Of fathers and sons: generational conflicts and literary lineage--the case of Ernest Hemingway and Ernest Gaines

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OF FATHERS AND SONS:
GENERATIONAL CONFLICTS AND LITERARY LINEAGE—
THE CASE OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY AND ERNEST GAINES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by
Wolfgang Lepschy
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My father, a wise and grave man, gave me serious and excellent counsel against what he foresaw was my design. . . . He ask’d me what reasons more than a meer wandring inclination I had for leaving my father’s house and my native country, where I might be well introduced, and had a prospect of raising my fortunes by application and industry, with a life of ease and pleasure.


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*The fathers may soar  
And the children may know their names.*

Toni Morrison. *Song of Solomon*. 
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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the depiction of the father-son relationship and the generational conflicts in their works, as well as the metaphorical literary father-son relationship between the two authors, this dissertation offers an intertextual reading of the works of Ernest Hemingway and Ernest J. Gaines.

Part One examines Hemingway’s Nick Adams stories that feature the young hero’s growing disillusionment with and eventual rejection of his home and family. Parodying conventional stereotypes about Native American ways of life, Hemingway deconstructs prevailing notions of race by aligning Nick’s father with the wilderness and the Indians. Gaines’s earliest short stories focus on a reunion of the historically-divided African American family. Deconstructing traditional views of gender, Gaines emphasizes the concept of the African American extended and surrogate family as ever-changing.

Part Two shifts the focus from the son to the fathers. Hemingway’s seminal story “Fathers and Sons” presents a cyclical view of time, according to which the son runs the risk of repeating the father’s mistakes. The father’s “sins,” especially his suicide, are not resolved until Robert Jordan sacrifices himself for his friends at the end of For Whom the Bell Tolls and thus becomes a “father” to others. The discussion of Gaines’s two major novels on the perspective of fathers, In My Father's House and A Gathering of Old Men, demonstrates how the generational gap can be bridged.

Part Three analyzes the metaphorical father-son relationship between Hemingway and Gaines. Using Harold Bloom’s anxiety-of-influence theory as a model, and Ivan Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons as the original text both Hemingway and Gaines studied and “misread,” this section compares and contrasts the generational conflicts in
Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* and Gaines’s *Catherine Carmier* and *A Lesson Before Dying*.

The conclusion looks at Hemingway’s and Gaines’s works as instances of life-writing and places the two writers in two different traditions, with Hemingway representing a Western form of autobiography that emphasizes the individual and with Gaines representing an African form of autobiography that stresses the interdependence of individual and group experience.
INTRODUCTION
THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ERNEST HEMINGWAY AND ERNEST GAINES

An intertextual reading of two writers as ostensibly diverse as Ernest Hemingway and Ernest Gaines may seem to be a risky endeavor at first. After all, the two authors differ markedly in their regional, social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The one, Ernest Hemingway, is generally seen as a modernist writer, a member of the “lost generation,” and a representative of the privileged white middle class, whose works have often been criticized as insensitive to racial and gender issues. The other, Ernest Gaines, published the majority of his work during and shortly after the Civil Rights era, grew up in the racially segregated Deep South, and made the social and racial conditions in his native Louisiana the focus of all of his work. Whereas Ernest Hemingway’s style evolved from his time as a journalist at the *Kansas City Star* and later acquired traces of Gertrude Stein’s experiments with language and rhythm as well as Ezra Pound’s imagism, many of Ernest Gaines’s novels and stories can be regarded as descendants of the African American slave narrative tradition and are heavily informed by black folk culture, especially the element of orality.

This study will demonstrate, on the one hand, that there is a profound connection between the two writers, a connection that pertains not only to themes and style but also to a shared world view and the central place the father-son conflict occupies in each author’s oeuvre. On the other hand, I will argue that it is the ultimate differences between the two writers, both in themes and style, that illuminate their works. This study, then, seeks to contribute to a richer understanding of both writers’ works and the different literary traditions their works represent.
To begin, any discussion of influences on the writing career of Ernest Gaines needs to distinguish between literary and non-literary influences. The latter are especially crucial in Gaines’s case, as he was shaped early in his life by the men and women—mostly elderly—in his native Pointe Coupée Parish, as well as by African American folk culture, particularly the tradition of storytelling and music forms like jazz, blues, and spirituals. As a boy on River Lake Plantation, Gaines was frequently called upon to read and write letters for the elderly population. Many times, he recalls, he had to add words and details to get the letters to a reasonable length. In addition to his participation in these early exercises in writing fiction, Gaines was a regular witness to the storytellers and “liars” on the porches in “the quarters” (the community that centered around the former slave quarters in Oscar, Louisiana) and thus developed a keen ear for dialogue, which so distinguishes all of his books.

Gaines was shaped mostly, however, by the moral strength and discipline of his great-aunt Augusteen Jefferson, who was the sister of Gaines’s maternal grandfather. His dedication in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* explains how his great-aunt, who was crippled from birth and “did not walk a day in her life,” never complained and taught him the “importance of standing.” From her Gaines inherited his love for his people and native soil, as well as the discipline and perseverance to continue writing in spite of all odds. As Gaines emphasizes, “[T]he greatest influence on myself as writer and man has been my aunt, Mrs. Augusteen Jefferson” (“Auntie” 121).

As to his literary influences, Gaines has always pointed out that he was not influenced by any African American writers until after he had already formed his own style. No black writers were read in the schools he attended in Louisiana, and few of their
texts were available in the public libraries of California when he moved there in 1948. When he eventually got to read the works of Richard Wright and James Baldwin during his college years, he did not take them as models. As Gaines explains, “I think the black writers are much more interested in content—you know, putting it down like it is—and the style is sort of secondary” (Fitzgerald and Marchant 14). In a writer like Ralph Ellison, who certainly did attach an immense significance to style and form, Gaines missed the “Southern sense of the land being important” (Ingram and Steinberg 41). Since Ellison was from Oklahoma and not from the Deep South, Gaines felt that Ellison’s work did not reflect his own experience. In addition, *Invisible Man*, according to Gaines, is written very differently from any of his own works. His elaboration of this point illustrates an important aspect of his own approach toward writing: “One of the things I’ve always criticized about Ellison’s *Invisible Man* is that Ellison is always the puppeteer. He’s always there. You never lose him. . . . That thing is supposed to take over, and you’re not supposed to sense that writer ever again” (Gaudet and Wooton 30). For Gaines, the character’s voice needs to be distinct from the author’s. This is why he feels that there is “too much thinking going on all the time [in *Invisible Man*].” In his own works, by contrast, Gaines tries to “[l]et the thing flow[,] to [l]et it go” (Gaudet and Wooton 13).

The only African American book that could have influenced Gaines had he read it earlier is Jean Toomer’s *Cane*, which Gaines has called “the Black American novel” (Rickels 47). Gaines considers *Cane* a masterpiece of form and style in its combination of poems, shorts stories, and interchapters. Quite interestingly, it was considerations of form and style that attracted Gaines to Hemingway, and it is possible that Hemingway himself
had read and been influenced by Jean Toomer, as evidenced in Hemingway’s combination of stories and vignettes in the structure of In Our Time.\(^1\)

Because of the unavailability of African American literary voices from the South during Gaines’s formative years as a writer and due to the de-emphasis on craft in much of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, Gaines’s literary influences have to be sought somewhere else. Taken together, the writers and concepts that left a mark on Gaines’s career read like a carefully selected list of European and American classics.

Gaines has always emphasized that he knew what he wanted to write about, that is, his home, his people, and his experiences in rural southern Louisiana, none of which he found portrayed truthfully in any other writings. However, he found familiar portraits of peasant life in some of the Russian writers he had read. As he explains, “When the white writers are writing about the blacks of the fields, they seem to make them caricatures rather than real people, but the Russian writers made their peasants real” (Fitzgerald and Marchant 7). In addition, Gaines identified with the Russian writers’ “sense of soil, of being close to the earth, to the people” (6). In particular, Gaines emphasizes the importance of Ivan Turgenev, both for his “perfectly constructed” novel Fathers and Sons and for the vividness of the hunting scenes in A Sportsman’s Sketches (13). The Russian system of serfdom and sharecropping reminded Gaines of the Southern plantation tradition, and Turgenev’s implicit but strong criticism of Russian society, together with Hemingway’s tone of understatement, provided Gaines with a model for voicing protest in his own writings. Besides Turgenev, Gaines also points to Anton Chekhov’s, Nikolai Gogol’s, and Leo Tolstoy’s stories as having influenced him in their realistic portrayal of serfs, the great country estates, and rural scenes.
Leo Tolstoy and James Joyce also helped Gaines to understand how to write a story that takes place during one day. Having read Tolstoy’s “The Death of Ivan Ilych” as well as Joyce’s “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” and *Ulysses*, Gaines was able to apply the “day thing” to some of his early stories, such as “A Long Day in November,” “The Sky Is Gray,” “Bloodline,” and “Just Like a Tree,” as well as to his later novel *A Gathering of Old Men*. “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” deserves special notice, as this story reminded Gaines of “the barber shop type of thing [where] you get together and everybody talks,” not unlike his experience on the porches in the quarters of his childhood home (Tarshis 76). Joyce also proved instrumental for Gaines in developing the child’s perspective that is featured so prominently in Gaines’s early stories and for providing a model, with *Dubliners*, of how to arrange a collection of stories into a short story cycle, as in *Bloodline*. While Gaines also read other “episodic novels,” such as Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* and William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses*, his enthusiastic response to *Dubliners* in a letter to his friend Gus Blaisdell, written in March 1967, underlines its significance for him: “Just finished reading Joyce’s ‘Dubliners.’ Boy, that’s a good thing. . . . Read all of them. Not just one or two but all of them. It’s a whole if you read them all.”

