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### **The Struggle to Re-establish Anglo Superiority in American Modernism and its Collapse into American Tragedy**

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**The Struggle to Re-establish Anglo Superiority in American  
Modernism and its Collapse into American Tragedy**

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*The Struggle to Re-establish Anglo Superiority in American Modernism and its Collapse into American Tragedy*

I

It was once said to me by a wise Professor, an authority on the subject, “English departments have a monopoly on modernism. No one else reads it.” For a period of the arts and humanities thought to be so revolutionary and new, most of the exposure given to it is by teachers and scholars, often by way of an assignment in an English course. Before delving into how Anglican xenophobia created an undercurrent of racial assertion by conservative, socially reactionary writers in American modernism, it is important to define what is usually a non-committal and fluffed explanation of what “modernism” actually is and further, when the period began and when it ended.

Modernism, for our purpose, is a concentration on a movement in literature and the arts. By “movement”, I mean movement away from classic or traditional forms, not by forgetting or doing away with them altogether, but by exercising and employing their key foundations and principles to develop something new: a progression. Ezra Pound’s “make it new” is a rallying cry for the modernist generation. What Pound meant with this legendary statement, and T.S. Eliot his devout partner in shaping modernist criteria would agree, was asking scholars to renovate classic forms of technique and structure, foundational themes of literature and art, passed down by leading players in the world of humanities to “do it again” with the progressive intent of building on proven method and performance. The attempt to break through the limitations of form imposed by specific kinds of art implies a preoccupation with form itself, which is a major distinguishing feature of modernism. Eliot created a blueprint for this sentiment by demanding the

essential characteristic of “tradition” be a foundational rule to distinguish a writer or artist as a valued modernist in his treatise *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. Eliot was frightened that writers and artists were moving away from the established theory, style, and technique of their predecessors, preventing his generation and generations to come the opportunity to create worthy celebrated works. He feared a culturally barren output of literature and art was on the horizon.

By the early twentieth century the profusion of artistic movements was striking. Most important, during the first two decades of the century were Postimpressionism, Cubism, Imagism, Vorticism, Futurism, Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Existentialism, and Structuralism. Modernist masters dominated in all arts, from Picasso, Cezanne, and Braque in painting, to Joyce, Pound, and Eliot in literature, Stravinsky in music, and Frank Lloyd Wright in architecture. All of these “isms” fall underneath the umbrella of modernism. In the first half of the twentieth century, theories and fashions were being shaped by the intellectual elite as a response to the cultural malaise brought about by late Victorian repression.

Modernist literature is distinguished by its formalism. It insists on the importance of structure and design. A good way to identify a period is not only to look for ways in which its art reflected what was happening in the social or ideological climate, but also to identify traits held in common by the most representative writers and artists of the time. Just as commonality in the style of one’s expression in temper and tone is characteristic of the defining traits of a genre, reoccurring themes motivated by social or ideological zeitgeist can label a movement. It is common among scholars to identify the New York Armory Show of 1913, with its exhibition of Cubist and Postimpressionist painting, as

the first shot in the battle to establish modernism in America. However, one would argue the class focused seduction plot of Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* with its early and innovative stream of consciousness style, sparking the muckraking journalism of Jacob Riis was a foundational example of American literary modernism. William James had already honed in on individual consciousness, spontaneity, authenticity, and personal experience as his self-proclaimed scientific philosophy broke way for the stream to flow through the arts and humanities. Crane's writing style as well as rebirth of traditional themes of seduction paved the way for a generation of writers that followed.

*Maggie* is a blueprint for the standard traditional class-based seduction plot revisited frequently in American modernism: a lower-class girl is seduced by an upper-class, or at least higher-class male, and she usually becomes pregnant. The man leaves her, neglects her, banishing the fallen woman to fend for herself which usually results in her death. Much of the plot revolves around this action and helps to define her supporting cast of characters, their contribution to the plot, as well as provide statements on social morays of that time in history that are showcased in the reaction from the community she lives in. We saw the progression of community reaction to the fallen woman in Cather's *My Antonia* with Antonia's refusal to be judged by her community and their refusal to acknowledge the social infraction of Antonia having her child out of wedlock. The fact that Antonia doesn't die was an untraditional choice of Cather's, as with the exception of Hawthorne, in a traditional seduction plot, the woman who has a child out of wedlock usually dies.

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* shows evolved progression of the use of the seduction plot formula, as *Gatsby* is a reverse seduction plot designed to show the pursuit

of an Anglo female by the ethnic “new man” who is trying to break into the ruling class elite social circle. The definition of “Anglo” for our study is a white English-speaking person with both blood and cultural roots based upon the population originating from the British Isles. Anglos are the founding members of the representative American elite ruling class and controlled much of high society during the period of American modernism. In representative works of American modernism a “host of characters pursue a central promiscuous Anglo female whose sexual involvement with a military figure sparks the central conflict of the novel...the military figure she gets involved with is an ethnic American or social outsider and the crisis of the plot comes when the chivalrous male romantic, committed to a sentimental fantasy of female rescue, is faced with fairly incontrovertible evidence that he has mistakenly idealized the principal woman: the promiscuous woman does not want to be saved.”<sup>1</sup> In *Gatsby*’s version there is this typical gender reversal in the seduction plot where Jay Gatsby or Jimmy Gatz is the ethnic man, with a military background, having served in World War One, who is seduced by the upper class Anglican debutante Daisy. Gatsby and Daisy don’t have a child, but Fitzgerald still follows suit using the thematic device of killing Gatsby after Daisy’s refusal to be with him. Fitzgerald’s seduction plot is quite complex as there is a mirror seduction plot with Tom Buchanan and Myrtle’s story, Tom is the upper class male stooping to have an affair with the lower-class female, Myrtle, which ruins her and causes her to commit suicide by running out in front of Gatsby’s car. The fact that Fitzgerald brings both seduction plots to a head, literally colliding with each other, in the

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<sup>1</sup> Gandal, Keith. *The Gun and the Pen Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction*

dramatic action of a fatal car crash is extremely clever and shows a superior ability of creating a complex plot.

Ernest Hemingway shares the same ideas in *The Sun Also Rises* but his is a neo-Anglo progression on Fitzgerald's seduction plot as it makes an example out of the military school "ethnic Jew" Robert Cohn. Robert Cohn is obsessed with the Anglo female Brett Ashley and has a brief affair with her. After this brief affair she spends the rest of the novel doing her best to avoid him, treat him like a stranger, and he loses himself trying to pursue her. The supporting cast of characters are all Anglos who degrade Cohn, make fun of him, and treat him like an outsider the entire novel. Hemingway uses stereotypical racist insults to describe Cohn and his shortcomings as an inferior Jew. Cohn ends up ostracizing himself by beating up three of Brett's Anglo lovers, including Jake the main character and is banished from the Anglo clique that make up the rest of the characters in the novel. In *Gatsby* the ethnic dreamer is flawed, but in *Sun*, Hemingway takes the racial stigma to new levels choosing a Jew to make an example of as well as giving him no redeeming qualities.

T.S. Eliot's use of seduction in *The Waste Land* is dynamic and has complex connotation. The scene in the section "Game of Chess" displays women gossiping at the local pub, where he too comments on the "war bride", Lil, whose husband is away at war and she has been home fraternizing with men, living it up. Albert, Lil's military husband, gave her money to fix her teeth, rather get a "new set", and she spent the money having a good time instead. The Anglo female promiscuity theme is implied because the women are in London, and although Lil isn't a typical "charity girl", a woman like Daisy or Brett Ashley that is "romanticized" in *Gatsby* and *Sun* for "sexually fraternizing with

recruits”<sup>2</sup> as Lil has 5 children already, she is disrespecting her husband and family by carrying on while her husband is away and now that Albert is coming home that much will be obvious. Eliot made this statement on the dishonest and unfaithful “war bride” years before Fitzgerald or Hemingway commented on this pop culture scandal.

In his “Fire Sermon” Eliot also employs the traditional seduction plot with the sexual liason between a “typist” and a “small house clerk” that has made a bit of industrial money during the Great War. The newly well-to-do man has his way with the typist and he “encounter(s) no defense” and as his “vanity requires no response” he is satisfied with the relations and leaves abruptly after, and to the typist he “bestows one final patronizing kiss.”<sup>3</sup> Eliot’s use of “patronizing” shows the clerk’s class dominance over the typist and she is Eliot’s example of the “new woman”: a cheap woman with loose morals, the type that provides dreamers like him no hope to hold out for. Eliot feels the seduction plot is exposed and broken.

*The Waste Land* also comments on the seduction of modern Western Civilization tempting the reader to forget the tradition of the past and give in to the new wave of waste and carelessness that he felt was plaguing post-war culture. He chooses the theme of ancient fertility rite and the tale of the Fisher King as metaphysical conceit. The Fisher King of ancient grail legend is impotent and therefore his land remains infertile as well. Only magic can restore his fertility and save his barren waste land, restoring

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<sup>2</sup> Gandal, Keith. *The Gun and the Pen Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization*. Oxford University Press, 2010. pg.9,10.

<sup>3</sup> Nelson, Cary. *An Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. Oxford University Press, 2000. pg. 9,10.



fruitfulness to his kingdom. Eliot's abundant use of classical reference in the poem suggests the magic that will restore wealth of culture to the post-war world is knowledge and tradition of the past that modern civilization is forsaking.

The modernist version of the seduction plot ended but also transformed with Arthur Miller's social realist statement on seduction in his post World War Two play *Death of a Salesman*. Miller's pathetic Willy Loman, a salesman seduced by the empty dream of success, following in the footsteps of the modernist romantic Jay Gatsby by creating a false identity to achieve his desires and losing himself and his family in the process, is disillusioned by the fantasy of the American dream. Miller portrays Willy as not living in reality, every action and every word from his mouth is a wishful embellishment and fabrication. In the end all Willy can offer to his legacy and his family is his life insurance policy and he commits suicide. This is the figurative suicide of the American Dream. Arthur Miller tells us the seduction of the dream is false, cheaper than the men who become its prey.

The progression of the seduction plot is key to our study of American modernism with its racial undertones and its thematic transformation coinciding with the shifting cultural malaise of the early twentieth century. *Maggie* revitalized the heavy usage of the seduction plot in American literature and paved the way for the race-based promiscuity novel that was so prevalent in American modernism and beyond. *Maggie* also called attention to the tenement house life of New York City's lower east side, which brought about both sides of social reform: a call to the middle and upper class to help the impoverished immigrant class and the cracking down on immigration by the elite ruling

class for the purpose of maintaining desired living conditions as well as preserving their social and cultural dominance in America.

