seem to actually "function to reauthorize patriarchal power relations and masculine hegemony under new and ever more complicated guises" (Modleski, qtd. in Robinson 9).[542]

Actually, most of the masculine insecurities portrayed in these novels operate on two significant levels: on the one hand, as "an inevitable condition," to use Breitenberg's words,

that reveals the fissures and contradictions of the patriarchal system, a system that Rhett himself sees as incapable of preparing men (and women) for the real world. On the other hand, masculine anxiety also paradoxically enables and "drives patriarchy's reproduction and continuation of itself" (Breitenberg 2), in returning the dominant into invisibility or in resorting to therapeutic cases of masculine crisis, for example. In doing so, the discourse of masculine fragmentation may indeed voice new ways of understanding and performing gender; yet, the discourse also veers to what could be called the strategies of containment, assimilation, or appropriation of these subordinate discourses.[543] The hegemony of the Southern gentleman model (while it may sometimes be supported by force or caricatural characters) means ascendancy of the most honored way of being a man, requiring all other men to position themselves in relation to it, an ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and normative practices. It may be no surprise that Calvin Thomas concludes that "masculinity studies and the 'turn to gender' [have] thus [been] charged with perpetuating rather than interrogating the reproduction of male dominance in the South" (61).[544] In light of these effects, one may even wonder if masculinity—being as much a construction as femininity—can be deconstructed, disrupted, and dismantled, allowing self-creation. Does a study of masculinity and a focus on Southern masculinities lead to greater equality between

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[542] Tania Modleski, Feminism Without Women : Culture and Criticism in a "Post-feminist" Age (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).

[543] If we follow Breitenberg's argument, we must understand that "anxiety is the inevitable product of patriarchy at the same time as it contributes to the reproduction of patriarchy. The term anxiety is thus employed here as a means of critique [. . .] and as a way of understanding the considerable resilience—the strategies of containment, re-circulation, appropriation—of a social system whose most fundamental assumption, at least in theory, was the natural inequality of its members" (3). From this premise, it follows that those individuals whose identities are formed by the assumption of their own privilege must also have incorporated varying degrees of anxiety about the preservation or potential loss of that privilege. Once again, the critical task of Breitenberg's analysis is to read masculine anxiety in two inseparable ways: as a signifier of cultural tensions and contradictions, but also as an enabling condition of male subjectivity in early modern patriarchal structure. Such an analysis draws from Althusser's definition of ideology as simultaneously illusory and constitutive of subjectivity: masculine anxiety reveals both the contradictions inherent in patriarchal structure and the ways that culture smoothes over those contradictions" (3).

[544] Calvin Thomas, "Reenfleshing the Bright Boys; Or, How Male Bodies Matter to Feminist Theory," Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 60-89.

the sexes or rather to an entrenchment of oppressive masculinities in a new disguise? (Staiger 1).[545] Can Southern men respond to J. Weeks' notion that "[i]dentity is not a destiny [. . .] but a choice … [a] self-creation …on ground not freely chosen but laid out by history?" (209).[546]

On a more positive note and to respond to Bryce Traister's concern that institutionalizing a crisis model may simply function as an "Academic Viagra," this dissertation underlines the possibilities offered by the deconstruction of supposedly stable, engrained, and fixed meanings of masculinity and femininity in the plantation South.[547] As this dissertation has shown, there could be a struggle for hegemony as older forms of masculinity may be displaced by new ones. As the texts under analysis also emphasize, maybe a more human (wounded) less oppressive means of being a man, maybe "some compensating humanity" as General Archbald voices, may become hegemonic.[548] The analysis equally suggests a shift in the nature of masculine domination in the New South, with the definitions of gentility being changed, or subverted, the advantages gradually whittled away so much so that masculine domination often feels like a pyrrhic victory without the fruits of power (or merely the dried fruits of Freudian sublimation). Men, and as seen by Tom in The Glass Menagerie, now seem to experience the patriarchal script as more burdensome than advantageous indeed not as their script at all, suggesting that hegemonic social discourse may indeed be about men and about masculine centrality, without being a masculine discourse. And it seems at times to suggest that the invisible could also be a feminine, but not

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[545] Annegret Staiger. "Examining Men's Studies, or: Reflections on a Gender Division in Gender Studies," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta Hilton Hotel, Atlanta, GA, Aug 16, 2003 . 15 Oct. 2009 <http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p106824_index.html>

[546] Jeffrey Weeks, Sexuality and Its Discontents (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

[547] Bryce Traister, "Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies." American Quarterly 52.2 (June 2000): 274-304.

[548] This view has been developed in R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity. Gender & Society." Gender & Society. Web. 10 Sept. 2010. <http://gas.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/19/6/829>.

feminist, ideology that has appropriated the terms of masculine domination in the interest of

the household order, and as a means of limiting masculine abuse.[549]

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[549] Nick Growse proposes the same shift in the nature of hegemonic masculinity in "Lads, Men, and The Reluctant Patriarch," Proc. of Paper for Performing the Invisible: Masculinities in the English-Speaking World, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris.

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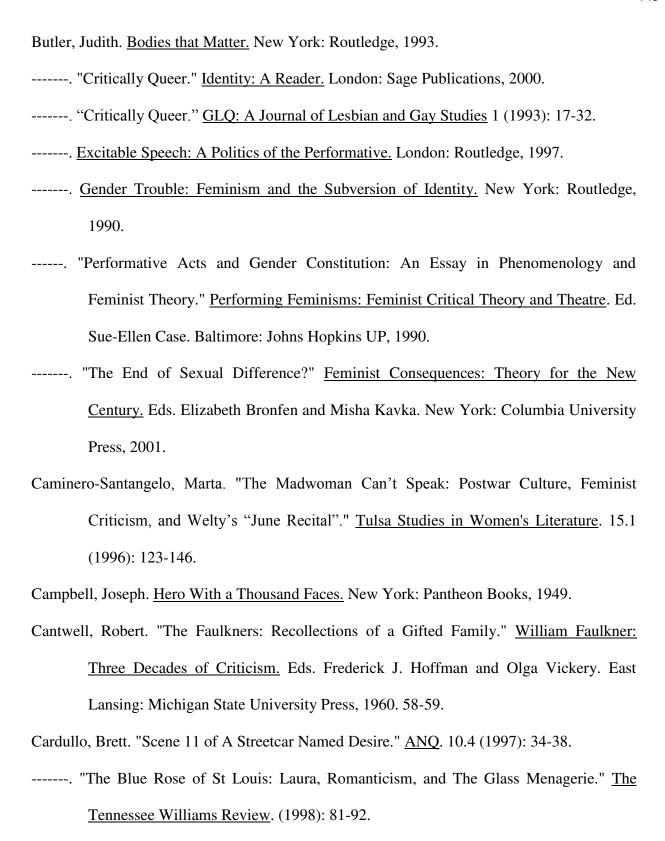
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