Next to Hemingway, however, it was certainly William Faulkner who turned out to become one of Gaines’s major literary influences. Just as *Go Down, Moses* might have had an impact on *Bloodline*, so *As I Lay Dying* certainly became the model for narrating a story from multiple points of view, as Gaines did in “Just Like a Tree” and *A Gathering of Old Men*. Moreover, studying Benjy’s section of *The Sound and the Fury*, Gaines found further guidance for developing the child’s perspective. Even more importantly, he
admired Faulkner’s way of capturing the South, “the smell of the trees when the weather is hot or when there’s been a light rain” (Tooker and Hofheins 108). And it was Faulkner’s concept of Yoknapatawpha and its capital of Jefferson that gave Gaines the idea of creating a mythic locale that forms the setting for almost all his works, namely Louisiana’s St. Raphael Parish with Bayonne as its center.4

Above all, however, Gaines admired Faulkner’s “ear for dialect,” his way of capturing language, “both the white and the black” (Rowell 43). Even though Gaines felt that “in certain scenes Faulkner did capture great black characters,” it was Faulkner’s style, rhythm, and the element of orality that impressed him more (Beauford 18). Faulkner was also preoccupied with some of the same themes, including the complexities of change, stasis, and time in the South; the reality of interracial love; and the increasing mechanization and economic exploitation of the land. However, Gaines has always pointed out that he does not share Faulkner’s philosophy: “Faulkner has influenced me, as I think he has influenced most Southern writers. But I’d like to make this clear: Faulkner has influenced me in style only, not in philosophy” (Rowell 43).

What Gaines is alluding to here is the distinction between, on the one hand, traditional African American narrative patterns, what Robert Stepto defines as narratives of ascent and narratives of immersion,5 and, on the other hand, what Craig Hansen Werner calls Faulkner’s “narrative of endurance.” While it is true that Faulkner’s portrayal of black life in Mississippi in such works as *Go Down, Moses, Intruder in the Dust, The Sound and the Fury*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* “helped break down traditional stereotypes and introduce Afro-American folk materials into American modernism,” Werner argues that “Faulkner’s fundamental limitation regarding Afro-American
characters and culture is that he rarely perceives, and never emphasizes, these kinetic narrative patterns. Rather he substitutes a third narrative type—what I call the narrative of endurance—for those of ascent and immersion” (Playing the Changes 29). Although Gaines shares with Faulkner the desire and artistic goal to rewrite, and thereby to reflect more accurately, Southern and American history, Gaines differs from his literary predecessor in that he “demonstrates the masked presence of an ascent in what appears to be an endurance narrative” (35). Thus, for example, when Miss Jane Pittman confronts and walks by Robert Samson at the end of The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, she represents a more active and politically involved figure than Faulkner’s enduring Dilsey. Similarly, Procter Lewis in “Three Men” and Jefferson in A Lesson Before Dying use their jail sentence to actively recreate themselves and to leave a positive legacy for others. Revising Faulkner’s portrait of Lucas Beauchamp’s mere endurance in Intruder in the Dust, Gaines allows both Procter and Jefferson to reach out to the community. Thus, they align themselves with the activism of Martin Luther King, Jr. in their supporting and affirming behavior toward others and in their redefinition of themselves. As Werner summarizes the difference between Gaines’s and Faulkner’s portrayal of the black community:

For [Faulkner] “the past isn’t dead, it isn’t even past.” But for Gaines, the past not only is not past, it is not even merely present. It takes meaning from the future. . . . Without the sense of a history moving toward the future, the black community must resign itself to Egyptian bondage. Sensitive to this threat, Gaines takes an enduring saint and transforms her into an articulate kinswoman demanding that Pharaoh let her people go. This difference in temporal movement—Faulkner moving toward the past, Gaines toward the future—reflects a deep difference of sensibility, involving perception of the past, between Faulkner and most African American-American writers. (40-41)
In spite of this fundamental difference, Faulkner remains an undeniable influence for any black writer in the South.

Besides Faulkner, however, it is certainly Ernest Hemingway who influenced Gaines most during his formative years as a writer. Even though these two writers are markedly different in their origins and lifestyles, it is important to note that Hemingway had an impact on Gaines in both style and themes. Not satisfied with the durable, yet powerless black characters in Faulkner’s works, Gaines admired the courage of Hemingway’s white protagonists and their resilience. In this sense, Herman Beavers argues that Gaines’s “fiction is probably closer in intent to Hemingway than to Faulkner” (144). For instance, Beavers claims that “Jackson Bradley may be a closer relative to Jake Barnes . . . than to any of Faulkner’s tortured scions” (144).6

In this context it is also important to recall what Ralph Ellison said about the importance of Hemingway for him. In “The World and the Jug,” Ellison explains why he regards Richard Wright as a mere “relative,” whereas he sees in Hemingway a literary “ancestor”:

[B]ecause he [Hemingway] knew the difference between politics and art and something of their true relationship for the writer. Because all that he wrote—and this is very important—was imbued with a spirit beyond the tragic with which I could feel at home, for it was very close to the feeling of the blues, which are, perhaps, as close as Americans can come to expressing the spirit of tragedy. (Shadow and Act 140)

Hemingway’s vision, then, his “spirit beyond the tragic,” becomes a source both Ellison and Gaines could appropriate for conveying their own themes. As Gaines himself explains, “Hemingway’s importance to me is a combination of the language and that particular theme of grace under pressure” (Gaudet and Wooton 23).
The often-quoted concept of “grace under pressure” in the face of an unsympathetic society plays an important role in Gaines’s works, as many of his characters are distinguished by a stoicism and defiance that endanger their lives. Yet, Gaines has been clear that such behavior is not modeled exclusively after Hemingway’s characters: “The stoicism in these two characters [i.e., Proctor Lewis in “Three Men” and Marcus Payne in Of Love and Dust] was not because of Hemingway’s influence on me. I was writing these stories during the time when young blacks were standing up against the establishment” (O’Brien 27). It is certainly true that the history of African Americans is a story of survival and defying the odds, and, more often than not, people did survive gracefully. Gaines never grows tired of explaining the importance of such public figures as Joe Louis and Jackie Robinson, whose ground-breaking careers took place against enormous societal pressure and hostility.

But not only did black public figures, whether athletes or political leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., have to endure pressure in their fight against the establishment; the story of survival, of living gracefully under pressure, is best illustrated by the common African American man and woman. This is the connection that Gaines sees between Hemingway’s characters and his own people:

I feel that Hemingway was writing more about blacks than he was, really, about whites when he was using the grace-under-pressure theme. . . . Hemingway usually put his people in a moment where they must have grace under pressure, and I’ve often looked at black life not only as a moment, but more as something constant, everyday. This is what my characters must come through. (Gaudet and Wooton 22)

As in Hemingway’s works, the themes of coming through pressure, of rising up as an individual, and of standing tall against all odds feature prominently in all of Gaines’s
works because, as he explains, “The bull ring, the fight, the war, blacks did this sort of thing all the time, daily” (Tooker and Hofheins 108-09).

The fact that Hemingway wrote about similar themes makes him an important influence: “[N]obody has experienced as much pressure as the black in this country, and nobody has come through more gracefully. I’m afraid I give most of my characters a heavy burden to carry, and then expect them to come through with dignity. This is why I admire Hemingway: he showed me how to write that kind of thing” (Desruisseaux 115). Interestingly enough, Gaines feels that Hemingway’s writing “made me see my own black people” even though Hemingway’s characters are predominantly white, and black characters are rarely given any sympathetic role in Hemingway’s works (Rowell 44).7 Again, Gaines emphasizes the connection to his literary ancestor:

These are the things I tell a young writer he can learn from reading Hemingway’s stories. Hemingway’s characters are white, that’s true, but we can learn how to write about our own black characters by reading what he has to say about his white characters—because . . . the theme that Hemingway uses is more related to our own condition than that of white Americans (Rowell 44).

Specifically, Gaines was impressed by the struggles and heroism displayed by such Hemingway characters as Santiago in The Old Man and the Sea, the boxer Jack Brennan in “Fifty Grand,” and the aged bullfighter Manuel Garcia in “The Undefeated.” Like them, Gaines’s characters may have been defeated physically but never spiritually. Gaines makes it clear, though, that there are subtle differences in the way both authors are handling the theme of “grace under pressure.” For African Americans, circumstances rarely provide an equal opportunity to stand and fight for themselves. What counts is the attempt, the desire to make it, the determination to assert oneself, the question of “[w]hat you do when you have to do the right thing[.] Hemingway’s grace under pressure is doing
it right . . . doing it right but under pressure. Mine is doing it—making an effort to do it even if it’s not as pure as Hemingway would want it to be—you did make the effort to do it” (Saeta and Skinner 242). For Gaines’s characters, and most African Americans in the South, the pressure of living with segregation and discrimination has been a part of their quotidian life. And there comes a moment when it is necessary to refuse to back down. This is the “moment in life when you stand” (242). Gaines’s characters have to demonstrate such a resoluteness in order to prove their humanity and qualify for “manhood,” a term Gaines uses in a non-gendered way. In such moments, the characters need to rise up as individuals, even though the risk is high.

Arguably, the degree of risk and danger involved in these tests is similar for Gaines’s and Hemingway’s protagonists, but I would like to suggest that what eventually distinguishes Hemingway’s theme of “grace under pressure” from Gaines’s themes of “standing” and “manhood” are the circumstances and the long-term significance of the characters’ heroic acts. If Hemingway’s heroes are primarily existentialists who find themselves at odds—sometimes self-imposed—with white middle-class society, Gaines, as an African American growing up in the South, has quite different concerns. For his African American characters, the task is not only to endure and survive with dignity, but also to challenge the status quo and its racist Jim Crow laws. For Hemingway’s hero, pulling through gracefully is more of an aesthetic concept, more of an individual challenge or test of moral character, rather than an urgent necessity or an issue of survival with far-reaching implications. Vital to a healthy mind and spirit, behaving gracefully under pressure is an important and often dangerous exercise for Hemingway’s characters, but not a question of physical necessity even though it may lead to death. By contrast, all
of Gaines’s characters, as Jeffery Folks explains, “face a fundamental and inescapable decision: to choose to be actors within a flawed system and unjust history or to withdraw from it as passive ‘victims’ or onlookers” (267). In either case, the character is part of a larger communal and social system “in which ethical choices are shown to have particular consequences” (Folks 271).