A brief look at the rise of eugenics and the trends that ultimately led to the Immigration Act of 1924 provides a foundation to the claim that Anglos were doing everything they could to keep foreigners out of their ruling class and making examples out of anyone trying to push in to their bubble. Eugenics is the science of improving a human population by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics. The founders of eugenic thought: Thomas Huxley, Francis Galton, Herbert Spencer, and Karl Pearson were British. Influenced by their study, U.S. eugenicists like Charles Davenport and H.H. Goddard embraced a hereditarianism view of social characteristics, constructing hierarchies that ranked individuals, groups, races, and nations in terms of their biological value. Naturally, as the founders of United States were of British descent, and the founders of eugenics were British as well, the ruling class elite of America consisted of people with old money and Anglican roots.

The mixing of races and diluting of Anglican blood was not only looked down upon but mostly forbidden. The overflow of immigrants was ruining the authenticity of American life but also threatening the Anglo stratosphere and shaking the barriers of traditional American ideology. Works like Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color*, a study of eugenics and the dilution of the Nordic race as well as the claim that The Great War should actually be viewed as the "White Civil War"<sup>4</sup> because the death of so many Nordic people by other Nordics, severely damaging the ability to produce a strong

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<sup>4</sup> Stoddard, Lothrop. *The Rising Tide of Color: against White World-Supremacy*. Scribner, 1922.pg. 207.

generation of Nordic people, were popularized and credited as legitimate theory in the early part of the twentieth century. These studies were highly regarded in governmental philosophy and cited as fact in the United States Congress.

The Immigration Act of 1924, or Johnson Reed Act, including the National Origins Act, and Asian Exclusion Act, was a United States federal law that limited the annual number of immigrants that could be admitted from any country to two percent of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States as of the 1890 census, down from the three percent cap set by the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, which used the Census of 1910.<sup>5</sup> The law was primarily aimed at further restricting immigration of Southern Europeans and Eastern Europeans, especially Italians and Eastern European Jews. In addition, it severely restricted the immigration of Africans and banned the immigration of Arabs and Asians. According to the U.S. Department of State Office to the Historian the purpose of the act was "to preserve the ideal of American homogeneity."<sup>6</sup>

The two greatest purveyors of American modernism, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound showed great interest in preserving the authenticity of American literature by idolizing the “poets whom Eliot described as his “ancestors” the figures of American history—Jefferson, Quincy Adams, old John Adams, Jackson, Van Buren—whom Pound described as constituting our cultural heritage. Pound’s “heritage” and Eliot’s “tradition” both participate in the genealogical discourse that nativism made central to the work of

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<sup>5</sup> Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Duke University Press, 2012. pg. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Harvard University Press, 2003. pg.93.

art and the idea of culture.”<sup>7</sup> Michaels is saying is that Anglo nativists like Pound and Eliot defined the Anglican stronghold on accepted works in American modernism by filtering it with genealogical prerequisites and cultural background that stayed true to what they felt was the disintegrating true “heritage” and “tradition” of American discourse. American modernist thought attempts to restore a sense of order to human experience and this order is often an enforcement of a class-based societal hierarchy, the unifying principal: representational Anglican dominance. Anglican dominance in American modernism has been a developing observance that has taken shape as a definitive study toward the turn of the twenty first century. Looking at some of the early twentieth century’s most impressionable works through the Anglican canon has provided clarity and understanding to literature that were thought to be fully dissected and handled by scholars and most notably, academia.

Our study of the efforts by Anglo American writers to create literature that comments on the degradation of American culture as a result of the promotion of the ethnic new man is greatly indebted to three pivotal works on the subject. First is Walter Benn Michaels’s *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Michaels provides a reinterpretation of American modernism by exploring the role of cultural identity and race on the defining works of the period and the popular studies of scientific discourse on eugenics and genealogy that influenced them. Michaels offers that the combination of the social movement of nativism and the aesthetic movement of modernism shows the commitment to the resolution of the significance of national, cultural, racial, and

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<sup>7</sup> Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Duke University Press, 2012.pg.102.

linguistic identity in post-war literature. Michaels provides a history of the Johnson Immigration Act of 1924 and its white supremacist influences as well as traces the relation between World War One and racial diversity and the anxiety that stemmed from cultural pluralism and the fading traditional American identity.

Matthew Frye Jacobsen gives a detailed historic account of the Johnson Immigration Act of 1924 and highlights the key players that furnished its success in Congress in *Whiteness of a Different Color*. Jacobsen's study is a discourse of race showing how ethnic minorities were whitewashed into inheriting the desired Caucasian identity by the contingencies of power, politics, and culture of the United States bureaucratic institution. He defines the stages of racial formation by documenting imperialism, enslavement, conquest, segregation, and labor migration as part of the complex history of racial identity and culture in America. Jacobsen gives historical reference for much of the historic material this paper explores from the years 1893-1949.

Finally, Keith Gandal's *The Gun and the Pen* offers explanation and context to Michaels's *Our America* by discussing its theory and motivations providing tremendous insight into the idea of nativist modernism. He takes Michaels' work a step further building on the influence World War One had on American authors blending literary analysis with military history, specifically the employment of testing by the United States military to shift into a meritocratic based system for rank, status, and promotion resulting in what authors like Fitzgerald and Hemingway felt was a societal and cultural pitfall. Gandal shakes-up traditional readings of the major works of American modernism by outlining how the military's new meritocratic system provided ethnic Americans special opportunities to upstage native Anglo Americans and infiltrate their social stratosphere.

Much of the of the race-based and sociological vocabulary such as “new man”, “new woman”, “charity girl”, and “ethnic American” employed in the focus of this paper was defined and explained by Gandal, enhancing the discussion these roles played in the shaping of American modernism. Building on the identification of Anglican cultural assertion and racism in American modernism by Gandal and Michaels and the detailed historic account and reference of the events of the time period the movement took place, allowed this study of the struggle to establish Anglo superiority in American modernism to take its shape.

Three prominent writers of the period of American modernism, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and T.S. Eliot, chronicled the disintegration of modern society and culture. Their primary concern was to make the world re-connect with the societal status quo of the traditional American value system. Most works of Anglo modernism are motivated by seduction. Whether it is the seduction of the American Dream, the employment of the traditional seduction plot, twisted and mangled, evolved and adapted, or rather, ratified for the author’s purpose of showing who does and who doesn’t belong or who is penetrating the idealistic status-quo of structural social stratification.

Some of these clues are buried in the undercurrent of poems and plays as well as the more surfaced examples in the modern novel. As a significant chunk of time separates us from the lost generation, we are able to take a step back and observe the broken caste system of American Civilization, disrupted by the wave that had been swelling at the turn of the twentieth Century and broke at the end of World War One. What washed up on shore were the mixture of pristine sea glass, traditional seashells, and

the erosion of the corroded undertow; shattered shells and softened driftwood all laid together to be equally recognized by the light of the sun. Passer byers walking in the wake of the great wave sought to collect the desired pieces exposed by the sun before the tide came in and swept all of the treasures together with the debris out into the dark depths where one is indistinguishable from the other. “As interpreted by the racial discourse of the 20’s, immigration and the war were simply two aspects of the same phenomenon, the rising tide of color.”<sup>8</sup> A close look at examples of high modernism, a status of production awarded to few representative writers of the period, will establish Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and T.S. Eliot as those passer byers collecting the pristine pieces of society, culture, and art, shining new light on them, passionately struggling to assert their value and preserve their authenticity.

A generation of literature surfaced in the aftermath of The Great War as its founders reacted to the war’s effects that brought on a new attitude, and a new outlook of mixed feelings as to which direction their country was going, and what it had lost. As the west picked up the pieces of triumphant devastation and men returned home, these “modern nativists”<sup>9</sup> scattered the ashes of a race based culture that their bloodlines had ruled for centuries. To them, the Anglo ruling class, this meant a struggle to re-establish their traditional dominance of American culture and society, a privilege they felt entitled to, because a post-war crack in the American caste system granted their new ethnic adversaries opportunity for advancement, an opening the “new man” was diligently working to expose. Social stratification was on the forefront of American awareness and

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<sup>8</sup>Gandal, Keith. *The Gun and the Pen Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization*. Oxford University Press, 2010. pg.29.

<sup>9</sup> Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. Print. Pg. 3.

Anglos quickly realized a class shift was inevitable, as new groups were infiltrating their circles. Anglos looked to once again solidify their privileged identity as the superior beings of America, a role only their race had claim to in this country and it was “the emergence of this notion of identity that will come to seem the crucial feature of modernism, around which future studies of the subject will organize themselves.”<sup>10</sup> Three authors, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and T.S. Eliot emerged as the voices of this identity, and a close interpretation of their break out works during the crescendo of the roaring twenties and its aftermath bring clarity to what they considered a “lost generation”.

A further look into the fresh social realism philosophy provided by Arthur Miller that sparked the golden age of American drama directly following the collapse of American modernism in the wake of the Second World War, will show America’s sociological and cultural shift into a new era of American literature, providing a definitive book end for American modernism and its break from elitist themes. The social expressionism of Arthur Miller found its roots in American modernism but shifted demographics to concentrate on the modern day everyman catering to the masses instead of just the intellectual elite, generating a definitive statement on the progress of literature and arts in America, leading this next movement toward the identifiable themes of the working class citizen. A close reading of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* along side these modernist works of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Eliot shows the collapse of American modernism and its suffocating Anglo stronghold on American literature into the “Tragedy of the Common Man”: a much more relatable form of art and literature for

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<sup>10</sup> Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. Print. Pg. 141



the American public after World War Two as well as a progression of the themes of the modernist period that initiated this cultural shift, providing a definitive end to the period of American modernism.

## II

Both F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway were embarrassed by their positions in The Great War and had a feeling of masculine inferiority to the ethnic “new man” to whom chances to shine with valor and catapult into the Anglo social stratosphere. The outsiders were reaping all the benefits that were at one time exclusive to the Anglo “club” forcing Fitzgerald and Hemingway to struggle to re-establish Anglo superiority in America the only way they knew how, by working to tip the scales back in their favor making examples of ethnic Americans in their literature, putting the “new man” back in his place. In his book, *The Gun and the Pen*, Keith Gandal uses his term “mobilization modernism”<sup>11</sup> to define this literary movement. Part of this study aims to investigate how authors invoke a style that has the “critical ability to perceive the shared context of the mobilization for World War I”<sup>12</sup> that has, “high modernist literary control, symbolism, and tragedy in the context of their learning to disguise, transmute, and sublimate their “mobilization wounds”<sup>13</sup>. To understand this term one must look to the historical facts and events that led up to the creation of the mid 1920’s works of Hemingway and Fitzgerald. A good start to forming this background would be to investigate what both

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<sup>11</sup>Gandal, Keith. *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print. Pg. 51.

