



**An American Eve:
The Construction of a Modern Revisionist Heroine in Kate
Chopin's *The Awakening*, Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also
Rises* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby***

Mémoire

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Résumé

Cette recherche a pour but d'identifier une personnalité féminine révisionniste dans le modernisme littéraire américain. Cette personnalité révisionniste a pour nom «American Eve» et défie le «American Adam» qui est un personnage mythique patriarcal de R.W.B. Lewis provenant du dix-neuvième siècle. Cette conceptualisation est accomplie à l'aide d'une analyse socio-critique et comparative des trois protagonistes féminins dans les romans modernes *The Awakening* (1899) de Kate Chopin, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) d'Ernest Hemingway, et *The Great Gatsby* (1925) de F. Scott Fitzgerald. Ma construction de cette personnalité féminine est divisée en trois chapitres, chacun étant dédié à un protagoniste en particulier. En comparant ces personnages littéraires sur un plan socio-critique et féministe, je permets à mon étude d'établir en quoi les personnages en question contribuent ou ne contribuent pas à la personnalité de «American Eve». Cette approche comparative est un excellent moyen d'évaluer l'évolution du potentiel révisionniste de la femme au vingtième siècle et les différentes façons par lesquelles elle emploie ce pouvoir

Abstract

This thesis identifies a female revisionist figure that belongs to the Modernist period in American literature. This female revisionist figure challenges R.W.B Lewis' 1955 American Adam figure which champions the existence of a purely masculine American myth in nineteenth-century literature. Its conceptualization is achieved through a socio-critical and comparative study of the female protagonists in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). My construction of the revisionist figure whom I call the American Eve is divided into three chapters. Each chapter analyzes one of the female characters at hand through both an extensive theoretical framework as well as a literary analysis of the novel. By comparing the three female characters through a socio-critical as well as a feminist lens, I am able to determine the ways in which they succeed or fail to contribute to the formation of the American Eve figure. Furthermore, the decision to engage in a comparative analysis of three Modernist novels allows me to observe the evolution in the nature of the woman's revisionist potential and the agency she displays in the face of this possibility. In doing so, this thesis identifies the American Eve as a figure who provides both social and sexual revisions of modern patriarchal society as well as an illustration of the risk undertaken by the woman who does not respond to her revisionist calling

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to women everywhere. Although a large number of the world's women now live in places where women's rights have come a long way, it is imperative that those who still live a life brimming with inequality not be forgotten and that the women who enjoy the freedom of equality be vigilant in protecting it.

Also, I would like to thank my professor, Dr. Jean-Philippe Marcoux, who provided me with his utmost support throughout every stage of this project. He always insisted that everything I write be my absolute best writing and never let me fall into the trap of being a mediocre scholar. I am thankful for this as well as the patience he demonstrated over the course of this entire project. A special thanks also goes out to my family who never lost sight of the bigger picture and never ceased believing in the fact that my hard work and perseverance would yield my desired result.

“I don’t blame him. Viva’s right, sometimes you’ve got to help your destiny along. Even if it calls for drastic measures. Father says the army will do Toto good, make a man out of him and all that shit. But what’s available to make a woman a woman?”

-Sandra Cisneros, Caramelo

Introduction

Context:

My thesis analyzes the progression of Eve from a biblical character to a literary figure in the twentieth century. The character identified in my thesis challenges the masculinist mentality prevalent in nineteenth-century American literature. This mindset is embodied by R.W.B Lewis's 1955 American Adam figure, the concept of the mythical masculine hero my project intends to challenge. My thesis argues that the core of America's patriarchal ideology in the nineteenth and early twentieth century is made up of this American Adam figure. In an attempt to oppose this patriarchal concept in nineteenth-century American society, my thesis conceptualizes an American Eve character. The American Eve figure developed out of the early twentieth-century woman's dire need to free the female voice from the patriarchal discourse for which the American Adam stands. To understand precisely what the American Eve represents and how her character came to be, it is important to grasp the essence of the male character that she challenges.

R.W.B Lewis discusses the American Adam figure in his first major work published in 1955 entitled *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*.¹ In his work, he claims his intention is to “disentangle from the writings and pronouncements of the day the emergent American myth and the dialogue in which it was formed” (Lewis 4). Due to the fact that the American myth conceived of life and history as “just beginning” (Lewis 5), the figure elected to lead it is endowed with the potential to give birth to American literature. In doing so, it provides the nation with a second chance to reinvent itself free from the confines of the Old World. This masculine mythical hero is thus viewed as the author of the great journey of American renewal upon which the nation saw itself embarking. Indeed, Lewis's Adamic figure is “the hero of the new adventure” (Lewis 5). This adventure embodies the second chance at reinvention that the American Adam provides the nation. He is characterized by his role as sole American hero who is “emancipated from history,

¹ Although Lewis's work was published in 1955, the American Adam figure Lewis identifies belongs to the nineteenth century. Lewis specifies that “this book has to do with the beginnings and outlines of a native American mythology [and] the period [covered] runs from about 1820 to 1860” (Lewis 1).

Historically speaking, the late nineteenth century in the United States was defined by rapid and vast industrialization (Hortons, Edwards). Indeed, large-scale industrialism in the United States inevitably led to urbanization and the feeling that American men were moving further and further away from the “religious values of his forebearers” (Welter 151) and creating their own unique American myth. The power of industrialization along with the feeling that they were indeed the masters of their nation's destiny was predominant in the nineteenth century.

happily bereft of ancestry, [and] untouched by the usual inheritances of family and race” (Lewis 5).² Essentially, the American Adam is not bound to any story or previous history. Instead, he possesses the power to write his own history grounded in the masculine American myth. The term “masculine American myth” in this context refers to the American “idea of Progress, the belief that man is not only politically, socially, and morally perfectible but also that his tendency toward improvement is inevitable” (Horton and Edwards 69). This concept ties in with the idea of reinvention that the American Adam represents. The masculine dimension of the myth resides in the fact that, like patriarchal society, the idea of Progress was one which belonged to men alone. The American Adam embodies this masculine American myth of ongoing reinvention and self-improvement.

Naturally, Lewis’s postulation of a masculine American mythical hero in the nineteenth century prompted the question of the woman’s role in the unfolding of American history. This thesis conceptualizes the American Eve as a figure that rectifies the discursive imbalance of the nineteenth century in a Modernist setting. This discursive imbalance relates to the unequal distribution of power between men and women in the public sphere. She is constituted by a combination of three female characters in modern literature whose interaction with their modern setting informs the American Eve figure. The way these three women are defined by and engage with their modern environments is essential to understanding the American Eve’s central position in a Modernist discourse on gender. To understand how the Modernist period influences the American Eve, it is fundamental to establish the way in which it defined the woman and her situation in a modern American world.

In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, editor Michael Levenson describes the modernist period in terms suitable to my thesis. He describes the social atmosphere of the twentieth century as one laden with swift social change created by a general feeling of anxiety and uneasiness. Levenson claims that “crisis is inevitably a central term in discussions of this cultural moment” (Levenson 4). He also

² As Lewis notes, “it was not surprising that in a Bible-reading generation, that the new hero (in praise or disapproval) was most easily identified with Adam before the Fall” (Lewis 5). This direct biblical reference is key in that it posits the American Adam, as Lewis mentions, as a figure who “in his very newness was fundamentally innocent” (Lewis 5). The allusion to a pre-Fall Adam as leader of the reborn American nation necessarily leads to the comparison with the biblical Eve figure. The woman, through her association with the sinful and imperfect Eve character, is excluded from the nation’s myth of renewal.

points out that this modern atmosphere of crisis was at once “real and manufactured, physical and metaphysical, material and symbolic” (Levenson 4). Indeed, with the rapid industrialization at work in mid nineteenth-century America, crisis could now be extended to include the material world.³ Railroad crises, building crises, and factory crises could now all amalgamate to form the suffocating feeling of an industrial havoc spinning out of control.

Based on Levenson’s observations, it can be concluded that the modern American world manufactured crisis like any other item on its production line. Modern crisis and anxiety can be attributed to noteworthy issues such as “the catastrophe of World War I, the labor struggles, the emergence of feminism, and the race for empire” (Levenson 4). These social and political issues undeniably had a profound emotional and moral impact on the conventional mainstream citizen as well as the artists and writers at the time. Thus, the modern period was unsurprisingly characterized by what Levenson calls “the loss of faith, the groundlessness of value, and a nameless faceless anxiety” (Levenson 5). The anxious and unstable nature of modern society and its individuals can arguably be perceived as a prompting force for change in male-female relationships. It is to be expected that the turbulent unrest of modern society resulted in the toppling of the predetermined gender hierarchy of a society whose traditional values had vanished in the wake of modernism.

In her chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* entitled “Modernism and Gender,” Marianne Dekoven sheds light on the reality that “shift in gender relations at the turn of the century was a key factor in the emergence of Modernism” (Dekoven 212). This shift in gender relations and the effect it had on the modern woman is essential to understanding the social context out of which the figure of the American Eve came to exist. The transformation in gender relations during the modern period can largely be attributed to the fact that Modernism coincides with what Dekoven calls “the heyday of first-wave feminism [which] consolidated in the women’s suffrage movement” (Dekoven 211). Hence, the way Modernism defined women is intricately related to the feminist movement. Although in its early stages “the first wave of feminism in the United States was interwoven with other reform movements, such as abolition and temperance” (Krolokke 3), it was ultimately characterized by the women’s

³ For more detail on modern industrialization in America, see the section entitled “The Triumph of Industry” in the book *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought* by Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards.

suffrage movement and their being granted the right to vote in 1920. The suffragettes of modern America defined first-wave feminism through their relentless battle for political power, an official form of power which had been in the making as early as before World War I. Indeed, women's fight for political power can be viewed as a mere extension or more specifically, a validation, of the colossal steps towards independence which the First World War had already granted them in the working world.

In her article "Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War," Sandra M. Gilbert addresses the topic of the First World War and the social effect it had on women. More importantly, she discusses how the First World War changed men's perception of women. Gilbert's main argument is that "as young men became increasingly alienated from their prewar selves, increasingly immured in the muck and blood of No Man's Land, women seemed to become, as if by some uncanny swing of history's pendulum, ever more powerful" (Gilbert 425).⁴ The "uncanny swing of history's pendulum" Gilbert alludes to here corresponds to the transformation in gender relations to which Marianne Dekoven refers to. With America's men fighting overseas, women took on roles as nurses, munitions workers, bus drivers, or soldiers in the "land army". This agency the First World War forced them to assume resulted in their ever-increasing presence in the public sphere formerly reserved for men (Gilbert 425).⁴ Despite the fact that the "struggle [goes] as far back as the Seneca Falls Convention in New York in 1848" (Krolokke 3), the subtle yet effective ways in which the First World War enabled women to enter the public sphere is an influential factor in the overall success of the suffrage movement. This entrance into the public sphere is a quintessential aspect of the American Eve figure.

Essentially, in the midst of a world war that affected the nation's men, the modern period was a time of escalating empowerment for American women. As Devonek points out, "the radical implications of the socio-cultural changes feminism advocated produced in Modernist writing an unprecedented preoccupation with gender" and "much of this preoccupation expressed a male Modernist fear of women's new power" (Devonek 212). Therefore, the Modernist period was a time during which the American male felt legitimately threatened by his female counterpart. The woman, for

⁴ Gilbert also quotes a verse by poet Nina McDonald when she states that during World War I, "Girls [were] doing things / They'd never done before... All the world [was] topsy-turvy / Since the War began" (McDonald in Gilbert 425). The song by Nina McDonald is known as "Sing a Song of War-Time" from the book *Scars upon my Heart: Women's Poetry and Verse of the First World War*.

the first time in history, posed a genuine threat to American masculinity. It is important to point out that this preoccupation with or fear of the woman's power often "resulted in the combination of misogyny and triumphal masculinism" (Devonek 212) of Modernist male authors. Nevertheless, as Devonek mentions, "this masculinist misogyny was often accompanied by its dialectical twin: a fascination and strong identification with the empowered feminine" (Devonek 212). The American Eve, as a representative figure of the time, is a product of both these reactions and exposes the decidedly ambivalent nature of the modern man's perception of the newly-empowered female.

The Modernist female icon which inspired the "irresolvable ambivalence towards powerful femininity" (Devonek 212) is known as the New Woman. One finds in the iconic New Woman the portrayal of the woman in the modern period and the foundation for the characters which form the American Eve. Devonek describes the New Woman as "the protagonist of [a] new movement": "independent, educated, (relatively) sexually liberated, [and] oriented more towards productive life in the public sphere than towards reproductive life in the home" (Devonek 212). The New Woman emerges out of key historical events, such as the First World War and the women's suffrage movement. She is the figure who triggered the widespread ambivalence among modern men concerning the modern woman. She is the source of their occasional attempts to denigrate her radically revolutionary role in their literature. An example of "male Modernism's self-imagination as a mode of masculine domination" (Devonek 214) can be found in Ezra Pound's Vorticist manifesto in which the image of the all-powerful masculine lord attempts to rule out any possibility of the woman's strong presence in Modernism. However, the ambivalent attitude of male authors can be detected in the abundance of contrary instances of men's genuine interest in the New Woman. As Devonek points out, in his essay "The Future of the Novel," Henry James begins by linking the empowered feminine with "a debased, feminine/feminized popular culture" (Devonek 215) but ends with a marked political shift by "[endorsing] feminist aims and the desire for radical cultural 'renewal'" (Devonek 216). The works of male Modernist authors indeed exemplify how undecided they were about woman's newfound status. In order for the New Woman not to be disregarded, the modern period demanded of its sympathetic male authors and women writers that they create female characters representative of the shift in social dynamic which is characteristic of the modern period.

The American Eve is formed by three female characters that embody the social condition of the modern woman. Given the modern woman's circumstances, there is an undeniable need to forge one's own path and female voice in the midst of men's attempt to maintain discursive control over women and to cling to their dwindling control of the public sphere. Historical events such as the First World War and women's suffrage succeeded in getting women out of the home and into the public sphere. The figure of the American Eve responds to women's desire not only to partake in a public sphere traditionally defined by men, but to claim it as their own through their self-defined feminine discourse. However, she is also envisioned as possessing a dimension which counters this claiming of a self-defined feminine discourse. Therefore, she equally sheds light on the dangers of letting one's female self be defined by patriarchal standards. My thesis presents the twentieth-century American woman's duty as one of acting upon her new-found power and affirming her female voice within the social spaces previously disallowed to her. The American Eve is born out of the urgency for women to re-appropriate their discursive power in a society historically defined by patriarchal institutions.

Summary of Argument:

My thesis defines the American Eve as a modern revisionist figure which challenges the American Adam's nineteenth-century masculinist claim to discursive power in American literature. In addition to her role as a modern revisionist figure, the American Eve figure also includes a counter-revisionist element which exposes the danger of allowing a masculinist claim to discursive power go unchallenged. She is a character who revises various social spaces which belong to the female of the American modern period. The American Eve's revision of the modern woman's space is performed by two different female characters in modern American literature. These two female characters are Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Lady Brett Ashley in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). On the other hand, F. Scott Fitzgerald's Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) functions as a counter-statement to the revisionist figure embodied by Edna Pontellier and Lady Brett Ashley. Edna Pontellier's contribution to the American Eve's lies in her gendered revision of the social roles of wife and mother in modern American Creole society. Her revision is achieved through the use of a feminine language within these traditional roles. Lady

Brett Ashley's sexual freedom as a New Woman results in a revision of modern female sexuality. This is enabled by the active exploration of her sexual discursive power over the male characters in *The Sun Also Rises*.

Despite the significant revisionist efforts Edna and Lady Brett contribute to the American Eve, Daisy Buchanan functions as a counter-statement to this figure. Her status as a passive social gift in *The Great Gatsby* robs her of all agency and potential to provide a female revision of her modern environment. She serves as a cautionary example of the risk taken by the modern woman who remains passive in the face of patriarchal oppression. Through the three female characters' respective roles, the American Eve testifies to the fact that the woman is as equally capable as the American Adam of being an American hero. However, she must be vigilant in affirming and protecting her female discursive power. The revisionist qualities displayed by Edna and Lady Brett demonstrate that she too can be "an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever await[s] [her] with the aid of [her] own unique and inherent resources" (Lewis 5). She revises the validity of the American Adam figure by claiming the voice and social space historically denied to her by his character.

Outline of the Chapters:

Chapter One: Edna Pontellier – A Revised Wife and Mother in *The Awakening*

Chapter One deals with Edna Pontellier's revision of what it means to be a wife and mother in early nineteenth-century Creole society. Her revision of the social role of wife is one she undertakes through her re-evaluation of the domestic sphere. This re-evaluation is characterized by her non-adherence to the Cult of True Womanhood described by critic Barbara Welter in "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860". Edna's revision of motherhood and the subsequent feeling of freedom gained through the dismissal of her maternal duties are also explored. The chapter demonstrates how, once freed from the weight of these male-defined social roles, Edna is capable of freely exploring alternative examples of femininity in the novel as well as of engaging in extra-marital sexual exploration.

Chapter Two: *Jouissance* and Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*

Chapter Two depicts how, through her display of Luce Irigaray's "female auto-eroticism" (Irigaray 101), Lady Brett Ashley's character shapes the sexual voice of the New Woman in 1920s America. Her embodiment of "female auto-eroticism" is explained by her "(re)discovery of the female self" (Irigaray 104) another Irigarayan concept that calls for the woman's unwillingness to sacrifice her pleasures for another as well as her refusal to identify with any one man in particular and abandon her female self in order to become one with him. Chapter Two is a demonstration of how Lady Brett achieves this self-centered "(re)discovery" through her relationships with Jake Barnes and Robert Cohn. Thus, she revises female sexuality by becoming an auto-erotic woman.

Chapter Three: Daisy Buchanan as a Gift in *The Great Gatsby*

Chapter Three analyzes Daisy Buchanan as a social gift and counter-statement to "becoming-revisionist" in her respective relationships with Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby. It explores the type of social gift she embodies in her relationships, the different forms of passive control she displays, and the reality that Daisy's potential sources of control are only rendered active through the men's projection of their social aspirations upon her. This fact confirms her role as a passive character devoid of all agency in her modern social environment. Chapter Three posits Daisy's fate as a cautionary tale of a woman who allows herself to be written into existence by men instead of writing her own feminine tale.

Theoretical Framework:

I will draw upon Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's concept of "becoming-woman" presented in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* to propose the concept of "becoming-revisionist". "Becoming-revisionist" is then theorized according to the French *écriture féminine* feminists Luce Irigaray's and Alice Jardine's responses to "becoming woman." Jardine's idea of "gynesis" and Irigaray's claim that it is "unrealizable to describe the being of woman" (Irigaray 21) are used to support the necessity for a female *site of différence* grounded in a new female

language.⁵ I use this *site of difference* outlined by Jardine and Irigaray to explain each female character's successful or unsuccessful creation of a revised feminine space entirely its own in its respective society.

To provide a theoretical background for the idea of "female auto-eroticism" Luce Irigaray presents, I turn to Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan's psycho-analytical views on the *écriture féminine* concept of female *jouissance*. I use Freud and Lacan's works because they were current and widely read over the course of the period during which Chopin's, Hemingway's, and Fitzgerald's novels were written and read. I explore Freud's views on *jouissance* outlined in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929) and Lacan's grappling with the feminist concept in his seminar entitled "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis" (1959-1960) as well as his later seminar "Encore" (1962-1963). Luce Irigaray's notion of "female auto-eroticism" expressed in her work *This Sex Which is Not One* serves as a rectification of Freud's and Lacan's ideas of *jouissance* and the "lacking" female body. Necessarily, Irigaray's "female auto-eroticism" is used to conceptualize her idea of the woman's "(re)discovery of herself" which involves a woman's decision not to sacrifice any of her pleasures for another or to identify with anyone in particular and become simply one, thereby losing sight of herself as a sexual individual (Irigaray 104).

The concept of the social gift proposed by Marcel Mauss in his essay "An Essay on the Gift: The Form and Reason of Exchange in Archaic Societies" published in 1925 will also be used. To apply Mauss's theory of the gift to narratives about the social institution of marriage, I employ Claude Lévi-Strauss's theory of marriage alliance elaborated on in his book *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949). My analysis of the use of the woman as a social gift within the institution of marriage draws on Gayle Rubin's article entitled "Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex." In her article, Rubin theorizes that the woman serves as a bearer of social status which can be transmitted when a woman is transacted as a gift among men. In light of Rubin's work, I also consider critic Carole Pateman's discussion of the obtainment of status through the marriage contract in her book *The Sexual Contract* published in 1988.

⁵ Jardine defines "gynesis" as the "problematization and putting into discourse of 'woman' and 'the feminine' in contemporary thought" (Jardine 47). Jardine's "gynesis" is comparable to Irigaray's "mystery of femininity" which, as is mentioned above, claims that it is impossible to "describe the being of a woman" (Irigaray 21).

Review of the Literature:

It is important to mention that Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* has been subject to three main critical approaches. The first wave appeared directly after its initial publication in 1899 and labeled the novel as “most unpleasant” (*Boston Herald* 1899) and “poison” (G.B. 1899). Chopin herself was even referred to as “another clever woman [who] has put her cleverness to a very bad use” (*Providence Sunday Journal* 1899). More often than not, the literary criticism of the time labeled Edna as an immoral and selfish woman. However, as Margo Culley states in her “Editor’s Note: History of the Criticism of *The Awakening*,” “early reviewers of *The Awakening* whose moral sensibilities were affronted by the novel’s themes of sex and suicide gave testimony to the power of the novel in their vigorous condemnations of it” (Culley 159). Indeed, the passionately negative nature of the novel’s first strand of criticism foreshadows the “revival of interest in the novel [which] began slowly in [the United States] in the 1950s” (Culley 159).

The second strand of criticism, which appeared approximately fifty years after its publication, was led by critics Kenneth Eble and Robert Cantwell. It is the criticism of the 1950s which first began to refer to *The Awakening* as a modern novel. Kenneth Eble states in “A Forgotten Novel” that one could say that “it is advanced in theme and technique over the novels of its day, and that it anticipates in many respects the modern novel” (Eble 188). Essentially, the second strand of criticism analyzes Edna not as an immoral woman but as one “trapped in marriage and seeking fulfillment of what she vaguely recognizes as her essential nature” (Eble 188). Finally, in 1956, critics began to approach the novel and its protagonist from a more sympathetically feminist angle. This distinct wave of criticism seems to slowly decode the message Chopin might have always been attempting to communicate through Edna, namely that of the woman’s right to challenge the social condition she was subjected to by men at the turn of the twentieth century. The critics of the 1950s provide a fresh perspective on Chopin’s novel and although they do not directly tackle it with an outright feminist perspective, they succeeded in uncovering the story of suppressed womanhood which earlier critics buried because of their “affronted moral sensibilities” (159).

The third strand of criticism on *The Awakening* and what Culley terms the “watershed year” of Chopin’s enduring significance as a female American author occurred in 1969. With the help of Per Seyersted’s publication of Kate Chopin’s biography and complete works, critics began trying to place Chopin’s work in a distinct category of American fiction. Seyersted’s work “coincided with and was influenced by, the beginnings of feminist literary criticism and its transformation of the literary canon” (Culley 160). Articles by critics such as Marie Fletcher and Joan Zlotnik in the late 1960s “anticipated what was to be an avalanche of feminist criticism of *The Awakening* in the 1970s and 1980s” (160). It is during this feminist period of criticism that issues such as patriarchy, woman’s independence, desire, sexuality, and language were first considered by critics.