In this context, the metaphor of the bullfight allows for a clarification of this crucial difference between the two writers. Both authors adhere to the belief that, like every bullfighter, man will get gored as part of his initiation into society. The question is how he will come back, defeated and frightened or stronger and poised to face further challenges. This is the question Hemingway examines in his writing. For him, grace is achievable, under all circumstances; however, the slashing test of the horns cannot be avoided. Similarly, Gaines’s heroes cannot avoid being wounded by the racist codes of society. However, they more often find themselves in the bull’s position rather than the matador’s. Like the bull, their moves are basically scripted, i.e., narrowly defined according to Jim Crow laws. Like the bull, the African American in the South has never been given a fair chance at survival. It is this perspective of the bull that Gaines is exploring in his works. If Hemingway’s interest is gauged toward the art of the toreo, the bullfight as an emblem of discipline and moral behavior, Gaines deals with the psychological and emotional dimension of the African American’s daily struggle against discrimination in the ring of a white-dominated society.9

This difference between the two writers’ concepts of grace and dignity may best be illustrated if one compares Santiago’s feat in The Old Man and the Sea and Manuel’s last bullfight in “The Undefeated” with the heroism of Charlie in Gaines’s A Gathering of
Old Men. Santiago has always preserved his dignity and pride, and even though his fishing was unsuccessful for 84 consecutive days, his eyes “were cheerful and undefeated.”\(^{10}\) When he finally hooks the giant marlin, he knows that this is the “one thing . . . [he] was born for” (OMS 40). The ensuing struggle to subdue and outlast the powerful fish is a fight over life and death, for Santiago is resolved to wrestle with the fish until the end: “‘I’ll stay with you until I am dead’” (OMS 52).

The struggle with the marlin is not only a test of prowess and endurance; the struggle gives meaning to Santiago’s life. While he has retained his self-confidence in spite of his recent lack of success and even though he does not feel that he has to prove himself in front of the other fishermen, who look at him sadly as an aged and now unsuccessful fisherman, Santiago does have to prove himself for his own sake: “The thousand times that he had proved it [that is, being a man] meant nothing. Now he was proving it again. Each time was a new time and he never thought about the past when he was doing it” (OMS 66). Santiago’s life is very much at risk during his three-day struggle with a fish weighing 1500 pounds and longer than his skiff. Without fresh water and any other provisions besides the fish he captures, he is in serious danger of losing the battle.

Santiago’s behavior, therefore, is indeed heroic, as he displays fortitude and courage under duress. However, the important point here is that Santiago’s struggle is primarily based on his own concept of dignity and does not have a profound meaning for the larger community he lives in. While it is true that his accomplishment earns him the temporary admiration of the other fishermen, and more importantly, of his disciple and friend Manolin, it is not implied that the result of Santiago’s feat will effect any long-term change in any of their lives. Fittingly, the final image is one of loss and
meaninglessness, as the skeleton of the marlin is surrounded by “empty beer cans and
dead barracudas” (OMS 126). The inconsequentiality of Santiago’s actions is best
illustrated by the ignorant tourist’s remarks, which mistake the marlin’s “great long white
spine” for a shark’s “handsome, beautifully formed tail” (OMS 126-27).

Like Santiago, Manuel Garcia in “The Undefeated” is determined to prove
himself once more and face one more bull. Released from the hospital after his last severe
goring, Manuel is questioned by the wise, old matador Zurito why he doesn’t quit. “I got
to do it,” Manuel responds. “I got to stick with it” (Men Without Women 17-18). As
with Santiago, Manuel’s mature age is a factor in the character’s determination. Whereas
Santiago had run into a streak of bad luck, Manuel was doing fine before he was injured.
Both men need to redeem themselves in their own eyes. Unlike Santiago, however,
Manuel will not survive his fight. The bull he faces proves to be second-rate and too
tenacious for him to get the sword in cleanly. In the end, Manuel kills the bull, but only
after he has been fatally gored.

It is very important to keep in mind here that Manuel insists on killing the bull
cleanly and professionally, by inserting the sword the way bullfighting etiquette
prescribes. He thus willingly risks his life, rather than simply opting to do away with the
bony bull in a less harmful and easier way. In this sense, Manuel can still be considered a
heroic figure who doesn’t take the easy way out and doesn’t give up in his effort to
redeem himself, even though his death also demonstrates that his persistence was not
only heroic but also somewhat ill-considered.

One can certainly argue that both Santiago and Manuel exemplify “grace under
pressure,” but their fights of will and endurance are different from the decision to stand
up and be a man that Charlie makes in *A Gathering of Old Men*. Charlie has spent most of his life running from the injustice encountered by the Boutans: “That’s all I ever done, all my life, was run from people. From black, from white, from nigger, from Cajun, both. All my life. Made me do what they wanted me to do, and ‘bused me if I did it right, and ‘bused me if I did it wrong—all my life. And I took it.”11 It takes Charlie 50 years to follow the example of his *parrain*, Mathu, and to finally resist the abuse by Beau Boutan. What is significant, however, is not that he fights back and kills Beau in self-defense, but that he stops running away afterwards. His return and confession, as well as his willingness to assume responsibility and accept his arrest, indicate the process of maturation he has undergone. As Charlie proudly proclaims, “But they comes a day! They comes a day when a man must be a man. They comes a day!” (*GOM* 189). The decision to stand and act responsibly imbues Charlie with new pride and self-esteem, which manifest themselves both in his insistence on being called Mr. Biggs from now on, rather than merely Charlie, and in his determination to face Luke Will in the fatal shooting. Charlie’s courage to confront Luke’s vigilante mob and die in the process qualifies as heroic, even though—similar to Manuel’s determination in “The Undefeated”—it might also smack of hubris, an over-confidence in his nascent manhood.

Having successfully put an end to his previous life-pattern of entrapment and escapism, Charlie has been transformed from a cowardly figure to a symbol of strength and courage. Even more importantly, Charlie continues to play a significant role beyond his death. And it is at this point that Gaines’s concepts of “standing” and “manhood” differ most clearly from Hemingway’s notion of “grace under pressure.” The community, white and black, is changed after having witnessed Charlie’s transformation. After
Charlie’s confession, Sheriff Mapes recognizes him as an equal, by granting him the social recognition implied in the title “Mister.” After the shooting, all the people present gather around his corpse, and everyone is eager to touch Charlie’s dead body in the hope of receiving the same inspiration as Charlie. As Dirty Red, one of the participants in the gathering, describes the event of Charlie’s death: “I leaned over and touched him, hoping that some of that stuff he had found back there in the swamps might rub off on me. After I touched him, the rest of the men did the same. Then the women, even Candy. Then Glo told her grandchildren they must touch him, too” (GOM 210). The scene is highly evocative of a holy communion, in which Charlie is transformed into a martyr whose legacy will be carried on by others, especially by the children who have witnessed the actions. The fate of Charlie, in the end, recalls Ned Douglass’s death in The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, when likewise everyone in the community touches the dead martyr’s blood.

Charlie’s becoming a source of power and inspiration for the others distinguishes him greatly from Santiago, especially if one considers that the Christian theme of crucifixion also plays a significant role in The Old Man and the Sea. The allusions to Christ in the description of the old fisherman are multiple and obvious. Santiago had been with Manolin, his disciple, for 40 days before he sets out to sea alone to prove himself to the unbelievers in the village and to set a noble example for Manolin. During the struggle with the marlin, Santiago endures his pain stoically, taking “his suffering as it came” (OMS 64). The “deep-creased scars” in his hand and the way he bears the burden of the marlin across his shoulders, settled against the wood of his boat (OMS 10), are just as evocative of Christ’s crucifixion as his final climb up the hill to his shack, when “he fell
and lay for some time with the mast across his shoulder” (OMS 121). Evoking the stations of the cross, Santiago has to rest five times on his way to the shack. When Manolin finds the old man, Santiago is again depicted in a crucified position, sleeping “face down on the newspapers with his arms out straight and the palms of his hands up” (OMS 122). The boy cries but he knows that Santiago has not been defeated; his faith is renewed.

But here the story ends. Santiago has redeemed himself, and Manolin will in all likelihood uphold the old man’s memory after his death, but Santiago’s heroism has no larger effect on the rest of the community. Santiago has nothing to show for his adventure besides the carcass of the marlin surrounded by trash. The fishermen may marvel at the length of the marlin’s skeleton and be impressed by what Santiago went through, but the novella does not imply any larger social message. There are no indications that the fishermen will revise their belittling or indifferent view of Santiago, nor does Hemingway seem to have intended any such optimistic reading. Santiago remains first and foremost an individual, an outsider in the fishing village. For Gaines, on the other hand, the individual’s feat is only important in terms of its impact on the rest of the community. Most of Hemingway’s works seem to celebrate a personal code of values; Gaines’s novels emphasize the inextricable relationship between the individual and the community. Gaines might be able to appreciate Santiago’s endurance and courage, but Santiago’s death will not be inspirational to others—with the possible exception of Manolin—the way Charlie’s death is. In other words, Hemingway’s story ends in the present with the impending death of its protagonist, whereas Gaines’s novel projects a
message into the future with Charlie’s stand, which gives inspiration and new life to the heretofore passive and silent community.

In spite of this crucial difference, Hemingway and Gaines do have in common that they put their heroes under heavy pressure and have them face difficult situations, which the courageous and resilient can turn into victories. Ernest Gaines took over Hemingway's vision of life as a series of fights, of man’s never-ending predicaments and his capacity to overcome, and appropriated it to his own experiences. However, as seen, the process does not stop with the individual assertion of dignity. Gaines goes beyond Hemingway in suggesting that an individual's dignity and pride provide essential strength for the members of the entire community, both black and white, to survive. In the end, the emphasis is on the whole network of community, which allows Gaines to have a more optimistic view toward life and the future than Hemingway.

This study will return to Santiago and Charlie, as both characters occupy a central position in their authors’ lifelong preoccupation with the conflicts between fathers and sons, and with generational conflicts in general. The fictional depiction of the father-son relationship will be the focus of this project, as the parallels and differences in the two writers’ treatment of this theme are indicative of the connection between Hemingway and Gaines. It will further be shown how their eventual differences contribute to a richer understanding of each writer and his oeuvre.

In addition to an analysis of the fathers and sons in the fiction of Hemingway and Gaines, this project will also look at the connection between the two writers as a metaphorical paternal relationship. As seen, Gaines never grows tired of emphasizing Hemingway’s role as literary father to him during his formative years, and it will be
demonstrated how Gaines eventually cut the ties of Hemingway’s influence to find his own distinctive voice. This intertextual study, then, attempts, on the one hand, to chronicle Gaines’s development and progress as a writer and, on the other hand, to reevaluate Hemingway’s own works in the light of Gaines’s. Finally, comparing the two writers will illustrate that the differences in form, style, and themes go hand in hand with the authors’ distinct cultural backgrounds and their place in different literary traditions.