<sup>12</sup>Gandal, Keith. *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print. Pg. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Gandal, Keith. *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print. Pg. 74

authors accomplished, or better yet, didn't accomplish during the First World War.

Hemingway was an ambulance driver for the Red Cross on the Italian front, delivering chocolate and cigarettes to soldiers and the only one of the two to see any action, if you can call it that. On a delivery he was struck by mortar shrapnel in his leg and hospitalized for his injuries for the better part of the rest of the war. Hemingway embellished this story in his novels claiming he was with a battalion when the shelling ensued, and although incapacitated, he mustered up the strength to carry not one but two soldiers to safety. A man with machismo prowess like Hemingway was never doubted and his fable became known as historical fact for some time and he had to live with the fact that his greatest claim to bravery in WWI was a fabricated lie.

Fitzgerald, although eventually promoted to lieutenant, spent the whole war here on American soil and was the laughing stock of his troops at Camps Gordon, Sheridan, Zachary Taylor, and Leavenworth, where he was remembered as, "the world's worst second lieutenant."<sup>14</sup> As a result of their military shortcomings both men had feelings of failure as soldiers and they chose not to blame these shortcomings on themselves. Instead, Hemingway and Fitzgerald blamed ethnic Americans for their lack of heroics in the Great War, as these social climbers received prestigious ranks in the military the two authors felt they deserved because of their socio-political backgrounds. Promotion of these ethnic Americans over privileged Anglos was the result of the military testing and screening the United States military exercised to select candidates for duty in WWI after watching the rest of the world fail miserably with insufficient recruiting standards.

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<sup>14</sup> Gandal, Keith. *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print. Pg. 33

Race and background had little to do with military assignment after these tests were utilized and watching ethnic Americans get the chance to be heroes while they sat back and watched internally effected Hemingway and Fitzgerald. World War One defined a generation, and what one did in the war defined his masculinity. If a recruit didn't go over seas to fight on the front lines he was considered less of a man than a soldier who got that privilege. Ethnic Americans were being shipped out to fight in droves over Hemingway and Fitzgerald, thus creating what they felt was an undeserved inferiority complex. Much of the motivation in their writing is the result of their post-war masculinity wounds.

As a result of ethnic promotion within the military, the U.S. Government as well as the ever weakening ruling class, supremely made up of Anglo Americans, felt immigration was out of control after the war. Seeking a solution to this problem, "In 1921, a stopgap measure, the Immigration Restriction Act, also known as the Emergency Immigration Act, was enacted, and the 1924 act extended the 1921 act indefinitely and made its restrictions yet more severe. Brewing for decades, but in immediate reaction to the post-Great War Red Scare and the fact that more than 800,000 foreigners had entered the United States in 1921, this legislation put a cap on immigration for the first time and involved limiting immigration from specific countries."<sup>15</sup> Hemingway and Fitzgerald's sentiment was validated by other members of the ruling class elite, as well as the United States Government, with the opinion that too many foreigners and outsiders were infiltrating their country and most importantly their social circles. A close look at one of

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<sup>15</sup> Gandal, Keith. *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print. Pg.223.

each of their works of the 1920's: *The Sun Also Rises*, by Hemingway and *The Great Gatsby*, by Fitzgerald, will show how each dealt with presenting Anglos as America's elite stock, and what happens to ethnics that try to enter their superior world of dominance.

On the first page of his master work *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's narrator, Nick Carraway, gives the reader valuable insight into his character and the roots of his outlook on life by sharing his dad's words to live by, "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone, just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the same advantages that you've had."<sup>16</sup> Fitzgerald is referring to all the Jimmy Gatzs' out there, but it also sounds like something that was probably said to him as a child and here he is using the phrase as a tongue-in-cheek expression. Nick then goes on to state that he is "inclined to reserve all judgments" but "Gatsby, the man who gives the name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby for which I have unaffected scorn."<sup>17</sup> Gatsby should be included in the people "that haven't had the advantages" Nick has had, but all readers should agree that Nick's "unaffected scorn" for Gatsby leads him to make judgments on Gatsby from the second he meets him, through after he is murdered. Therefore Nick breaks his rule especially for Gatsby, but the reader should also note that all Nick does is judge people in this story. These statements are Fitzgerald's way of saying there is a man, a "new man" that has caused him, being born into the Anglo-elite

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<sup>16</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 1.

class, to put aside his allowances and judge because he gets under his skin to the point that he can't help himself, and in the end he got what was coming to him.

In the first chapter of *Gatsby* Fitzgerald introduces the reader to his example of an Anglican prince, Tom Buchanan. Familiarized by Nick as an old classmate at Yale, coming from a family of enormous wealth: “even in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach—but now he'd left Chicago and come East in a fashion that rather took your breath away; for instance, he'd brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest. It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that.”<sup>18</sup> Tom owns an indulgent estate in “East Egg” and Nick goes to visit one evening. After describing Tom's supreme physique Nick goes on to analyze “His speaking voice” that had “a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward the people he liked”.<sup>19</sup> Fitzgerald's use of “paternal contempt” brilliantly sums up an Anglo elitist's nature of speaking or looking down on a person or a thing beneath his consideration, and disregard for opinions that shouldn't be taken into account. Nick elaborates further with:

“Now, don't think my opinions on these matters is final,” he seemed to say, “just because I'm stronger and more of a man than you are.” We were in the same senior society, and while we were never intimate I always had the impression

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<sup>17</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 6.

<sup>19</sup>Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 7.

that he approved of me and wanted me to like him with some harsh, defiant wistfulness of his own.<sup>20</sup>

Nick's physical inferiority to Tom is noted, however it is important to observe his assertion that they are both in the "same senior society". Nick could be referring to a school organization they are were both members of, but deeper lies the affirmation to the reader that although Tom is rich and powerful, Nick belongs to the same social club and wields status of equality with him as a ruling class elite. It is also crucial to realize Tom's high rank in this ruling class as although Nick places himself in the same "senior society" he feels the need to tell the reader that he "always had the impression that he (Tom) approved" of him and flatters himself that Tom "wanted me to like him." It is as if Nick needs to establish his belonging to a man of Tom's stock and put to rest any self consciousness it may appear he showed when introducing his and Tom's dynamic by saying Tom "approved" of him but boasting that Tom wanted him to "like him". This admission shows Nick's vanity, but also is his vulnerability, as even though he too is Anglo, he is over compensating here to keep up with Tom. The reader should get the sense that Nick is over-compensating for his humble background because although he is Anglo, he knows men like Tom, American blue bloods, would only associate with him if he had a direct tie to his lively hood. Nick does in fact possess the essential criteria as Tom's wife is linked to Nick by blood.

During Nick's introduction to his new social circle he is only accepted into because of the pre-requisite that Daisy, Tom's wife, is his second cousin, Fitzgerald

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<sup>20</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 7.

cleverly references current popular literature of his time that was widely read and accepted theory on race and identity by many, including the United States Government when it created the new immigration restrictions of the 1920's. The reference comes early in the novel with Tom Buchanan explaining the argument of a book Fitzgerald calls *The Rise of the Colored Empires* by a man he calls Goddard: "The idea, [Tom says,] is that we're Nordics....And we've produced all the things that go to make civilization,[but that] if we don't look out the white race will be...utterly submerged by these other races."<sup>21</sup> Michaels explains that the real life book Tom is referencing is *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*, by Lothrop Stoddard and that "Tom's paraphrase, though crude is essentially accurate" to Stoddard's chief theory and that "Stoddard's mission in *The Rising Tide* was to teach white men the importance of "true race-consciousness" before it was too late."<sup>22</sup> Tom defends Stoddard's or "Goddard's" study saying, "This fellow has worked out the whole thing. It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things."<sup>23</sup> Tom also gives Stoddard's study merit like the rest of the ruling class of the early twentieth century justified themselves as believing ethnics were of inferior culture and stock by exclaiming, "It's all scientific stuff. Its has been proven."<sup>24</sup> It seems Fitzgerald is using Tom as a mouth piece to popularize what he feels is an important study of his time, something

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<sup>21</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. Print. Pg. 23.

<sup>23</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 13.

people will either recognize as a direct reference, or to educate people who don't recognize it and feels the study is at least relevant enough to have made reference to it in the first fifteen pages of his masterwork.

The base theme in *Gatsby* is often identified as Old Money vs. New Money. This is not incorrect, but does not go deep enough. A progression of this thought would be Old America, that is pre-WWI America vs. New America. In the post WWI New America, ethnics or non-Anglo Americans through a combination of immigration laws, military promotion, and an industrial boom were breaching the stratosphere of the Anglo-elite, experiencing the same or even better privileges that come along with that status. These statements progress into the heart of what Fitzgerald's novel is about: Old American Man vs. the "new man". Jay Gatsby represents the man that threatens the Anglo-superiority bubble. He is taking their women, driving their cars, owns their real estate, and is penetrating their social circles. He must be stopped. Even Gatsby himself knows he must re-invent his past just to legitimately enter this stratosphere and be viewed as an equal. But he is not "one of us" or a member of "the club" and is eventually ousted. Gatsby, by structural default has to be Fitzgerald's hero, but more than a hero, Gatsby is an example. An example of what can happen to the "New Man" full of romantic ideas of breaking into "the club". Fitzgerald's end solution of killing Gatsby is dramatic but says, "This is what happens".

When Gatsby takes Nick out to lunch, during their drive Gatsby is swallowing and choking on his fabricated back story, he has enough insight into Nick's



skepticism that he is doing his best to prove he isn't "just some nobody".<sup>25</sup> But the reader knows Nick doesn't buy it when he jabs back at Gatsby with, "What was that? The Picture of Oxford?"<sup>26</sup> Later on at lunch Gatsby digresses to, "Look here, old sport, I'm afraid I made you a little angry this morning in the car." To which Nick responds, "I don't like mysteries, and I don't understand why you won't come out frankly and tell me what you want"<sup>27</sup> or what you are. Nick knows Gatsby is hiding his true identity and its Fitzgerald's way of showing that it is Gatsby's background he is hiding and has justification to be ashamed of in the company of the Anglo-stratosphere if he wants to fit in. Like Nick, Tom who went to Yale, can't believe a man of Gatsby's lower ethnic and lower class origins could attend a school like Oxford. It is an unbelievable story to a man like Tom, whose acceptance to Yale was most likely a direct result of family legacy or family money, most likely both, to discover that his first rate university credentials are equaled by a low class ethnic American like Gatsby, who made it to Oxford on the basis of merit, not family tradition or wealth.