My thesis’s treatment of Chopin’s novel belongs to this third strand of criticism which started in the 1970s. I use articles which belong to the third wave of criticism and engage with Edna as an emblem of feminist power. I do this in order to analyze Edna in the context of “becoming-revisionist.” The critic central to my analysis is James Justus and his article entitled “The Unawakening of Edna Pontellier.” I draw on Justus’s argumentation to demonstrate how Adele Ratignolle functions as a foil to Edna, thus allowing the protagonist to examine her femininity by comparing it with alternative female images in the novel. I also use Marion Muirhead’s “A Conversational Analysis of *The Awakening*” in my argumentation given that she discusses Mlle Reisz’s relationship with Edna and its effect on the latter. These critics allow me to engage with Edna’s active revision of her own femininity through her contact with the women in her environment. A. Elizabeth Elz’s “*The Awakening* and a Lost Lady: Flying with Broken Wings and Raked Feathers” is also key to this comparison of Edna with other female models in that Elz voices the fact that although Edna may appear to face the challenge of redefining her femininity alone, she constantly grapples with differing examples of femininity over the course of her journey towards her own image of womanhood. Bert Bender’s “The Teeth of Desire: *The Awakening* and *The Descent of Man*” and Lawrence Thornton’s “*The Awakening*: A Political Romance” discuss Edna’s creation of a new self, a concept which is essential to her character’s contribution to the American Eve figure. Other significant studies on Edna Pontellier which my thesis uses include: “Local Color in *The Awakening*” by John R. May; “Kate Chopin and the Creole Country” by Elmo Howell; “A Prologue to Rebellion: The Awakening and the Habit of

Self-Expression” by Joseph R. Urgo.

The first reviews of *The Sun Also Rises* after its publication in 1926 were mixed. Linda Wagner-Martin points out that *The Chicago Daily Tribune* referred to the book as “the kind of book that makes this reviewer almost plain angry” (Wagner Martin 1). *The Dial* made remarks about how Hemingway’s characters were “vapid” and “as shallow as the saucers in which they stack their daily emotion” (Wagner Martin 1). Much of the initial criticism was concerned with the morally corrupt nature of Hemingway’s characters along with his revolutionary writing style, which critic Cleveland B. Chase terms “some of the finest dialogue yet written in this country” (Chase in Wagner Martin 2). As Wagner Martin explains, “most excited comments focuse[d] primarily on style” (Wagner Martin 2). A few decades were required before critics began engaging with the themes and gender dynamics of *The Sun Also Rises*.

In his famous work entitled *The Critical Reception of Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises*, Peter L. Hays states that “it was not until the New Criticism began to take hold in the 1940s that critics such as Edmund Wilson, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and Malcolm Cowley began looking beneath the surface of Hemingway’s writing in general and *The Sun Also Rises* in particular” (Hays 7).⁶ Owing to Cowley’s publication of his essay “Hemingway at Midnight” in 1944 and Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* in 1957, criticism of Hemingway’s novel began to dig beneath the surface of style by looking at the story through the lens of myth criticism.⁷ Through this specific approach to the novel, critics “began to pay attention to the role women played in Hemingway’s fiction and to the commodification of values in his novel” (Hays 7).

However, it is not until the 1970s that critical material on *The Sun Also Rises* truly proliferated and that “women scholars increasingly turned their attention to Hemingway beyond aesthetic studies” (Hays 81). Dolores Schmidt’s article “The Great

⁶ Although New Criticism is “a term which refers to a kind of ‘movement’ in literary criticism which developed in the 1920s (for the most part among Americans),” it “was not until 1941 that John Crowe Ransom published [his] [seminal] book called *The New Criticism*” (Cuddon 544). The arrival of Crowe Ransom’s book can be considered the beginning of critic’s referral to the movement as an official trend in literary criticism.

⁷ The general principles of myth criticism are described by John B. Vickery in his book *Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice*. The first principle is the fact that “the creating of myths is inherent in the thinking process and answers a basic human need” (Vickery ix). The second follows the logic that “myth forms the matrix out of which literature emerges both historically and psychologically” (Vickery ix). Vickery explains that “in recognizing that mythic features reside beneath as well as on the surface of a work, myth criticism differs substantially from earlier treatments of the mythological in literature” (Vickery ix).

American Bitch” is an excellent example of this step forward. Schmidt describes Lady Brett as a woman who “dominates every man she meets” (Schmidt in Hays 81). This characterization depicts how great of a leap literary criticism had taken from the days when critics labeled Lady Brett Ashley as a “destructive bitch” (Adair 189). The criticism which emerged in the 1970s broadened the perspectives on the novel as well as on Lady Brett’s character, thus demonstrating that the critical understanding of Hemingway’s female character is bound to the history of sexual empowerment. This critical understanding, whose foundation can be traced back to the feminist criticism of the 1970s, informs my analysis of Brett’s revision of female sexuality in *The Sun Also Rises*. Articles such as Todd Onderdonk’s “Bitched: Feminization, Identity, and the Hemingwayesque in *The Sun Also Rises*”, “Pedagogy of *The Sun Also Rises*” by Donald Daiker, and Richard Fantina’s “Hemingway’s Masochism, Sodomy, and the Dominant Woman form the crux of my engagement with critical material when dealing with Lady Brett.

Todd Onderdonk's argument concerning the “loss of an ostensibly masculine autonomy and certainty to what is seen as a feminizing modernity” (Onderdonk 62) is applied in my chapter on Brett to validate her role as a sexually revisionist woman. By demonstrating how Hemingway’s male characters are overpowered by Brett’s sexuality and make no attempt to control it, Onderdonk highlights the idea of a modern male culture slowly being engulfed by female forces. Indeed, her sexual control over her male companions allows Brett to (re)discover her sexual self and thus perform her role as “becoming-revisionist.”

Daiker’s argument is similar to Onderdonk’s in that he highlights Jake Barnes’ status as a willing victim and Robert Cohn’s lack of emotional control. Likewise, Fantina’s article seems to sum up Lady Brett’s sexual control over the men. The result of this control is her ultimate dethroning of the phallus. These three scholars’s studies form a cohesive critical foundation for my analysis of Lady Brett Ashley’s “female auto-eroticism.” Other significant studies on Lady Brett Ashley which my thesis uses include: “Reading Around Jake's Narration: Brett Ashley and *The Sun Also Rises*” by Lorie Watkins Fulton; “Bitch” by Beverley Gross; “Failed Relationships in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*: Defending the New Woman” by Robert Mattes.

When *The Great Gatsby* was published in 1925, countless critics did little more than comment on how the novel secured Fitzgerald a spot as an American writer and, referring to *This Side of Paradise*, not just a “man of one book” (Butcher 197). *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* called it an “ironical panorama of the weakness of the strong and the strength of the weak” (*Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* 203). As in Hemingway’s case, much was said about Fitzgerald’s command of language and style. The reviews varied and much discussion around the novel involved how much it measured up to Fitzgerald’s earlier achievements and how *The Great Gatsby* fit in amongst them. Very few critics analyzed the book as thematically as the *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* did and many somewhat dismissed the novel’s content as a result of Fitzgerald’s “youthful cynicism” (*Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* 203).

More serious critical engagement with the novel’s sociological message began in the 1940s. Nicolas Tredell mentions that the novel was seen as “a kind of tragic pastoral” due to its comparison of the East and the West (Tredell). The criticism did not involve Daisy Buchanan as a symbol of gender relations in the 1920s. On that note, “the most influential interpretation of the 1950s would be that [the novel] is about ‘The American Dream’” (Tredell). Edwin S. Fussell’s “Fitzgerald’s Brave New World” (1952) as well as Marius Bewley’s “F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Criticism of America” (1954) are prime examples of this strand of criticism; the critical trend was indeed shifting towards the novel’s status as a representation of social realities. Still, it was only in the 1970s that the topics of “the novel’s ethnic, gender, and sexual representations and exclusions” were broached (Tredell). Much of this discussion about gender had to do with the “rapid development of feminism and feminist literary criticism in the 1970s” (Tredell). My extensive use of Leland S. Person Jr.’s article “‘Herstory’ and Daisy Buchanan” (1978) is an excellent indication of my critical position within the larger existing spectrum. I engage with feminist criticism on *The Great Gatsby* in order to demonstrate Daisy’s shortcomings as a counter-statement to “becoming-revisionist.” Person Jr. focuses intently on Daisy’s dream-like quality. He argues that Daisy can be seen as a victim and the mythical character upon which Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby project their dreams. Person Jr.’s article is thus useful to my argumentation that Daisy embodies a counter-statement to “becoming-revisionist”. The article discusses the illusions and dreams which Daisy represents as a social gift the two men vie for.

My thesis also makes extensive use of A.E. Elmore's article "Color and Cosmos in *The Great Gatsby*" as well as Meredith Goldsmith's "White Skin, White Mask: Passing, Posing, and Performing in *The Great Gatsby*". The two articles place distinct emphasis on Daisy's embodiment of ultimate purity through her whiteness and how this whiteness is commodified by Tom Buchanan. Goldsmith argues that Daisy's whiteness is most blatantly conveyed through the objects she possesses. Indeed, this critical perspective is an important component of my depiction of Daisy as a commodified and consumed good. Jeffrey Steinbrink also discusses Daisy's relationship to Gatsby. Steinbrink explores her specific role in Gatsby's myth of regeneration, a pertinent issue in my reading of her as a passive woman. Other significant studies on Daisy Buchanan which my thesis uses include: "F. Scott Fitzgerald's Trompe l'Oeil and *The Great Gatsby*'s Buried Plot" by Ernest Lockridge; "Fitzgerald's Daisy: The Siren Voice" by Glenn Settle; "The Language of Time in *The Great Gatsby*" by Tony Magistrale and Mary Jane Dickerson.

Methodology:

The methodology for this thesis involves a socio-critical approach to the three novels. My thesis maps out a sociology of womanhood in a modern literary context. That is to say it deals with femininity as an issue with social repercussions and demonstrates how this social dimension of womanhood is explored through a literary lens. Therefore, my thesis consists of both close readings as well as a comparative approach. Both methods are crucial to the well-rounded unfolding of my project. Close reading allows me to focus on specific passages in which the female characters do or, in the case of Daisy, do not display revisionist qualities. I employ this method to provide an in-depth portrayal of how the women engage with their respective societies. This permits me to embark on detailed discussions of which social elements the women revise as "becoming-revisionist." Given that my socio-critical approach aims to demonstrate the relationship of womanhood to different social environments in a selection of American twentieth-century novels, close readings provide an effective way of exposing the details of these interactions.

My project also includes comparative reading as a key component of its methodology. This comparative method is important to the analysis of the ways in

which “becoming-revisionist” is depicted over the course of the modern period. The comparative approach is an excellent way of establishing key similarities and differences between the three female characters. It will be especially effective in terms of my project’s reading of Daisy Buchanan as a counter-statement to Edna and Brett’s revisionism. In order to show that the American Eve is not a purely utopic and flawless female figure, the comparison of the different women’s qualities is essential. The comparative approach allows my thesis to define the politics of “becoming-revisionist” and explain why Edna and Lady Brett meet the criteria while Daisy does not. Only through their comparison can Daisy’s shortcomings be brought to light. By comparing and contrasting the ways in which femininity is revised over the course of the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, it is possible to discuss the complementary elements which come together to form the modern woman.

Chapter One

Edna Pontellier: A Revised Wife and Mother in

The Awakening

“Becoming-Woman” and *Écriture féminine*

In their 1982 work *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari present their idea of “becoming-woman.” Deleuze and Guattari posit “becoming woman” as a molecular collectivity freed from her existence as a molar entity or a “woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject” (Deleuze 275). The idea of “becoming woman” emerged in the midst of the French feminists’ development of concepts known as *écriture féminine* and *féminité*. *Écriture féminine* can be defined as the attempt to speak of femininity in what critic Ann Rosalind Jones terms “the new languages it calls for” (248). In her seminal article “Laugh of the Medusa,” Helene Cixous explains that *écriture féminine* revolves around the idea that “the woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women into writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal” (875). According to *écriture féminine* feminists, these new languages and *écriture féminine* are needed in order to establish a female “point of view” or “site of *différence*” (Jones 248). In “Laugh of the Medusa,” Cixous also defines this new feminine language as an “impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes” and as a tool the woman must use to “submerge, cut through, and get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse” (Cixous 886). Thus, the new feminine language that *écriture féminine* feminists envision revises the language historically imposed upon the woman.

The point of view established by *écriture féminine* is meant to be completely independent from Western culture’s phallogocentric perspective and its application is referred to by *écriture féminine* feminists as *féminité*. Feminist thinker Monique Wittig insists that “the theory and practice of *féminité* must be focused on women among themselves, rather than on their divergence from men or from men's views of them” (Jones 248). *Féminité* as the manifestation of this resistance to the male-centered Western world must not focus on the male-female dichotomy. Its goal is to create an entirely feminized site of *différence*. This precise goal of French feminist theory appeared around the 1970s and was carried into the 1990s. Thus, the *écriture féminine* movement was well-established by the time Deleuze and Guattari published *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* in 1982. Feminist thinkers such as Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Monique Wittig, Alice Jardine, and Luce Irigaray all took part in this feminist movement. Despite their collective participation in the

movement, the individual women often had differing opinions on how *féminité* should be executed. In spite of this fact, the one element the women agreed on was what they termed *jouissance*. According to them, *jouissance* is the ultimate form of resistance to male-centered thinking and involves the “direct reexperience of the physical pleasures of infancy and of later sexuality” (Jones 248). Hence, for the feminists of the *écriture féminine* movement, the re-appropriation of the female body constitutes the ultimate weapon of resistance to the phallogocentric world.

The individual ways these women went about resisting the various institutions of masculine thinking are numerous and varied. Some feminist thinkers of the time, such as Kristeva, agree with the importance of this re-appropriation of the body, but do not believe that the creation of alternative discourses could inform the site of *différence*. For Kristeva, “woman” “represents not so much a sex as an attitude” (quoted in Jones 249). Irigaray’s opinion differs in that she believes that “women, historically limited to being sexual objects for men (virgins or prostitutes, wives or mothers), have been prevented from expressing their sexuality in itself or for themselves” (Jones 248). For Irigaray, women’s potential to re-write themselves through *écriture féminine* outside masculine boundaries is crucial. It is their alternative discourse that has the potential to create the site of *différence* which is required to revise phallogocentric concepts not only in theory but also in practice (Jones 248).

Alice Jardine is another prominent figure in the *écriture féminine* movement whose concept of “gynesis”, the term she coins in *Gynesis: Configurations of Women and Modernity*, enters in dialogue with the concept of the “new languages” which *écriture féminine* advocates.⁸ In this work, Jardine states that modernity and its “redefinition of the world” is at the “heart of gynesis” (Jardine in Creed 401). According to Jardine, gynesis involves “giv[ing] a new language to these other spaces” which “have hitherto remained unknown” (Jardine in Creed 401). Jardine also argues that gynesis “has always been discernible in the religious and literary texts of the West and is a process of questioning and rethinking – a process brought about by the collapse of the master narratives of the West and a re-examination of the main topics of philosophy: Man, Truth, History” (Jardine in Creed 400). By “other spaces”, Jardine

⁸ Despite being an American feminist theorist, Jardine worked and exchanged extensively with the French feminist thinkers, particularly Kristeva. Jardine both translated Kristeva’s work and wrote her own work *Gynesis: Configurations of Women and Modernity* under Kristeva’s influence.

means the “spaces not attributable to Man: the spaces of the *en-soi*, Other, without history – the feminine” (Creed 401). Gynesis involves giving a feminine language to these inherently female spaces. Clearly, Jardine’s gynesis and the French feminists’s *écriture féminine* share a common goal which is the re-writing of feminine space. Like Irigaray, Jardine firmly believes in the opportunity alternative discourse offers women to re-write what they have been historically prevented from expressing.

During this period of feminist discourse and debate Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming woman” emerged. Interpreted by numerous critics as an alternative to biologically essentialist feminism, “becoming woman” provides the possibility of doing away with the body altogether.⁹ Such an act is made possible through a focus on the numerous and varied “atoms of womanhood” (Deleuze 276) which female writers such as Virginia Woolf aimed at creating. “Becoming-woman” creates a femininity grounded in the co-existence of countless molecules of womanhood “capable of crossing and impregnating an entire social field” (Deleuze 276). By “crossing and impregnating an entire social field,” Deleuze means that the “molecules of womanhood” he imagines not only exist alone in one social field but instead have a widespread power which is capable of “sweeping up men” in their becoming (276). This femininity is meant to liberate women from the historical burden that is the female body and provides an alternative to the biological essentialism which permeates French feminism from the 1970s to the 1990s.

However, Deleuze's theory of “becoming woman” did not go unquestioned in the feminist world. Statements such as “man is majoritarian par excellence, whereas becomings are minoritarian” (Deleuze 291) and, therefore, “there is no becoming-man because man is the molar entity par excellence” (Deleuze 292) necessarily caught feminist thinkers’ attention. These statements, far from empowering women, relegate them yet again to an inferior position in the gender hierarchy. Not only are they inferior, but such a status is also a permanent one since the “process of becoming” can never lead to a minority's status as a molar entity. These weaknesses in Guattari and Deleuze’s argument give way to what critic Dorothea Olwoski calls feminist critics’ “universal

⁹ Essentialism is a mode of feminist thought which champions the idea that there are “shared characteristics common to all women, which unify them as a group” (Stone 135). There are many different forms of essentialism. In this case, biological essentialism is being referred to. By ridding “becoming woman” of her female body, Guattari and Deleuze challenged the biological essentialism which tended to permeate feminist criticism of the 1980s

caution and hesitancy” (Olkowski 86) towards Deleuze's work.¹⁰ The way “becoming woman” posits women as inherently minoritarian due to an absence of possibility has led to a wide variety of feminist criticism.

For instance, critics Jardine and Irigaray are among the most important critics in the Deleuzian debate on feminism. The emphasis they place on a “new language” which is necessary for women to carve out their own spaces which Jardine claims are “not attributable to man” (Creed 401) is important in the discussion of the figure of the American Eve. The potential for a female revision of these spaces that the two theorists envision is essential to the American Eve due to the significance they bestow upon an alternative discourse. Contrary to Kristeza who believes that alternative discourse is unnecessary, Jardine and Irigaray view such discursive agency as indispensable. This stance makes them stand out amongst the vast array of feminist critics. Femininity must be re-written; it must be reconsidered. The figure of the American Eve embodies this very revision, this birth of a new female language. Given that Jardine’s and Irigaray’s criticism of Guattari and Deleuze’s theory elucidates elements of the American Eve figure, it is important to consider the ways in which the two women open the door to a wider debate on the idea of “becoming-woman.”

In her article “Woman in Limbo: Deleuze and his Br(others)” (1984), Alice Jardine criticizes the fact that “Deleuze and Guattari's imperative 'to become woman' has very little to do with women” (Jardine 52). In their attempt to do away with a dichotomized view of gender, Jardine argues that “becoming-woman” must become a “de-identitized entity” so as to “resist the dominant mode of representation represented by any majority” (Jardine 52). Hence, Deleuze's solution to the gender binary merely discards the feminine half of it. Jardine believes that, in his effacing of the body and treatment of the woman as molecular minority, Deleuze actually evades what Jardine calls the “gynesis” or the “problematization and putting into discourse of 'woman' and 'the feminine' in contemporary thought” (Jardine 47).¹¹ By treating woman as a molecular being, Deleuze strips her of an identity. Such a being is incapable of developing the new language which Jardine’s “gynesis” depends on. In order to speak the words that will enable her to “[re]define” a male-centered world, woman must be

¹⁰ For more information on Olkowski’s discussion of Deleuze, see her book entitled *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation* published in 1999. Her second chapter entitled “Can a Feminist Read Deleuze and Guattari?” is of particular interest in this context.

¹¹ For more on the concept of “gynesis”, see Jardine's 1985 work *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*.

independent and whole. Deleuze's theory allows man alone to exist as a molar entity, thus robbing women of their new language and capacity to revise the female space. It forces them to submit to their minoritarian and molecular position.

Indeed, Jardine states that “the woman who does not enter into the 'becoming woman' remains a Man, remains 'molar', just like men” (Jardine 53). Clearly, Jardine points to one of the most problematic aspects of “becoming-woman”. She uncovers the reality of “becoming woman” which is that if women do not submit to their minoritarian position, what is left of femininity will disappear altogether. Jardine does not claim that Deleuze's theory should be discarded completely but believes it must be read with caution. The concept has an “aura of futurity about it” (Jardine 47) which “often seems out of synchrony with immediately feminist concerns” (Jardine 48). In Jardine's view, the attempt to escape the essentialist argument through the effacement of the body merely results in woman's limited existence as a mere extension of man in a masculine space. Critics should strive not towards the effacement of women but towards preventing their “disappear[ance] from that space of exploration” (Jardine 59).

Similar to Jardine's work, Irigaray's position on Deleuze's “becoming-woman” has also received an abundant amount of feminist critical attention. As an advocate of what has been termed “sexual difference feminism,” Irigaray's position on Deleuze provides interesting feminism insight into the short-comings of “becoming-woman.” Irigaray believes that “illumination cannot come until we have learnt how in general the differentiation of living organisms into two sexes came about” (Irigaray 20). By “illumination” Irigaray means the understanding of what she calls “the mystery of femininity.”¹² This “mystery of femininity” exists due to the fact that Irigaray claims it is “unrealizable to describe the being of woman” (Irigaray 21). However, it is indeed possible with the help of psychoanalysis to “set about enquiring how she comes into being” (21). Although this is possible, a psychoanalytic “coming into being” is still one that is influenced by patriarchal structures. Irigaray's “mystery of femininity” could be solved by a new language and the development of a “site of *difference*.” To that end,

¹² According to Irigaray, the “mystery of femininity” has its origins in the tendency of psychoanalysis to “not describe what a woman is” but to “set about enquiring how she develops out of a child with a bisexual disposition” (Irigaray 21). Thus, it is “impossible to represent what woman might be given that a certain economy of representation – inadequately perceived by psychoanalysis, at least in the scientific discourse that it speaks – functions through a tribute to woman that is never paid nor assessed” (21).

she comments on Deleuze's "becoming-woman" in her own book *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985). She states that "one might begin by being surprised, being suspicious, that it should be necessary to *become* a woman" and that "this [becoming] should be more difficult and more complicated than becoming a man" (Irigaray 22). She grounds her discussion of men and women's "sexual *production-reproduction* relationship" in this "process of becoming" which treats women as "a function of the (re)-productive necessities of an intentionally phallic currency" (Irigaray 22).¹³ In such a context of sexual production and reproduction, the woman's journey towards "becoming-woman" is one which is marked out and determined by male needs.

Like Alice Jardine, Irigaray is convinced that according to this "process of becoming," a woman is none other than "a little man who will suffer a more complicated and painful evolution than the little boy in order to become a normal woman" (Irigaray 26). In other words, for Irigaray, "becoming-woman" is realizing that you cannot be man and that your feminine space is already mapped out for you. It is precisely this lack of female agency that Irigaray criticizes. Women are left unable to define sexual difference on their own terms, which results in their existence as molecular collectivities under masculine control. It can be argued that both critics' concepts, Irigaray's "mystery of femininity" and Jardine's "gynesis," cannot be applied to Deleuze's theory. In their post-modernist attempt to unburden the woman of her physical body, Guattari and Deleuze create a feminine space which, according to both Jardine and Irigaray, is devoid of all feminine agency and possibility for revision.

My thesis uses these critics' works as building blocks for the development of my own stance on the figure of the American Eve. It is my intention to construct the American Eve figure with the help of these two critics' position with regards to *écriture féminine* theory. Although the figure of American Eve is grounded in late nineteenth and early twentieth century femininity, its revisionist nature benefits from the French feminists' emphasis on multi-faceted reclamation. Like Jardine and Irigaray, I refute Deleuze's concept of "becoming-woman". American Eve does not need to "become." She exists as a molar entity. Her molar identity needs to be vocalized in order to be

¹³ Irigaray's in-depth discussion of the "sexual production-reproduction relationship" can be found in the first chapter of *Speculum of the Other Woman*.

heard and acknowledged in a patriarchal world. Deleuze qualifies men as molar entities based on “how ‘Man’ constitute[s] a standard in the universe” (Deleuze 291). It can be argued that women also constitute their own standard in the universe because they are capable of leading an independent existence without being required to define their feminine selves on a pre-existing masculine standard of discourse.