Certainly, the importance of Hemingway as a “literary father” becomes even more understandable if one considers that Hemingway and Gaines share a nearly identical list of other writers they read and admired—Anton Chekhov, Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, Guy de Maupassant, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein. The figure of Hemingway also attracted Gaines in more than a literary sense: “Hemingway is the great technician, and I think I’ve been impressed by his lifestyle and of course his style of writing” (Tarshis 76). In fact, one can easily detect a kindred spirit between Hemingway and Gaines. Bon vivants both, they celebrated outdoor life, took a keen interest in fishing and hunting, valued sports, and shared a somewhat similar view of life as war, that is, as a continual battle to uphold one’s dignity and sanity. What also attracted Gaines is the artistic rendering of Hemingway’s world view, the author’s control over his material, often resulting in a characteristic tone of detachment that stands in such marked contrast to the often violent events. Especially important in this context is their use of understatement, which Gaines links to Hemingway’s sharp ear for dialogue: “In dialogue writing you’ve got to listen, and you’ve got to read, and you’ve got to come to the point as quickly as you possibly can. Hemingway can use the word as well as anybody. When people talk, they always leave out words, they always understate things” (Tooker and Hofheins 104).
Gaines here obviously refers to Hemingway’s famous iceberg theory, according to which “[t]here is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg” (Plimpton 125). As Hemingway continues to explain, “I have tried to eliminate everything unnecessary to conveying experience to the reader so that after he or she has read something it will become a part of his or her experience and seem actually to have happened” (Plimpton 125). This technique of eliminating certain things appealed to Gaines; however, it needs to be pointed out that there is a crucial difference between Hemingway’s iceberg theory and Gaines’s comparable use of sparse language and terse dialogue. For African Americans, strategic use of language and silence, as well as body language and mien, became especially important because their freedom of speech and behavior was restricted by the laws and unwritten social codes of the post-Reconstruction era. Thus, African Americans, especially in the South, were forced to wear a mask, and often had to convey their views in understated and less obvious ways. Gaines’s characters’ most frequently used technique to convey their feelings is the use of body language, especially facial expressions. Gaines’s description of his characters’ eyes and gaze is of paramount importance in all of his works.

The question of style and tone preoccupied Gaines immensely, considering that he was often writing under extreme circumstances during the 1960s when violence and race riots were engulfing San Francisco, sometimes right outside his apartment. In a letter to Gus Blaisdell, dated June 8, 1966, Gaines gives a vivid picture of the situation he found himself in:

It’s been hot as hell in San Francisco, and there’s been race-rioting the last couple of nights. My neighborhood is on curfew . . . and I can’t even go
outside and walk on the street. The whole thing started when a white cop shot and killed a Negro boy running from a stolen car. From that moment all hell broke loose in this town. . . . Right now I can hear police sirens all over the place.

The ongoing Civil Rights demonstrations and the movement’s vocal leaders exerted considerable pressure on African American writers like Gaines. As a primarily realistic writer, Gaines saw himself confronted with the question of how to describe best the stark circumstances of his segregated and racist home state. Unlike his contemporaries in the Black Arts Movement, however, Gaines thought that you did not have to be graphic and overtly dramatic in your descriptions in order to be effective.12 Hemingway’s more allusive and understated style seemed more appropriate to him. After the massacre scene in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, for instance, the two surviving children pragmatically grab the leftovers and march on. There are no cries and tears, and the cruelty and violence of this scene are rendered in a deadpan tone that stands in sharp contrast to the dramatic content. As the author describes this style, “The artist must be like a heart surgeon. He must approach something with sympathy, but with a sort of coldness and work and work until he finds some kind of perfection in his work. You can’t have blood splashing all over the place. Things must be done very cleanly” (Beauford 21).

Another typical example of Gaines’s style can be found in the story “The Sky is Gray.” The eight-year-old James is initiated into the harsh reality of segregation and racism. But rather than having direct confrontations with racists, James learns the lessons through the long hours spent in pain and hunger while walking the cold streets of Bayonne, waiting for the dentist. As Gaines explains, “They can’t have any food or drink or anything ‘uptown.’ They must go back-of-town in order to eat and drink. Now, if I had wanted to hit the nail on the head, I could have put them in a white restaurant and had
them thrown out, but by the fact that they have to go back-of-town, you know that they would not have been accepted uptown” (Gaudet and Wooton 20). Comparing it to jazz, Gaines describes this technique as “playing around the note”: “Instead of playing on the note, he [i.e., Lester Young] plays around the note, or under the note, or above the note, but he still gives you those feelings. . . . I think this is much more effective. And I learned a lot of that from reading Hemingway, and I learned a lot of that from listening to certain jazz musicians” (Gaudet and Wooton 19-20).

Earlier, when James and his mother board the bus to town, the boy laconically comments: “They got seats in the front, but I know I can’t sit there, ‘cause I have to sit back of the sign. Anyhow, I don’t want to sit there if my mama go’n sit back here.” Getting off the bus, James wonders about the flag waving at the courthouse, which “ain’t like the one we got at school. This one here ain’t got but a handful of stars” (BL 93).

Rather than expressing themes outright, as in this case the effects of segregation on a young child, Gaines prefers to imply them in understatements, reinforcing them through the chosen perspective of an innocent child.

As these examples illustrate, Gaines studied Hemingway’s style and then appropriated it to his own themes and background, fusing it with African American culture, and thus developing his own unique voice. The stylistic parallels and differences between the two writers are thus indicative of their respective cultural and philosophical background. Publishing a substantial part of his work between two world wars, Hemingway was writing in the context of existentialism and its feelings of alienation from and disillusionment with an increasingly meaningless world. The concomitant emphasis on the individual’s solitude and his struggle for self-mastery found its expression in an often nihilistic mindset and tone. Gaines initially shared some of
existentialism’s tenets. Because of his personal experience with racism and
discrimination, he, not unlike Richard Wright, could relate to some of the ideas
Hemingway’s characters exhibited. During his progress as a writer, however, Gaines
moved away from an existential approach and reverted to his African American roots.
This artistic development manifests itself especially in his later works, which are imbued
with the blues aesthetic and oral tradition that characterizes many other African
American-authored works.

The initial parallels between Hemingway and Gaines become especially obvious
in their earliest short stories, which emphasize the relationship between a boy and his
father. When asked about Hemingway’s influence, Gaines has always pointed out that it
was “the stories much more than any one particular novel” that had attracted him (Laney
64). Certainly, as will be discussed in chapter one, his earliest stories, such as “The
Turtles” and “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit,” are the most Hemingwayesque. In
addition to these early stories, which have been largely disregarded by critics so far,
Gaines’s short story cycle Bloodline bears remarkable parallels to Hemingway’s
collection In Our Time. Both titles function as organizing concepts with the latter
“creating a visual scrapbook of the age that spawned it” (Reynolds 47), and the former
delineating “the bloodline [that] is the common experience of all the male characters”
(Gaines, “Bloodline in Ink” 527). In both collections, there is a movement from
childhood and loss of innocence to manhood and disillusionment or wandering, with the
concluding stories providing a moment of reconciliation. Interestingly, the titles of the
collections also hint at the key difference between the authors, as Hemingway’s In Our
Time portrays a certain age, that is, it provides a synchronic perspective by depicting a
certain moment in time, whereas Gaines’s Bloodline presents a diachronic perspective by emphasizing the relationship between the generations.

Using the authors’ early stories, part one of this study will focus on the perspective of the sons and the way Gaines and Hemingway use child protagonists to convey the theme of initiation into the harsh realities of life. At such an early stage in his identity formation, the child, always a boy, is especially vulnerable to the outside stimuli of dissonance and conflicts. Both writers emphasize the child’s relationship to his parents, who are either estranged or separated temporarily or permanently. In Hemingway’s stories, the father is often weak or gets humiliated, whereas the mother is usually absent. Likewise, Gaines’s fathers are usually weak and seriously flawed if present; however, in his stories the mother is the strong and guiding parent. Since most of Gaines’s fictional families are one-parent families, the boy is confronted early with difficult choices and has to assume responsibilities he would not have had to assume in a functional, nuclear family. Because of the hardships which result from a parent’s absence and the frequently concomitant poverty, the child protagonists are often forced into a premature awareness of adversity and adulthood.

As a consequence of the harsh realities of African American familial life, in particular the disruption of family life during slavery and the continued economic and social discrimination in its aftermath, Gaines’s fiction emphasizes the importance of the larger community, whose members often function together as a surrogate family. Consequently, the boy often receives communal help in his search for reunion with the lost parent. If reunion is not possible, the boy seeks a re-connection to the community and an awareness of the past in order to forge the necessary intergenerational links. This
orientation toward the collective African American experience and its history is reflected in the oral style of the works, as especially Gaines’s later novels either are narrated from or offer multiple perspectives.

Whereas Gaines stresses the communal African American experience, Hemingway focuses on Nick Adams as an individual and on his individuation process. In Hemingway’s stories, the youthful Nick Adams has to discover himself through rebellion, first against his mother and then against his father. It is an interesting parallel between Gaines and Hemingway that the identity of their respective boy-characters is both formed and complicated by the presence of or conflict with other ethnic groups. All of Hemingway’s stories that feature the young Nick Adams take place in the Michigan woods amidst the presence of “Indians,” that is, Native Americans. As will be shown, there is an inextricable link connecting Nick’s father, Nick, and the Indians. Therefore, Nick’s knowledge of the world and his place therein is tied from the beginning to his relationship with the Indian world, and it is the memory of these childhood experiences that will have a huge impact on his later life, as it impels him to look for places that allow him to recreate his childhood experiences.

The more Nick is estranged from his parents, the more he embraces the natural world of the Michigan woods and its Indian culture. Deconstructing the powerful white father figure in stories like “Indian Camp,” “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” “Now I Lay Me,” and “Ten Indians,” Hemingway depicts the false values and shallowness of the civilized world, which Nick has to reject. Yet, due to his abiding love for his father and the simultaneous rejection of his values, Nick’s feelings remain ambiguous. Since he
associates the father with the vanishing woods and the declining Indian culture, Nick will always be a wanderer, rootless and disconnected.

By comparison, Gaines’s young African American protagonists are often torn out of their protective home and environment to be confronted with racism and discrimination in a white-dominated society. In their attempt to construct a positive identity in the midst of an oppressive environment, they have to learn early the complex task of negotiating the values of home and relative communal stability with the adversities involved in the struggle for sheer survival in the dangerous world outside.