When Nick speaks of Gatsby's "extraordinary gift for hope" and "romantic readiness" it has the sound of Fitzgerald saying he has "too much hope" and "too much romantic readiness" that it "closed out" his "interest" in "the short elations of men". Jimmy Gatz's social success is a product of self-mythification as he transformed his presumably German last name to an Anglo-sounding one and invented a family pedigree

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<sup>25</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 67.

<sup>26</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 68.

<sup>27</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 71.

for himself. The near-sightedness of Gatsby's entire being makes his dreams in Nick's point of view; naïve, second-rate, and "short-winded". Gatsby is an ethnic American, hence Tom Buchanan's condemnation that Gatsby is not of the same race as he, Daisy, and Jordan, to which Jordan responds, "We're all white here."<sup>28</sup> But *how* white or what type of white? White like the kind "From Louisville", the "beautiful white" that shares the sentiment of their "white girlhood that was passed together there" as Daisy reflects on to Jordan: "Our beautiful white."<sup>29</sup> Tom Buchanan will be "damned" if he sees how Gatsby, this "Nobody from Nowhere," "got within a mile of [Daisy] unless [he] brought groceries to the back door."<sup>30</sup> This outburst shows exactly what Tom thinks of Gatsby and all the other ethnic Americans living in the western world, they have a place, and that is "the help" or to serve the Anglican ruling elite class. Gatsby can have his dream of being a part of Tom and Daisy's class, as long as he keeps his dream to himself and doesn't damage any true member's affiliation:

"Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees—he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Brucoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 130.

<sup>29</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Brucoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 19.

<sup>30</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Brucoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 131.

<sup>31</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Brucoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 110.

Fitzgerald uses this metaphoric symbolism to describe Gatsby's glimpse of his journey. The "ladder" is the ladder of society and the "secret place" isn't a secret to Tom or Daisy, only to people who don't have the background or password. But if he "climbed alone" and sacrificed himself and his true identity, only harming himself, that was the sacrifice that was accepted to "suck on the pap of life", a direct line into the masters of the universe, and "gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder." This feeling or desire of quenching his insatiable thirst to taste this "milk of wonder" is only incomparable to Gatsby as an elusive wonder, because it is something no accomplishment can help one attain or amount of money can buy, one has to be born into it. This is Fitzgerald's way of saying Gatsby must essentially sell his soul to the devil.

Nick is infatuated, not enamored, with Gatsby. He is infatuated with his lies to make up his past, his romantic nature, his gaudy grandiosity, and the great lengths he will go to fit in, but most of all, as an observant narrator, Nick is infatuated with seeing through Gatsby and watching the plot unfold. Whether Nick is rooting for Gatsby or not is not as important as that Gatsby is a social experiment from which Nick draws all the information and conclusions. The last time Nick sees Gatsby alive he gives him a calculated back-handed compliment, "They're a rotten crowd, you're worth the whole damn bunch put together."<sup>32</sup> Nick is speaking of the Anglo crowd, Gatsby has been shunned from. Nick follows this "compliment" with his most telling insight on how he really feels about Gatsby: "I've always been glad I said that. It was the only compliment

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<sup>32</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 154.

I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end.”<sup>33</sup> Nick “disapproved” of Gatsby and everything he stood for “from beginning to end” and the reader should know that even though Gatsby seems to be romanticized, he is not intended to be shown in a positive light by Fitzgerald and Nick for that matter. The prime conclusion is Gatsby will never be “one of us” and to trying to be is to not to be true to himself, to die a man with a blurred identity and to die alone.

Many scholars have done their best to interpret the elusive last few lines of *Gatsby* and there is still not a firm understanding of what Fitzgerald may have meant so this quote is open to interpretation:

“Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic  
future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then,  
but that’s no matter—to-morrow we will run faster, stretch  
out our arms farther....And one fine morning—  
So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back  
ceaselessly into the past.”<sup>34</sup>

In the scope of this study of the struggle to establish Anglo-superiority using the mechanism of modernist literature, the green light can be interpreted as the original American dream, of the founding American race, that is being diluted “year by year” by other races, with other cultures, that Americans were still trying to solidify then, and will

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<sup>33</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 180.

<sup>34</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. Print. Pg. 154.

work twice as hard to solidify now. And these true Americans will work against the current of diverse culture shift in America to recover the original dream, the dream they once dreamed before it became diluted.

Not referencing popular literature of his time, but literature that has rang through the ages, Hemingway opens *Sun* with Ecclesiastes' quote:

“One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever...The sun also riseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose...The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.... All rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.”<sup>35</sup>

One could interpret the Hemingway's use of this quote is speaking to a specific target audience and saying to that learned reader: The Anglo dominated generation is dead, the new generation of culture, which the “new man” immerses out of, has come. All races have flooded the gates of America and mixed and intermingled, yet her vast plains still have room, creating the melting pot, but originators of this land would not be content until where these races once came from, “they return again”. Not so much as return to their own countries, as to return back to their position of the subordinate class. Ecclesiastes may not have meant to have his words used as a declaration of social

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<sup>35</sup> Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Scribner, 2006. Print. Introduction.

expression, but Hemingway used them to show the condition of the state of his country after the Great War, where its future lay, but further, where he hoped it would return to again: a country with a deep-rooted Anglo undercurrent, housing an exclusive club that only a certain genetically predisposed group were privileged to be a part of. The same undertone is much on the surface of his characters and their interactions in *Sun*.

To continue this study one should analyze the carefully chosen language each author employs to set their Anglo protagonists apart from their ethnic adversaries. Robert Cohn, the Jewish outsider of Hemingway's *Sun* becomes obsessed with the Anglo princess of the novel, Brett, or Lady Ashley, and meets Jake, the Anglo male protagonist, outside his office after work the day following Cohn's introduction to Lady Brett Ashley. They go to a restaurant and this conversation ensues and Cohn asks:

“What do you know about Lady Brett Ashley, Jake?”

“Her name's Lady Ashley. Brett's her own name. She's a nice girl,” I said. She's getting a divorce and she's going to marry Mike Campbell. He's over in Scotland now. Why?”

“She's a remarkably attractive woman.”

“Isn't she?”

“There's a certain quality about her, a certain fineness. She seems to be absolutely fine and straight.”

“She's very nice.”

“I don’t know how to describe the quality,” Cohn said. “I suppose it’s breeding.”<sup>36</sup>

Jake Barnes is part of Lady Brett Ashley’s club, the Anglo club, where Hemingway employs the word “nice” to make use of the Anglo-modernist “linguistic style—modernist style—(which) can indeed become supremely important as the sole factor that sets the Anglo apart.”<sup>37</sup> In his book about culture, identity, and race within the American people, Walter Benn Michaels in his *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* comments on this assertion stating, “Breeding is the term used by people who don’t really have any; “nice” is the term used by people who do.”<sup>38</sup> Hemingway uses “nice” again when Count Mippipopolous says to Brett and Jake, “You are very nice people,” and then, “Why don’t you get married...?”<sup>39</sup> The Count looks at both Brett and Jake as a part of the same race or quality of person, a “very nice people” and therefore feels they should be married. Fitzgerald also uses the adjective “nice” to describe Daisy, and Michael’s analysis of his usage is best as he states, “Gatsby’s love for Daisy seems to Tom the expression of something like the impulse to miscegenation, an impulse that Nick Carraway understands as “the following of the grail. [Gatsby] knew Daisy was extraordinary, but didn’t realize just how extraordinary a ‘nice’ girl could be”(149). “Nice” here doesn’t exactly mean “white,” but it doesn’t exactly not mean “white” either.

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<sup>36</sup> Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Scribner, 2006. Print. Pg. 46.

<sup>37</sup> Gandal, Keith. *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print. Pg. 70.

<sup>38</sup> Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. Print. Pg. 26.

<sup>39</sup> Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Scribner, 2006. Print. Pg. 68

It is a term—like “breeding”<sup>40</sup>. Both Fitzgerald and Hemingway use “nice” as a way to linguistically separate Anglos from ethnic Americans in a way that was probably exclusive only to Anglo readers. Michaels goes on to say, “To be nice—even better, to be able to *say* nice—is to identify yourself as neither Gatsby nor Cohn; the social point of Hemingway’s prose style was relentlessly to enforce such distinctions.”<sup>41</sup>

Hemingway is a progression of Fitzgerald’s Anglo Saxon superiority complex, a Neo-Anglo, as Fitzgerald is only half-Anglo. Hemingway poked fun at “Gatsby’s melodramatic qualities (the hero is killed at the end), but mostly the fact that the hero is an ethnic criminal.”<sup>42</sup> He even went as far as to write Fitzgerald after *Sun*’s first publication that he promised to subtitle the novel “The Greater Gatsby.”<sup>43</sup> Most of Hemingway’s criticisms, statements, and opinions of Fitzgerald are condescending and demeaning as to say Fitzgerald is not “one of us” or “part of the club”. Although they were in great competition up until the day Fitzgerald passed, Hemingway has an air of superiority, almost as if Fitzgerald is playing Nick to Hemingway’s Tom Buchanan.

One doesn’t have to read far into the novel to find an example of Hemingway’s feeling toward the ethnic “new man” as one surfaces in the first two pages of *Sun*. His narrator lets the reader know about Cohn’s boxing title and his narrator, Jake, is (not) “very much impressed by that as a boxing title, but it meant a lot to Cohn. He cared

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<sup>40</sup> Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. Print. Pg. 25.

<sup>41</sup> Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. Print. Pg. 27

<sup>42</sup> Gandal, Keith. *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print. Pg. 54.

<sup>43</sup> Gandal, Keith. *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print. Pg. 147.



nothing for boxing, in fact he disliked it, but he learned it painfully and thoroughly to counteract the feeling of inferiority and shyness he had felt on being treated as a Jew at Princeton.”<sup>44</sup> No one had ever made Cohn “race-conscious” or “had ever made him feel like a Jew, and hence different from anyone else, until he went to Princeton”.<sup>45</sup> At an Anglo dominated ivy league school like Princeton, Hemingway wanted to make clear that a Jew would be treated as inferior, perhaps even lucky to be there and would have to prove themselves worthy of that privilege by punching his way into a ring he could never really contend in. Cohn is treated more like a spectacle, and altogether not a positive display of appreciation and acceptance, more like a novelty for his Anglo counterparts to enjoy. The novel suggests that if you throw the right clothes on a Jew, give him some Ivy League manners and ideals, some athletic ability and lessons, and even flatten his nose at a sporting event, maybe then he can rub elbows with the elite, but will never be accepted as one.