The American Eve figure represents the opportunity to voice that standard and claim a molar identity for women through this new language, this *écriture féminine*. Women always existed in molar form albeit silenced by what Deleuze refers to as “the standard upon which the majority is based: white, male, adult, ‘rational’” (Deleuze 292). My thesis allows the American Eve to claim the voice which has been historically buried by masculinist discourse.

Thus, the American Eve is a figure in the midst of discovering her discursive possibilities. Through her development of a “new language,” she re-appropriates the Deleuzian feminine space which Jardine and Irigaray define as regulated by masculine needs. Therefore, she is not a “becoming-woman,” but rather a “becoming-revisionist.” As an already existent woman, she responds to the need for a feminine space free from masculine discourse. At the same time, my thesis views it as reductive to claim that “female subjectivity is derived from women’s physiology and bodily instincts” (Jones 247). Jardine’s “gynesis” and Irigaray’s “mystery of femininity” are concepts of femininity which involve but cannot be reduced to, female physiology. Thus, the American Eve figure’s revisionist scope includes but also extends beyond female physiology to consider the woman’s role in social and political matters. I intend to demonstrate that the feminine space is multi-faceted one and that the American Eve is one female voice among many. The American Eve is a voice engaged in American Modernism. As mentioned earlier, the modern period in America was one in which first-wave feminism played a vital role in changing gender relations (Devonek). As a period characterized by social change and progress, it lends itself perfectly to the examination of the modern woman’s forging of independent female spaces. My project indeed acknowledges the need for authentically feminine spaces. These spaces are multiple and cannot be envisioned as one space which arches over all females and all of history. The American Eve cannot claim the ability to demystify Irigaray’s “mystery of femininity” or Jardine’s “gynesis.” Still, as “becoming-revisionist,” she can revise the spaces which belong to the female of the American modern period. This revisionism

represents the way in which the American Eve figure constructs independent spaces in modern American literature.

Edna Pontellier's Revision of the Roles of Mother and Wife

The intent of this chapter is to look at Kate Chopin's character Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* and her role as "becoming-revisionist". The revisionist element which Edna contributes to "becoming-revisionist" is her reclamation of the female self through a gendered revision of the social roles of wife and mother. This chapter deals with how these gendered revisions allow her to experiment with various modes of femininity as well as female sexual agency. These explorations enable Edna to carve out a space for the early twentieth-century woman that is untainted by patriarchal domination. They also allow her to create a new feminine language for the roles of wife and mother. Her rewriting of these social roles constitutes her early modern foreshadowing of Jardine's "gynesis" and Irigaray's "mystery of femininity." This chapter aims to demonstrate how, through her gendered revisions of social roles, Edna succeeds in altering the female's social space in the early twentieth century. This revision of the woman's social space through the use of her own new language, or *écriture féminine*, provides the foundation for the early modern woman's voice.

One of the social roles Edna revises through her gendered gaze is that of wife. In her article "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," Barbara Welter describes the role of women in the early to late nineteenth century. She refers to woman as the "hostage in the home" (Welter 151) whose duty was to act as a source of reassurance and tradition to the nineteenth-century man. As a source of tradition, the woman was expected to embody the foundational American Puritan values of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (152). The woman was meant to encapsulate "all the values which [man] held so dear and treated so lightly" (Welter 151). She existed to remind man that despite the ever-increasing materialism of their society, not all traditional values had been lost. In the face of this progressive disappearance of traditionalism, the man emerged as the emblem of progress and "a busy builder of bridges and railroads" (151) while woman was confined to the domestic sphere. She was expected to be the redeeming force for the "religious values of [man's] forebearers" (151). Woman's role involved upholding traditional American values, thus imprisoning her to a domestic life. She was a means used by man to ease his consciousness concerning the "vast countinghouse" (151) he was turning his country into. As Welter states, in a country "where social and economic mobility provided instability as well as hope, one thing at least remained the same—a true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found" (152). Thus, in the late nineteenth century, a woman could not choose to

live by her own code of femininity. Her duties were mapped out for her and required an unflinching subservience to man. Her status as pillar of tradition served as a faithful reminder of the country's Puritan roots.

In the opening pages of *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin provides the reader with a description of Léonce Pontellier's gaze upon his wife. He is said to “[look] at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered serious damage” (Chopin 4). This reductive gaze is quickly replaced by Edna's assessment of her own condition. At the core of the novel is Edna's re-assessment of her social roles and environment from her female perspective. Edna's role in the American Eve's revisionist project involves a process of simultaneous awakening to and re-examination of her own gender. She imposes her own language upon her prescribed social roles. She attempts to create a “site of *différance*” for herself so as to establish her own femininity. In the case of the social role of wife, this occurs primarily through Edna's progressive re-evaluation of the domestic sphere.

Edna undertakes the re-examination of the domestic sphere progressively in the novel. The best example of its initial phase occurs upon the family's return to New Orleans after the summer spent at Grand Isle. It is important to consider the Grand Isle setting and its role as trigger for Edna's re-examination of her social roles. It is also crucial to mention the role which Grand Isle plays in the provocation of Edna's revision. Chopin describes Grand Isle in a footnote as a “celebrated Creole resort” (Chopin 3).

As Katy Frances Morlas explains in “La Madame et La Mademoiselle: Creole Women in Louisiana, 1718-1865,” “both in the past and at present in Louisiana, a person could be considered Creole if [they] descended from the first French and Spanish settlers” (Morlas 2). Hence, being Creole in the United States was a matter of what Morlas refers to as racial fluidity (v) and meant that one belonged to a recognized cultural group completely separate from the rest of America. The Creole's status as part of an independent cultural group within their nation created a race of women who “differed from women in the rest of the United States in their language, religion, legal system, and traditions” (v).¹⁴ These differences make Grand Isle a social microcosm

¹⁴ Morlas explains in her work that this created a culture of women who, empowered by their distinct legal system, were given “the right to draft their own wills, obtain legal separations from their husbands, and act as private business owners” (v). Despite the empowered economic and legal status of Creole women within their society, these women were nevertheless expected to adhere to a code of femininity defined by wifehood and motherhood. Edna, due to her lack of cultural know-how, experiences difficulty in understanding the delicate balance of Creole culture.

with its own customs and cultural code. In the case of Edna, it is the glimpse into the world of Creole femininity provided by Grand Isle which accounts for the location's role in the arousal of Edna's revisionism of her femininity. However, despite the empowered economic and legal status of Creole women within their society, Morlas specifies that their culture nevertheless considers them "belles or beauties, good Catholic wives and mothers akin to the Virgin Mary herself" (Morlas 14). Therefore, Creole women did indeed benefit from a more balanced sharing of social power, but were not exempt from their duties as wives and mothers. There was a culture of delicate balance constructed upon an implicit understanding that although the woman was given more power, the fulfillment of the roles of wife and mother were expected of her nonetheless. It is this delicate balance and complex cultural code on Grand Isle which Edna grapples with in the midst of her revisionism.

As Chopin points out, the Creole culture and its people are characterized by "their entire absence of prudery" (Chopin 10) and the women in particular by their "lofty chastity" (10). As a Kentucky native and foreigner to Creole culture, Edna perceives Grand Isle as an environment which, John May explains, "promise[s] familiarity, open expression of affection, and freedom from moral rigour" (May 215). However, as Richard Gray and Owen Robinson state in *A Companion to the Culture and Literature of the American South*, Creole culture in Louisiana constitutes "a different language" (Gray and Robinson 321) compared to the rest of America. This "different language" is a result of the racial fluidity Morlas speaks of as well as the cultural uniqueness of Creoles in America. The absence of prudery and a laissez-faire environment, typical of Creole culture, are made possible solely because the Creole woman is nonetheless aware of the code of femininity she must follow. In her article, Morlas quotes Louisiana church historian Joseph Roger Baudier when she states that the Creole mother's "first duty was to serve family and home and sacrifice was the theme of her life" (Baudier in Morlas 42). Thus, following the code of Creole femininity required "a delicate balance of humility and pride, elegant grace and hard-working sacrifice, piety and vivacity, beauty and homeliness" (42).¹⁵ It is clear that the atmosphere of

¹⁵ The Creole code of femininity is treated here in terms of motherhood because this is the dimension of the code that Edna faces in terms of self-evaluation in her relationship with Creole mother Adele Ratignolle. Morlas mentions that Baudier differentiates between the concepts of Creole lady and Creole mother and claims that the two "could never be confused with each other or one evolve into the other" (Baudier in Morlas 41). However, Morlas makes it clear that it was expected of a Creole lady that she become a Creole mother. Hence, the two forms of femininity are nevertheless intricately linked and one is considered an extension of the other.

“lofty chastity” Chopin describes is only possible because Creole women, unlike Edna, are aware of and willingly abide by the Creole code of femininity.

Interestingly, John R. May explains, in his article “Local Color in *The Awakening*,” that the Creole setting “provide[s] a climate of psychological relaxation sufficient to allow Edna’s true nature to reveal itself” (May 215). This atmosphere of psychological relaxation leads Edna to believe that the most unconventional of female desires in the rest of American society are attainable in a Creole climate. In this case, unconventional female desires” can be considered the wish for freedom or of placing one’s personal needs above those of one’s children (Chopin 19, 46). Critic Elmo Howell claims that Edna is a victim of sorts to the “subtle influence of the landscape, so different from her native Kentucky” (Howell 217). Thus, Edna allows herself to be seduced by the climate of psychological relaxation which prevails at the summer resort. What she fails to understand is that this climate is still governed by a “political atmosphere and a parade of dress and manners” (Howell 211). For such a climate to exist, men and women must be aware of their rightful roles and strictly adhere to them. Without such an adherence, a *laissez-faire* atmosphere is not possible. The fact that she is “thrown so intimately among “[the] society of Creoles” (Chopin 10) and fails to understand the limits and boundaries of their culture affects Edna’s behaviour upon her return to New Orleans.

Upon Edna’s return to her home in New Orleans, one of her first acts of rebellion against domesticity as defined by the Cult of True Womanhood occurs when she neglects her reception day.¹⁶ This marks the beginning of her re-evaluation of her social role as wife and the creation of her own “site of *difference*.” She “[does] not wear her usual Tuesday reception gown” but rather an “ordinary house dress” (Chopin 48). When her husband asks why, she replies simply that she “felt like going out, and [she] went out” (Chopin 49). This example of defiance, albeit unconscious, illustrates Edna’s initial re-examination of both the domestic sphere itself and the duties it entails. Crucial to her defiance is the insistence that she wanted to go out and leave the “charming home on Esplanade Street” (Chopin 47). This intuitive yet unpremeditated desire for a glimpse of the world outside her domestic duties constitutes the beginning of Edna’s re-

¹⁶ This was known as a day when women were expected to stay at home and greet visitors. See Richard A. Wells’s *Decorum: A Practical Treatise on Etiquette and Dress of the Best American Society* (New York: Union Publishing House, 1886) 248-249.

writing of her social role as wife. As an American Eve figure, she demonstrates the desire to redefine her social space as wife according to her own feminine language.

By neglecting her reception day, she unknowingly begins this process of revising the patriarchal rhetoric which ties her to this tradition. Furthermore, Edna disappears into her bedroom after this scene of rebellion. She is said to “[begin] to walk to and fro down its whole length, without stopping, without resting” (Chopin 50). Edna's pacing calls to mind the image of a trapped animal attempting to break out of its cage. It is followed by the flinging of her wedding ring upon the carpet and the throwing of a glass vase upon the hearth. The desire Edna physically expresses “to destroy something” (Chopin 51) is an indication of her longing to annihilate the domestic sphere and all its tethers. Inherent in her desire to destroy something also lies the conscious wish to negate what surrounds her: the walls of domesticity keeping her prisoner. This desire to negate these walls of domesticity is a stellar example of how Edna consciously enters into her role as an American Eve. Her wish to negate the social norms to which she is hostage implies her ensuing intention to replace them with her self-defined revisionism. Hence, Edna's decision to go out on her reception day and destroy the meticulously-constructed domestic sphere both point towards her hunger for life outside the boundaries of prescribed domesticity. As an American Eve figure, she seeks to satisfy this hunger through the revision of this domestic role which she embarks upon.

Such scenes of domestic discord and rebellion permeate the novel and lead up to a pivotal moment when Edna's re-examination of her role as wife is extended to include motherhood. This moment involves her decision to move out of the family home into what she terms the “pigeon-house” (31). Edna makes this decision following a period of time spent in solitude and explains to the pianist Mlle Reisz that she intends to “move away from [her] house on Esplanade Street” (Chopin 76) because “the house and the money that provides for it” are not truly hers. The solitude she experiences awakens in her the impression that “[she] will like the feeling of freedom and independence” (76). The time she spends without her husband and children undoubtedly trigger the extension of Edna's revision of wifedom to that of motherhood. Indeed, the time she spends alone allows her to re-evaluate her position in the domestic sphere the Pontellier house represents.

In a state of “radiant peace,” Edna “walks all through the house, from one room to another, as if inspecting it for the first time” (Chopin 69). Free from their duties as

wife and mother, her eyes obtain a fresh perspective on her home and her position in it. This assumption of an alternate viewpoint is a quintessential component of Edna's act of revising of her role as mother as an American Eve figure. Only from a perspective that is solely hers can she create a social space free from the influence of patriarchal expectations. After "try[ing] the various chairs and lounges" and "perambulat[ing] around the outside of the house," Edna enters the garden and stays there "digging around the plants, trimming, picking dead, dry leaves" (Chopin 69). These actions permit her to inscribe her own desires and whims upon her surroundings. Edna revises her house not as mother and wife, but rather as woman. She asks the cook to free her of all burdens, adjusts the lighting in the kitchen, dines in "a comfortable peignoir," and decides to "start anew upon a course of improving studies" (Chopin 70). As A. Elizabeth Elz notes, "for Edna, the home represents having to act as the True Woman" (Elz 21). Not wanting to abide by this code, she becomes a stranger to its rules, for its demands do not represent the way she wishes to live. As a "becoming-revisionist" character, she revises her position in the family home by engaging in self-elected actions rather than following a prescribed code of femininity which does not reflect the *féminité* she wishes to embody. This revision is one Edna first undertakes by revising what is expected of her in her own home.

The “Pigeon-House” and Alternative Modes of Femininity

Her decision to move into the “pigeon-house” then enables her to revise her position in an environment which does not bind her to the role of wife or mother. Despite the pivotal nature of Edna’s decision, critics have argued that Edna’s move into the pigeon-house is the act of “trading a gilded cage for a simpler one” (Elz 22). This argument implies that the act refers to a change of setting that will set Edna free from social conventions. Elz argues that “even when fleeing, Edna cannot escape” (Elz 22). However, the act of escaping is not Edna’s ultimate goal in moving into the pigeon-house. The pigeon-house does not represent a form of escape. Rather, it provides an opportunity for Edna to re-write herself and her feminine space. Critic Katherine Kearns points out in her article “The Nullification of Edna Pontellier” that Edna “has been taught that the female body/house is no fit place to raise the spirit” (Kearns 81). Hence, Edna’s move into the pigeon-house serves as a form of re-education and revision of what she has been taught. In the context of this chapter, it is important to deal with how the pigeon-house succeeds in allowing Edna to generate a foundational female space for the early modern woman. In her complete abandonment of both motherly and matrimonial duties, Edna succeeds in exploring an entirely self-determined expression of gender and sexuality.

Edna’s complete liberation from matrimonial and maternal duties is crucial to her revision of femininity. This freedom allows her to consider various modes of femininity with which she is presented over the course of the novel. This exploration of these modes of femininity involves Mlle Reisz and Adèle Ratignolle. Chopin implies through her character’s behaviour that Edna’s time in the pigeon-house allows for an exploration of gender and sexuality which “[add] to her strength and expansion as an individual” (94). Kristin Rabun refers to Edna’s move into the pigeon-house as a “throw[ing] off [of] the smothering draperies of *Chez Pontellier*” (Rabun 92). This metaphorical idea of “throwing off” the patriarchal system that smothers her allows for a self-determined expression of her own femininity. By getting rid of “the smothering draperies of *Chez Pontellier*,” Edna gives her female voice new breadth, thus allowing herself to engage in the revisionist language typical of the American Eve.

The time she spends in the pigeon-house is central to Edna’s journey to define herself in feminized terms. It is a time and place in which she re-writes the identity inscribed upon her by patriarchal discourse. The pigeon-house is the setting Edna chooses for the exploration and realization of this discursive potential. In it, Edna is

permitted to define herself without the social expectations that accompany the masculine gaze. Chopin describes her as one who “[begins] to look with her own eyes” (Chopin 89). It is precisely by looking at the world through her own, female eyes that Edna is able to “see and apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life” (89). It can be argued that these “deeper undercurrents” are those of the female’s self-defined condition in a world regulated by masculine desires. Aided by “her own eyes” as a tool to see and evaluate her own condition, Edna is endowed with the revisionist power required to revise her femininity on her own terms.

As Elz rightly claims, given this agency, “Edna grapples with society over what her position should be,” all the while never being “physically isolated from a community of women” (Elz 18). Adèle Ratignolle and Mlle Reisz are two important sources of femininity Edna surrounds herself with over the course of her revision of identity. In his article “The Unawakening of Edna Pontellier,” James Justus treats Adele Ratignolle and Mlle Reisz as foils to Edna’s character. However, it is important to not consider them foils, but rather legitimate alternative models of femininity that Edna considers in the revision of her own identity. The women play crucial roles both before Edna’s move to the pigeon-house as well as during her stay in it. This consideration of various modes of femininity oftentimes places Edna in a position of ambivalence. This ambivalence can be compared to what Chopin terms “the dual life – that outward existence which conforms [and] the inward life which questions” (Chopin 14). Due to the fact that Adele’s femininity is a conformist one and Mlle Reisz’s is one which involves inward questioning, Edna’s indecision regarding them can be viewed as her struggle with “the dual life” which she must rid herself of. Justus refers to this state as being “caught between the claims of ‘mother-women’ and those of ‘artist women’” (Justus 111). This oscillation between the two examples of femininity is key to Edna’s interaction with Jardine’s “gynesis” and Irigaray’s “mystery of femininity. In order to contribute to the new female language the feminist critics envision, Edna must position herself amongst the various examples of femininity she experiences.

At the very beginning of the novel, Chopin describes the summer at Grand Isle as a time when Edna begins to “loosen the mantle of reserve which had always enveloped her” (14). This loosening of reserve is said to have many causes, but “the most obvious [is] the influence of Adele Ratignolle” (Chopin 14). She is a “woman who idolize[s] [her] children, worship[s] [her] husband, and esteem[s] it a holy privilege to

efface [herself] as [an] [individual] and grow wings as [a] ministering [angel]" (9). Her status as "mother-woman" is one she bears faithfully throughout the novel. Interestingly, despite Adele's unwavering fidelity to her own role, Edna's feelings towards it shift constantly. Chopin's clear statement that "Mrs. Pontellier [is] not a mother-woman" and Edna's abandonment of domesticity point to her eventual rejection of this mode of femininity. Nevertheless, she is not able to dismiss Mme Ratignolle immediately. Her position regarding the "mother-woman" requires exploration and examination in order to be established.

The initial phase of Edna's relationship with Mme Ratignolle takes place at Grand Isle in an atmosphere of cultural uncertainty. As a Kentucky native and daughter of a Presbyterian minister, Edna is "not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles" (Chopin 10). It is a society she entered through marriage and she clearly does not feel a part of the "one large family" (Chopin 10) the Creoles form that summer at Grand Isle. She is said to like "to sit and gaze at her fair companion as she might look upon a faultless Madonna" (Chopin 11). Elizabeth LeBlanc states that in the earlier parts of the novel, Mme Ratignolle is often described according to "traditionally masculine codes of female beauty" (LeBlanc 292). She is placed on a pedestal of Creole femininity that mystifies Edna. Despite this fact, she cannot help but admire Mme Ratignolle's physical and maternal graces. Indeed, their opposite natures may "might have furnished a link" (Chopin 14) for their friendship. Edna expresses the constant desire to draw Mme Ratignolle's portrait, to "try herself on [her]" (Chopin 12). In the initial phase of their friendship, Edna seems to want to reproduce Mme Ratignolle through artistic means. This fervent desire can be interpreted as Edna's hope that, through an artistic expression of the woman, she might also be able to understand or absorb her ways. Mme Ratignolle is no doubt a tempting artistic subject because she is a social subject Edna is determined to understand. Hence, in its beginnings, it is curiosity and admiration that permeates the women's relationship.

Upon her return to the city, Edna's attitude towards Mme Ratignolle acquires a more critical perspective. It can be explained by the agency that she gains through her re-examination of domesticity. Interestingly, following the initial scenes of domestic dispute, Edna chooses to pay Mme Ratignolle a visit in New Orleans. Unlike Edna who feels like she is living in "an alien world which [has] suddenly become antagonistic" (Chopin 51), Adele "look[s] more beautiful than ever there at home" (Chopin 53). This

contrast between the two women is further explored through Chopin's description of the Ratignolles' apparent cheerfulness over dinner and Edna's mood of "[depression] rather than [soothing] after leaving them" (Chopin 54). Their display of matrimonial harmony does not succeed in convincing Edna that such a union is, in any way, fulfilling. Peggy Skaggs notes that "the perfect union of the Ratignolles results more from the extinction of Adele's individuality than from the fusion of their two identities" (347). Given that the American Eve acts with the purpose of revising the woman as opposed to accepting the absence of her individuality, Edna views the social option Mme Ratignolle represents as utterly impossible. She is "moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle" and her "colorless existence which never uplifted the possessor beyond the region of blind contentment" (Chopin 54). Such a feeling of pity is indicative of Edna's evolving position regarding the "sensuous Madonna" she knew at Grand Isle.

Thus, Edna begins to understand the true nature of Adèle's character which is, as critic Lawrence Thornton points out, "trapped without even knowing it" (Thornton 55). This realization regarding Adele results in Edna's successive and concrete application of Jardine's and Irigaray's concepts of a site of *difference* and a new feminine language. Understanding Adèle's true nature allows Edna to realize that one who wishes to revise a female space defined by masculine needs cannot overlook the importance of the enactment of such feminist ideas. She no longer views Mme Ratignolle as a doting Madonna. Her own taste for freedom from domestic life has tainted Edna's perception of Adèle. She now sees her as a victim of domesticity, a woman incapable of defining a female space for herself outside of her husband's and children's needs. The pity Edna expresses concerning the fact that Mme Ratignolle "would never have the taste of life's delirium" (Chopin 54) is telling. For Edna, "life's delirium" involves the agency necessary in the construction of one's own identity. A woman can only truly experience the wild excitement of life if she is free to do so outside the confines of patriarchal control. Jardine and Irigaray, in their calling for an authentically female space, demand of women that they experience life in its most intense form through the exploration of their female identities. Interestingly, Edna reaches a point in which she considers life's delirium a privilege. Hence, this advantage she sees in being able to live a life of such wild emotion confirms her adherence to the "becoming-revisionist" role as the American Eve. Her decision to embrace the delirium of her life evokes her willingness to construct the authentically feminine space Jardine and Irigaray champion. Her

expression of pity towards her friend is an indication of Edna's embracing of her own position as a woman fighting to free herself from the patriarchal confines of what it entails to be a "mother-woman."