The embrace of home and family, both nuclear and extended, in Gaines’s world and the severing of all ties in Hemingway’s world have a profound impact on the authors’ other themes, especially on the importance of place. As a consequence of their emphasis on reunion and connectedness, all of Gaines’s works feature characters who have to strive for rootedness in a place as part of their search for identity and freedom. Whereas all of Gaines’s works are located in his native Louisiana, Hemingway’s fictional and non-fictional creations reveal a frantic search for a meaningful place. Hemingway’s protagonists typically suffer from a restlessness and a lack of stability that could be counterbalanced by a rooted sense of place. From Upper Michigan’s woods and lakes to Europe’s streams and mountains and the ocean between Key West and Cuba, from Spain’s bullrings to the streets and cafés of Paris and the African plains, Hemingway often uses places in a proprietary sense, as a testing ground for a “white male’s drama of individuation,” as one critic has argued (Moddelmog, “Re-Placing Africa” 127). What is left out, quite obviously, is Hemingway’s home in Oak Park, which never appears directly in his major fiction or essays. The struggle of Hemingway’s characters thus
takes place on a larger geographical scale than the struggle of Gaines’s characters, but both Hemingway and Gaines focus on place as a potential healer that can fill the spiritual void that results from the repudiation of home and family.

The connection between the rejection of home and the feeling of restlessness, on the one hand, and the embrace of home and the sense of rootedness, on the other hand, may be a point that is all too obvious. Reaching out to others and forming bonds goes hand in hand with committing oneself to a place. Once rooted in a place, one becomes also connected to the generations who have lived in that place. Conversely, “to be lost,” as in “lost generation,” “is, of course, a geographical condition,” as Deborah Tall astutely remarks (338). Physical and spiritual displacement often follow each other. As Tall summarizes the quandary of Hemingway’s characters, Hemingway “epitomizes the twentieth-century archetype of the uneasy, ‘lost’ individual whose identity is crafted in isolation rather than communally enacted. The idea of making a home and attaching oneself to a place, with its inevitable limitations and mundane responsibilities, has no draw” (343). If Gaines is driven by “‘this Louisiana thing’” (Rowell 40), forever rooted in the smells and voices of his Louisiana home, then Hemingway and his alter ego Nick Adams are forever driven by “a postlapsarian search for the raptures of childhood in the wild” (Tall 341). Certainly, J. Gerald Kennedy is correct in pointing out that Hemingway’s travels are primarily motivated by his “intuitive need for creative replenishment”: “He could ‘see the country all complete’ only by leaving it, by relying on the mind’s eye” (328). However, as part two will demonstrate, Nick’s memories of the Michigan woods are inextricably linked to the father, thus establishing a connection
among the loss of home, the lack of paternal void, and his lifelong restlessness and wandering.

This idea of place or places informs the discussion of the father-son relationship throughout this study. Whereas part one focuses on selected short stories that feature the perspective of the son, part two examines the father-son conflict from the father’s viewpoint. Hemingway’s story “Fathers and Sons,” which, as the last Nick Adams story, assumes a central position in this context, underlines the importance of Nick’s memory of the father, but it also makes clear how unbridgeable the gap between the generations has become, as Nick is unable to reach out to his own son. The story is characterized by the tension between Nick’s love for the nature surrounding his childhood summer home in Michigan and his present aimlessness, as well as by his ambiguous love-hate relationship toward his father.

Hemingway’s continued concern with the father-son relationship, especially with the issue of the father’s suicide, will be illustrated by a discussion of central passages in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and an in-depth analysis of *The Old Man and the Sea*, which features symbolic father-son relationships on several different levels. More than any other Hemingway work, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* illustrates the interaction between the individual and the group, as Robert Jordan not only reaches an understanding of his father’s cowardly suicide but is also able to apply its lesson and sacrifice his life to ensure the survival of others. Jordan thus comes close to experiencing the liberating effect of becoming a “father” to others that we see in Gaines’s work.

The power inherent in a father-son relationship that is based on love and trust is depicted in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Even though Santiago’s and Manolin’s relationship
is only a symbolic father-son relationship, it is the most positive bond between the
generations in Hemingway’s work. However, even in the bond between the fisherman
and his disciple we see a crucial difference from Gaines, as the father-son reconciliation
remains isolated from the rest of the community in Hemingway’s novella.

The Hemingway works are compared and contrasted to Gaines’s two major
novels on the father-son subject, *In My Father's House* and *A Gathering of Old Men*.
Relating the father’s position to the historical condition of African American men, Gaines
emphasizes the importance of personal and communal responsibility. In order for the
intergenerational gap to be closed, the fathers have to take a stand and assert their dignity.
Only then is the respect of the young guaranteed. While Philip Martin in *In My Father's
House* still has to search for his roots and learn how to reach out to the larger community,
the old men in *A Gathering of Old Men* have learned to assume personal responsibility;
they demonstrate the self-confidence and power that result from communal cohesiveness.
Thus, whereas Hemingway’s focus remains on the individual, be it Robert Jordan or
Santiago, Gaines celebrates the whole group as protagonist and stresses the importance of
the communal family.

As a consequence of the focus on communal and intergenerational bonds, as well
as on belonging to place, Gaines’s works are imbued with more optimism than
Hemingway’s comparatively somber works. In contrast to the cyclical view of time that
informs Hemingway’s writing, Gaines’s novels could be described as envisioning time as
a spiral, reaching back into the past and extending into the future and thus implying the
possibility of progress for the entire society. Consequently, even death is not perceived as
completely negative but can effect change for the better for those left behind.
After this analysis of the fictional father-son relationship in the first two sections, part three will discuss the connection between Hemingway and Gaines in terms of a metaphorical, literary father-son relationship. To illustrate the connection, this section will include a detailed discussion of Ivan Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons*, which both Hemingway and Gaines have cited as a major influence on their writing of *The Sun Also Rises* and *Catherine Carmier*. A comparison of the three novels allows the reader to see crucial differences in the authors’ treatment of generational conflicts and the issue of nihilism.

Harold Bloom’s theory of the anxiety of literary influence will facilitate the discussion of how Hemingway and Gaines revised, or “misread,” their literary predecessor, and also make clearer how Gaines revised and misread Hemingway. If in Turgenev’s novel the generational conflicts and the tension between nihilism and romanticism are seemingly resolved in a picture of harmony at the end, Hemingway parodies this optimistic note by prefacing *The Sun Also Rises* with two opposing epigraphs that uphold the tension between the generations. Because of the absence of pre-war generations in Hemingway’s novel, the idea of love represents pre-war values. In the portraits of Jake Barnes and Brett Ashley, Hemingway paints a rather complex relationship, which neither completely negates nor affirms the possibility of love. In contrast to Turgenev’s Bazarov, Hemingway does not allow his hero to die but forces him to live through his post-war disillusionment and face life’s contradictions. Far from being a staunch nihilist like Bazarov, Jake thus appears as a powerful and complex character, who is able to live with ambiguities and uncertainties.
Like Turgenev’s and Hemingway’s novels, Gaines’s *Catherine Carmier* features a disillusioned young man as protagonist. As I will show, however, Jackson Bradley is a rather flat character compared to the complex Evgeny Bazarov or Jake Barnes. The novel’s weak resolution demonstrates that Gaines at this point in his career was not yet the “strong poet” who could convincingly “misread” his predecessors (Bloom 5). Eventually, Gaines wrote a sequel to *Catherine Carmier* with *A Lesson Before Dying*, which illustrates his literary development and marks the crowning achievement of his own voice. In this later work, Gaines depicts two opposing characters in Grant Wiggins and Jefferson, who both have to overcome their selfish and nihilistic mindset; they eventually leave a powerful legacy for the entire community. In *A Lesson Before Dying* Gaines develops his emphasis on the interdependence between the individual and the community and once more expresses his optimism concerning societal change.

The comparison between *The Sun Also Rises* and Gaines’s novels *Catherine Carmier* and *A Lesson Before Dying* extends the previous remarks on the importance of place(s). While Gaines’s works celebrate rootedness and belonging to a place, it is also true that his fictional Louisiana exhibits both utopian and dystopian elements. Especially in his earlier works, the quarters and plantation homes appear as oppressive and constraining for the characters, both black and white. Yet, Gaines’s later works do depict his home as being in transformation. The South in general, and Louisiana specifically, can be positive places and viable resources for their inhabitants. Home, community, and history do not have to be constraining but can be nurturing. This ambivalence of his Louisiana home is symbolically rendered by Gaines’s frequent use of the jail as both a confining place and as a positive space, as a site of self-realization.
To do justice to the aesthetic complexity of the two writers’ works, it will be helpful to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the “dialogic imagination.” The use of Bakhtinian terminology can help explain and lend additional insight into both Hemingway’s and Gaines’s texts. Therefore, this introduction shall close with an explanation of some key terms that will be used.

Both authors have in common that they write “dialogic” texts, that is, they create fiction that offers a variety of positions and counterpositions for the reader to negotiate. Both Hemingway and Gaines refuse to give in to abstract statements, clearly defined moral messages, or “scientific truths”; they repudiate general philosophies and emphasize instead the primacy of human acts by “explor[ing] actively the full, undiminished nature of the individual human subject in dialogue with other dialogized subjects” (Crowe 21). Unlike a “monologic” text, which reflects a fixed idea or limited viewpoint and insists on the truth of its position, the dialogic text expects the reader to make meaning out of the juxtaposition of a multitude of voices offered. However, dialogism goes beyond a mere presentation of different voices; it requires that each voice is a “fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual word” (Bakhtin, Problems 5). In other words, the author of a dialogic text always maintains a certain distance from the characters’ voices, thereby lending full “semantic weight” to each voice. In a monologic text, on the other hand, the character fuses with the author and becomes his mouthpiece. As Bakhtin explains, “If the umbilical cord uniting the hero to its creator is not cut, then what we have is not a work of art but a personal document” (Problems 51).

The term “voice” signifies “the speaking personality, the speaking consciousness. A voice always has a will or desire behind it, its own timbre and overtones” (Bakhtin,
A voice in a literary text thus refers to the combination of values and style represented by an individual character. In a dialogic text, such voices are continually juxtaposed to other voices competing for supremacy in the eye of the reader. Each voice’s limitations become obvious, but the treatment of a voice is not entirely ironic since the voice always contains admirable qualities as well. This technique is called “double-voicing”; it goes beyond irony in that the voices competing with one another are all valid semantic centers to some extent. The reader, therefore, has to sort through this “polyphony” of voices to search for meaning.