The need to identify the ethnic “new man” as an outsider imposing on an Anglo elitist America is a key element to understanding the motivations of Hemingway and Fitzgerald and their contributions to modernism. Gandal puts it best when he claims, “this postwar genre and specifically these 1920s novels are not so much post combat as post mobilization: the Anglo American male fictional characters are not so much shell-shocked as culture-shocked.”<sup>46</sup> The portrayal of Anglo bubble being pierced by social climbing ethnic Americans, posers, having affairs with pure women, out of their league, in an evolving society based on meritocracy, not blood lineage, is a shock to the Anglo

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<sup>44</sup> Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Scribner, 2006. Print. Pg. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Scribner, 2006. Print. Pg. 12.

<sup>46</sup> Gandal, Keith. *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print. Pg. 29.

entitled characters in American modernism. Both novels, *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Great Gatsby* demonstrate what happens when their ethnic American characters mingle in the Anglo stratosphere and try to make it their own, and both authors had the necessity to create these characters in an attempt to re-establish Anglo superiority using the canon of American modernism.

### III

T.S. Eliot used the authority of his critical prowess that dominated literary culture from 1917 until his death in 1965 to shape academic and public opinion, molding it with his Anglican predisposition. Before examining T.S. Eliot's work, and its relevance to the rejuvenation of Anglican dominance in American Modernism, it is important to get a pulse on his personality, style, motivation, and background. He wrote countless essays on style and form, seventeenth century baroque poetry, culture, social reform, and produced a wealth of literary critique on classicists as well as his contemporaries. T.S. Eliot may not have gone unchallenged, but he is the undisputed gatekeeper of American modernism. If one wanted to be read, recognized, or reviewed, he was the master who held the keys to their success. The currents of modernism went through him from 1917 through his death in 1965, and some may say his death marked the period's definitive end. As a social critic, Eliot's enterprise is decimated by ambivalence; grandiose ambitions are announced with gestures of futility. Impulses toward action and commitment are checked by disinterest and detachment.

A sizable portion of Eliot's writing is *about* writing; how it should and should not be done, what it may or may not accomplish. The successive burdens Eliot lays upon

writing—mainly attaining “impersonality,” involve aspirations beyond the merely verbal, so that writing becomes a model for other intellectual, imaginative, and spiritual projects that concern him as the conflictedness of the work of writing is thus an index to the tensions animating his career. “Escape from personality”<sup>47</sup> for example, is an aspiration *Tradition and the Individual Talent* has in common with *Prufrock* whose protagonist longs for escape into *eros* and escape from “the women that come and go”<sup>48</sup> as well as mortifications to his own isolated existence: thinning hair, wispy arms, and a comic name. Names are funny in Eliot’s poems and it is too bad that the broad comedy of Prufrock’s name has somewhat eclipsed Eliot’s real point, the *pathos* of joining an impersonal lyric genre, “The Love Song,” with so personal a property as an individual name.

Publicly, Eliot is bothered that his past success has made him an idol among a set of people he holds in contempt, the youth, the fops and flappers of the jazz age. Eliot after the late 1920’s must operate in a world in which “T.S. Eliot” has become a name to conjure with, a public property, a specter of influence and authority of a generation he wants nothing to do with. They are lost, motivations and inspirations misdirected, and furthermore lost to him, missing his meaning entirely. Against precisely this sort of literary personality Eliot directs his disappointment/condemnation in *After Strange Gods*. Eliot felt he was misunderstood: it was not, he cautioned, “their disillusion he had expressed, but their illusion of disillusion.”<sup>49</sup> This proclamation exemplifies all the qualities of witty arrogance of the disillusionment of being admired too much. It also

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<sup>47</sup> Eliot, T. S. *Selected Essays, 1917-1932*. Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1964. pg. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. pg.279.

<sup>49</sup> Eliot, T. S. *After Strange Gods: a Primer of Modern Heresy*. Faber & Faber, 1934. pg. 42.

indicates Eliot's need to fashion a self in opposition to what the public had made of an earlier "T.S. Eliot" and his works—an opposition to his own success. To get an idea of Eliot's writing personality is to understand his imposition on the era of literature he presided over like a judge on sentencing day. Understanding his background and style helps us interpret the motivation and meaning behind his masterwork, *The Waste Land*.

*The Waste Land* had offered itself as an anatomy of "the mind of Europe,"<sup>50</sup> an "impersonal" public poem whose protagonist was western civilization itself, however it was just these claims that licensed Eliot's pagans to appoint him the voice of their generation, and so Eliot from the late 1920's disowns them. In 1932's *The Use of Poetry* Eliot concludes "No honest poet can ever feel quite sure of the permanent value of what he has written: he may have wasted his time and messed up his life for nothing."<sup>51</sup>

Eliot's Calvinist distrust of anything resembling the vanities of the will produces an attachment to the idea of failure. To involve failure is, for Eliot, an inevitable ritual, for involved in any ambition is a distrust of the will that impels it. *The Waste Land*: a confession of failure, of the end of culture, of impotence and despair and *aboulie* that is yet, itself, rejuvenation of culture and of individual sensibility, is a tour-de-force, a virtuoso display of intellectual imaginative power. There is a confession of despair in the lines "I can connect/ Nothing with nothing,"<sup>52</sup> but also a kind of boast: the poem's achievement in connecting, synthesizing, the fragments whose ruin it laments is only the

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<sup>50</sup> Nelson, Cary. *An Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. Oxford University Press, 2000. pg. 285.

<sup>51</sup> Eliot, T. S. *Selected Essays, 1917-1932*. Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1964. pg. 394.

<sup>52</sup> Nelson, Cary. *An Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. Oxford University Press, 2000. pg. 297.

most heroic, if improbable, of its successes. The sense of ironic, painful, reluctant resurrection that animates *The Waste Land* suggests a sort of disturbed but ominous life Eliot's masterpiece is likely to continue to have, as future readers find themselves drawn to the difficult and painful chore of discovery the poem summons a reader to.

*The Waste Land* is a pre-cursor to the rest of Eliot's days as an authority on western cultural dissonance. The poem establishes him as the high priest of modernism, burdening the movement with his highbrow references and constricting morals. Many critics have stated that Eliot's allusions to fertility myth in *The Waste Land* are a call for religious revival in the Western World. Eliot was on his way to becoming a permanent member of the Anglican church when he wrote the poem and sympathized with his conservative contemporaries with the belief that everyone had their place and our society had a structured hierarchy that had been instilled for the benefit of all. All of the languages in the poem emerge as to say, "the world is falling apart everywhere," as the fertility reference is a negative progression throughout the poem to claim that the contamination of society is due to its misguided morality and must go back to knowledge already obtained by Anglican ancestors, to restore fertility and regenerate our decimated culture.

In Eliot's footnote to the title of the first section of the poem he states "The Burial of the Dead" is "the title given to the burial service in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer."<sup>53</sup> By now it should be recognized and assumed that Eliot is heavy handed and deliberate with his choice of reference in all of his work and the fact that he chose an

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<sup>53</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 286. Print.

Anglican prayer book to set the tone of this poem is to say to his learned readers, “if you share this identity with me, this poem is for you,” as he is looking to connect with a specific target audience. A standout theme to the first section is quite literally “The Burial of the Dead” as Eliot references nature fertility rite rituals of burying a ruler or someone ordained by a group of people to bring fertility to their land. In traditional fertility rite the chosen land lays baron and must be resurrected for a fruitful bounty.<sup>54</sup> Eliot uses this primitive story as mythic understructure, but poses the question: is new life even possible for us? “The Burial of the Dead” is significant because the god is sacrificed only to come back to life in a new form. Also, agrarian philosophy has proved that burying things such as plants or even animals is good for the soil and naturally enhances its fertility by enriching it through decomposition.

“April is the cruelest month”<sup>55</sup> is an antithetical reference to Chaucer’s opening line of *Canterbury Tales*.<sup>56</sup> Using the “spring has sprung” cliché as a negative, as “lilacs” are sprouting “out of the dead land”<sup>57</sup> or “waste land”, the ground in which they surface is infertile, just as the society of modern youth immersing from the decimation of the First World War, a war referred to as the “White Civil War” by Stoddard, is left culturally barren. Society is “mixing memory”<sup>58</sup>; the memories of the Great War and its stifling hold on progression, with its “desire” to move on, a double positive counteracting

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<sup>54</sup> Frazer, James George. *The Golden Bough; a Study in Magic and Religion*. New York: Macmillan, 1951. Pg. 139-140. Print.

<sup>55</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 286, line 1. Print.

<sup>56</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey, and Nevill Coghill. *The Canterbury Tales*. London: Penguin, 2003. Print.

<sup>57</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 286, line 2. Print.

<sup>58</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 286, line 2,3. Print.

with a negative result, a “cruel” result, as “cruel” as “stirring the dull roots with spring rain”.<sup>59</sup> “Dull roots” are the roots of western culture that have been forgotten, dismissed, or ignored by modernity or “spring rain” which is new and fresh. “Stirring the dull roots with spring rain” can be interpreted as one of Eliot’s many calls to refer to knowledge humans have already acquired.

In his essay, *Tradition and the Individual Talent* Eliot warns that tradition “cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor.”<sup>60</sup> The post-war generation is being covered up and blinded by “forgetful snow, feeding” whatever “little life” it has have left with “dried tubers”.<sup>61</sup> Eliot is insistent upon providing agrarian metaphysical discourse to label western culture’s “soil” or new foundation, infertile. But what are the “roots that clutch” or “branches that grow out of this stony rubbish”?<sup>62</sup> What is or are the traditions that have stuck or continue to grow out of this negligent society? “Son of man cannot say or guess” what these traditions are “for you (he) know only a heap of broken images” that have been shattered by modernity and the majority of the modern world has no desire to pick up the pieces unless it is convenient and quite obvious “where the sun beats”, they must be exposed where “the dead tree gives no shelter”.<sup>63</sup> Eliot calls to look and seek refuge in the “shadows”<sup>64</sup> where it requires not

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<sup>59</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg.286. line 3,4. Print.