In the latter parts of the novel, Edna's perception of Adèle undergoes yet a further shift based on her presence during Adele's childbirth. This is a decisive moment in Edna's examination of her friend's mode of femininity. Interestingly, Edna has rejected the roles of wife and mother in her own life and even expressed pity towards the blind contentment of the Ratignolle union. However, it is not until she is seized with "a vague dread" (Chopin 104) as she witnesses Adele's childbirth that her critique of her friend's femininity can be complete. The dread with which she discerns this particular scene indicates that not only has she rejected the demands of wifehood and motherhood in her present life, but she also refuses to be a part of the traditional cycle of submissiveness of which childbirth is a part. As a revisionist figure, she is averse to participating in the cycle which forever locks women into their social roles as defined by men. She even speaks of the childbirth scene as a "scene of torture" (Chopin 104). Arguably, a form of *jouissance* is already occurring in Edna. By referring to child birth as torture, she turns her back on the patriarchal expectations of the female body. She terms as "torturous" that which dispossess her of her own body and, in doing so, prepares the latter for sexual agency. Her "rejection of the role Adele plays so well" (LeBlanc 298) is a vital aspect of her revisionist decision to reclaim control of her own body in her creation of an authentically feminine space. Her friendship with Adele results in the evolution of marriage and motherhood from simple social burdens to torturous, de-identitized states which are a result of an imprisoning cycle she does not wish to be a part of. Through her Creole friend, she utterly rejects the woman's roles as blindly contented wife and mother-child bearer.

Therefore, the catalyst for her revision of femininity is not triggered entirely by her reaction to her personal situation, but is one which she constructs with the help of the women in her surrounding environment. Through such a revision, Edna strengthens the "becoming-revisionist" character and announces the arrival of the early modern woman as an American Eve figure. Critic Joseph R. Urgo, in his discussion of Edna's previously-mentioned failure to paint Mme Ratignolle, states that "Edna does not 'see' with the eyes of her compatriots, nor does her vision conform to standard patterns of representation" (Urgo 25). This failure to reproduce Adèle artistically echoes Edna's

ultimate rejection of her friend's mode of femininity. It establishes her as an outsider to her surrounding environment and initiates her development into the early modern woman she embodies and speaks for. Hence, her evolving view of Adele's femininity demonstrates that Edna not only perceives the roles as inhibiting to herself, but also as inhibiting to women as a gender. She senses women's need for a new language which would liberate them from these oppressive, patriarchal expectations.

Edna's perception causes her to seek an alternative, which is found in her relationship with Mlle Reisz. It is important to mention that Mlle Reisz is not a social model which Edna attempts to understand and, eventually, to reject. Her mode of femininity is unconventional; Justus defines it as "a model for an alternative way of life" (110). Mlle Reisz's life constitutes a refutation of the cultural concept of "mother-woman." She is both childless and unmarried, thus exemplifying her complete disregard for cultural and social expectations. Indeed, Chopin's initial description of the pianist explains that she is someone "who [has] quarrelled with almost everyone owing to a temper which [is] self-assertive" (25). Mlle Reisz is a female character who prefers to stand on the outskirts of *les convenances* rather than to play along with them. In keeping with the aspirations of *écriture féminine* theory, she chooses to define a site of *différence* for herself instead of complying with patriarchal conventions. Her decision to live outside the boundaries of social conventions serves as a powerful example to Edna. As a model of feminine difference, she causes Edna to question her femininity and how she wishes to live it. Whereas Mme Ratignolle provides a model Edna eventually deems an "anti-model," Mlle Reisz provides Edna with an alternative female language which she can use to test the boundaries she has been set by the masculine world.

Mlle Reisz and her rooftop apartment form a zone of both social freedom and impropriety for Edna, thus permitting her to examine her own femininity in a place devoid of masculine expectations. According to critic Ann Rosalind Jones, Luce Irigaray as well as Helene Cixous define the female site of *différence* as "a point of view from which phallogocentric concepts and controls can be seen through and taken apart" (Jones 248). Mlle Reisz's rooftop apartment performs this exact function. It has many windows "that [are] nearly always open" and welcome in "all the light and air that there [is]" (Chopin 59). They are also windows from which "the crescent of the river, the masts of the ships, and the big chimneys of the Mississippi steamers" can be seen (59). Chopin describes Mlle Reisz's apartment as a bright place of vast vision. Instead of

conforming to the image of selfless wife and mother, Edna tells Mlle Reisz that “[she] [is] becoming an artist” and sobs over Robert Brun’s letter from Mexico City. These actions depict the ease with which the pianist’s apartment gives her the opportunity to fulfill her artistic ambitions and ponder her affection for a man other than her husband. The rooftop apartment can indeed be interpreted as the site of *différence* Mlle Reisz has created for herself and which Edna is inspired to emulate. In the end, it can be argued that Edna, although sometimes conflicted by the example that Mlle Reisz and her rooftop apartment provide, attempts to establish a space for herself between the two extremes which MmeRatignollw and Mlle Reisz provide.

Mlle Reisz’s personality functions as a key factor in Edna’s examination of her femininity. Chopin states that Mlle Reisz, although “offensive to [Edna]”, “reach[es] Edna’s spirit and set[s] it free” (Chopin 75). Hence, a visit to Mlle Reisz causes Edna to see beyond the limitations which society puts on her femininity. Mlle Reisz is thus a model of alternative feminine behaviour which at once inspires and unsettles Edna. In Mlle Reisz’s liberal environment, Edna reveals her intention to acquire a place of her own as well as confesses her socially forbidden feelings for Robert Lebrun.

An important dimension of Edna and Mlle Reisz’s relationship is the latter’s role as confidant. Sharing her intention with Mlle Reisz prompts Edna to reflect on the genuine motive behind her move into a place of her own. Edna claims that she does not want to be bothered with too many servants, wishes to be financially independent from her husband, and intends to pursue her career as an artist. Despite these assertions, Mlle Reisz insists that Edna’s “reason [for moving out] is not yet clear to [her]” (Chopin 76). As critic Marion Muirhead rightly suggests in her article “Articulation and Artistry: A Conversational Analysis of The Awakening,” Mlle Reisz “may be trying to encourage Edna to articulate her feelings more, to think things through with more effort, so as to achieve a more substantial and enduring comprehension” (Muirhead 45). Muirhead’s comment qualifies Mlle Reisz as a woman who teaches Edna to speak, who encourages her “becoming-revisionist” nature to venture out into unspoken spaces and carve them out for herself with her own words. Her insistence makes Edna realize that her reason for moving into the “pigeon-house” “[is] [not] quite clear to herself” either (Chopin 76). Hence, Chopin makes Mlle Reisz’s role as instigator of deeper self-examination very clear. Guided by the latter’s relentless honesty, Edna comes to realize that her decision to move into the pigeon-house is based on her resolution to “never again belong to

another than herself” (Chopin 76). It is a choice she makes based on her determination to be the master of her self and femininity.

At this point in Edna’s revision, the relationship between a new female language and a site of difference is called to mind. Jardine’s “gynesis” and the answer to Irigaray’s “mystery of femininity” are only attainable if the woman is free from the tethers of masculine desire. Edna’s decisions and actions can belong to no one but herself. Her hidden motivation, brought to light by Mlle Reisz, is pivotal to her revisionism. Not only has Edna freed herself, but she has also realized that the continuation of this state is necessary to the further building and survival of the feminine space she is creating. Interestingly, following this particular visit with Mlle Reisz, Edna tells Alcee Arobin that she is “going to pull [herself] together for a while and think – try to determine what character of woman [she] is” (Chopin 79). The decision to be the sole possessor of her being is thus directly linked with a desire to determine exactly what “character of woman” she is. In other words, her decision to move to the pigeon-house is linked with her desire to decide independently what kind of feminine space is truly hers. Her relationship with Mlle Reisz, an unconventional female type, grants her the ability to express the language and female space necessary for a revision of her social roles.

Edna's Extra-Marital Affairs

Another important dimension of Edna's revision of her feminine identity concerns sexual exploration and the forging of her own sexual agency. This calls to mind the French feminists's idea of *jouissance* or the "direct reexperience of the physical pleasures of infancy and of later sexuality" (Jones 248). Edna's sexually-charged relationship with Robert Lebrun foregrounds the later sexual exploration she undertakes with Alcée Arobin. These two men contribute to Edna's *jouissance* which takes place over the course of the novel. The pigeon-house is a site rich in demonstrations of this very agency. The sexual freedom enables Edna to subvert the "sexual *production-reproduction*" relationship Irigaray addresses in *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Irigaray claims such a relationship robs women of sexual agency and relegates them to "a function of the (re)-productive necessities of an intentionally phallic currency" (Irigaray 22). Consequently, what Irigaray terms the "mystery of femininity" remains unsolvable in the context of such sexual inequality. The sexual agency Edna displays in her relationships with Robert Lebrun and Alcée Arobin revises this male-determined sexual relationship. The female is no longer a function of the man's reproductive necessities, but an involved member of the sexual relationship. She no longer exists as a response to the man's needs; instead, she assumes her position as an equal sexual agent and fulfills her own desires upon the relationship.

Edna's affair with Robert is an expression of the former's desire for the passion her marriage does not provide, almost devoid as it is of any physical demonstrations of affection. Critic Donald Ringe refers to the relationship as a "sexual arousal" (Ringe 580) that Edna experiences. Her daydreaming and longing for a relationship with Robert expose Edna's need for an extramarital source of sexual fulfillment. This wish is significant in that it transforms Edna into an active member of the sexual relationship which Irigaray describes. The core of Edna's and Robert's relationship lies in the possibility of its manifestation as well as in its demonstration of Edna's potential to decide what she wants in a sexual relationship.

On the other hand, Edna's relationship with Alcée Arobin constitutes a concrete manifestation of Edna's sexual agency. Awakened to the power of her own sexuality by Robert Lebrun, Edna takes physical action with Arobin in Robert's absence. A key factor in this relationship is the control Edna exercises in it; she no longer exists as the victim of a fruitless infatuation. Arobin is turned into, to play on Irigaray's words, a function of Edna's own necessity for sexual exploration.

Edna's relationship with Robert is a vital step in the development of her sexual agency. Given the fact that it Edna's desire to be with Robert is an ongoing one over the course of the novel, it continually affirms her awareness of what she desires in a sexual relationship. This recognition is the first step towards the sexual agency she develops. Chopin states towards the beginning of the novel that Edna's "marriage to Leonce Pelletier was purely an accident" (18) and that "no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening its dissolution" (19). Edna's passionless marriage is juxtaposed with the relationship she develops with Robert at Grand Isle. In his article entitled "Kate Chopin's The Awakening: A Dissenting Opinion," Hugh J. Dawson also draws attention to the fact that "when life with Leonce proves unsatisfying, [Edna] encourages Robert Lebrun in his flirtation" (Dawson 45). Indeed, their flirtation is pregnant with silent desire, but largely devoid of any physical act. For example, Chopin writes of "the first-felt throbbings of desire" (Chopin 30) Edna feels when Robert stays with her after her symbolic moonlight swim. Immediately following these "throbbings of desire," Edna "watch[es] his figure pass in and out of the strips of moonlight as he walk[s] away" (Chopin 30).

Robert's tendency to exit such passion-filled situations is not uncommon in the novel. His purpose is one that involves the instigation of passion. He awakens a sexual agency in Edna but does not physically act on this awakening. A similar example is when Edna recognizes "the symptoms of early infatuation which she felt incipiently as a child" (Chopin 44). These symptoms appear after the emotionally tumultuous day she and Robert spend at *Chênrière Caminada* and her subsequent learning of Robert's intention to leave for Mexico. Once again, when the possibility of the physical consummation of their desires appears imminent, Robert chooses to leave Edna alone with "a void and wilderness" (Chopin 45) within her. This "wilderness" can be considered as a prelude to "life's delirium" (54) to which Chopin refers shortly after. This state of untamed emotion is imperative to Edna's fulfillment of the American Eve's revisionist qualities. Due to its placing of Edna in an emotional position previously foreign to her and not defined by society, the wilderness Robert leaves Edna in plays a key role in her ability to revise the femininity historically ascribed to her by men.

Moreover, this wilderness remains present upon her return to New Orleans. Edna even states that she "[does] not recall in any special or particular way his personality; it

was his being, his existence which dominated her thought” (Chopin 52). The fact that she has nothing concrete to hold on to or remember about Robert testifies to his role as a character who does not satisfy passion-filled fantasy but rather incites it, thereby providing Edna with the emotional state necessary to perform her role as “becoming-revisionist.” His role changes when Edna is in the city. Her infatuation for him is not nourished by his inconstant presence, but rather by letters that he addresses to their common acquaintances in New Orleans. Edna has access to these letters through her friend Mlle Reisz who, “if [she] happened to have received a letter from Robert during the interval of Edna’s visits, would give her the letter unsolicited” (Chopin 77). Hence, it can be argued that Edna’s romantic passion no longer unfolds in the actual world. Her relationship with Robert loses all touch with reality. Robert is substituted by the letters he sends home to New Orleans. He still instills in her these extramarital feelings of passion, but Edna pursues their deliverance by reading the letters. She consciously chooses to continue nurturing these feelings which, as a married woman, are socially unacceptable. Her choice demonstrates that Edna refuses to adhere to her role as a passive subject in a sexual relationship. The decision to pursue her romanticized relationship regardless of its social impropriety is one of sexual empowerment.

Therefore, the unfolding of their relationship upon Robert’s return to New Orleans enables the analysis of Edna’s developing sexual agency. The final stage of their relationship is defined by a hornation between fantasy and materialization. Robert’s return and their meeting in Mlle Reisz’s apartment signify a shift in their relationship from one built on the romantic exchange of letters to one with an absence of emotional materialization. Chopin describes how Edna had “always fancied him expressing or betraying in some way his love for her” (Chopin 93). This desire does not coincide with them “[sitting] ten feet apart” (Chopin 93) and does not relate to their relationship in the realm of reality. Their subsequent unplanned meetings are similar and lead Edna to think that, although he is physically present, “some way he had seemed nearer to her off there in Mexico” (Chopin 98). This is yet another demonstration of the arguably unrealistic nature of their relationship. In spite of this fact, they do reach the point of physical affection, with Edna initiating this long-awaited and anticlimactic physical contact. Chopin clearly communicates the sexual agency Edna chooses to manifest: she “lean[s] over and kiss[es] him” and then “move[s] away from him” (101). In this passage, Chopin makes Edna capable of acting upon her sexual

desires. She is not the one who is kissed but rather the one who kisses. This initiation of a kiss demonstrates Edna's intention to be the person who defines the unfolding of their relationship, thus exposing her readiness to claim the spaces formerly governed by men. The effectiveness with which she claims a self-defined feminine space in her relationship with Robert empowers her in terms of both gender and sexuality. Also, Edna tells Robert he is foolish to have thought of her as one who can be "set free" (Chopin 102). As is made plain by her initiating of the kiss, Edna wants to establish herself as a woman freed by her own revisionism of the woman's role in a sexual relationship. As part of the American Eve, she does not need to be set free by a masculine figure, but has the agency to do so herself through her revisionist ways and "giv[ing] herself where she chooses" (Chopin 102). In doing so, she is not a passive sexual subject but turns her role into that of sexual agent.

Their relationship returns yet again to the world of romance and imagination later in the novel. In the midst of the consummation of Edna's and Robert's affection, Adele Ratignolle asks Edna to sit at her bedside as she gives birth to yet another child. This interference calls Edna back to the world of social conventions she is determined to escape. It is a sign that the further consummation of Robert and Edna's relationship remains impossible. Notwithstanding, this interference does not bear any weight on how Robert influences Edna's sexual agency. Despite the fact that the physical manifestation of their affection is short-lived, it empowers Edna to claim her sexuality. In the end, their relationship does not revolve around the two of them existing happily together. To a certain extent, Robert's character appears even replaceable. Likewise, Edna's claim that she "loves [him], only [him]; no one but [him]" is highly romanticized. His role could have been played by any man, given that its narrative import is not the actual relationship but rather its role in the development of Edna's own sexual agency.

The control Edna exercises over Alcée Arobin is partly attributable to the ease and familiarity of the environment they associate in. Their relationship begins during their afternoons at the horse races together. Chopin mentions that "the racehorse was a friend and intimate associate of [Edna's] childhood" (71). The association of the racehorse with Edna's childhood gives the setting a sense of comfort and ease. In such a setting, Edna, like her child-like self, is free of all inhibition and social expectations. Such a setting provides the basis for the attitude of dominance she assumes within it. She is even said to "[sit] between her two companions, as one having the authority to

speak” (Chopin 71). This control foreshadows the sexual control Edna exercises over Arobin. It establishes her as the one with the authority not only to speak at the races, but also to make decisions in their relationship. In such a position of power, Edna voices the desire for “something to happen – something, anything; she did not know what” (Chopin 72). Chopin empowers Edna by allowing her to voice her innermost desires: she allows Edna to speak her own feminine language.

Edna’s desire for action results in a succession of decisions that she makes based on what Chopin terms the “animalism which stirred impatiently within her” (75). She decides against inviting her acquaintances to the race with her and Arobin because “for some reason [she] did not want [them]” (Chopin 73). Already, it is clear that Edna is paving the way towards intimacy with her new companion. Albeit her desire, when her objective is reached and Arobin “[stands] close to her” and “[draws] all her awakening sensuousness,” (73), Edna feels the need to regain control of the situation. She bluntly tells Arobin that she “[wishes] him to go” (Chopin 74). It can be argued that Edna refuses to submit to intimacy unless she orchestrates it herself and is unwilling to be lured into situations that are beyond her control. She no longer wishes to be beckoned into new situations, but instead wishes to draw people in herself. Edna’s contrary reaction to Arobin’s proposals is meant to re-establish the roles of suppliant and authority figure in their relationship. Hence, sexual empowerment is only available to Edna if the situation is entirely of her own choosing. Indeed, Arobin’s reply that “[he] [goes] when [she] command[s] [him]” (Chopin 74) is in line with the distribution of power Edna possesses. Edna does not allow her sexual agency to be trampled upon by Arobin’s seductive ways.

This vigilant and defensive attitude is maintained as the relationship progresses. Arobin, aware of his status in the relationship, adopts what Chopin calls “an attitude of good-humored subservience and tacit adoration” (75). He “submit[s] to her moods” and “talk[s] to her in a way that please[s] her” (75). In doing so, Arobin is relegated to what Irigaray refers to as the status of a “function” without agency in the sexual relationship. Arobin is turned into a function of Edna’s desire for sexual exploration.

A final allocation of power occurs on a physical level when Edna takes control of the kiss they share. Although Arobin leans in to kiss her, Edna assumes control of the situation by “clasp[ing] his head” and “holding his lips to hers” (Chopin 80). Edna nullifies Arobin’s endeavour to re-establish himself as the all-powerful male figure in

their relationship. Chopin notes that “it was the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded” (Chopin 80). Jardine and Irigaray would attribute this response to it being a product of her own sexual agency for the first time in her life. Through her sexual relationship with Alcee Arobin, Edna succeeds not only in being made aware of her desire for sexual agency, but also in using this sexual agency as a way of establishing a power hierarchy in the relationship.

In summary, Edna Pontellier performs her role as “becoming-revisionist” through the revision of her social roles as wife and mother. These revisions allow for a materialization of the need for a “new female language” Feminists such as Alice Jardine and Luce Irigaray advocate. Edna, as representative of the American Eve figure, uses this new-found “female language” in her exploration of various modes of femininity as well as female sexual agency. Edna vacillates between these differing modes of femininity Adele Ratignolle and Mlle Reisz embody. In the end, this ambivalence allows her to identify what she deems to be her own mode of femininity. Her new language of female power is also employed in the enactment of her sexual agency. Her relationships with Robert Lebrun and Alcee Arobin provide her with the possibility of experiencing her own *jouissance*, what French feminists term “the direct reexperience of the physical pleasures of infancy and of later sexuality” (Jones 248). Through her decisive role in this re-experiencing of sexuality Edna succeeds in attributing her own female language to it, thus making her a sexually agent woman. Hence, the revision of her roles as wife and mother empower Edna to define herself as a woman and sexual being. These revisions testify to her role in the American Eve as a “becoming-revisionist” figure.

Chapter Two

Jouissance and Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*

Jouissance, “Female Auto-Eroticism”, and the
New Woman

In the following chapter, the concept of *jouissance* briefly touched upon in Chapter One will be revisited more closely. It will be expanded upon in relation to Lady Brett Ashley's character and her revision of female sexuality in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Crucial to this deeper engagement with *jouissance* is a preliminary contextualization of the term and its later re-appropriation by French feminists. Initially translated as "pleasure" or "enjoyment," *jouissance* emerged in Lacanian theory as a result of his deconstruction of Freud's pleasure principle. In his work *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929), Freud defines the pleasure principle as one's "tendency to dissociate from the ego everything which can give rise to pain, to cast it out and create a pure pleasure-ego, in contrast to a threatening outside, not-self" (Freud 3). The way the pleasure principle disallows the reaching of the point of absolute satisfaction constitutes a barrier to Lacan's *jouissance*. As Lacan outlines in his seminar entitled "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis" in 1959 and 1960, *jouissance* can only be obtained by breaking the barrier of Freud's pleasure principle. In Lacan's view, one's movement towards the moment of *jouissance* overpowers the Freudian instinct to avoid potential pain at the cost of strong feelings of pleasure. Hence, *jouissance* is not about prohibition, but rather about transgression. Lacan's editor Jacques-Alain Miller states that "jouissance in itself is a certain destruction, and precisely in this it differs from the pleasure principle, in its sense of a certain moderation and a certain well-being. The very name *jouissance* fundamentally translates what resists the pleasure principle's moderation" (Miller 26). Until the 1970s, *jouissance* was associated solely with the phallus. Therefore, phallic *jouissance* was the only acknowledged form of the concept. Due to the fact that the woman does not possess a phallus, the notion of phallic *jouissance* relegates her to "a position of fantasy" (Rose 137) and the saboteur of male desires.

Lacan expands his work on *jouissance* to explore the woman's condition in his seminar entitled "Encore" (1972-1973). According to Jacqueline Rose, translator of "Encore", "it is Lacan's most direct attempt to take up the question of feminine sexuality" (Rose 137). In this work, Lacan deals with the other half of the heterosexual sexual relationship that is excluded from a phallic *jouissance*. As Rose explains, it is his central claim that "'The Woman' does not exist, in that phallic sexuality assigns her to a position of fantasy" (Rose 137). In a revolutionary approach to feminine sexuality, Lacan states that "if she is excluded by the nature of things, it is precisely in being not all, she has, in relation to what the phallic function designates of *jouissance*, a

supplementary *jouissance*” (Rose 144). In this manner, “Encore” paves the way for French feminists’ reaction and a bilateral debate on feminine sexuality. Once again exposing Freud’s weaknesses, Lacan mentions that he takes up the question of what the woman wants which “Freud expressly left aside” (Rose 151). He reproaches Freud for allowing “a whole field which is hardly negligible” to be left unspoken of (Rose 151). Still, Lacan’s revolutionary acknowledgment of a purely feminine sexuality is at times plagued with a mystic uncertainty. He states that people who “get the idea” and “sense that there must be a *jouissance* which goes beyond” are mystics (Rose 147). Also, he believes in “the *jouissance* of woman in so far as it is something more, on condition that you screen off that something more until I have properly explained it” (Rose 147). Lacan’s inconclusiveness with respect to “supplementary *jouissance*,” invites a feminine viewpoint. A feminine perspective is needed to free the female’s “supplementary *jouissance*” from the grips of phallographic interpretation.