Because of the polyphony of voices, the world depicted in dialogic fiction is “heteroglot.” “Heteroglossia,” as Bakhtin describes it, “insures the primacy of context over text” so that any utterance can only be understood in its fullest implications by reading it in the context of other utterances (Dialogic 428). A heteroglot world is, therefore, necessarily ambiguous, and the dialogic impulse reflects the authors’ concept of the radical ambiguity of the world, a world which makes it hard for their characters to act decisively. Making decisions in such a world comes with a price, as the world is neither completely bitter and disillusioning nor wholly idyllic and nurturing.

The fact that the world is ambiguous is best revealed by the concepts of “parody” and “metaparody.” The traditional idea of “parody” refers to an utterance that, as Gary Saul Morson stipulates, has to meet three criteria: “[i]t must evoke or indicate another utterance”; “it must be, in some respect, antithetical to its target”; and it must be clear that “it is intended by its author to have higher semantic authority than the original” (67). In addition to devices such as irony, satire, and travesty, Bakhtinian parodies can also take the form of understatements and, as I would like to show, silence, which are two devices
frequently used for this purpose by both Hemingway and Gaines. If parodies are “those double-voiced texts or utterances that clearly indicate which of their conflicting voices is to be regarded as authoritative,” then “metaparody” refers to texts in which “each voice may be taken to be parodic of the other[,] [and] readers are invited to entertain each of the resulting contradictory interpretations in potentially endless succession” (Morson 81). In other words, the meaning of a metaparody cannot be resolved because no single voice has a higher semantic value than the other; consequently, any attempt by the reader to privilege one reading over the other would be reductive to the novel’s or story’s intended impact. Dialogism, then, is an attitude that acknowledges ambiguity over “truth”; that is, dialogism resists the urge to resolve ambiguities and tension.

Applying these ideas to Hemingway and Gaines, one can certainly agree that both authors create out of a dialogic imagination and rely on a juxtaposition of many voices to generate meaning, rather than advancing any one particular reading or fixed idea. All of their characters exhibit the capacity for both good and evil; therefore, the closest approach to capturing such ambiguity is to portray them in a multi-voiced discourse, via a comprehensive vision. Specifically, any attempts to formulate “philosophies,” as for example an exact definition of “manhood,” or to construct codes, such as the famous Hemingway “code hero,” are reductive and only provisional. In both Hemingway’s and Gaines’s world, characters are fully human, with any principles to live by “accruing dialogically” while residing not in one but “in a variety of characters” (Crowe 25). Since no stable definitions of codes and philosophies can be given, we must shift our attention to specific situations and the way characters behave at a given place and time.
So far, David Crowe has been the only critic to apply Bakhtin’s theory to Hemingway’s works. Focusing on the writer’s first four major books, Crowe argues that *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises* are Hemingway’s best works since they best reflect his interest in dialogical poetics. *In Our Time*, according to Crowe, excels in its “bold juxtapositions of relatively independent scenes and voices,” its endless metaparodic play, as well as in its technical innovations (10). *The Sun Also Rises* also qualifies as dialogic through its verbal play, its episodic structure, and its use of metaparody on life’s central problems, as faced by Jake Barnes. While admitting that *Men Without Women* is a less “open” book than *In Our Time*, Crowe explains that dialogism is still preserved through the “controlling men-without-women theme as a metaparodic dilemma” (15). In *A Farewell to Arms*, however, we find more of a deterministic quality even though Hemingway’s use of double-voicing concerning Frederic Henry’s decisions qualifies the sustained thematic bitterness in the novel. Crowe then concludes that Frederic Henry is perhaps Hemingway’s “last truly complex character” (143) and *A Farewell to Arms* his “last metaparodic book” (16).

While Crowe’s argument is generally convincing and the trend toward monologism in these four works is evident, his position that Hemingway’s later works, such as *To Have and Have Not*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and *The Old Man and the Sea* are “closed works . . . with their male protagonists carrying Hemingway’s single-voiced word” is less justifiable (16). Rather, I would like to suggest that it is especially in these later works and in those published posthumously that we see Hemingway’s continued fascination with metaparodic dilemmas, as may be best illustrated in the play with hetero- and homosexual ambiguities in *The Garden of Eden*. In fact, it may very well be
Hemingway’s reliance on metaparodies and his unrelenting attempts to deal with life’s ambiguities that explain his restlessness and final desperation. To deal with life’s ambiguities and tensions is a dangerous game. Certainly the unanswerability of questions and the unfinalizability of clear solutions can be perceived as a threatening loss of any hope of consensus.

In contrast to Hemingway, the discussion of Ernest Gaines’s works will illustrate that Gaines has moved the opposite way from monologism in his earlier works to dialogism in his later writings. It is certainly no coincidence that Gaines felt particularly attracted to Hemingway’s most dialogic works, notably *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises*, as the dialogic imagination exhibited in these works seemed applicable to Gaines’s own experiences with his ambiguous world. However, whereas Hemingway often relied on metaparody as a key dialogic device, Gaines primarily makes use of parody. This choice is significant because the use of parody, as we have seen, implies an utterance of higher semantic value, which is testament to Gaines’s belief that there may be answers to life’s problems. Certainly, parodies allow for faith in a humanist core, if not for optimism. I would like to suggest, then, that the trend toward dialogism in Gaines goes hand in hand with his development of the jazz aesthetic, as it parallels the interplay, the antagonistic cooperation, between the individual and the communal voice.

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1 According to my research, nobody has yet established a link between Jean Toomer and Hemingway. The composite record of Hemingway’s libraries, compiled by James D. Brasch and Joseph Sigman, does not list *Cane*, which was published in 1923, two years prior to *In Our Time*. It is possible that Gertrude Stein, whose *Three Lives* (1909) is generally regarded as having been influential on *Cane*, had pointed out Toomer’s work to Hemingway.

2 Gaines’s current novel, *The Man Who Whipped Children*, which is still unpublished, is told in a barbershop.

The only exception is *In My Father’s House*, which is set in the (sub)urban atmosphere of St. Adrienne and Baton Rouge.


Chapter eight will examine the soundness of this claim, as the relationship between Jake Barnes and Jackson Bradley, as well as their connection to Turgenev’s Evgeny Bazarov, is discussed in more detail.

For a discussion of Hemingway’s black characters, see Herman Beavers, *Wrestling Angels into Song: The Fictions of Ernest J. Gaines and James Alan McPherson* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995) 20-22. Beavers argues that Bugs in “The Battler” and Sam in “The Killers” are mere “caricatures” whose humanity is not fully realized and who are not provided with a story of their own; instead, they mainly function as “the canvas against which the white characters are projected” (21).

Gaines’s use of the term “manhood” is, of course, controversial in its gendered bias. His fiction, however, demonstrates that he refers to a spirit of survival with dignity and an all-encompassing humanity that apply to both men and women. Miss Jane Pittman may be the best illustration of these qualities.

It is thus an interesting parallel that both writers focus on the psychological effects of their characters’ struggles and not on the actual violence. In spite of the violent nature of much of their content, violence usually occurs “offstage” in both Hemingway’s and Gaines’s works.

Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952; New York: Scribner’s, 1995) 10. All further references to this edition will be indicated in parentheses in the text, preceded by the abbreviation OMS.

Ernest Gaines, *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983; New York: Vintage, 1992) 188-89. All subsequent quotations from this novel will be given parenthetically in the text, preceded by the abbreviation GOM.

Gaines’s way of voicing protest in his art differs markedly from his contemporaries of the Black Arts Movement. For example, in his poem “Black Art,” LeRoi Jones calls for “‘poems that kill.’/ Assassin poems, Poems that shoot/ guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys/ and take their weapons leaving them dead/ with tongues pulled out” (*Black Magic* 116).
13 Ernest Gaines, *Bloodline* (1968; New York: Vintage, 1997) 91. All further references to the stories in this collection will be given parenthetically in the text, preceded by the abbreviation *BL*.

14 Hemingway does use Chicago as a setting in some of the stories published after his death, as for example in “Portrait of the Idealist in Love—A Story,” “The Mercenaries—A Story,” and “The Ash Heel’s Tendon—A Story.” These stories, written after his return from World War I, are some of his first experiments since his high school years and are collected and discussed in Peter Griffin’s *Along With Youth*.

15 The terms are taken from Bakhtin’s works *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* and *The Dialogic Imagination*, as well as based on the paraphrases of Bakhtin’s terms in Gary Saul Morson’s and Caryl Emerson’s *Rethinking Bakhtin* and David Wesley Crowe’s *The Dialogical Imagination of Ernest Hemingway*. 
PART ONE
“HOLLOW AND HAPPY” INSIDE THE FATHER’S HOUSE:
SONS LOOKING FOR THEIR FATHERS

Among the prevalent themes that Hemingway and Gaines explore in their stories and novels, the father-son relationship occupies a prominent place. The identity crises of their various male protagonists are almost always related to or can be traced back to a problematic or non-existing relationship to their father. Using selected short stories, this part will focus on the perspective of the sons who grow up deprived of the parental guidance they need.

Even though both writers make the father-son relationship a central theme, they approach the subject from different angles. Hemingway grounds his works in the deconstruction of the powerful father figure. Torn between admiration and love for the father, on the one hand, and simultaneous embarrassment or hatred toward him, on the other hand, the son’s ambivalence translates into a repudiation of home and a rebellion against both mother and father.