<sup>60</sup> Eliot, T.S. The Sacred Wood; Essays on Poetry and Criticism." *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. T.S. Eliot. 1921.

<sup>61</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg.286. lines 6,7. Print.

<sup>62</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg.286. lines 19,20. Print.

<sup>63</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 286. Lines 20-23. Print.

only effort and diligence, but also where the fruits of tradition provide answers to this infertility. He invites the reader to “come in under the shadow of this red rock” where he “will show you something different from either Your shadow at morning striding behind you Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you”,<sup>65</sup> a reference to “The Death of St. Narcissus”, basically asking the modern reader to quit this narcissistic attitude “beyond good and evil” and look past themselves, because the reference he will employ through his “mythic method” will allow one to rediscover and he “will show you fear in a handful of dust”.<sup>66</sup> The fact that society has dismissed these stories of myth and tradition, guidelines of knowledge and salvation, and allowed them to deteriorate into “a hand full of dust” frightens him and should frighten the reader.

Eliot comments on modern fertility, or lack there of, by addressing trends of the “new woman” that were becoming increasingly common, much to the dismay of conservative traditional western public, a comment on Anglo-female promiscuity, with his war bride in “A Game of Chess”.<sup>67</sup> It seems, although he does not directly reference Homer, there are all too few Penelope(s) left in the world.

When Lil’s husband got demobbed, I said—

I didn’t mince my words, I said to her

myself,

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<sup>64</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 286. Line 26. Print.

<sup>65</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 286. Lines 27-29. Print.

<sup>66</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 286. Line 30. Print.

<sup>67</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 289. Print.



HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a

bit smart.

He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave

you

To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.

You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,

He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.

And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,

He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,

And if you don't give it to him, there's others will, I said.<sup>68</sup>

Not much allure here, Eliot is picking on this "new woman". She is weathered, and has squandered all the money her husband sent home while at war on philandering and good times, and when Albert comes home, that much will be obvious.

You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.

(And her only thirty-one.)

I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,

It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.

(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)

The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been

the

same.

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<sup>68</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 291. Lines 139-149. Print.

You *are* a proper fool, I said.

Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,

What you get married for if you don't want children?<sup>69</sup>

Those youth-stealing pills are reference to abortion. In this passage Eliot is blatantly going after loose women with loose ideals influenced by a drastic change of relationship moral standards. Anglo female promiscuity and her sexual involvement with men while their husbands are on the front lines spark the central conflict of much of the literature at the time and express her rebellion against Anglo-male authority. He has left this woman tattered, barren, and incapable of having children. Is she capable of love? "What you get married for if you don't want children?"

Eliot uses this metaphysical conceit of teeth in *The Waste Land* to knock the post-war modern movement in the teeth, literally showing that its foundation is a mouth with no teeth. A mouth with no teeth can't chew or process and therefore can't swallow, just as he can't swallow the direction civilization seems to be going in. The modernist scholar Margot Norris works Eliot's conceit of teeth out best shedding light on the scene between women at the bar discussing Lil's teeth reparation:

The conversation in the pub that retells the conversation with Lil is Eliot's Arnoldian demonstration that the discourse of the Populace is impervious to poetry because it lacks the porosity of other parts of the poem that let quotation leak in. For discourse to become art like sculpture requires the scission of metaphoric teeth. "I didn't mince my words," the speaker says, and her narrative is conspicuous in its seamless wholeness, unchopped by

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<sup>69</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 291. Lines 156-164. Print.

the parataxes that segment the poem's other speech. The masses produce a nearly perfect redundancy of citation, the episode suggests; culture and tradition are replaced by verbatim or unmastered reproduction of earlier verbatim reproductions. This pullulation or regurgitation of trivial discourse—the speaker telling us what she told Lil Albert had said before he left—reproduces endless Heideggerean Gerede or idle talk deprived of teeth, "You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set, / He said." The conversation's twice-told and triangular structure, whose parenthetical asides make a confidante of the poem's addressee, restores the implied reader herself to the masses. It is among the poem's projects to break up this mindless abulia of the masses by using the text's erudition to babelize its readership, carving its homeogeneous philistinism into polyglottal segments and cultural elites. By refusing to translate or reference many of its citations, the poem's cultivation creates borderlines of incommunication and minefields of incomprehension that recreate the conditions of geopolitical war and class revolution. The unified empire of culture the poem conjures up in its referenced appeal to the cosmopolitanism of Cambridge anthropology and the archetypalism of comparative religion becomes no more than a bogus sublation of the poem's politics into a myth of universal order that its own textual babelization ritually destroys.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Norris, Margot. "Margot Norris: On 'The Waste Land.'" *Margot Norris: On "The Waste Land"* | *Modern American Poetry*, [www.modernamericanpoetry.org/criticism/margot-norris-waste-land](http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/criticism/margot-norris-waste-land).

Norris is saying that Eliot is “cutting his teeth” with this poem and is communicating with the cultural elite. His choice to use extensive archaic, scholarly, religious, and mythic reference in this poem and refuse to “translate or reference many of its citations” creates a distortion effect in the poems communication with the reader that mirrors the inability of western civilization to communicate with each other and establish order, creating the conditions of “geopolitical war and class revolution.” One thinks of a city and its architecture, a skyline, buildings, statements of culture appearing as a set of teeth, and when World War One came it decimated the city, knocking all of its teeth out. Now the city has to rebuild and the buildings are cheaper and inferior to the one’s that once stood, and you can barely tell the difference between them, just like false teeth. Eliot also uses the word “nice” to explain the type of teeth the woman should buy to replace her originals. The employment of “nice” as Michaels has told us means that Eliot wants this woman to re-establish some pedigree to herself and her appearance and by referring to teeth as the conceit it encapsulates all of the statement on the degradation and rebuilding of a strong society with good stock.

In the “The Fire Sermon”<sup>71</sup>, the reader meets Tiresias, the oracle, and ancient Greek character of wisdom that was a man who was turned into a woman for some time. Eliot refers to this character as the “main voice” of the poem in his notes, which is convenient as Tiresias has both the perspective of male and female. Tiresias, the observer, gazes in on a scene of a young typist of low means and a lower class. Eliot makes her class status known by showing her laying “out food in tins”, preparing for

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<sup>71</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 290. Print.

company, for no well to do person eats from cans. A pimply “clerk” arrives and they have dinner and after,

The meal has ended, she is bored and tired,  
 Endeavors to engage her in caresses,  
 Which still are unproved, if undesired.  
 Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;  
 Exploring hands encounter no defence;  
 His vanity requires no response,  
 And makes a welcome of indifference.<sup>72</sup>

The woman is “bored and tired” with this meek and sexually undesirable male, but he doesn’t care, he will have his way with her, “his vanity requires no response, and makes a welcome of indifference”. After all she doesn’t seem to care either, his “exploring hands encounter no defense”.<sup>73</sup> Eliot is describing dispassionate, impotent sex, with no hope or desire of fertility. This is the modern sexual liaison, and what passion has been deduced to. It is more of a comment on women at the time, once again the “new woman”. She doesn’t care about passion or fertility, as she is left right after with “one final patronizing kiss”<sup>74</sup> and,

Hardly aware of her departed lover;  
 Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:

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<sup>72</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 294. Lines 236-243. Print.

<sup>73</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 294. Lines 240-243. Print.

<sup>74</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 295. Line 247. Print.

“Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over.”

When lovely woman stoops to folly and

Paces about her room again, alone,

She smooths her hair with automatic hand,<sup>75</sup>

She is removed and detached from the situation, but this is all normal to her; cooking for a man, having bad sex, him leaving right after, and leaving her alone. She is alone, a product of modern society, but she routinely accepts this as “she smooths her hair with automatic hand.” Eliot’s use of “automatic” is quite deliberate as this has happened before and will happen again. Tiresias suffers both the man and woman’s indifference to social morays, which is why Eliot chooses him as the speaker of the poem.

One must lay Eliot’s poem beside “From Ritual to romance” by Jessie L. Weston to grasp conceptually what Eliot is aiming for in his work, for in his notes he states, “Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston’s book on the Grail Legend.”<sup>76</sup> Eliot is definitely alluding to a specific part of Weston’s work in his “What the Thunder Said” as she says “the misfortune which has fallen upon the country is that of prolonged drought, which has destroyed vegetation, and left the land a waste; the effect of the hero’s question is to restore the waters to their channel, and render the land once more fertile.”<sup>77</sup> It is obvious the poem’s name comes from Weston’s “land of waste”, but Weston has provided the definitive hero or link of commonality in the heroes that restore fertility to their land.

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<sup>75</sup> Nelson, Cary. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Pg. 295. Lines 250-255. Print.

<sup>76</sup> Notes and Sources to *The Waste land*. Pg. 21.

<sup>77</sup> Weston, Jessie L. *From Ritual to Romance*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957. Pg. 4. Print.

Eliot's adaptation of Weston's study on fertility rite and the grail legend had a profound effect on a generation of writers and their work, much like tossing a stone into a tranquil lake and watching the ripples form over and over until they reach the bank. Eliot's ripple effect made waves with the darling of the 1920's and prince of modernism himself, F. Scott Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald's regard for T.S. Eliot and his work is a key to the map of East and West Egg and all that lies in between for his breakthrough and defining novel *The Great Gatsby*. Shortly after it was published Fitzgerald sent a copy of his book to T.S. Eliot with the inscription:

For T.S. Eliot  
 Greatest of Living Poets  
 from his enthusiastic worshipper  
 F. Scott Fitzgerald<sup>78</sup>

Fitzgerald "worshipped" the high priest of modernism and there is evidence he was indebted to Eliot, and further Eliot's influence led him to Weston's work, when he was developing *The Great Gatsby*.

In her study, "The Fisher King of West Egg: The Influence of Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* on *The Great Gatsby*" Andrea Lagomarsino links Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* to Eliot's *Waste Land* and also provides evidence that Fitzgerald was paying mind to Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* when writing his masterwork. She points out:

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<sup>78</sup> Lagomarsino. "The Fisher King of West Egg." *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2014, p. 44., doi:10.5325/fscotfitzrevi.12.1.0044.