In “This Sex Which is Not One” in her book of the same title, Luce Irigaray tackles Freud’s and Lacan’s positing of the “lacking” female body. She engages with what she calls “female auto-eroticism” and how it is denied in “a civilization that privileges phallographic” (Irigaray 101). Irigaray’s “female auto-eroticism” corresponds to the “something more” Lacan mentions in his unfledged idea of a “supplementary *jouissance*.” According to Irigaray, the woman is not in a state of phallic lack. In fact, through her focus on the labia and other sites of female pleasure, Irigaray demonstrates that “woman has sex organs just about everywhere” (Irigaray 103). This sexualized plurality is used to deconstruct the uni-dimensional phallographic privileged by a patriarchal society. As Diana J. Fuss outlines in her article “Essentially Speaking: Luce Irigaray’s Language of Essence,” “Irigaray’s critique of Lacan centers primarily on his refusal to listen to women speak of their own pleasure” (66). Therefore, women must make their own pleasure known to patriarchal society. “Female auto-eroticism” is only possible if women are capable of acknowledging and speaking of their own pleasure. Irigaray’s wish for female sexuality requires that women speak out on behalf of their own pleasure.

Later in the chapter, Irigaray discusses the necessity of “[analyzing] the various systems of oppression which affect her” if a woman wishes to enjoy her own pleasure (Irigaray 105). She speaks of “a woman’s (re)discovery of herself” and how it entails “the possibility of not sacrificing any of her pleasures to another, of not identifying with

anyone in particular, of never being simply one” (Irigaray 104). In order to free herself from the sexual impotence she is ascribed by a phallic society, a woman must rediscover herself in a way completely independent of men’s desires. Her sexuality must be one which is centered around the fulfillment of her own pleasure. This “(re)discovery” is also tied to Irigaray’s analysis of how “woman is traditionally use-value for man, exchange-value among men” (105). She speaks to a woman’s status as a mere product on the phallic sexual market.¹⁷ Woman is a sexual product designed and exchanged by men. The fact that she is exchanged implies that her sexuality does not belong to herself or even to one man. It belongs to many men and is a product which they are allowed to exchange among themselves. These sexual economics result in what Irigaray calls woman’s “undeveloped condition” which stems from “their submission by/to a culture which oppresses them, uses them, [and] cashes in on them” (Irigaray 105). Necessarily, if a woman is to claim her “female auto-eroticism,” she needs to emancipate herself from the context of a sexual economy ruled by men. A woman’s (re)discovery of herself is contingent on this liberation of her sexuality from its state as a phallic commodity.

The involvement of the woman’s (re)discovery of herself and the liberation of her sexuality from its state as phallic commodity are thus crucial elements in the attainment of “female auto-eroticism”. These two elements are explored through the character of Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*. Published six years after women were granted the right to vote, Hemingway’s novel depicts a female character who represents what it meant to be a woman in this specific period, widely referred to as the modern period, the war-stricken years of the first half of the twentieth century. It is a historical period that Michael Levensen, in his introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, describes as laden with “the loss of faith, the groundlessness of value, the violence of war, and a nameless, faceless anxiety” (Levensen 5).¹⁸ Emblematic of this modern climate is a group of artists, known as The Lost Generation,

¹⁷ In her book *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray dedicates an entire chapter entitled “Women on the Market” to this idea of “exchange of women” (Irigaray 170). Although not dealt with in detail here, this chapter will be revisited in the in-depth discussion of Lady Brett Ashley.

¹⁸ Although emphasis on issues of morality and war are key to this chapter’s discussion of the Lost Generation, Levensen also defines the modern period in terms of “an alienation, an uncanny sense of moral bottomlessness, a political anxiety” (5). He explains that “there was so much to doubt: the foundations of religion and ethics, the integrity of governments and selves, the survival of a redemptive culture” (5). These characteristics all in some way contribute to the development of Hemingway’s characters in *The Sun Also Rises*.

to which Hemingway himself belonged. The Lost Generation was made up of American expatriates who found in Europe what author Martin Halliwell describes as a “sexual and writerly freedom they felt they had been compromised at home with the rise of hostile social trends, including the public disdain for the Armory Show, the rise of Prohibition after the Great War, and the mass arrests stemming from the Red Scare of the 1920s” (Halliwell 111). In this atmosphere of turbulent modernity Ernest Hemingway creates his female character Lady Brett.

Heike Wrenn highlights the effects this changed society had on women at the time. She explains that “as time progressed a gradual change took place and ‘the new woman’ emerged between the two world wars” (Wrenn 10). Consequently, given the previously-described social climate, the modern period involved an ideological shift concerning what it meant to be a woman. It brought about a considerable change in the definition of womanhood and allowed women to venture into the economic and financial spheres of life previously inaccessible. She points out in her article “The Woman in Modernism” that “the turn of the century and its many changes, industrialization in particular, gave a number of women the chance to work outside of the home” (Wrenn 10). Their newly-acquired political freedom “brought with it other rights: to choose whether to marry or remain single, to obtain work positions, the right of sexual expression and so much more” (Wrenn 10). About this “right of sexual expression,” Gail Finney states that the New Woman “pursues self-fulfillment and independence,” “seek[s] to eliminate the double standard that shaped the sexual mores of the time,” and is “in general much more frank about sexuality than the old woman” (Finney 195).¹⁹ These changes in female sexuality in the 1920s define the New Woman

¹⁹ For the purpose of this chapter, Finney’s focus on independence and sexuality is given precedence. On pages 195 and 196 of her book *Women and Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theater*, Finney provides her definition of the New Woman. She states that “one of the primary factors motivating the typical New Woman is rebellion against the ‘old woman,’ described by one member of an 1890s women’s club as ‘bounded on the north by servants, on the south by children, on the east by ailments and on the west by clothes.’ “The New Woman pursues self-fulfillment and independence, often choosing to work for a living. She typically strives for equality in her relationships with men, seeking to eliminate the double standard that shaped the sexual mores of the time, and is in general much more frank about sexuality than the old woman. Dismayed by male attitudes or by the difficulty of combining marriage and a career, she often chooses to remain single; concomitantly, she comes to place increasing value on relationships with other women. Furthermore, the New Woman tends to be well-educated and to read a great deal. Although not necessarily a woman suffragist, she is likely to be more interested in politics than the conventional woman. Finally, the New Woman is physically vigorous and energetic, preferring comfortable clothes to the restrictive garb usually worn by women of the era. She often has short hair, rides a bicycle, and smokes cigarettes—all considered quite daring for women at the turn of the century. Significantly, however, the ultimate fate of the fictional New Woman is frequently hysteria or some other nervous disorder, physical illness, or even death, often by suicide, her unhappy end reflecting the fact that society was simply not yet ready to accommodate her new ways” (195-96).

and are central to Lady Brett Ashley's characterization in *The Sun Also Rises*.

**Lady Brett's "Female Auto-Eroticism" in her
Relationship with Jake Barnes**

This chapter thus intends to deal with how Lady Brett Ashley's sexual freedom and New Woman status form the crux of her role as "becoming-revisionist." They enable her to be analyzed in light of Irigaray's call for a "female auto-eroticism". Lady Brett's "(re)discovery of the female self" allows her to revise her status as a product on the phallic market and conceive of her female sexuality in terms that oppose the phallic society. As a "becoming-revisionist" figure, she uses her own sexual discourse to perform this revision. Through the exploration of her sexual discursive power, Lady Brett contributes to the development of the American Eve's revised feminine space. Despite the fact that "women's physiology and bodily instincts" (Jones 247) should not entirely define this feminine space, it is an element which nevertheless deserves consideration. This chapter intends to demonstrate how, through her embodiment of Irigaray's "female auto-eroticism", Lady Brett Ashley's character can be interpreted as one that shapes the sexual voice of the New Woman in 1920s America. Lady Brett Ashley's character can thus be examined according to Irigaray's call for woman's "(re)discovery of herself."

This rediscovery is closely linked to the definition of *jouissance* appropriated by *écriture féminine* feminists. As Rosalind Jones states, *jouissance* refers to the "direct reexperience of the physical pleasures of infancy and of later sexuality" (Jones 248). This definition is directly in line with Irigaray's "female auto-eroticism". (Re)discovery of the female self involves a woman's decision not to sacrifice any of her pleasures for another. This (re)discovery is also contingent on the woman's unwillingness to identify with anyone in particular and become simply one, thereby losing sight of herself as an individual (Irigaray 104). Lady Brett's unwillingness to sacrifice her own pleasures in the face of another is best portrayed through her relationship with Jake Barnes.

Jake is a victim of a war wound that has rendered him sexually impotent. Despite an emotional connection with Brett, he can never satisfy her sexually. Owing to this fact, Brett insists that the two lead a platonic relationship. Brett's refusal to sacrifice her sexual pleasure for a romantic relationship testifies to her position as a woman who (re)discovers her female sexuality in the modern period. Also, Jake's impotence juxtaposed with Brett's fiercely promiscuous ways suggests an inversion of Freud and

Lacan's "lack" principle.²⁰ The way Brett acts on her phallic potency is a demonstration of her refusal to be, in the words of Irigaray, "just one" (Irigaray 104). She employs the power of her phallic nature so as to ensure that she is not reduced to "being one" with another man. Lady Brett is not forced to renounce any part of her femininity to make herself one with a man.

Brett's insistence on a platonic relationship with Jake permits a sexual (re)discovery of herself. Irigaray's statement that an auto-erotic female does not "[sacrifice] her pleasures to another" (Irigaray 104) is applicable to the relationship Brett engages in with Jake. In her article entitled "Bitch," critic Beverley Gross provides a fitting description of Brett as "a woman who is driven by her sexual drives, desires, and vanity" (Gross 152). This allows her to perform her role as "becoming-revisionist;" overlooking masculine interests is the key to a successful revision of the modern woman's sexual space.

The sexual dimension of Brett's (re)discovery of herself can be seen early in *The Sun Also Rises*. Jake desparingly asks her why they "couldn't just live together" (Hemingway 62) despite the impossibility of a sexual relationship. Brett bluntly answers that she "[doesn't] think so [because] [she] would just *tromper* [him] with everyone" (Hemingway 62). Her affirmation is a demonstration of the prioritization of her own sexuality. The consciousness involved in this self-centered decision is imperative to her role as "becoming-revisionist". The way she places her sexuality above masculine desires allows her to free herself from the bondage of phallogormorphism. Her decision enables her to revise the female sexual space in a way which is independent from masculine desires.

The consciousness with which Brett makes this decision renders her a sexually mature individual. Robert Mattes explores this idea in his essay "Failed Relationships in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*: Defending the New Woman." He describes Brett as "more mature" and "capable of facing the fact that living with Jake is an impossibility"

²⁰ As Derek Hook explains in "Lacan, The Meaning of the Phallus and the Sexed Subject," the lack principle is based on "the identification of a 'lost object' that we are continually trying to 're-find' – that best describes the unending substitutions and replacements of the workings of human desire" (Hook 67). In the case of the female, this 'lost object' is naturally the male phallus which, despite her continual search, she never succeeds in finding. Due to this fact, the woman is considered by Freudian and Lacanian theory to be in a perpetual state of lack. Clearly, this lack is perceived as due to the phallus's absence in her physiological make-up.

(Mattes 15). The foundation of the maturity Mattes mentions is the fact that Brett's decision is entirely her own. In her case, maturity is connected to "becoming-revisionist's" development of a self-defined, independent female sexuality. As a New Woman figure, she assumes her right to the sexual expression Heike Wrenn elucidates in her article. Indeed, Brett explains to Jake that "it's [her] fault" and that "it's the way [she's] made" (62). Brett is a woman who is aware of her sexual needs and the repercussions they have on Jake. Regardless of these negative effects, she refuses to apologize for her own sexuality. Instead, as "becoming-revisionist" she uses her sexual nature as a foundation for a female-defined sexual space. Her sexual awareness and maturity thus contribute positively to the carrying out of her "female auto-eroticism". Ultimately, her nature is one characterized by decisions which permit this development. In turn, this "female auto-eroticism" grants "becoming-revisionist" the opportunity to develop her sexual discursive power.

Brett's (re)discovery of herself and the revision of female sexuality possess another dimension which relates to the control she exercises over her and Jake's restricted physical intimacy. For example, Jake and Brett share a kiss in a taxi (33). However, Brett breaks away from the physical contact and orders Jake not to touch her because she "can't stand it" (Hemingway 33). This is a pertinent example of how she preserves power over her and Jake's occasional demonstrations of affection. She engages in the affection as long as it positively serves her own pleasures. This exertion of sexual power attests to the way she contributes to "becoming-revisionist's" discursive potential. In this case, the term "discursive" does not refer to actual discourse or dialogue, but rather to the quality of giving definition to a particular situation. The term "discursive potential" is thus used to express the potential "becoming-revisionist" has to control a sexual relationship, to define it, and tell the relationship's story independently. Similar to Edna Pontellier's manipulation of Alcée Arobin in *The Awakening* is Lady Brett's mastery of these intimate situations. However, unlike Edna who is uncertainly experimenting in uncharted territory, Lady Brett is thoroughly aware of the power she has over her relationship. Brett's dominance is exerted repeatedly over the course of the novel, notably in Chapter VII of Book I. Brett visits Jake in a presumably drunken state and "[kiss[es] [him] coolly on the forehead" and "stroke[s] [his] head" (Hemingway 61-62). In response to these displays of physical affection, Jake tells Brett that he "love[s] [her] so much" and "turn[s] [his] face away

from [her]” because he “[does] not want to see her” (61-62). Hence, despite Jake’s clearly vulnerable emotional state, Brett’s careless displays of affection do not cease. As “becoming-revisionist,” she upholds her role as discursive master of the situation. She does not let Jake’s tortured emotional state affect the positive aspects she derives from their relationship.

On that note, Brett’s focus on her sexual pleasures is extended to include her exploitation of Jake as a source of romantic comfort. Her self-centered use of Jake’s loyalty is best demonstrated in the Madrid sequence towards the end of the novel. The Madrid sequence is arguably Hemingway’s way of making clear his female character’s “becoming-revisionist” quality. In his article “Pedagogy of *The Sun Also Rises*,” critic Donald A. Daiker discusses how, “in agreeing to meet Brett at her Madrid hotel room, Jake is knowingly—and courageously—exposing himself to another potentially debilitating bedroom scene” (5). By “bedroom scene,” Daiker is clearly referring to a scene such as the one in Chapter VII. Inherent in Daiker’s statement is the presentation of Jake as a willing victim of Brett’s self-serving ways. While the critic’s mention of Jake’s knowledge of the nature of the situation is indisputable, his mention of courage can be called into question. By rushing to Brett’s aid at the end of the novel, Jake arguably validates his role as a victim of Brett’s abuse of his loyalty. His action is not a courageous one, but rather one which is merely expected of him in such a relationship. As an extension of Brett’s sexually self-serving ways, Jake’s action refers to Brett’s role as (re)discoverer of female sexuality who does not sacrifice any personal gain to another, regardless of the pain it may cause him and Brett.

Fundamental to the Madrid sequence is the fact that Jake is torn away from his solitary and idyllic setting in San Sebastian. He goes to San Sebastian to spend some relaxing time alone after the tumultuous events of the fiesta. In line with this idea is the unquestionably pastoral setting of San Sebastian. Jake describes his room “with a balcony that opened out above the roofs of the town” and that “there was a green mountainside” beyond the roofs” (Hemingway 238). San Sebastian is even described as having an “early-morning quality” (237). Hemingway’s descriptions point to the idea of San Sebastian as a place of refuge from Jake’s otherwise hectic and corrupt lifestyle. In Brett’s absence, Jake appears to be able to focus on himself and regain control of his life. Despite his intention to remain in San Sebastian for six days (238), he declares

“San Sebastian all shot to hell” (243) when he receives Brett’s cries for help from Madrid.

Faithful to her character, Brett attempts to regain her discursive power by disturbing Jake’s attempt at inner peace while he is alone in San Sebastian. When he rushes to her aid, Jake is confronted with Brett’s heartache over the bullfighter Pedro Romero. Once again, aware of the pain her affair causes Jake, she subjects him to the details regarding Romero. Brett’s monologue from page 245 to 248 is evidence of her regaining of this discursive power. Brett tells Jake how she “made [Romero] go” (245), how he “wanted to marry [her]” (246), and how they “got along damned well” (247). As critic Scott Donaldson points out, “what [Brett] requires of [Jake] is that he listen to her talk about her affair with Romero, a painful subject” (Donaldson 130). Donaldson rightly speaks of the conversation in terms of a “requirement” which Brett imposes on Jake. As is visible in his curt one-word answers, Jake is reduced to a robotic figure programmed to satisfy Brett’s desire for comfort. Hence, she does not sacrifice her sexual or emotional needs in order to spare Jake the emotional torture. On the contrary, she performs her role as reviser of the female sexual space through her claiming of both physical and narrative power over Jake.

**Lady Brett, the “Lack” Principle, and the Men in
*The Sun Also Rises***

Also linked to Brett's (re)discovery of herself is the inversion of Freud and Lacan's "lack" principle. Brett's assumption of Jake's phallic potency suggests her indisposition to become one with a man. Her promiscuity confers upon her sexuality the dominance of the phallus in Freudian and Lacanian terms. In the chapter entitled "The Significance of the Phallus" from *Écrits*, Lacan explains that "to be the phallus ... the woman rejects an essential part of femininity, namely all its attributes, in the masquerade" (Lacan 583). In his view, a woman's supposed state of lack leaves her no choice but to reject her female physiology in the phallic quest. Brett's behavior can be read as a refusal to participate in the masquerade which is the rejection of her femininity. She herself is the phallic and dominant sexual force in *The Sun Also Rises*. Consequently, she does not need to divorce herself from her female sexuality. On that note, critic Richard Fantina describes Jake as an "example of the negation of the phallus" (Fantina 87) and Lady Brett as "the first of the overtly phallic women with her short haircut and promiscuous ways" (Fantina 103).²¹ As "becoming-revisionist," Brett rewrites feminine sexuality in the wake of this newly-acquired phallic potency. She performs the inversion of the lack principle that grants her the freedom to be one with herself as opposed to being one with another.

Brett's phallic potency and its role in her unwillingness "to be one" are best displayed in her openly promiscuous ways. As opposed to being a female controlled and defined by the phallus, she "dethrones the male phallus" (Fantina 102) in the novel. This can be detected in the bluntness with which Brett's many sexual affairs are spoken. In the early pages of the novel, Jake refers to Robert Cohn's infatuation with Brett and insinuates that she "like[s] to add them up" (Hemingway 30). Brett unashamedly confirms his statement with the rhetorical question, "What if I do?" (30). This shameless avowal of a sexually-charged lifestyle is a significant one given Jake's situation as an impotent man. It can be concluded that his numerous references to her promiscuous nature represent a transference of phallic power from him to her. Lady Brett is endowed with the sexual potency Jake is incapable of executing. The idea of transference is given substance by the masculine frustration that permeates the comments Jake makes about Brett. Critic E.M. Halliday also alludes to Jake's "war-wound impotence [as] a kind of

²¹ In his article "Hemingway's Masochism, Sodomy, and the Dominant Woman", Fantina also mentions that fictional female characters were commonly assigned phallic roles in the years following World War I. This shift functioned as a "reaction to the loss of masculine authority and potency" (Fantina 86) during World War I. As a New Woman of the modern period, Lady Brett arguably assumes this potency lost by society's men.

metaphor for the whole atmosphere of sterility and frustration which is the ambiance of *The Sun Also Rises*" (Halliday 7). For example, when Cohn naively claims that Brett "wouldn't marry anybody she didn't love," Jake bitterly answers that "she's done it twice" (47). Once again, Jake's frustration sheds light on Brett's sexually selfish intention to not "become one". As "an example of the negation of the phallus" (Fantina 103), Jake appears to find in Brett a character capable of actively appropriating his lost phallic potency. This idea of transference and appropriation accounts for Brett's sexual dominance over the novel's men. It serves as a means for Brett to preserve a sexual life solely grounded in her own desires.

The accounts of Brett's phallic nature in the novel are not limited to Jake's narration. As "becoming-revisionist," her promiscuous ways are inflicted upon numerous men so as to engage in a fully-fledged (re)discovery of female sexuality. Namely, her "refusal to be one" is most apparent in her relationship with her fiancé Michael. Unlike Jake, he is sexually potent and capable of satisfying her sexual needs. Nevertheless, Brett's promiscuity extends to their relationship as well. In a presumably monogamous context, Brett does not tame her phallic power. Instead, she demonstrates her defiance in the face of a union which expects her to negate aspects of her femininity. She is intent on remaining the authoritative phallic power. Michael attests to this fact when he states that "Brett's had affairs with men before" and that "she tells [him] all about everything" (147). This statement testifies to the atmosphere of declared defeat Hemingway's men project regarding Brett's phallic strength. Brett's promiscuity testifies to her inversion of the lack principle as well as the roles inherent in a phallic sexual relationship. As "becoming-revisionist," she revises the self-denial which is central to a woman's role in a sexual relationship characterized by the "lack" principle. Brett's phallic potency transforms the female into one who defines sexual standards to which men must submit. Fantina quotes critic Carl P. Eby when he states that as a Hemingway woman, Brett "assumes her phallic attributes at the expense of her man" (Fantina 103). Brett unquestionably chooses not to suppress her sexuality. As a figure who defines female sexuality, she abides by Irigaray's prescription for an unfragmented female self. She does so regardless of the effect it has on men. Her phallic authority allows her to subvert the denial of her femininity by potential patriarchal figures.

Her affair with Pedro Romero provides further insight into the open promiscuity and phallic potency Brett exercises in her relationship with Michael. Given that monogamy is typically expected in a relationship, Michael's character is crucial to how Brett executes her phallic potency. Notably, Brett's relationship with Romero is a sexual escapade that she undertakes in front of him. Once again, Michael openly acknowledges both his position as a cuckold and at the same time the reversal of sexual power in his and Brett's relationship. He states that "Brett's got a bull-fighter" and that "she had a Jew named Cohn, but he turned out badly" (210). Similar to the way she defends her sexual behaviour to Jake (30), Brett tells Michael that "[she's] not going to listen to that sort of rot from [him]" (210). Rather than apologize for her behavior, Brett comes to the defence of her own sexual desires and rights of expression. Not only does she refuse to be one with him, she refuses to let him speak of her in a derogatory way. Although in this case Pedro Romero merely serves as an accessory Brett uses to demonstrate her phallic power, her refusal to be one with Romero is also a good example of how she eludes the oneness Irigay describes. She tells Jake that she sent the bullfighter away because "he wanted to marry [her]" in order to ensure that she "could never go away from him" (246). Brett's behavior validates her open promiscuity as one which constantly safeguards her selfhood. Accordingly, when a sexual escapade threatens to imprison her in a self-effacing union, "becoming-revisionist" ensures she maintains the upper hand and discursive power over her own female self.

In addition to her overt promiscuity, Hemingway's ascription of prostitute-like qualities to Brett also plays a role in her inversion of the lack principle. However, in Brett's case, the term "prostitute" does not function in its traditionally negative light. Her "prostitute-like" character permits her to evade submission to a male-dominated sexual relationship. In her article "Reading Around Jake's Narration: Brett Ashley and *The Sun Also Rises*," Lorie Watkins Fulton argues against Patrick D. Morrow's statement that Brett functions as "the group's prostitute in that most of her relationships sooner or later become based on money" (Watkins Fulton 56). The former contends that "although several men try to purchase her favors, she only accepts things from those who do not want to buy her, or, like Jake, know that they cannot" (Watkins Fulton 67). As an extension to Watkins Fulton's idea of Brett as a woman who cannot be purchased, it can be argued that Brett's status as a prostitute is paradoxically grounded in her refusal to be treated as a transaction. Hemingway's men employ the term

according to its traditionally negative connotation, but Brett's character revises the term to suit her personal needs.²² Thus, "becoming-revisionist's" discursive potential is showcased in this re-writing of society's traditionally negative image of the prostitute.