Gaines, by contrast, explores the historical African American paternal void and its repercussions. Because of the often socially and/or economically enforced absence of the father, the son’s quest for identity goes in the opposite direction from the search of Hemingway’s hero. Gaines’s boys seek a reunion with the father or work toward a reconciliation between the parents. As a consequence of this different treatment of the father-son theme, Gaines’s texts differ from Hemingway’s in that the traditional Western concept of the nuclear family is often replaced by the African American extended and surrogate family. In Gaines’s works the larger community is of paramount importance to the family, as the characters always find themselves within a network of relationships.
The two different perspectives are reflected in the authors’ choice of protagonists. Hemingway often uses the same character, Nick Adams, and chronicles his experiences from childhood to fatherhood. Even Hemingway’s novels frequently feature male protagonists who are informed by Nick’s childhood experiences. As Philip Young argues, Nick Adams . . . emerges clearly as the first in a long line of Hemingway’s fictional selves. Later versions, from Jake Barnes [The Sun Also Rises] and Frederic Henry [A Farewell to Arms] to Richard Cantwell [Across the River and into the Trees] and Thomas Hudson [Islands in the Stream], were all to have behind them part of Nick’s history and, correspondingly, part of Hemingway’s. (Preface 6)

By contrast, Gaines’s protagonists vary from work to work, and we have to read their aggregate experiences as forming a composite character, one who represents and reflects the wider experiences of African American boys and men. In other words, the different approach is already indicative of the writers’ divergent emphasis. Hemingway focuses on the individual and his individuation process; Gaines probes into the collective African American experience.

In particular, the chapters in this section will analyze both writers’ short stories that focus on children as protagonists. Ernest Gaines’s two earliest stories, “The Turtles” and “The Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit,” feature boys who grow up without a mother and are reared by flawed fathers, who turn out to be unreliable guides to their sons’ maturation. “My Grandpa and the Haint” and “A Long Day in November,” by contrast, constitute the only two occasions in Gaines’s short fiction in which both parents are present. The boy protagonists in the two latter stories are depicted as the primary victims of the marital strife and problems the parents undergo. As in the first two stories, the father figures are seriously misguided; they have to undergo a profound transformation into more responsible adults before the children can look up to them. Finally, in “The Sky
Is Gray” and “Three Men,” Gaines explores directly the consequences of the father’s absence. In the former story the mother proves to be a powerful and effective guide, whereas in the latter both parents are absent so that the protagonist has to reach out and accept the advice and help of his surrogate family. These two stories also mark a progression in setting and themes, as they take the son out of the protective environment of the quarters and into the racist and segregated town. In such an environment, the absence of the father proves especially detrimental to the son’s maturation. In all six stories, Gaines effectively deconstructs traditional notions about gender and family, frequently depicting the mother as the stern and effective parent, whereas the fathers, if present, are often irresponsible and weak.

By contrast, the discussion of Hemingway’s Nick Adams stories that feature Nick during his childhood will demonstrate the pivotal role of the father. In contrast to Gaines’s stories, the mother is never depicted in a positive light and is almost always absent. In “Three Shots,” the father is still protective and can assuage the son’s growing fears. However, a subtle plot detail foreshadows Nick’s lifelong pattern of rebellion and the restlessness that is its punishment. The sequel to “Three Shots,” “Indian Camp,” begins Nick’s initiation into the Indian world, a process of acculturation that runs parallel to his growing estrangement from his father. While Nick is still mostly impressed with his father in “Indian Camp,” the father’s role as hero receives more severe blows in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” as Dr. Adams proves to be weak and submissive. More details about the relationship between Nick’s parents emerge in a later piece, “Now I Lay Me,” and clarify the reasons for Nick’s growing distance from both his parents. In “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” however, Nick rejects his ineffective mother and still
chooses to be with the father. At the same time, he grows more and more familiar with the woods, thus signaling his eventual break with the “civilized” world of his parents. “Ten Indians” and the brief piece “The Indians Moved Away” demonstrate Nick’s continuing engagement and familiarity with the Indian world. The former story also depicts the deep pain he suffers from both his father’s and girlfriend’s betrayal, which will ultimately lead to his repudiation of home.

Hemingway’s Indian stories also reveal the author’s interest in parodying traditional notions about Indians. Far from being stereotypes, Hemingway’s Indian characters provide Nick with valuable insight into the falseness of his own world. By tying Nick’s father to the Indian world, Hemingway parallels the decline of Indian culture and the gradual disappearance of the Michigan woods with the diminishing effectiveness of Dr. Adams as a father figure.

The discussion of the authors’ portrayal of sons who are affected by absent or ineffective fathers will illustrate intriguing parallels and differences between Gaines’s and Hemingway’s works. Both writers set their young heroes on difficult roads toward adulthood, reflective of the two authors’ view of life as a constant struggle. The childhood experience is therefore significant for a better understanding of the behavior of later adult characters in the two authors’ novels. Before we begin the close reading of the stories, this chapter will briefly discuss the two authors’ childhood relationship with their parents, as the biographical background informs their fictional treatment of these experiences.
Chapter One
Oscar, Louisiana and Oak Park, Illinois

Growing up in the racist and discriminatory environment of River Lake Plantation in Oscar, a hamlet in Pointe Coupée Parish, Louisiana, Gaines had to experience personally what it meant to face the daily pressures of hard work, poverty, and segregation. Born into a sharecropper’s family, he had to work in the fields and swamps to help out, and, as the oldest of twelve children (five by his biological father and seven by his stepfather), he had to lead by example. At the age of eight, he started working in the hot and humid fields, picking potatoes and cotton for fifty cents a day. In addition, like James in “The Sky Is Gray,” he recalls having been conditioned in the act of killing things for us for food. And as a small child, at the boucheries, I had to be one of the children to hold the pig, because at that time you did not shoot him or hit him in the head with a big sledge, but you grabbed him—the macho stuff—and threw him down and cut the throat to catch the blood for blood pudding. And they made you hold him. . . . As for hard work, I could do that. I went out to the swamps when I was about twelve, and I had to pull the end of a saw or take an axe to chop wood or go out to the field. (Gaudet and Wooton 65)

All of Gaines’s published fiction takes place in his native Pointe Coupée Parish from 1940, when he was growing up, to the early 1970s, the heyday of the Civil Rights movement. Life in the Deep South then was strictly regulated according to Jim Crow laws. As Gaines recalls the rigidly prescribed and dehumanizing codes of behavior, “I felt the discrimination that any black Southern child would feel. New Roads was my little Bayonne. I couldn’t eat or drink in certain places. I had to ride [in] the back of the bus and I couldn’t go into the bathroom in certain places. I’ve been hurt and insulted and I’ve seen the same things happen to my mother, sisters and brothers” (Blake 138).
Given such denigrating experiences, reading Hemingway must have struck a chord in Gaines even though the adversities faced by Hemingway’s characters are, of course, of a different nature than Gaines’s firsthand, day-to-day experiences. However, Gaines saw parallels:

There is the story, “The Undefeated,” which is about an old bullfighter who is just about washed up but goes for one more try. Our people go back for one more try all the time. We get up day after day after day and try again. With all the pressures on us, we, some kind of way, force ourselves to try again. We have survived by trying over and over and over. A writer like Hemingway can show you how to write the story about your own people. (Rowell 44)

In spite of the external pressure of growing up in a racist society, Gaines found a nurturing environment in the predominantly female household he was raised in. During the time his mother was working in the fields and later, after she had moved first to New Orleans for work and then to California to join her second husband, Gaines was primarily raised and shaped by his crippled maternal great-aunt who, as he remembers,

... did everything—cooking, washing, and ironing. She completely ignored the wheelchair that welfare gave her (we kids played with it). She’d crawl over the floor like an infant, down the steps and into the garden to weed and hoe, then to the backyard to collect pecans and back into the house. When we misbehaved she made us cut the switch that would punish us. If it wasn’t the right size, she sent us back for another one. (Carter 82)

Gaines continues to revere Miss Augusteen Jefferson as the most important influence in his life. Her mixture of discipline and love instilled in Gaines the virtues and traits he demands from himself as well as from his fictional characters: “My aunt never felt sorry for herself. . . . And the people did not feel sorry for her. She had a great moral strength. I know the kind of burden she carried trying to raise us[,] and I feel any character has to have a heavy burden” (Carter 82). This burden ties his works to Hemingway’s, for, as Gaines continues to explain, “This is the philosophy I have, if I have any at all, because
of the struggle of my aunt, the struggle of my race, the struggle of people in general. Any
person who’s worth a goddamn must really struggle” (82).

Gaines never tires in emphasizing the love and admiration he feels for the three
women who shaped him most during his childhood—his mother Adrienne Gaines, his
maternal grandmother Julia McVay, and great-aunt Miss Augusteen Jefferson. Gaines has
frequently expressed pride in his family’s accomplishments, which he attributes to the
lessons in strength, dignity, and discipline the children were taught by the larger family
and community.1 In his work and in his personal life Gaines emphasizes the importance
of the surrogate family for him: “So, you know, a lot of the blame for juvenile
delinquency is put on broken homes, or one parent in the house type thing, and yet there
were never, at any time, more than one parent in our home. And when there was one
parent, most of the time, there was no one but my aunt; neither my mother nor father was
there” (Gaudet and Wooton 71).

The importance of the surrogate family, and especially the female influence,
shapes all of Gaines’s fiction, as can be seen by the numerous strong mother figures in
his short stories, as well as by the influential and wise grandmothers and great-
grandmothers in his novels. It wasn’t until later when Gaines visited Louisiana in the
1960s that he formed closer relationships to men, which is reflected in the shift toward
the portrayal of older men in his later works, such as A Gathering of Old Men and his
present work-in-progress, The Man Who Whipped Children. As he explains,

I was raised by older women as a child. My stepfather . . . was not at
home; he was in the merchant marine all the time. . . . Of course, I went
into the fields and into the swamp, where the men worked, but the
relationships with the men were quite tenuous. I worked around them, but
. . . it was not as strong a relationship as the one at the house with my
aunt and the people who visited her. I was around older women much
more than I was around the men who came around the place where I lived. (Gaudet and Wooton 39)

Gaines’s biological father, Manuel, left the family when Ernest was eight years old, and Gaines prefers not to discuss him. Manuel joined the American forces in World War II, but after his return he and Adrienne separated. Anne K. Simpson explains the father’s initial departure as economically motivated, but Gaines himself seems to have wrestled with the father’s desertion all his life. Although Manuel continued to reside in Louisiana, there was no more contact between him and his eldest son.  

However, Gaines credits his stepfather, Ralph Norbert Colar, with getting him off the streets after Gaines, at the age of 15, had joined his mother in California. As a consequence of his stepfather’s discipline, Gaines spent much time in the public library, where he discovered his love for reading and writing. As he summarizes his stepfather’s influence: “He was a very strict person with me. Very strong. A very handsome man, a big man. Most of my strong characters, I think, are built around him” (Laney 59). His warm relationship to his stepfather is reflected in the positive portrayal of Chippo Simon in *In My Father's House*. In spite of the harsh circumstances of his youth, then, Gaines’s attitude toward his childhood experiences is not necessarily bitter but realistic.