Careful readings of each text indeed reveal numerous similarities between *The Waste Land* and *The Great Gatsby*. Perhaps the most notable parallel is the presence of the “valley of ashes ... the waste land” in *Gatsby*, home of George and Myrtle Wilson and setting for Myrtle's death (*Gatsby* 23, 24). Other intriguing echoes of *The Waste Land* include the water imagery that pervades *The Great Gatsby*. The “small, foul river” in the valley of ashes seems to be a counterpart of the “dull canal” in *The Waste Land* (*Gatsby* 24; Eliot 189). Nick lamenting Gatsby's death by the waters of Long Island Sound evokes Eliot's narrator who weeps by the waters of Leman. Imagery of water and color even suggest a similarity between Fitzgerald's Daisy and Eliot's hyacinth girl. When Daisy meets Gatsby at Nick's house, she appears “under the dripping bare lilac trees.... A damp streak of hair lay like a dash of blue paint across her cheek, and her hand was wet with glistening drops” (*Gatsby* 85). Similarly, Eliot's hyacinth girl returns “from the Hyacinth garden,” her “arms full, and [her] hair wet” (37, 38).<sup>79</sup>

As Lagomarsino shows that the similar use of imagery in Fitzgerald's writing to Eliot's, the usage is almost more of tribute in nature than the format and themes that are

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<sup>79</sup> Lagomarsino. “The Fisher King of West Egg.” *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2014, p. 44., doi:10.5325/fscotfitzrevi.12.1.0044.



reminiscent of Weston's book in *Gatsby*. Lagomarsino is convinced that Fitzgerald was "inspired" by Weston's work and that it helped him shape his masterwork, giving it deeper meaning and roots to "archetypal characters in an ancient ritualistic drama." Even though Eliot's influence on Fitzgerald for the development of *Gatsby* may have given its plot and origins depth and classical validity with inspiration from centuries old grail legend it is hard to swallow the observance that Eliot's influence of Anglican repression sours the characters and plot focus of Fitzgerald's and Hemingway's post-war novels. When gazing through the Anglican canon that Eliot diligently fostered, Fitzgerald and Hemingway, and their characters seem to be more bitter about their position in American culture rather than hopeful for its future. The reason Lagomarsino's study is so important and has relevance to our hypothesis is that it shows Eliot's prophetic impact on the authors that shaped modernism. Eliot's influence saw no limits on the period of American modernism as writers conformed to his philosophy and others made a career out of protesting against it. After a close read of *The Waste Land* and a look at studies that show its influence on the period of modernism one may ask: "Who is Eliot's hero? Who will restore fertility to the dried up barrens of modernity?" The Anglican reader "who think(s) elucidation of the poem worth the trouble"<sup>80</sup> is Eliot's hopeful hero. Eliot is beckoning the call to restore order and Western societal structure to the reader who will embrace tradition and let it reflect in their "individual talent" restoring fertility to art, culture, and society in what he considers a Modern Waste Land.

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<sup>80</sup> Notes and Sources to *The Waste Land*. Pg. 21.

## IV

The leading tragic dramatists of the fruitful period of post World War Two American drama, Arthur Miller, Eugene O'Neill, and Tennessee Williams, continued to be influenced by classical themes of American modernism, but it is also clear their tragic heroes became more and more representative of the modern era of the common man. Despite some attempt to associate their plays with classical themes, as in O'Neill's *Elektra* and Williams' *Orpheus Descending*, the staple content of American tragedy has been American life and American tragic heroes. By the Anglican ruling class standards, the "new hero" of the American golden age of theatre comes from a relatively classless society. In more theatrically descriptive terms, the Sicilian Roderigo, who Miller showcases in his *View from the Bridge*, may have a son who is as "one hundred per cent American"<sup>81</sup> as Williams' Stanley Kowalski and grow up to be a success like Big Daddy of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* or a suicide like Willy Loman, without ever being asked who his father had been. From the heroes of aristocracy in the earlier decades where the middle class man is an outcast or out of place, the common man has become the "new hero" and focal point of the American theatre movement after the Second World War. American tragedy shows a complete reversal from the emphasized class distinction of American Modernism.

The rest of the world knows the American as the prototypical Anglican aristocrat of wealth and success; this American likes to feel they live in a nation of fraternities, social gatherings, and polo matches. In disclosing the pathetic reality behind the heroic

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<sup>81</sup> Miller, Arthur. *Arthur Miller Collected Plays 1944-1961*. pg. 37.

illusion of the earlier part of the century, mid century American playwrights have found high tragedy, criticism of life, and conflict of both self and nationalistic identity is the essence of drama. One playwright in particular, Arthur Miller, of Jewish descent, slammed the gavel on the glorified period of Anglicized American modernism with his break-through modern everyman plays, and theatrical philosophy that old tragedy of the aristocrat was dead; America has moved on and was captivated by the “Tragedy of the Common Man”. Had he come about in the early stages of American modernism when Hemingway ruled and Eliot was holding court, he would have been dismissed and ostracized as the “ethnic Jew” disrupting the balance, but America moved on in the wake of the Second World War, and high art in America had shifted from the novel to the stage.

In 1949, three weeks after the opening show of his masterpiece *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller published an essay that gave his audience a view into the political and social agendas of his plays. “Tragedy and the Common Man” defended Miller’s conviction that tragedy, a form traditionally reserved for characters of high rank or noble blood, was in modernity a narrative structure more suited to the identity and life of the common man. Miller’s essay illuminated his intentions that coincided with his works of the second half of the 1940’s, particularly *All My Sons* (1947) and *Death of a Salesman* (1949), while also giving his critics and audiences a template to analyze the plays he produced in following years. As Miller came of age during the reign of New Deal politics and paradigms, these years were an exceedingly influential period for his politics and work. Miller’s tragic vision drew strongly upon the social realist tradition from which the modern playwright emerged, his use of tragic form added a wider

validation of human suffering and dignity which appealed to the audiences of postwar society.

“Tragedy and the Common Man” claims that classical tragic tradition has previously held a very specific and limited role in the public eye. It has been considered “fit only for the very highly placed, the kings or the kingly,”<sup>82</sup> writes Miller. This gives tragic theater a certain archaic quality, as well as a rather elitist one. “If the exaltation of tragic action were truly a property of the high-bred character alone,” Miller argues, “it is inconceivable that the mass of mankind should cherish tragedy above all other forms, let alone be capable of understanding it.”<sup>83</sup> Miller sees something exceedingly valuable in the tragic form that is not limited to the noble or godly. Tragedy for him derives from “the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what or who we are in this world” and, as he notes, “it is the common man who knows this fear best.”<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, the tragic form demands that its audience learn from the misfortune of its heroes. It brings enlightenment and knowledge about the “right way of living in the world,”<sup>85</sup> setting it apart from the pathetic form which lacks this key element of moral and social education. For Miller, it is the common man who in the years after the Second World War grapples with his place in the world and with self-

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<sup>82</sup> Miller, Arthur. “Tragedy and the Common Man.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, [www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-common.html](http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-common.html).

<sup>83</sup> Miller, Arthur. “Tragedy and the Common Man.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, [www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-common.html](http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-common.html).

<sup>84</sup> Miller, Arthur. “Tragedy and the Common Man.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, [www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-common.html](http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-common.html).

<sup>85</sup> Miller, Arthur. “Tragedy and the Common Man.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, [www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-common.html](http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-common.html).

judgment and assessment, making tragedy most meaningful and relevant in a democratic, accessible context that deals with the lives of everyday people.

Miller's predominant dramatic form is an extension of social realism, most clearly apparent in his choice of ordinary people as his characters and subject matter. The Kellers and the Deeveres in *All My Sons*, the Lomans in *Death of a Salesman*, and the Carbones in *A View from the Bridge* are the ordinary people of American society. From the social realist tradition of the cultural front comes Miller's insistence that it is these ordinary people who deserve attention, and who, most of the time, do not receive it. Miller fulfills the convention of the social realist by socially extending his work into the everyday lives of these characters, and uniting his democratic leftist politics with an aesthetic and characters that match them.

Another divergence from the philosophy of 1930s populist drama came in Miller's treatment of the individual. In contrast to social realism, Miller's liberal tragedy shows individuals striving with all their might for acceptance, fulfillment, and validation, but in the end they are brought down by their own actions. Miller's "Tragedy and the Common Man" upholds this definition of his work, describing a hero who pushes against overpowering forces of humanity for individual realization. Miller most poignantly captures this individualistic liberal impulse in the words of Willy Loman's wife Linda in *Death of a Salesman*. Linda demands her son Biff honor the humble accomplishments of his father:

I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and

a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person.<sup>86</sup>

While scenes such as this one certainly demonstrate Miller's evaluation of the democratic, non-elite ranks of American citizen, his is a vision of a society with no room for individual dreams and aspirations or ordinary people. In depicting common heroes who lay down their lives to preserve their integrity, and who take it in their own hands to combat the oppressive forces around them, Miller glorifies those who are not swept away with the crowd. Surely, these stories are tragic, but they celebrate heroes with such a strong a sense of conviction, identity, individual desire, and aspiration that they sacrifice their lives in the search for these things.

In *Death of a Salesman*, Miller creates a portrait of failure and personal neglect that speaks to a generation in a way that Hemingway could not. Hemingway's concern for exotic hunting trips, bullfighting, and the Parisian social scene was stuck in the times of overindulgence and frivolity that the post war middle class citizen could not relate to. Willy Loman's overindulgence is a lie of disillusion that Eliot's generation created and that Fitzgerald romanticized. In *Salesman's* characters, Miller revisits these delusions of grandeur and puts them to rest in the old scrap metal of a car wreck that will be salvaged for parts, but the heart of the body will be junked for good.

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<sup>86</sup> Miller, Arthur. *Arthur Miller Collected Plays 1944-1961*. pg. 151.

Fitzgerald and Hemingway's use of the word "nice" as a right of passage is parodied by Miller with his use of "liked" or "not well liked" in *Salesman*. When Bernard confronts Willy with the reality of Biff "flunking" math and not graduating to move on and take advantage of his scholarships to college, Willy shoos him and calls him a "pest" and then later to his boys as an "anemic". Bernard is confronting the Lomans with the reality that having the pedigree of "nice" won't get you keys to the castle anymore, society has shifted to success based on merit in this generation. Time will show that the "anemic" scholastic over achiever Bernard will possess what Willy desires but has no conception of actually attaining when it is too late for him: tangible skills acquired through hard work. Dedication to the reality of being "well liked" will only get you so far. After Bernard goes home to study during Willy's flashback, he asks his boys:

Willie: Bernard is not well liked, is he?

Biff: He is liked, but he's not well liked?

Happy: That's right, Pop.