A prime example of how Hemingway's men label Brett as a prostitute occurs via Jake. After Jake sees Brett off with Romero, a heated quarrel regarding her whereabouts occurs between him and Cohn. Cohn tells Jake that "[he'll] make [Jake] tell [him] where Brett is and calls Jake "a damned pimp" (194). The argument's subtext is that Jake's act of introducing Brett to Romero is equivalent to that of a pimp sending off a prostitute with a client. Notably, Brett is entirely absent from this scene which involves three men who are sexually connected to her in various ways. The situation marks yet another occasion during which Brett not only verbally but also physically avoids defending herself against the men's remarks. Under the guise of a "prostitute," she is free to go off with Romero. Thus, "prostitute" is a male-defined term Brett uses to evade submitting to a single man. This evasion is made possible through the reinvention of the term to suit her needs as a (re)discoverer of female sexuality. Brett turns what they call a "prostitute" into a (re)discoverer of female sexuality who refuses to be one with any of the three men.

As an addition to her idea of the woman's fulfillment of her own pleasure, Irigaray also speaks of the female's liberation from a phallic sexual economy. Necessarily, "female auto-eroticism" cannot exist without the woman's conscious effort to liberate herself from her role as a phallic commodity.²³ She states that "the society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women" (Irigaray 170). As a result, "women lend themselves to alienation in consumption" (Irigaray 172). The consumption and subsequent alienation of the female body are responsible for an erosion of self-defined feminine sexuality. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Lady Brett Ashley's character transforms the female from a commodity at man's disposal to a consumer of

²² As Joyce Outshoorn explains in her article "Debating Prostitution in Parliament: A Feminist Analysis", "the traditional moral discourse of the 1890s and early 1900s had defined prostitution as immoral, drawing on the Bible for its ideas about sin and unchaste women" (Outshoorn 5). She goes on to specify that until the 1980s, "prostitution was still seen as based on the exploitation of female sexuality" (Outshoorn 5). Therefore, the image of the prostitute that "becoming-revisionist" re-evaluates is one of the female as a weak, immoral victim.

²³ In her chapter "Women on the Market", Irigaray ventures into a Marxist explanation of "commodities as the elementary form of capitalist wealth" and how this concept mirrors the female situation in a patriarchal society. For the purpose of this argument, this Marxist angle will be left aside so as to focus more intently on Irigaray's discussion of the female body in terms of the latter's rhetoric concerning the alienation of the female body in male consumption.

man. Her subversion of this sexual economy is best depicted through her relationship with Robert Cohn. Brett's consumption of Cohn alienates him from his own masculinity as well as from his identity. Her consumption constitutes a revision of the female's role in the sexual economy Irigaray describes. Hence, "becoming-revisionist's" discursive power is demonstrated through Brett's redefinition of Robert's character. Her consumption of Cohn on the sexual market results in his ultimate emasculation. Based on her power in this transaction, she carves her own product out of Robert's sexuality and character.

Cohn's sexual emasculation is demonstrated through his "steer-like" character in the novel. The steer as symbol is introduced on page 143 of the novel when, as critic Mahmood Azizi mentions, "Jake and his companions witness a bull gore a steer upon unloading, prompting Cohn to observe 'it's no life being a steer' (Azizi 1). Given the steer's status as a castrated bull, its association with Robert Cohn is telling. Not only is Robert immediately associated with this symbol of castration, but it is clear that Brett, in her role as "becoming-revisionist" figure and New Woman, undeniably plays the role of the bull. Indeed, Azizi mentions in his article "The Bulls and Steers Imagery Association in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*" that "because of their physical prowess and their sexual potency, bulls are capable of ascending to the heights of glory" (Azizi 1). The sexual potency Azizi refers to can arguably be linked with the New Woman's determination "to eliminate the double standard that shaped the sexual mores of the time" (Finney 195). In Brett's case, the eradication of a sexual double standard involves the woman's right to sexually consume the male subject as opposed to being consumed by him. She adopts the role of the bull and relegates the man to a steer-like position. Just as the castrated steers are at the mercy of the bulls in the arena, Robert is at the mercy of Brett's sexual potency.

Robert Cohn's steer-like state is grounded in his inability to understand the changed nature of the New Woman's modern sexuality. As Wrenn's article states, the modern period was one of the gradual emergence of the New Woman whose newly-acquired political freedom brought with it the "right of sexual expression" (Wrenn 10). Similar to their right to "choose whether to marry or remain single" (Wrenn 10), their right of sexual expression allotted women power in terms of the ways in which they exercised their recognized individual sexuality. Cohn's emasculation is a product of his incapacity to deal with Lady Brett as a sexually independent being. Essentially, he

chases after a masculine ideal of female sexuality which the arrival of the New Woman had long since erased. It is this chase which reduces him to the position of helpless and emasculated steer.

Michael points to Cohn's doomed chase when he asks their group of friends if Cohn was "going to follow Brett around like a steer all the time" (146). In his drunken state, Michael goes on to taunt Cohn and questions him about the actual significance of his and Brett's sexual encounter. He says that even if Brett did sleep with him, "she's slept with lots of people better than [him]" (146). Michael's harsh verbal attacks expertly shed light on a code of modern, revolutionized sexuality. It is a sexuality characterized by what Martin Halliwell calls "the expatriate rejection of a particular understanding of America as gendered aggressively male" which "informs their exploration of what Irigaray called 'an ethics of sexual difference'" (Halliwell 113).²⁴ It presents the idea that "ethics can emerge out of the rethinking of sexual difference as mutually complementary, rather than combative, and by reconceiving the parameters and the relevance of 'the masculine' and 'the feminine' as essentialising terms" (Halliwell 118). It is the idea of men and women as mutually complementary that revolutionizes modern sexuality. As Irigaray argues, sexuality is no longer based on what she terms the "dialectic model of master-slave" (Halliwell 118). Modern sexuality "does not try to seize, possess, or reduce [the woman], but leaves [her] subjective, still free" (Halliwell 118). Indeed, it is Robert's and Brett's position as mutually complementary which the former fails to understand.

Todd Onderdonk makes a comment to that effect in his article "Bitched: Feminization, Identity, and the Hemingwayesque in *The Sun Also Rises*". He states that whereas "Cohn is in denial about his loss of agency in [his and Brett's] relationship," Jake "remains acutely aware of the historical reversal represented by Brett's sexual agency" (Onderdonk 66). Onderdonk points out that although Hemingway's other male characters are equally overpowered by Brett's sexual agency, they do not attempt to control or regulate it. The men adapted to the modern world simply acknowledge and allow Brett's sexuality to exist. In the context of *The Sun Also Rises*, it is Robert's

²⁴ In this particular case, Luce Irigaray's "ethics of sexual difference" is being used to demonstrate how this ethics informs the revolutionized sexuality which appeared in the works of modernist writers such as Ernest Hemingway. Irigaray's desire for a "mutually complementary" view of man and woman is highlighted due to its significant bearing on the changes which occurred during the Modern period. Irigaray's 1984 collection *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* as well as pages 117 to 199 of Halliway's *Modernism and Morality* may be consulted for a more extensive perspective on the matter at hand.

attempt to tame Brett's sexuality which results in his emasculation. It represents the opportunity "becoming-revisionist" seizes to clearly revise the roles in this sexual economy and emasculate Robert. His following her around and unwillingness to accept the sexual economy's "historical reversal" Onderdonk speaks of strips him of his sexual potency in the novel.

Brett also denounces Robert's steer-like behavior. This direct confrontation (184-185) between so-called consumer and commodity constitutes the core of the reversal of Irigay's sexual economy. After Robert Cohn tells Brett that he will "stay with [her]" in the place she has decided to sit down, Brett tells him in exasperation "to go off somewhere" and asks him whether [Cohn] can see that "[she] and Jake want to talk" (184). She then tells Jake that she is "so sick of him" (185). In an act of ultimate rejection, Lady Brett demonstrates her revisionist quality as a sexually potent bull by exposing the steer's sexual ineptness. This exposure constitutes the way in which she "kills" what is left of Robert's masculine sexuality by exposing his inability to deal with the New Woman's modern sexuality. However, her exposure of this fact does not end there. She goes on to tell Jake that "[Robert] can't believe it didn't mean anything" (185). The word "it" refers to their sexual encounter in San Sebastian. Once again, Robert's inability to grasp the code of modern sexuality is emphasized. Brett, however, is the defining force of this code. As a New Woman, she fulfils her role as "becoming-revisionist" by revising the previous phallic code of sexuality. She claims her right over her sexuality and how she exercises it. As the other men point out and accept, it is not Brett's sexuality which is faulty but rather Cohn's inability to cope with its overwhelming independence. As Onderdonk says, it is "Cohn [who] cannot see the modern world without delusion (Onderdonk 73). Indeed, it is Cohn whose romanticized and outdated view of female sexuality makes him Brett's prey in a reversed sexual economy.

Robert is faithful to his role as steer until the very end of the novel. Brett's sexual consumption of him is followed not only by a sexual rejection but also by a sexual "betrayal." The word "betrayal" is contentious since Brett's sexuality belongs to no other but herself. Notwithstanding, it is in such a light that Robert views her affair with the bullfighter Pedro Romero. In a final act of denial and continuous emasculation, Robert enters their hotel room and violently attacks Romero. Michael tells the men after the incident that "Cohn wanted to take Brett away [and] make an honest woman of her"

and that it was a “damned touching scene” (205). Hence, Cohn’s last attempt to control Brett’s sexuality results in an actual physical attack which divests him of his last ounce of respectable masculinity in the eyes of his comrades. Ironically, in a modern world, his attempt to make Brett an “honest woman” leads to the loss of his masculinity.

Brett’s redefinition of Robert involves how his infatuation with her socially alienates him from his male friends.²⁵ Mike and Jake are the two main characters who, on separate occasions, turn their back on Robert. In both cases, their bitterness towards him can be attributed to his behaviour which can be attributed to his sexual encounter with Brett. Jake’s first sign of annoyance with Cohn occurs when he does not hand over the telegram Brett sends him. Jake partially attributes his feelings to jealousy, but also says that “[he] [does] [not] really think he ever really hated [Robert] until he had that spell of superiority at lunch” (105). This “spell of superiority” refers to how Robert insinuates that he knows more about Lady Brett’s whereabouts than Jake does. Clearly, Robert’s desire to nurture the idea of a false intimacy between him and Brett causes Jake to develop feelings of hostile hatred towards him. Cohn’s infatuation with Brett reaches the point of out-of-character behavior that leads to the insinuation of false situations. As the catalytic force behind this behavior, “becoming-revisionist” can be interpreted as the root of the hostility between the novel’s men. Over the course of the novel, she transforms Robert into a bold and cocky character very different from the “[painfully] self-consciousness” (12) one Hemingway presents at the beginning. The “becoming-revisionist” figure displays the power to infatuate a man to the point of his ultimate transformation, thus showcasing a complete subversion of the power structure in a patriarchal sexual relationship.

When Robert Cohn returns to the novel’s action for the last time, he cinches his position as a character completely altered by his infatuation with Lady Brett. What critic Donald A. Daiker refers to as “Robert Cohn’s lack of emotional control” is showcased in the scene alluded to earlier in which he confronts Jake about Brett’s whereabouts and refers to her as a prostitute. Robert who, earlier on in the novel, claims that Jake is “really about the best friend [he] [has]” (47) proceeds to punch him and call him a

²⁵ It is important to note that the hostility with which Robert is treated by his male friends is also largely due to his status as a Jewish character. Criticism on the anti-Semitic dimension of the novel constitutes a large part of Robert’s character. However, this chapter seeks not to explore Robert from that angle but rather from the angle of a man whose personality is rendered detestable due to his infatuation with Lady Brett Ashley.

“damned pimp” (194) when Jake refuses to tell him where Brett is. Hence, Cohn’s “lack of emotional control” is brought on by his romantic ideal of Lady Brett and their one-time sexual encounter. He is a product that Brett treats as she wishes. His overly emotional nature is a stereotypical behavior of women according to patriarchal values, thus demonstrating how Lady Brett’s character can be used as an example of Irigaray’s reversed sexual economy.

Brett’s role as becoming-revisionist reverses the idea that “women lend themselves to alienation in consumption” (Irigaray 172). The violence exerted by a once amiable Robert testifies once again to the fact that his character has been alienated by Lady Brett. “Becoming-revisionist’s” remoulding of his character comes full circle in this moment of complete estrangement. Cohn exits the novel’s action altogether after he punches both Jake and Pedro. After Robert “cri[es] and tell[s] [Brett] how much [he] love[s] her and she [tells] him not to be a ruddy ass” (206), Bill tells Brett that Cohn “hired a car” (210) and is gone. Therefore, Brett’s redefinition of Cohn’s masculinity leads to his complete disappearance. His character has no chance of survival in a modern world.

In summary, Lady Brett succeeds in liberating the modern female figure from the grips of a phallic sexual economy. Not only does she emasculate the character of Robert Cohn, but she also makes him her self-defined product through her revision of his character. These respective feats form the crux of Lady Brett’s reversal of Irigaray’s traditional sexual economy. They affirm the self-defined feminine sexuality of the New Woman. Lady Brett’s sexual freedom and New Woman status allow her to be effectively examined in terms of Irigaray’s call for an auto-erotic woman and form the essence of her role as “becoming-revisionist.”

Chapter Three

Daisy Buchanan as a Gift in *The Great Gatsby*

**“Counter-Revisionism”, Mauss’s Theory of the
Gift, and Levi-Strauss’s Theory of Marriage
Alliance**

In the first two chapters of this thesis, Edna Pontellier from *The Awakening* and Lady Brett Ashley from *The Sun Also Rises* have been posited as “becoming-revisionist” characters in that they contribute to the formation of an American Eve character. The American Eve is a “becoming-revisionist” figure due to the fact that she is in the midst of discovering her discursive potential and actively implementing it in the respective social environments she engages in. The crux of the “becoming-revisionist” figure is an active revisionism of patriarchal discourse in the modern literary period. Each female character in my thesis responds to this revisionist need in her respective way. The revision Edna Pontellier commits herself to is that of female social roles in the early modern period. On the other hand, Lady Brett Ashley’s revision of the modern female space is grounded in feminine sexuality.

The first two chapters were thus dedicated to detailed analyses of the ways in which these two women go about constructing the American Eve’s voice through revisions of phallogomorphic principles. However, whereas Edna and Brett enrich the American Eve character, Daisy Buchanan’s character opposes the revisionist work of these two women. She represents a counter-statement to the “becoming-revisionist” character. The essence of her status lies in the idea of the “exchange of women” which has its roots in the theory of the woman as “gift.”

It is Daisy’s position as a gift that explains her status as a counter-statement to “becoming-revisionist”. Her status renders her a passive character. A case can be made for her exertion of a certain amount of control over Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby. However, it is a control devoid of veritable action. The following chapter explores Daisy’s passive control as opposed to Edna’s and Lady Brett’s active influence over their respective environments. Unlike Edna and Lady Brett, she is incapable of self-empowerment and is turned into a site of projection for the dreams of two competing men. The men’s social rivalry makes her a passive hostage to their desires. To use Gayle Rubin’s terms, Daisy is merely a conduit which brings about Tom Buchanan’s and Jay Gatsby’s antagonistic relationship. Unlike the American Eve and “becoming-revisionist” figures, Daisy lets Tom and Gatsby impress their conflict upon her. She allows herself to be written into being as opposed to actively creating a space for herself. In so doing, she acts as a counter-statement to the revisionism Edna and Lady Brett perform in their respective ways. As a “careless” (Fitzgerald 179) person, she does not assume her role in the cautionary tale of the American Eve.

This chapter intends to analyze how Daisy constitutes a counter-statement to the “becoming-revisionist” figure in her respective relationships with Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby. In the eyes of each man, she represents a different kind of social gift attainable through marriage. Likewise, the arguable control she exerts in her respective relationships is of a unique nature; it is a control which is rendered passive because it is dependent on the men’s individual desires. Hence, as Rubin implies in her discussion of women as gifts accompanied by a wide variety of social implications, Daisy is a gift which entails different social implications for both Tom and Gatsby. The following chapter explores the type of social gift she embodies in her relationships, the different forms of passive control she displays, and the fact that her existence is contingent upon the men’s projection of their desires upon her.

French sociologist Marcel Mauss explores the theory of the gift in his essay "An Essay on the Gift: The Form and Reason of Exchange in Archaic Societies," published in 1925. Mauss studies “the organization of contractual law and the system of total economic services operating between the various sections or subgroups that make up so-called primitive societies” (3). He sheds light upon the true nature of these services believed to be purely voluntary, specifying that “almost always these services have taken the form of the gift” (Mauss 4). Once he establishes the gift as the token of exchange between various sections or subgroups of societies, Mauss examines the economic market within societies, which he extends to include “the market as it existed before the institution of traders and before their main invention – money proper” (5). This examination of the non-monetary gift is essential to this chapter’s analysis of Daisy within the conceptual frame of the exchange of women. The focus on marriage is also key to the question of the woman’s status and value in such a system of total economic services devoid of money proper. This chapter intends to expose not only the exchange of non-monetary gifts, but also the woman’s status as a token of exchange within this very system. It is in line with the idea of marriage at the root of the exchange of gifts that this chapter examines Daisy. The chapter intends to argue that she is a non-monetary gift within her respective social system.

In Mauss’s essay, it is clear that the gift need not assume the form of money proper. Mauss’s detailed descriptions of various societies’ different potlatches testify to

this fact.²⁶ Indeed, he refers to potlatches as “none other than the system of gifts exchanged” (Mauss 45). It is interesting to note Mauss’s repeated mention of family and marriage. He speaks of “contracting alliances through wives or blood kinship” (Mauss 17) and “the economic and juridical relationships between the sexes within marriage” (Mauss 39). This focus on the institution of marriage and the contracting of alliances is critical to analyzing how Daisy functions as a vehicle in their formation.

In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Gayle Rubin argues that “[Claude] Lévi-Strauss adds to [Mauss’s] theory of primitive reciprocity the idea that marriages are a most basic form of gift exchange, in which it is women who are the most precious gifts” (43). The concept of women as gifts exchanged through the institution of marriage is articulated in Levi-Strauss’s renowned theory of marriage alliance. As Louis Dumont points out in his book *An Introduction to Two Theories of Social Anthropology: Descent Groups and Marriage Alliance*, Levi-Strauss explores two different theories of kinship in his book. Levi-Strauss deals with the restricted and general theories. Levi-Strauss’s general theory is grounded in the prohibition of incest which he states is “taken to be a protective measure, shielding the species from the disastrous results of consanguineous marriages” (Levi-Strauss 13). The general theory is hence “centered on a structural interpretation of the prohibition of incest” (Dumont 63) and is a negative expression of the law of exchange. This negative expression focuses solely on the preventative idea that it is forbidden for a man to marry his close relatives based on the “protective measure” Levis-Strauss describes. It is not concerned with, as Louis Dumont points out, the “setting up of social ties between families” (Dumont 63) and for this reason, will not be dealt with here. Instead, this chapter deals with the “restricted theory [which] can be designated the theory of marriage alliance” (Dumont 63). According to Levi-Strauss, “marriage rules do not always merely prohibit a kinship circle, but occasionally fix one within which marriage must take place” (Levi-Strauss 45). Therefore, in the case of the restricted theory, a positive yet limited element of choice exists. This theory deals not with the negative rules of what is not allowed, but rather with the *positive rules* regarding the choice of marriage partner.

²⁶ The Canadian Encyclopedia provides a definition of the potlatch as “a highly regulated event [which] validated status, rank, and established claims to names, powers, and privileges” (Canadian Encyclopedia). Potlatches were held to “celebrate initiation, to mourn the dead, or to mark the investiture of chiefs in a continuing series of often competitive exchanges between clans, lineages, and rival groups” (Canadian Encyclopedia).

In Part III of his book, entitled “The Theory of Marriage Alliance,” Dumont provides an outline of how the theory of marriage alliance functions. He describes it as a theory which hinges fundamentally on Levi-Strauss’s idea of the prohibition of incest.²⁷ It “refers only to societies of a certain type, societies which possess *positive rules* relative to the choice of marriage partner from the point of view of kinship” (Dumont 63). He goes on to explain that “we should actually say positive rules of a certain type, since these societies uniformly prescribe or prefer marriage between persons falling into the anthropological category of ‘cross-cousins’” (Dumont 63). What Dumont refers to through “positive rules” is a situation in which a spouse or partner may be freely chosen. This situation is held up in opposition to the “negative” rules which characterize the prohibition of incest. Dumont ensures that he defines these “positive rules” as permitting a choice, albeit one restricted to the category of “cross-cousins.” Without dealing with the biological complexities of cross-cousin marriage, which are irrelevant to this thesis, the latter can be defined as a “preferential union” based on preferred spouses among various groups (Levi-Strauss 119). Cross-cousin marriage is marked by “a discriminatory procedure which it applies to each individual” (Levi-Strauss 119). Fundamentally, the theory of marriage alliance can be viewed as the exchange of women performed with the aim of upholding certain social or class structures within a given society. It points towards the interrelationship between certain families or social groups that clearly see a social advantage in being allied through marriage. The combination of “positive rules” and “negative rules” thus forms an illusion of choice in partners. However, the reality is that unions formed within the framework of the theory of marriage alliance are of a highly-predetermined and strategic nature.

Dumont remarks that the idea of the exchange of women as it is presented in the theory of marriage alliance has “scandalised some” (Dumont 64). In the context of Levi-Strauss’s theory, “women seem to be assimilated to moveable goods pure and simple” (Dumont 64). Levi-Strauss also mentions that although they may have the so-called “privilege” of being “the most precious good,” “women figure among the prestations that actually pass from one group to another” (Dumont 64). Through his deeper look at the woman’s role in such a context of exchange, Dumont highlights the

²⁷ In the case of this chapter, the prohibition of incest will only be discussed insofar as Levi-Strauss “takes it as synthetically defining the essence of kinship” which is that “a man cannot marry his close relatives, his sister, or his daughter; therefore he must abandon them as wives to other women and receive in return his own wife (or wives) from others” (Dumont 63).

objectified state to which the woman is subjected within the theory of marriage alliance. The question of the woman's status or value in Levi-Strauss's theory of marriage alliance is primordial. In light of the fact that the theory of marriage alliance touches upon the issue of the woman as hostage to a patriarchal system, many feminist scholars have grappled with it in the wake of Levi-Strauss's publication of *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*.

Luce Irigaray's chapter "Women on the Market" in *This Sex Which Is Not One* sheds light on the idea of the woman as a commodity. One of Irigaray's points of contention with the exchange of women is the question of why men cannot be exchanged by women. She concludes that women's bodies "provide for the condition making social life and cultural possible" (Irigaray 171). Irigaray constructs her argument around the issue of the woman's physiological nature, an essentialist tendency for which she has often been criticized.²⁸ Irigaray explains that, "as commodities, women are thus two things at once: utilitarian objects and bearers of value" (Irigaray 175). Women are considered useful due to their "physical or natural form" (175). In their initial phase as utilitarian objects, women are defined by their natural body. Originally, the natural body possesses no social value. A woman can only become a bearer of value "when a relationship has been established" (180). Thus, it is only by entering into a relationship with men through exchange that a woman's natural body takes on the form of a "socially valued, exchangeable body" (180). A woman's development into a commodity "lies in the passage from [one state] to the other" (185). Irigaray's argument undoubtedly contributes to the analysis of the woman's social value in such an exchange. However, her rhetoric focuses solely on the female body and loses sight of the potential discussion of the woman's social value in an exchange between men.²⁹

Carole Pateman offers another perspective on the exchange of women. She engages primarily with what she calls "contractarian theory." In the chapter entitled "Feminism and The Marriage Contract" in her monograph *The Sexual Contract* (1988),

²⁸ Examples of such criticism can be found in works such as Christine Fauré's article "The Twilight of the Goddesses, or the Intellectual Crisis of French Feminism" on pages 84-86 and Carolyn Burke's article "Irigaray Through the Looking Glass" on page 302. Both are mentioned in Diana J. Fuss's article "'Essentially Speaking': Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence" on page 63.

²⁹ As mentioned in the first chapter, this thesis deems the *écriture féminine* movement's emphasis on "women's physiology and bodily instincts" as too restrictive. Likewise, this chapter deems this emphasis unsuitable to the analysis of Daisy.

Pateman deals with the woman's fate in terms of the marriage contract. She begins by referring to Sir William Blackstone's assumption that "women both are, and are not, able to enter contracts" (Pateman 156). The woman's apparent positive and negative capabilities evoke the "positive rules" and "negative rules" of the theory of marriage alliance. Similar to the confusion caused by Levi-Strauss's oscillation between choice and obligation, Pateman insists that concentrating on "the defects of the marriage contract as contract [with regards to women] deflects attention from the problems surrounding women's participation in this agreement" (Pateman 156). Instead of participating in this deflection, Pateman engages with a crucial aspect of the marriage contract: the notion of status.

Pateman points out that "feminist legal scholars often follow other legal authorities in arguing that marriage is less a contract than a matter of status" (Pateman 165). She initially defines status according to the "old world of status" in which "men and women had no choice about the social positions they occupied as husbands and wives" (165). In order to provide a modern stance on status, she considers John Stuart Mill's comment in *The Subjection of Women* that the "peculiar character of the modern world [is] that human beings are free to employ their faculties, and such favorable chances as offer, to achieve the lot which may appear to them most desirable" (165). Indeed, Mill also contends that "at present this principle applies only to men" (165). Therefore, a man may achieve his social status by participating in a marriage contract of his choice. This view of the marriage contract can be reformulated as an opportunity reserved for males to marry into a social status of their choosing by means of a legal contract. The woman would thus be viewed as a gift capable of determining and securing a man's social status.

In her article entitled "Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," Rubin takes Pateman's notion of social status a step further by introducing the woman as the "conduit of a relationship." In order to do so, she returns to Levi-Strauss's theory of marriage alliance. She mentions that, for Levi-Strauss, the "gift" and the incest taboo are "a dual articulation [which] adds up to his concept of the exchange of women" (Rubin 42). She aptly states that "if it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner of it" (Rubin 44). Unlike Irigaray, she does not attempt to find a biological answer, but rather focuses on the articulation of the effects this

gender dynamic has on women. Such a conclusion allows Rubin to expand on Irigaray's biological realm into that of social life.³⁰ Likewise, in her expansion on Pateman's discussion of status, Rubin posits the woman as a bearer of social status, which can be transmitted when the woman is transacted as a gift among men. Thus, in Rubin's opinion, the woman is a conduit which leads toward men's obtainment of a desired social status.

Rubin further notes that the exploration of the exchange of women "is attractive in that it places the oppression of women within social systems rather than biology" (45). This perspective allows for a deeper analysis of the woman as a gift in a marriage transaction. The exchange of women extends beyond the mere exchange of female physical bodies. As Rubin explains, it is an exchange of "sexual access, genealogical statuses, lineage names and ancestors, rights, and *people* – men, women, and children – in concrete systems of social relationships" (Rubin 46). In the context of Rubin's analysis, women are transformed from mere gifts of flesh into gifts accompanied by a wide variety of social implications. In light of her analysis, Daisy will be considered as a gift defined by her social value.

³⁰What is meant here by Irigaray's "biological realm" is the essentialism which permeates her feminist rhetoric. Danielle Poe explains Irigaray's biological essentialism as her establishing of a "distinction between the masculine and the feminine based on biological differences" (Poe 112). Irigaray's biological realm can thus be explained as her focus on the male and female biology in order to establish sexual difference. Rubin manages to take what is often criticized as the limited scope of Irigaray's work and apply it to a wider social context.

**Tom Buchanan's Commodification of Daisy's
Wealth and Whiteness**

As the object of desire that both Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby fight over, Daisy is placed at the center of the men's battle for social prestige. In *The Great Gatsby and Modern Times*, Robert Berman points out that the modern society of the 1920s was permeated with "an uneasy sense of the swiftness of social change, and, even more, that it might be unmanageable" (Berman 16). Naturally, in the midst of one of America's largest waves of immigration, much emphasis was placed on American national identity as opposed to those who "[could] not defend their origins" (Berman 19). Tom Buchanan, a member of the "ruling class", and Jay Gatsby, a man who "cannot [seem] to defend his origins" are contenders for the top rung of the social ladder that Daisy represents. Their fight over who is to possess Daisy mirrors the battle to preserve the purity of American national identity. This social atmosphere is one rooted in nativist convictions concerning the Euro-American man's maintaining of the upper hand over the newly-arrived immigrants, who were seen as potential threats to his social dominance. As a Euro-American woman with verifiable American origins, Daisy constitutes the perfect ally in the modern Euro-American man's nativist battle against social change. In a modern society teeming with "upstart half-breed Americans" seeking "to rule the larger American cities" (Berman 20), Daisy is the ultimate symbol of Euro-American power. She is the "king's daughter, the golden girl" who lives "high in a white palace" (Fitzgerald 120). She is emblematic of the American "ruling class" (Berman 20) threatened to be overrun by the "upstart half-breeds" swarming the United States. Given her position, she is capable of elevating one to the top of the American social ladder. This is the value she represents as gift in the context of marriage.

It is fundamental to mention that Tom commodifies both Daisy's wealth and whiteness. This commodification turns Daisy's character into a counter-statement to a "becoming-revisionist" figure. Although her money and whiteness are potential forms of control for Daisy, it is Tom's concrete usage of her wealth and whiteness in order to secure his social status that makes them active aspects of Daisy's character. Hence, Daisy's existence requires the projection of a masculine figure's desire upon her. This dependence on the male figure for discursive possibility contradicts the underlying characteristic of the "becoming-revisionist" figure which is the empowerment of the female through self-defined revisionist discourse. As opposed to the active ways in which Edna Pontellier and Lady Brett Ashley exert control over their environments, Daisy's character lets Tom project his own patriarchal discourse onto her instead of

carving out a self-defined female space. Her relationship with Tom renders her a passive character unable to uphold the active revisionism that the “becoming-revisionist” figure embodies.

In his book *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*, Walter Benn Michaels quotes John Higham who defines nativism as “intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign (i.e. ‘un-American’) connections” (Michaels 2). Nativist attitudes were prominent in the 1920s and “what mattered most in American life was the management of domestic change” (Berman 16). Given the circumstances, the opposition to an ever-growing foreign minority is in line with the “many anxieties” (Berman 16) about the fact that “all the [American man’s] values which he held so dear” and were now being “treated so lightly” (151). Michaels refers to a phenomenon he terms “nativist modernism” (Michaels 3). He claims that “in nativist modernism, identity becomes an ambition as well as a description” (3). Thus, according to Michaels, American identity was no longer a fixed concept but rather a concrete aim or goal to which one aspired. Tom Buchanan exists within this context of nativist modernism. He is a character for whom Euro-American identity is not merely a concept but an ambition. Tom’s position on race conforms to the idea of aspiration, in that he views American identity as an ideal which must be protected “or these other races will have control of things” (Fitzgerald 13). As a white man with verifiable origins, Tom’s ambition regarding race is to uphold authentic American identity as the pillar of modern American society. Daisy’s social value as gift is made clear based on Tom’s position. To recuperate Rubin’s term, Daisy acts as the conduit necessary to Tom’s maintaining of his identity. His and Daisy’s alliance through marriage allows him, as he aptly puts it, to uphold the Euro-American standard of family life and family institutions by means of money and ethnicity (Fitzgerald 130). Thus, Daisy is a social gift characterized by verifiable wealth and indisputable whiteness.

Daisy’s own wealth through heritage accounts in part for her value as a social gift in her marriage to Tom. For him, the question of Euro-American dominance is not purely ethnic; economic dominance is also reserved for the Euro-American man. His acquisition of Daisy is a demonstration of his desire to keep economic dominance an exclusive Euro-American privilege obtained through marriage. Throughout the novel, marriage is presented as an institution which revolves around social class and the organization of wealth among high-class Euro-Americans. For example, narrator Nick

Carraway refutes Tom and Daisy's insinuation that he is engaged to a girl out West by telling Tom and Daisy that "[he's] too poor" (Fitzgerald 19). Mrs. McKee recalls almost making the mistake of marrying a man that was "'way below [her]" and Myrtle Wilson explains that she married her husband because "[she] thought he knew something about breeding, but he wasn't fit to lick [her] shoe" (Fitzgerald 34).³¹ These comments testify to the fact that, in the context of the novel, marriage is a means used to secure one's social class and, consequently, one's financial wealth.

Fitzgerald focuses on Daisy's own wealth and belonging to a socially distinguished family. The first mention of Daisy's girlhood suggests her social rank. Jordan Baker tells Nick Carraway that "the largest of the banners and the largest of the lawns belonged to Daisy Fay's house" and that she was "by far the most popular of all the young girls in Louisville" (Fitzgerald 74). The Fay family's "largest banner" and "largest lawn" unquestionably mirror their social distinction and financial means. It appears fitting that the lawn bears an uncanny resemblance to the Buchanans's own lawn, which the narrator describes earlier. Nick explicitly states that Tom and Daisy's lawn "started at the beach and ran toward the front door for a quarter of a mile" (Fitzgerald 6). Once again, the physical vastness of their property is described so as to convey the extent of their financial means. The novel deliberately demonstrates that, owing to her family's social status, Daisy is a woman fit to carry on this legacy of wealth. She is a social gift moulded by her family's long tradition of wealth and social prestige that Tom deems desirable. The unification of their wealth through marriage involves the preservation of economic dominance as a Euro-American privilege.

Despite it being a potential form of control, the wealth Daisy possesses through her family is not hers to claim. It is important to note that her girlhood wealth is described alongside the "excited young officers from Camp Taylor" who call her all day long and "[demand] the privilege of monopolizing her that night" (Fitzgerald 74). Evidently, Daisy's wealth is not her own but rather destined for a man to appropriate or "monopolize." Thus, unlike Edna and Lady Brett, she is incapable of actively exerting

³¹ Such statements call to mind Carole Pateman's discussion of Mill's words regarding the achievement of a desirable lot through marriage. Pateman's notion of status is undeniably intertwined with these comments concerning breeding and financial status. In the world of nativist modernism, the institution of marriage revolves around the attainment or preservation of social status. Daisy is able to assist Tom in maintaining his social prestige, thus demonstrating her value as a social gift.

the control her wealth potentially symbolizes. A testament to this fact is her abandonment of her own girlhood reveries when she marries “Tom Buchanan with more pomp and circumstance than Louisville ever knew before” (Fitzgerald 75). Their marriage occurs after Daisy’s family effectively prevents her from visiting a soldier of her choice in New York. In addition to her family’s interference, the description of Tom and Daisy’s wedding is strongly tainted by the focus on Tom’s own wealth. He is said to “come down with a hundred people in four private cars” and “[hire] a whole floor of the Seelbach Hotel” (Fitzgerald 75). Indeed, their wedding is a moment in which the commodification of Daisy’s wealth takes on an even more tangible dimension in the novel. Daisy is directly associated with products which form the essence of her commodifiable nature. Before their wedding, Tom gives Daisy a “string of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars” (Fitzgerald 76). Arguably, this showcasing of his wealth is merely a way to brand Daisy as his own and to imprison her in the role of passive wife. The fact that Daisy has an emotional break-down before her wedding but is nonetheless “hooked back into her dress [with] the pearls around her neck” (Fitzgerald 76) re-affirms this reading. Like a puppet, she is “hooked” into the dress and becomes one with the pearl necklace, which holds her captive. Daisy is a valuable commodity Tom adds to his collection. As a commodity exchanged between her family and Tom, she evokes Rubin’s claim that “the total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman, but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners” (Rubin 45). In this case, the exchange is understood as one orchestrated by her family and Tom, thus excluding her from the active decision-making process.

Moreover, Daisy’s social standing as a white woman of marked financial means is also essential to her value as social gift in the context of Tom’s nativist values. In her article “Reading Race in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*”, critic Caroline Brown addresses the idea that “just because a plot [does] not revolve around race [does] not mean that race [is] not there, an active and shaping entity” (Brown). Indeed, Fitzgerald’s dealing with white supremacy is not explicit but rather contingent upon the fact that blackness and other forms of non-whiteness are suppressed at the expense of emphasizing Daisy’s whiteness. Race is indeed “an active and shaping entity” in *The Great Gatsby* seeing as Daisy’s whiteness is shaped by an implicit referral to the non-

whiteness it is held up against. Early on in the novel, Tom discusses the conclusions he has come to based on his readings on white supremacy.³² He insists that “[they] are Nordics” and that if “[they] don’t look out the white race will be utterly submerged” (Fitzgerald 13). His and Daisy’s marriage of ethnic purity is a prime example of such an act of defence. The length to which the novel goes in order to emphasize the indisputable quality of Daisy’s whiteness is noteworthy. Brown also makes the acute observation that *The Great Gatsby* speaks to the issue of race “less through the medium of a sustained black presence than through its notable absence” (Brown). Indeed, the novel contains no “sustained black presence” but is rather permeated with a persistent focus on whiteness which, in its attempt to stamp out the race issue, only makes it more visible. The first time Nick sees Daisy, she and Jordan are “both in white” (Fitzgerald 8) and Daisy insists on telling Nick that she and Jordan passed their “beautiful white girlhood” (Fitzgerald 19) together in Louisville. Jordan also mentions that during their girlhood, Daisy “dressed in white and had a little white roadster” (Fitzgerald 74). Such pointed references to Daisy’s whiteness pervade the novel, transforming her into an emblem of the white race. Not only is she white, but it can also be said that the “pervasive whiteness” (Elmore 429) critic A.E. Elmore associates with Daisy serves to demonstrate that she is the ultimate embodiment of the pure white American woman. This makes her capable of defending the white race against utter submergence. As Elmore mentions in “Color and Cosmos in *The Great Gatsby*,” “the Buchanans represent the rich, old-family wing of white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant America in the era immediately following World War I” (430). In this “world where the carefully guarded borders of old money European Americans are being penetrated and reconfigured by new wealth upstarts with non-Anglo names, murky backgrounds, and endless ambition,” Tom views it as his nativist duty to protect the “old money” Euro- American social class to which he belongs. As mentioned earlier, marriage in *The Great Gatsby* functions as a means of organizing class structures. In the case of Tom and Daisy, this organization of class structures implies the preservation of one’s belonging to a certain

³² The specific book Tom refers to is *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* published in 1920 by Lothrop Stoddard. The novel’s action takes place a mere two years after Stoddard’s publication of his white supremacist text, thus accounting for the rigour with which Tom’s character applies his principals of eugenics and what Stoddard views as the ultimate menace of immigration in the United States. Caroline Brown’s explanation for this rigour is the fact that “Tom’s insecurity emanates from his recognition of the creolization taking place in the United States” (Brown). Like Tom Buchanan, twentieth-century American society was very aware of the shift in American identity, thus explaining the prominence of Stoddard’s rhetoric.

class. Thus, united in marriage, they form the kind of respectable family institution that Tom insists is being threatened by “intermarriage between black and white” (Fitzgerald 130). Daisy’s value as social gift lies in the fact that her whiteness provides him with an ally in the defence of Euro-American ideals.

Similar to her wealth, Daisy’s whiteness is also an attribute which she possesses but does not have active control over. Towards the end of the novel, it dawns on Nick that coupled with her wealth, Daisy’s whiteness earns her a place on a social pedestal (Fitzgerald 120). She exists “safe and proud above the struggles of the poor” (Fitzgerald 150). Hence, like her wealth, Daisy’s whiteness is a product to be protected and cautiously exchanged in Rubin’s “total relationship of exchange”. In such a relationship, her whiteness, like her wealth, becomes a disempowering force through the commodification it undergoes at the hands of Tom. As critic Meredith Goldsmith explains, Daisy’s character “instantiate[s] her whiteness and class position through objects” (Goldsmith 455). Throughout the novel, Daisy’s whiteness is relentlessly conveyed through consumer items such as her white dresses and her white roadster. However, in addition to these objects’ mere marking of her whiteness discussed earlier, they also establish Daisy as yet another white product which can be procured as a social gift.³³ Goldsmith goes on to mention that “Daisy’s commodity aesthetic filters race and class through the conventionally gendered lens of consumerism” (Goldsmith 456). Daisy’s whiteness can therefore be viewed as a consumer product which Tom acquires in order to secure his social prestige. Her whiteness does not invest her with her own agency, but is a product capable of upholding Tom’s social class. This confirms Daisy’s performance of a discourse which is not her own, thus explaining why she cannot add to the revisionist work Edna and Lady Brett perform in their respective environments. She represents a counter-statement to the “becoming-revisionist” figure based on her inability to lead a self-actualized existence. The wealth and whiteness she stands for do not serve her own purpose, but instead fulfil a patriarchal discourse Tom imposes upon her.

³³ On page 13 of this chapter, Daisy’s white dresses and little white roadster are presented as items which serve to mark or underline the purity of her whiteness. In the present discussion of her commodification, they can be interpreted as items of whiteness which Daisy is placed alongside. Her white dresses and white roadster are not mere testaments to her whiteness but also represent a consumer culture which includes Daisy herself as white product who is readily consumed by Tom Buchanan.

**Daisy Buchanan's Voice: The Tool Jay
Gatsby Uses to Create Himself a Fictional Past**

While for Tom Daisy is a social gift which serves to preserve white exceptionalism, Gatsby uses her voice in order to create a romantic ideal of himself.

Since American society of the 1920s embraced the view that “the qualities that constituted the American could not be taught, but were functions instead of birth and breeding” (Michaels 8), the lack of a verifiable past and the “romantic speculation” (Fitzgerald 44) Jay Gatsby’s character inspires were to be avoided at all costs. In his article “Boats Against the Current: Morality and the Myth of Renewal in *The Great Gatsby*,” critic Jeffrey Steinbrink points out that Gatsby “adopts the myth of regeneration as the single sustaining principle of his existence” (Steinbrink 161).³⁴ Gatsby uses Daisy’s voice in order to adopt this “myth of regeneration.” Daisy’s voice functions as a product of her verifiable wealth and whiteness. Gatsby’s appropriation of it reveals the fact that her voice, like the money and whiteness she inherits from her family, does not belong to her. It is an extension of her wealthy, white identity she is expected to perform in order to meet both Tom’s and Gatsby’s needs. Hence, Gatsby co-opts the “magical properties of [Daisy’s] voice” (Person Jr. 254), namely those of wealth and whiteness, over the course of his reinvention of himself. In doing so, he infuses Daisy’s voice with his fictional persona’s story and produces a concrete, physical manifestation of the Euro-American power her voice stands for.

The narration Gatsby assigns to Daisy’s voice is the foundation of his desired conception of himself. Determined to flee the family his “imagination had never really accepted,” (Fitzgerald 98), James Gatz decides to “[invent] just the sort of Jay Gatsby” he feels corresponds to his “Platonic conception of himself” (Fitzgerald 98). The narrative power Gatsby has over Daisy’s voice is alluded to through the sensation it produces for “each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again” (Fitzgerald 9). The allusion to Daisy’s voice as an “arrangement of notes” indicates the manner in which Gatsby shapes her voice to suit his own narrative needs. Daisy does not arrange the “notes” of her own voice. Gatsby arranges them for her and forces a discourse upon her. Her voice is available to be shaped to suit Gatsby’s fictional past. In his article “Herstory and Daisy Buchanan,” Person Jr. claims that “Daisy’s lyric

³⁴ The “myth of regeneration” Steinbrink speaks of can be explained by the American Enlightenment belief that “man is not only politically, socially, and morally perfectible but also that his tendency toward improvement is inevitable” (Horton Edwards 69). This belief is the root of the “myth of regeneration” Steinbrink alludes to. The “myth of regeneration” is thus the conviction that through inevitable self-improvement, regeneration or renewal of one’s self is indeed possible.

energy” is a quality which “attracts Gatsby” (Person Jr. 253). Indeed, it is not simply her lyric energy to which he is attracted, but the power he is capable of exerting over it. Through this “lyric energy” and his “arrangement” of her discourse, he creates his fictional past and future.

Gatsby first makes use of Daisy’s voice in his attempt to disprove the romantic speculation about him. Gatsby tells Nick that he’s “going to tell [him] something about [his] life” because “[he] [doesn’t] want [him] to get the wrong idea of [him] from all the stories [he] [hears]” (Fitzgerald 65). A significant element of his account is his insistence that he “tried very hard to die” in the war, but he “seemed to bear an enchanted life” (Fitzgerald 66). His affirmation demonstrates that Gatsby creates a separate identity for himself by appropriating the incontestable wealth and whiteness characterizing Daisy’s voice. The above quotation seems to allude to two different versions of himself. His former persona James Gatz may have “tried very hard to die,” but his fictional persona whose foundation lies in Daisy’s voice could not be defeated. It is a persona he has grounded in the wealth and whiteness of Daisy’s voice and which therefore enjoys a privileged and enchanted existence at the top of the social ladder. In line with this idea of enchantment, Fitzgerald writes that “the rock of [Gatsby’s] world was founded securely on a fairy’s wing” (Fitzgerald 99). Daisy’s voice is undoubtedly the fairy wing Gatsby exploits in order to sustain his dreams and illusions of social grandeur. Through his exploitation of her voice, Daisy is reduced to a dream-like figure. Indeed, qualities of otherworldliness are associated with Daisy in Nick’s opening descriptions of her. She is said to be “buoyed up [on the couch] as though upon an anchored balloon” and her dress ripples and flutters “as if [she] had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house” (Fitzgerald 8). This image of airiness demonstrates how, as a character whose voice is used to perform the discourse of another, Daisy loses all substance in the real world. Joan S. Korenman’s article “‘Only Her Hairdresser...’: Another Look at Daisy Buchanan” also deals with Daisy in this world of the imaginary by referring to her as “the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, the fair-haired princess of the fairy tales” (Korenman 576). However, it is clear that the fairytale qualities of wealth and whiteness which form her voice are not Daisy’s to make use of; they are rooted in a history of Euro-American patriarchy which Gatsby appropriates in order to create a fictional past devoid of all romantic speculations.

A further demonstration of the control Gatsby exercises over Daisy's voice is provided by Nick's interpretation of Jordan's rhetoric. Jordan explains Gatsby and Daisy's romantic history and emphasizes to Nick that "Gatsby bought [his] house so that Daisy would be just across the bay" (Fitzgerald 78). Nick's subsequent claim that in that moment Gatsby "came alive to [him], delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor" (Fitzgerald 78) is essential. It helps the reader understand Gatsby and Daisy's relationship to one another. Nick's statement makes it conceivable to posit Daisy's voice as the medium Gatsby uses in order to give birth to his persona from the "womb of purposeless splendour" that is his imagination. Through his relationship with Daisy and the control he possesses over her voice, Gatsby's mysterious character finally materializes in Nick's eyes. Hence, Gatsby's appropriation of Daisy's wealth and whiteness makes him an authentic character in the eyes of others. In addition, when contemplating Barbara Hochman's observation that "Jordan's story brings Gatsby to life for Nick, giving 'form' to 'senselessness,'" (Hochman 27) it is also essential to consider Jordan's comment and the nature of the relationship it suggests between Daisy and Gatsby.

Daisy's voice does not serve her self-defined purpose but rather belongs to Gatsby and serves his alone. It is the medium upon which he projects his material dreams. Gatsby's dreams of social prestige substantiate to form his mansion in West Egg, a physical manifestation of Daisy's voice as a site of his projections. It encapsulates the moment in which Gatsby "shows [Daisy] around" (Fitzgerald 89) and presents her with the material product he has constructed out of the "colossal vitality of his illusion," (95) out of the wealth and whiteness of her voice. It is a material world he is unable to preserve power over in Daisy's presence, thus resulting in its transformation into an unworldly product which is no longer within his reach.