Willy: That's just what I mean. Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. "Willie Loman

is here!' That's all they have to know, and I go right through.<sup>87</sup>

Willy is setting his sons up for a life of failure and fantasy, rather the fantasy of success, or the idea and appearance of what success looks like, by not giving them the tools to actually attain it. Being “well liked” is the same as having “nice” qualities that get you ahead in life, except the Lomans have neither. Willy saw himself as a “nice” man back when it counted and he was forming a career, but in fact people were “laughing at him behind his back” because he had created a false façade for himself, and they weren't fooled, rather he was playing the part of the fool at his own expense.

Loman is a progression of Jay Gatsby as both characters create an identity in an attempt to achieve what they desire, but society tells them they are only fooling themselves in the end. Willy had the chance, or says he had the chance to make it big with his brother and attain the type of success he can “hold in his hands”, but gives it up for his dream to become a salesman he wants to model himself after.

“His name was Dave Singleman. And he was eighty-four years old, and he'd drummed up merchandise in thirty-one states. And old Dave, he'd go up to his room, y'understand, put on his green velvet slippers—I'll never forget—and pick up his phone and call the buyers, and without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, he made his living. When I saw that, I realized that selling

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<sup>87</sup> Miller, Arthur, and Gerald Clifford Weales. *Death of a Salesman, Text and Criticism / Text and Criticism*. Penguin Books, 1996.



was the greatest career a man could want. ‘Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty-four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people? Do you know? when he died—and by the way he died the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven and Hartford, going into Boston—when he died hundreds of salesman and buyers were at his funeral.’<sup>88</sup>

Singleman’s green velvet slippers to Willy are representative of Gatsby’s green light. Those green slippers encapsulate all of Willy’s desires and idea of the identity he has to create to attain them. Willy desires to be “remembered and loved” the way this Singleman is celebrated and demands the kind of respect from others that allows him to feel good about himself. He fanaticizes about those green slippers like Gatsby gazes across the bay in belief, at the green light on Daisy’s dock. Willy’s green slippers are his belief that if he “makes an appearance” and creates a persona of “personal interest” he will “get ahead” in life, achieving the success he desires. However, knowingly chasing an empty dream drives him to the point of exhaustion and mental fatigue and those green slippers become “the orgasmic future that year by year recedes before us.”<sup>89</sup> Arthur Miller explains Willy’s identity transformation and the significance of his profession.

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<sup>88</sup> Miller, Arthur, and Gerald Clifford Weales. *Death of a Salesman, Text and Criticism / Text and Criticism*. Penguin Books, 1996. pg.81.

<sup>89</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Scribner, 2004. pg.180.

“The fact that Willy Loman is by trade a salesman is important, but secondary. Central is that he has taken on a new—a social—personality which is calculated to ensure his material success. In so doing he has lost his essential—his real—nature, which is contradictory to his assumed one, until he is no longer able to know what *he* truly wants, what *he* truly stands for. In that sense he has sold himself. Obviously, then, his being a salesman has double significance. For me it represents the salesman as a class, because he does sell merchandise and his life is bound up in the facts of actual salesmanship. However, in the deeper, psychological sense, he is Everyman who finds he must create another personality in order to make his way in the world, and therefore he has sold himself.”<sup>90</sup>

Just like Fitzgerald with *Gatsby*, Miller has created a character to define a period of American literature that “must create another personality in order to make his way in the world” and this personality is a “social” persona. In the end neither “know what *he* truly wants, what *he* truly stands for” and end up selling themselves short and failing to achieve their main goals and desires. Miller is making a statement on the progression of America’s tragic hero where *Gatsby* was glamorous, his Willy is a hasbin. He has stripped the American hero down from his high society roots to his working class everyman reality.

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<sup>90</sup> Miller, Arthur, and Gerald Clifford Weales. *Death of a Salesman, Text and Criticism / Text and Criticism*. Penguin Books, 1996. pg.243.

Both Willy and Gatsby have mythical characters that influence their identity construction origins and remain in their consciousness. Gatsby's is the mining mogul of the Yukon, Dan Cody, and interestingly enough Willy's is his older brother Ben, a mining mogul of minerals and precious stones. Both characters represent the real essence of the identity that both works focal characters are trying to emulate and showcase examples of their shortcomings. Dan Cody and Ben are both pioneers of the American spirit and are from a time before the period highlighted in both pieces when roots of industry and enterprise were forming. The similar presence both of these representative folklore have in both stories is uncanny and again provide insight into the mind and motivations of both authors.

Just as Nick is skeptical and searching for truth in *Gatsby*, Biff does his best to grasp reality in the world of embellishment and half-truths in the Loman family. The reader gets the sense that Biff goes west to run from his past but also distance himself from all of the lies he has been filled with by his family. He travels west to find himself and sadly he doesn't care for what he discovers: Biff is a washed up high school football star that didn't graduate, has no trade or skills with kleptomaniacal tendencies. When the Loman men meet for dinner at the chop house after a day of father-son parallel meetings of self discovery, Biff wants to have a real talk and boil the family situation down to the facts. Willy responds to this with pushback saying, "I haven't got a story left in my head, Biff. So don't give me a lecture about facts and aspects. I am not interested."<sup>91</sup> Not only is Willy refusing to face reality, he is "not interested" in hearing about it. This admission is one of the most honest feelings Willy admits to in the entire play. He has never been

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<sup>91</sup> Miller, Arthur, and Gerald Clifford Weales. *Death of a Salesman, Text and Criticism / Text and Criticism*. Penguin Books, 1996.pg.107.

“interested” in facts and further has no more stories to tell. Throughout the entire play, Biff seems to be saying the same thing of Willy that Nick tells Gatsby after he is fed up with his stories: “I don’t like mysteries and I don’t understand why you won’t come out frankly and tell me what you want.”<sup>92</sup> In the last quarrel he has with Willy, in a moment of submission to his anger Biff asks him “Exactly what is it that you want from me?”<sup>93</sup> Just like Nick, Biff is asking his false hero to be honest and admit his true intentions. Both Willy and Gatsby are so devoted to their fantasy of self that they don’t even hear the plea for truth, they’re “not interested”.

Earlier when his mother asks why Willy through him out, Biff responds with “Because I know he’s a fake and he doesn’t like anyone around who knows!”<sup>94</sup> Just like Nick knows Gatsby’s secret, Biff knows Willy’s, and both Nick and Biff use their knowledge for self reflection in the end: Biff with his assertion to Happy when he is fed up with fake future plans and his, “I know who I am, kid.”<sup>95</sup> and Nick after his close with Jordan Baker, “I’m five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor.”<sup>96</sup> Biff is a progression of Nick because at the end of the play, Miller makes him the hero for owning his true identity as well as controlling his destiny. Although as readers we may question Biff’s future at the end of the play, we hold out hope for Biff and he is someone we can root for. This connection isn’t true for the reader’s feelings for Nick at the end of Gatsby. Miller’s characters are a progression on Fitzgerald’s as both are held in high regard for

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<sup>92</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Scribner, 2004. pg.71.

<sup>93</sup> Miller, Arthur, and Gerald Clifford Weales. *Death of a Salesman, Text and Criticism / Text and Criticism*. Penguin Books, 1996.pg.129.

<sup>94</sup> Miller, Arthur, and Gerald Clifford Weales. *Death of a Salesman, Text and Criticism / Text and Criticism*. Penguin Books, 1996.pg.107.

<sup>95</sup> Miller, Arthur, and Gerald Clifford Weales. *Death of a Salesman, Text and Criticism / Text and Criticism*. Penguin Books, 1996.pg.138.

<sup>96</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Scribner, 2004. pg.177.

their interpretation and cautionary tales of the pursuance of the American dream. Both of their stories claim a man feels he must reinvent himself and his quest for the dream is under false pretenses. The ostentatiousness of Gatsby's façade stripped down to the rawness of Willy's bombastic harshness shows the progression of the American antihero from a want-to-be member of the Anglo ruling class to the fabricated life of a desperate salesman.

When Miller wrote "Tragedy and the Common Man" in 1949, drama and society were both in periods of transition. In addition to the shift from socialist to liberal ideologies described in the preceding paragraphs, social realist drama was coming under attack in conjunction with a widespread withdrawal from social thinking, and yet Miller's plays retained their immense popularity. Judith Smith has suggested that this was largely because of the publication of "Tragedy and the Common Man" three weeks after the play opened on Broadway. By offering his audiences a dramatic theory of the play without mentioning it directly, "Miller encouraged audiences to read his portrayal of generic American-ness and his flowing together of past and present as an *alternative* to historically and socially situated characterization."<sup>97</sup> Tragedy offered Miller a way to circumnavigate the turn away from social criticism in drama, by presenting an expression of humanity rather than society.

Miller's tragic theory is rooted in the social realism of New Deal era, and likewise, it holds an essentially optimistic vision for the future. Miller used social realist aesthetics to raise more momentous, epic questions about humanity, desire, failure, and fate. Miller's tragic form asks the more timeless question of how we maintain a sense of

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<sup>97</sup> Smith, Judith E. *Visions of Belonging Family Stories, Popular Culture, and Postwar Democracy, 1940-1960*. Columbia University Press, 2012.

dignity and purpose in a universe where these things are not guaranteed. Through his combined use of social realism, social expressionism, and modern tragedy, Arthur Miller seems to have answered this question initiating the next great period of American literature with a progression on social and cultural reality.

In his ground breaking and forward thinking works, Miller's winners are ethnic American's like Bernard. He has won the battle against the idea of the traditionally victorious Anglo. For Bernard, it pays not to embrace the disillusioned promise of being "well-liked". Bernard is the winner and it is through the reading of Eliot, Hemingway, and especially Fitzgerald's "careless people" that "smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back to their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together"<sup>98</sup> that we can understand the importance of the break from aristocratic fantasy fiction Miller creates in his work. The reader can identify with Bernard, he is a real character, as well as Biff the cowboy who believes in honest work. We are fascinated with American modernism because it is far fetched. Everyone is captivated by illusion. Miller makes clear that chasing a dream and remaining stuck in the past is a losing proposition. Social realism makes us feel and experience emotion that seems to mirror the cathartic sentiment after World War One. Hemingway and Fitzgerald help us understand Willy and Biff because they created the origins of those archetypes in their works. With Miller, the ethnic American has finally broken through the portrayal of being stepped on, and fallen victims of the tragic fate of Anglicized repression as they are in the works of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Eliot. In Miller's works, hard working

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<sup>98</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Scribner, 2004. pg.179.

common men like Biff and over-achieving scholastic Jews like Bernard are the winners  
and the schism of Anglo dominance is empty.

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