Gatsby's loss of power over the substantiation of his illusion also engenders the regressive effect Daisy's presence has on the notion of time. The unworldly quality which Gatsby's mansion takes on in the fifth chapter is pointed out by Magistrale and Dickenson in their article "The Language of Time in *The Great Gatsby*." They make the claim that "[Gatsby's] glittering possessions, indeed his very existence, suddenly appear suspended in time, 'unreal' in Daisy's presence" (Magistrale, Dickenson 122). Indeed, Nick describes Gatsby as one who "stare[s] at his possessions in a dazed way, as though in [Daisy's] actual and astounding presence none of it was any longer real" (Fitzgerald

91). Gatsby's impression that his possessions no longer belong to the real world can be explained by the fact that Daisy's voice is not meant to be confronted with its physical identity. Since her voice does not belong to her, it is meant to function separately from her. What she stands for cannot be sustained when faced with her corporeal existence; it is the illusion of grandeur alone that is permitted to exist. Daisy is an idea which Gatsby had been full of for so long that her physical presence causes the world Gatsby has created to collapse (Fitzgerald 92). This testifies to the fact that, under Gatsby's control, Daisy is not destined to be an independent character but rather one whose qualities of wealth and whiteness are controlled by Gatsby to serve his social advantage.

Moreover, Daisy's physical presence annihilates the power to manipulate history which Gatsby attributes to her voice. When Nick tells Gatsby that he shouldn't "ask too much of Daisy" seeing as one "can't repeat the past," (Fitzgerald 110) Gatsby insists that such a feat is indeed possible. As the narrative force behind Daisy's wealth and whiteness, Gatsby believes that he can indeed manipulate time to modify history if he so desires. Unlike Edna and Lady Brett, Daisy cannot elect the past that her voice redefines. She cannot use her voice to alter time in terms of the history of patriarchal oppression suffered by women. Instead, it is Gatsby's own past which her voice is forced to redefine. Gatsby's need to tamper with time is essential to his persona and is thus a key task that he assigns to Daisy's voice. He makes her voice capable of refashioning his past and gives it the capacity to transcend time and its concrete, tangible implications. For Gatsby, the concrete implications of his past include his questionable lineage and unfortunate belonging to a family of "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people," (98) a historical fact which his persona can overcome through the appropriation of Daisy's voice. However, in her actual presence, the malleable notion of time which Gatsby designs her voice to represent is replaced by an unmoving, stagnant one.

The freezing of time is one example of the time-altering quality Gatsby gives Daisy's voice. This quality is ultimately overridden by her physical presence. Seeing as he is a character who reshapes history in an attempt to create a future, the absence of time makes Gatsby's fictional persona purposeless. The way in which time freezes is conveyed through the image of Nick's malfunctioning mantelpiece clock. The clock is said to "tilt dangerously at the pressure of [Gatsby's] head, whereupon he turn[s] and [catches] it with trembling fingers and set[s] it back into place" (Fitzgerald 86).

Arguably, the mention of the defunct state of the clock infers the already inexistent notion of time in the room. Gatsby's attempt to set it back into place can be seen as his endeavor to redeem his fictional persona's purpose, thereby recovering his fragile existence which is called into question by the absence of time. Nevertheless, Nick specifies that "[he] think[s] [Gatsby, Daisy, and himself] all believed for a moment that [the malfunctioning clock] had smashed in a million pieces on the floor" (Fitzgerald 87). As stated in "The Language of Time in *The Great Gatsby*," "the very realization of his dream, like the 'trembling fingers' that catch the clock, is not secure and cannot be sustained" (Magistrale, Dickenson 123). Gatsby does not manage to recover the time he has so relentlessly attempted to fashion. His dream hinges upon his ascribing of the ability to manipulate time to Daisy's voice. Therefore, Berman's idea of the "double vision" of time no longer holds true. Instead, there is a temporal void in which neither past, present, or future exist. Gatsby's story is one grounded in the revision of time and cannot be carried out in a world in which time is destroyed. His dictating of the past Daisy's voice is expected to rob her of her potential as a "becoming-revisionist" figure. In a similar way, he is robbed of the capacity to redefine his own history in her presence. The shattering of the malfunctioning clock demonstrates the reality that time is gone and irreparable, making Gatsby's persona irretrievable.

Furthermore, the novel also presents Daisy's physical presence as having a rearward effect on time. The scene during which he shows off his house to Daisy is arguably a potential moment of glory and achievement for Gatsby. However, Gatsby is said, "in the reaction, to [run] down like an overwound clock" (Fitzgerald 92). Fitzgerald's words "in the reaction" can be interpreted as meaning "in Daisy's presence" in the world Gatsby has created using her voice or illusion of her character. It is important to note that Gatsby's reaction is neither happy nor proud, but rather impregnated with a feeble feeling of termination.

In his article "Repetition, Race, and Desire in *The Great Gatsby*," Adam Meehan responds to the image of the unwound clock in relation to time in the chapter. He argues that "the image of the overwound clock aptly describes the inevitable failure of the dream to live up to reality [and] brings us back to the 'orgastic future' that has always already eluded us" (Meehan 84). Meehan's analysis displays the regressive effect on time Daisy's presence causes as well as Gatsby's ultimate failure to successfully manipulate time through Daisy's assets of wealth and whiteness. Meehan speaks of the

story's backward movement, of a return to the "orgastic future that year by year recedes before us" (Fitzgerald 180). Correspondingly, the image of Gatsby as an overwound clock is also one which moves backward in time and slowly runs down back to an initial starting point. The freezing of time and its backward movement are both consistent with the process via which Gatsby's world becomes unreal to him. In a world in which time is no longer present or moves backward, the future Gatsby has strived to create through the appropriation of Daisy's voice can no longer exist. The dream he has "thrown himself into" (95) for so long is denied all materialization through Daisy's physical reapparition into a world she does not belong to and annihilation of the voice he designs for her. Just as her presence brings about the freezing of time, it also has a regressive effect on the time Gatsby tries to shape.

Daisy Buchanan as a “Counter-Revisionist”

Figure

Daisy's role as counter-statement to "becoming-revisionist" in her relationship with Gatsby is characterized by the fact that the success of Gatsby's fictional persona ultimately depends on Daisy's existence as an object trapped within the confines of his memory. As if to support Gatsby's claim that it is possible to repeat the past, Fitzgerald uses the sixth chapter to transport the reader back in time to the precise moment at which Gatsby binds Daisy to his memory. Fitzgerald writes that Gatsby knows that "when he kisse[s] this girl," he chooses to "forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath" (Fitzgerald 110). Jay Gatz proceeds to kiss her and "at his lips' touch, she blossom[s] for him like a flower and the incarnation [is] complete" (Fitzgerald 111). Person Jr. rightly notes that "when Gatsby weds his unutterable vision to Daisy's mortal breath, he immediately restricts the scope of her potential meaning" (Person Jr. 254). To expand on Person Jr.'s contention, it is possible to say that Gatsby's appropriation of Daisy's character not only restricts the scope of her potential meaning but erases it altogether. Her fulfilling of masculine expectations ties her to a patriarchal discourse which disallows her existence as a self-defined female. In other words, she plays the role which patriarchal figures such as Tom and Gatsby demand of her. Seeing as social attributes are thrust upon her by men, she is incapable of defining herself on feminine terms. For instance, Daisy loses all active control under the spell of Gatsby's incarnation and exists to serve his social purpose alone. Seen in this light, she is an enchanted object produced out of Gatsby's own social aspirations. The possessive language such as "his unutterable visions" and "she blossom[s] for him" which Fitzgerald uses in these passages undeniably points towards Daisy's function as a site of romantic possibility which Gatsby makes his own, thus divesting her of all potential meaning or active influence in the novel as well as in the American Eve's revisionist tradition.

Furthermore, the twined ideas that he weds his visions to her and that she blossoms for him emphasize the possessor-possessed dynamic of their relationship. Suzanne Del Gizzo claims that "[Daisy] is for Gatsby less a person than an idealized object that will complete and validate his crafted identity" (Del Gizzo 82). Del Gizzo's affirmation exposes Daisy's status as a character who is depersonalized by her inheritance of a patriarchal discourse. Gatsby's idealization and appropriation of her wealthy and white identity do indeed reduce her to an idealized object and sentence her to a passive existence. This passivity is also present in the newspaper clippings that

Gatsby collects in her absence (Fitzgerald 93). Jordan Bacer tells Nick that Gatsby has “read a Chicago paper for years just on the chance of catching a glimpse of Daisy’s name” (Fitzgerald 79). Interestingly, he does not search for Daisy the woman, but her name in a Chicago newspaper. Hence, whether it be in the prison of Gatsby’s memory or in the words of a Chicago newspaper, patriarchy requires of Daisy that she be prevented from taking on an active role in her and Gatsby’s relationship. Therefore, Daisy can only serve as a site of projection for Gatsby’s romantic aspirations.

Daisy’s objectification also occurs through her removal from the novel’s argumentative focus. This focus involves Tom Buchanan’s and Jay Gatsby’s battle for social prestige in twentieth-century America. The two men compete for Daisy in the same way they do for the top rung of America’s social ladder. Daisy, through the men’s commodification and depersonalization of her wealth and whiteness, represents this top social rung. Hence, she is not included in the novel’s argumentative focus but rather objectified and excluded from it. This exclusion is grounded in her ascribed role as social gift or top rung of the social ladder which the male characters expect her to perform. She inherits this discourse from age-old patriarchal views of women which she is expected to uphold. True to Gayle Rubin’s statement, Daisy’s oppression is one which can be placed within a distinct social system.³⁵ The silence she adopts while the two men bicker about her fate is evocative of the submissive effect that the internalized patriarchal discourse has upon her. Near the end of the novel, Tom’s and Gatsby’s polite facades fade and they “[are] out in the open at last” (Fitzgerald 129). In the midst of an argument which revolves around yet excludes Daisy, her character is assigned the role of passive listener for almost an entire page. The fact that she is constantly referred to by Gatsby and Tom in the third person relegates Daisy to the impersonal roles of “she” and “your wife.” This divests her of all agency and “becoming-revisionist” qualities which Edna and Lady Brett possess. Even when Tom does acknowledge her, tells her to sit down, and asks her what has been going on, Gatsby interjects and answers for her (Fitzgerald 131). Once again, he divests Daisy of an opportunity for

³⁵ As Ronald Berman establishes in *The Great Gatsby and Modern Times*, Daisy Buchanan belongs to the rapidly changing social system of the 1920s. This distinct social system is characterized by mass immigration and how this influenced what it meant to be American and how “one’s personal identity would be achieved through self-direction and self-determination” (Berman 16). As the epitome of the WASP American woman, Daisy is a key factor in Tom and Gatsby’s individual attempts at self-determination in an ever-changing world.

independent expression which leaves her voiceless and incapable of taking on the “becoming-revisionist” role.

In her article “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction,” critic Rena Sanderson makes the accurate observation that Fitzgerald often “presents the female characters through a central male consciousness” (Sanderson 154). This is indeed the case with Fitzgerald’s Daisy Buchanan. Whereas Edna and Lady Brett actively battle for freedom from characterization “through a male consciousness,” Daisy falls prey to it. She is a character completely disempowered by her role as social gift which the two men vie for. Even when Daisy is called upon to speak, it is not to speak her mind independently, but to fulfil her duty as upholder of Gatsby’s social dream. It is a dream which, in the heat of his confrontation with Tom, Gatsby slowly realizes is dying. He thus demands of her that she “just tell [Tom] the truth – that [she] never loved him [and] wipe [it] out forever” (Fitzgerald 132). Unable to perform the one active task demanded of her, Daisy is said to “[draw] further and further into herself” as “the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away [and] [struggled] unhappily, despairingly, toward that lost voice across the room” (Fitzgerald 134). The “lost voice across the room” is undeniably Daisy’s which, unable to harbour Gatsby’s illusion successfully, is portrayed as “irrecoverable”. Clearly, Daisy’s voice possesses no other purpose than that of fulfilling of Gatsby’s and Tom’s respective dreams of social prestige. Unlike the “becoming-revisionist” figure, her voice is not hers to use. It does not serve a feminine discourse, but is instead a necessary element of Tom’s and Gatsby’s masculinist battle for social power.

Ultimately, Daisy Buchanan constitutes a counter-statement to the “becoming-revisionist” figure. The execution of her role as social gift in her relationships with Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby illustrates Gayle Rubin’s affirmation that Levi-Strauss’ theory of marriage alliance transforms the woman into a “conduit of a relationship” from which men profit. Her position as social gift results in Daisy’s status as a commodity in her relationship with Tom Buchanan. In the case of her relationship with Gatsby, she is rendered an immobile artifact of his memory in order to serve his romantic purpose. The passive nature her role as social gift accounts for her inability to follow in the footsteps of revisionist characters such as Edna Pontellier and Lady Brett Ashley. This fact explains why she is unable to contribute to the American Eve’s “becoming-revisionist” figure.

Conclusion

This thesis is an attempt to argue for the existence of a female revisionist figure in modern American literature through the analysis of three female characters in representative novels. This figure which I call the “American Eve” challenges R.W.B.Lewis’s concept of the American Adam and his masculinist claim to discursive power found in nineteenth-century American literature. In addition to her revisionist nature, my project also gives the American Eve the power to display the modern woman’s potential for a counter-revisionism, which demonstrates the risks involved in not freeing one’s female voice from the grips of the patriarchal American narrative. Through my project’s enabling of her feminized revision of various modern social spaces, the figure of the American Eve affirms the woman’s discursive power which patriarchal institutions historically suppressed. The American Eve figure is not purely revisionist but is also assigned an element of forewarning concerning the consequences of not affirming one’s self-defined and revisionist female voice.

My project began in defiance of a masculine monopoly over American literary discourse in the nineteenth century. However, although my project’s initial intention was to identify whether a female counterpart to the American Adam existed, her character evolved out of my conscious realization that it was not sufficient for her to simply oppose the American Adam’s masculinist rhetoric. The American Eve’s “becoming-revisionism” evolved out of my awareness that the outright opposition to Lewis’ figure merely places the American Eve in a position of dependence on the American Adam figure. If her existence fulfills the sole purpose of providing a counter example to masculinity, the woman cannot be freed from her age-old association with masculine discourse. The concept of the American Eve figure responds to the necessity to recognize the forging of a female discourse completely independent from masculine influence within the modern literary tradition. The modern female revisionist did not perform the insufficient task of merely countering patriarchal discourse, but instead established her own independent female language which she used to revise various social spaces of the Modernist period.

In the end, my project chose to respond to the American Adam figure by identifying a revised and independent female space in twentieth-century American literature. Nevertheless, it is still a project based on a rejection of patriarchal discourse in modern American criticism. Therefore, my argument’s objective was justified in that it shed light on “the obvious manifestation of turn-of-the-century feminism’s formative

influence on Modernism” (Devonek 212). As is made clear through my consideration of the socio-critical contexts of the three modern novels, the American Eve figure is very much a product of her time. My project thus gives a voice to the empowered female in modern times. This thesis responds to the suffocation the modern woman suffered at the hands of male misogyny and attempts to map her progressive gaining of social power. This social power allowed the woman to flourish without the influence of patriarchal discourse.

My thesis’ conceptualization of an American Eve figure required that I deal with three female characters of Modernist literature. Seeing as the American Eve is a female entity constructed on the basis of the women’s respective contributions to “becoming-revisionist,” it is imperative that they be examined independently. Thus, the crux of my thesis involved analyses of how Edna Pontellier, Lady Brett Ashley, and Daisy Buchanan developed or, in Daisy’s case, failed to develop their own feminine revisionist language. My thesis then demonstrates how Edna Pontellier and Lady Brett Ashley employed this language so as to revise the patriarchal institutions which they confronted in their social environments. The demonstration of this active revisionism in the case of each female character demanded the examination of the precise historical period and social context she belongs to and how these elements affected how the female was defined by her society. This definition of the woman was then considered in terms of how it influenced the specific women’s revisionist contribution to the development of the American Eve figure.

My project examined how *The Awakening*’s Edna Pontellier succeeds in developing her female revisionist language in the midst of her endeavour to revise the social roles of wife and mother. The Cult of True Womanhood and its prevalent influence on the late nineteenth-century society Edna belongs to was discussed as an element of her social environment that is relevant to the social spaces Edna revises. It is also pertinent to the way in which she goes about these revisions, choosing to reject the pious, pure, submissive, and domestic roles of wife and mother. Instead of clinging to the reality that “with [these roles] she was promised happiness and power” by society (Welter 152), she revises these patriarchal models of femininity. In the case of *The Awakening*, my project also depicted how critical it is that Edna marries into the Creole culture and its markedly different ways of dealing with women. Edna was portrayed as a character who, in order to revise the social roles of wife and mother, faces the challenge

of navigating Creole femininity in addition to her own conventional, Kentuckian femininity. The chapter on Edna Pontellier thus outlined how her female revisionist language emerges out of her observation of different modes of Creole femininity as well as sexual exploration with the men in her Creole society. My project succeeded in demonstrating how her revisionist language ultimately frees her from the shackles of wifehood and motherhood historically enforced upon women by patriarchal institutions. It is also made clear that Edna's revisionism does not speak of finality, but rather of beginnings; it opens the door to the possibility of ensuing revisionisms for other modern female characters.

In this project, I argued that Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises* used the basis for revisionism that Edna creates. Lady Brett uses this foundation in order to explore the issue of sexual empowerment and her embodiment of *jouissance* and "female auto-eroticism." My project examines Brett's situation in the context of post-war America and the emergence of the female type known as the New Woman. In a generation in which men were transformed by war and had mixed feelings about women's ever-growing involvement in society's public sphere, the New Woman is crucial to the change in gender roles in the years following World War One. She is more professionally, politically, and sexually assertive than any previous model of femininity. My project depicted how Lady Brett embodies above all her revolutionary sexual freedom. Brett's female revisionist language is forged by her exertion of sexual dominance over a society of men disillusioned and feminized by war. She revises the subordinate sexual space ascribed to women by men by exerting "auto-erotic" female sexual behaviour. In other words, the chapter demonstrated how she seizes "the possibility of not sacrificing any of her pleasures to another, of not identifying with anyone in particular, of never being simply one" (Irigaray 104). In so doing, she creates her own revisionist language of female sexuality. By explaining how this seizing of sexual power is a continuation of the revisionist work Edna Pontellier's initial sexual exploration began, my project made clear the need for a comparative methodology.

This comparative methodology was also used in the case of *The Great Gatsby's* Daisy Buchanan. In the context of this project, Daisy Buchanan was analyzed as a passive social gift and counter-statement to the "becoming-revisionist" figure. In order to do so, it was imperative that she be analyzed alongside Edna Pontellier and Lady Brett Ashley so as to highlight her short-comings as a potential revisionist figure. Thus,

the three women do not form one cohesive American Eve figure but rather represent its two opposing dimensions, that of revisionism and counter-revisionism. Although Daisy also belongs to the New Woman era, this project displays her failure to grasp the revisionist potential inherent to this model of modern femininity. She fails because in the eyes of Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby, she serves as a social gift that can be acquired through marriage. Therefore, any type of control she can be viewed as exerting is rendered passive based on its dependence on masculine desires to be transformed into agency. Daisy's character is written into being by the men in her environment, thus demonstrating that she is unable to contribute any revisionist element to the American Eve figure. As a counter-statement to the American Eve, Daisy serves as a cautionary figure concerning the fate of the modern woman who does not respond to the call for the revision of women's social spaces. She is a critical component of my project in that her character allowed for a complete, balanced, and representative image of the modern woman. She testifies to the fact that although my project's view of the modern woman's revisionist potential was a hopeful one, it is also necessary to exercise prudence and vigilance in the suggestion of a character type such as the American Eve figure. My project employs her character in order to exercise this vigilance and demonstrate how the modern woman's revisionist path was in no way flawless.

In addition to the consideration of each novel's historical context and its effect on the female characters, my theoretical framework permitted me to produce an in-depth portrayal of each woman's revisionist or counter-revisionist nature. Each chapter's argumentation is grounded in its own distinct feminist criticism which helps support the claims I make concerning the female character at hand. In the case of Edna Pontellier, the *écriture féminine* idea of a site of *différence* is applied to her revision of the social roles of wife and mother. The chapter on Lady Brett Ashley uses feminist critic Luce Irigaray's theoretical construction of "female auto-eroticism" to characterize the sexual control Brett has over her environment. Daisy Buchanan's failure to contribute to the American Eve's "becoming-revisionist" nature was explained through Gayle Rubin's feminist interpretation of Marcel Mauss's idea of the woman as social gift. These elements of feminist theory are also accompanied by textual evidence from the novels in order to make my argumentation a founded and academically sound one.

The conclusions which can be drawn from my project are varied. My thesis depicts how the woman in twentieth-century literature is capable of disproving R.W.B

Lewis' claim that the American Adam is the sole American mythical hero who "stands alone" (Lewis 5). Through its analysis of Edna Pontellier and Lady Brett Ashley, my project depicts that the woman is able to "creat[e] language [herself] by naming the elements of the scene about [her]," (Lewis 5). On the other hand, Daisy Buchanan's character is a counter-statement to the American Eve figure's revisionist quality and testifies to the fact that the woman must be wary of not letting her rhetoric be appropriated by patriarchal institutions. Her revisionism must be constantly present in the spaces she carves out for herself. It must pervade every step she takes towards the ownership of her own feminine self. My project also demonstrates the woman's equal ability to play the role of American mythical heroine. This ability is rooted in the revisionism of multiple aspects of womanhood defined by masculine power structures. Edna Pontellier forges her own revisionist voice and space by defining the roles of wife and mother on her own terms. Meanwhile, Lady Brett Ashley uses her female sexuality in order to establish her dominance and gain the upper hand over the men in her environment. These two women are a testament to the fact that although the American Adam might be one man "standing alone," (5) the American Eve is the result of women standing together and making their individual contributions to the "becoming-revisionist" figure. On a more cautionary note, my project ends with the issuing of a warning through the character of Daisy Buchanan. Daisy's status as a social gift serves as an example of the woman's fate if she allows herself to be written into being by men and their patriarchal desires. Hence, this thesis not only exposes the opportunity for successful revisionism and claiming of the modern female space on the part of the American Eve figure, but it also underscores the risk taken by the modern woman who fails to fulfil her revisionist duty as exemplified by Daisy Buchanan.

Hence, my project accomplishes the feat of exposing how three female characters of the modern literary period succeed at or fall short of revising social spheres previously regulated by masculine power structures alone. Through their individual re-appropriation or loss of control over these spaces, the three women collectively forge a "becoming-revisionist" character my project refers to as the American Eve. Regardless of whether they successfully revise their environments or not, the women's common experiences are what come together to form the American Eve figure. This figure can be summarized as the conceptualization of a female figure which is representative of the modern woman's revisionist potential as well as her duty

to remain wary of the ways in which patriarchal traditions attempt to suppress her self-defined female rhetoric.

Through the unearthing of an American Eve character in a selection modern American literature, my project opens the doors of her characteristic revisionism to the female characters of subsequent literary eras. I envision my thesis as providing a critical approach applicable to a particular period of literary history which can be recuperated and expanded upon to meet the evolving needs of feminist criticism. My project allows the woman's revisionist work to be liberating, mainly because it is based on self-defining statements rather than incomplete counter-statements which further imprison the woman in her dependency on masculine rhetoric. This study of the American Eve thus can serve as an example of how one may approach feminist criticism so that the woman is given the opportunity to exist as an independent entity alongside man and not simply against him.

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