The same cannot be said about Hemingway’s childhood memories, which are often bitter and unforgiving. Certainly, the parallels between Gaines’s and Hemingway’s upbringing are limited to the authors’ shared ambivalent attitude toward their fathers, for Hemingway’s rather well-off family living in almost exclusively white Oak Park cannot be compared to Gaines’s disadvantaged African American background and the racist conditions in the quarters of a Louisiana plantation. Yet, on a different—and very
important—level, Hemingway’s familial upbringing was also harsh and left a profound mark on the writer.

Although Hemingway grew up in the relative security of a fairly progressive, genteel, white middle-class environment, he also felt confined and under pressure. His biographers, though, disagree about the extent of Oak Park’s conformism. Kenneth Lynn speculates whether Hemingway really asserted that “Oak Park was full of ‘wide lawns and narrow minds,’” but eventually agrees that the village was “in a number of ways a quite restrictive community” (19). Michael Reynolds depicts Oak Park’s ambivalence toward change and status quo as follows: “The New so necessary for Progress, which all admired, was equally a threat to the Status Quo, which all admired. This type of paradox resides at the heart of Hemingway’s fiction. His style and subject matter are Modern; his structure and plot line traditional” (The Young Hemingway 162). However progressive or restraining Oak Park was, Hemingway repeatedly complained about not liking it there and eventually ran away.

Like most Mid-American towns, Oak Park underwent a profound change from 1899, Hemingway’s year of birth, to 1917, when he left to become a journalist in Kansas City. The traditional values of a predominantly agrarian society, such as patriotism, religion, and family, were gradually challenged by the new consumerism and progressive political movements. On the one hand, the final phase of the exploration of the West was tantamount to the end of the concept of the mythic frontier and its concomitant masculine values of physical strength, courage, and individual success. In reaction to this crisis of masculine values, a compensatory nostalgia and desire for heroes emerged, as manifested in the popularity of Owen Wister’s The Virginian, in the sculptures and paintings of
Frederic Remington, or particularly in the mythic figure of Theodore Roosevelt, whose adventures and safaris made him one of Ernest Hemingway’s most important cultural heroes (cf. Müller 16-19, Lynn 24-26).

On the other hand, modern society’s emphasis on material goods, its increasing social and geographical mobility, and its growing population demanded new virtues and modes of behavior, often leading to identity crises and feelings of disorientation, as well as a simultaneous longing for traditional “authentic” living. Changing gender roles as a result of the suffragist movement and larger social and cultural changes also impacted the marriage of Grace and Clarence Hemingway; they are generally assumed to have worsened Clarence’s genetic predisposition for nervous irritation and depression (cf. Reynolds, *Young Hemingway* 109-11).

Recent scholarship has shed more light on the complexity of Hemingway’s parents and their influence on his writings. Discussing the contexts of socialization within Hemingway’s family, Kurt Müller explains the roles that were typical of the American middle class, according to which the “feminine indoor values,” which Hemingway associated with hypocrisy and artificiality, were represented by the mother, and the “masculine outdoor values,” which Hemingway associated with authenticity and naturalness, were linked to the father. Both sides have a long tradition that finds its literary expression, on the one hand, in the depiction of repressive domesticity in Rip Van Winkle’s home and the hypocrisy of the “sivilized [sic] world” of Tom Sawyer’s aunt and, on the other hand, in the legendary frontier-thesis by Frederick Jackson Turner and the romantic portrayal of the wilderness in the novels of James Fenimore Cooper.
However, as Müller argues, the situation was more complicated than that in the Hemingway household, as the father Clarence not only represented the rugged individualism, freedom, and independence associated with “authentic,” outdoor life but also the repressive sides of Puritan middle class morality. Equally important, Müller shows that Hemingway’s mother Grace had a more lasting and decisive effect on him than he would ever admit. Grace, who was always proud of her British ancestry, stood not only for the domestic-artificial world but also encouraged a tendency toward rebellion, creativity, and independence. Not only was she the domineering member of the household, she was also unusually active as a suffragist and participated in business ventures, such as the restoration of their house. Very importantly, it was also Hemingway’s mother who introduced him to music and art. As Müller argues, Grace encouraged Hemingway’s desire to be successful and supported his first endeavors in writing. His lifelong competitiveness and drive to be center stage are thus more likely to be attributed to his mother’s influence than to his father’s. As Bernice Kert describes it, “From earliest boyhood he had entertained the family with imaginative tales in which he was the swashbuckling hero and had shown astonishing verbal aptitude, making puns and inventing nicknames. Like Grace he had an unusual power for projecting himself, and she watched his progress carefully” (40). Hemingway’s mother thus played a significant role in his career and his constant obsession with being successful.

Hemingway’s own memories of his parents were often very bitter. He was suffering both under his mother’s overbearing manner and his father’s ambiguous display of aggressive masculine values and psychopathological problems. The lack of warmth between Hemingway and his mother, compounded by his feeling that his father was weak
and henpecked, provides the basis for the portrayal of dysfunctional parents in the Nick Adams stories. Nowhere does the parental discord become more striking than in “Now I Lay Me” when Nick remembers how his mother expressed her domination by burning his father’s collection of Indian arrowheads and pottery while his father stood by helpless and utterly humiliated. Kenneth Lynn even goes as far as to argue that “[t]hanks to the manipulations of his mother, Hemingway did not enjoy a normal childhood” (27).

Lynn’s biography emphasizes the long-term damage on Hemingway that resulted from Grace’s insistence on dressing and raising alike Ernest and his sister Marcelline, who was 1½ years older. Well beyond a time that such behavior was considered normal, Ernest was forced to have the same haircut and wear the same dresses as Marcelline, as their mother held onto the illusion that they were twins of the same sex. When it could no longer be disguised that Ernest was a boy, Grace went to the other extreme and encouraged his nascent boyhood. He was given air rifles and taken along on hunting and fishing trips with his father. As a consequence of his mother’s conflicting signals, Ernest was, according to Lynn, “[c]aught between his mother’s wish to conceal his masculinity and her eagerness to encourage it” so that it is not surprising that he would be “anxious and insecure” (45).

Hemingway’s confusion was exacerbated by his conflicted feelings toward his father Clarence. A man of energy and vitality, Clarence was “the complete woodsman”: a “marvelous marksman with both shotgun and rifle, an accomplished fisherman, [and] a master of every technique for surviving in the wilderness” (Lynn 35). Hemingway’s frequent writing about high standards in fishing and hunting is a tribute to his father’s skills in these areas. However, Clarence was also a strict disciplinarian with an explosive
temper, often resulting in unwarranted, severe punishments of his children (Lynn 36). In addition, he was a sentimental and an “easily overwhelmed man” in domestic affairs, as he was subjected to humiliations from his wife and typically lost most arguments (Lynn 33). Aware of his failures as husband and father, Clarence was prone to manic depressions, which culminated in his committing suicide.

Hemingway himself has always been unequivocal about his relationship to his mother. In a letter to Charles Scribner he admits that he “hate[s] her guts and she hates mine. She forced my father to suicide and, one time, later, when I ordered her to sell certain worthless properties that were eating her up with taxes, she wrote, ‘Never threaten me with what to do. Your father tried that once when we were first married and he lived to regret it’” (Baker, Selected Letters 670). His sympathies were certainly more with his father, but the memories of his father would forever be ambiguous. Torn between love and admiration for his skills, on the one hand, and hatred of and condescension toward his submissiveness, on the other hand, Hemingway would make his attitude toward his father the subject of many of his writings.

According to Müller, Hemingway’s over-identification with the father and his exaggerated aggressive attitude toward the mother are signs of an ambivalence about his parents, which is reflected throughout his works (10). On the one hand, the shocking content of many of his stories and novels is indicative of the author’s rebellion against the father’s strict morality. On the other hand, both Hemingway’s ceaseless dedication to his writing and the character profile of many of his protagonists are distinguished by the father’s ethic of hard work, honesty, and self-control. Certainly, the absence of positive
mother figures in his fiction speaks volumes about the author’s unprocessed feelings toward his own mother.

Given the significance of their own childhood memories and the place their parents occupy—or don’t occupy—in their lives, it is hardly surprising that both Hemingway and Gaines begin their literary work by focusing on childhood experiences. However closely or loosely modeled after their actual lives, both authors decided to use child protagonists to reinforce their view of life as dictated by physical or emotional harshness, violence, and incessant trials, exacerbated by a lack of parental guidance.

Besides introducing key themes and establishing their view of life as a struggle, the authors’ focus on young protagonists also allows them to set up the journey as a prominent motif in many stories and novels. For both Hemingway and Gaines, however, the journey is more than a mere initiation into knowledge, more than just an illustration of maturation from childhood innocence to increased self-awareness. Instead, we have to read the child’s experiences as taking place in the context of the larger ambiguity of the world. In Hemingway’s and Gaines’s fiction, we rarely come across examples of the classic triadic journey pattern of heartbreaking departure, successful initiation, and celebrated return. What we find instead is the boys’ all-too-premature awareness of the father’s flaws and of the ambiguity of the world. Theirs is a world that can be both kind and cruel, where no easy answers, let alone solutions, to life’s problems are to be found. The boys have to adjust after experiencing a profound shock, and it is this painful process of adjustment that provides further conflicts, which the characters have to negotiate. Whether as children or a few years later, as adults, the characters have to form their identity under duress. They must pay a price for their knowledge, and it is this bearing of
the consequences of one’s experiences and actions that propels the children forward on their journey toward the destination “manhood.”

Both authors depict their protagonists as steadily growing, as making the transition from being passive observers, witnesses, and victims to showing first manifestations of a will of their own, and finally, to making active decisions. It is at this moment, when they become active participants, that they move toward adulthood and the authors leave them at the end of a story, only to pick them up again, in other narratives, at later stages in their lives. Yet, in their first conscious actions, we also see the crucial difference between Hemingway’s and Gaines’s boy-heroes. And this difference not only foreshadows many other differences in their works but is also reflective of a fundamental philosophical disagreement between the two writers.

Joseph DeFalco summarizes the fate that awaits Hemingway’s heroes: “[T]he hero must learn to adjust to contingencies, reconcile himself to them, and eventually create for himself a new moral center in harmony with his innermost drives” (39). As we will see, Hemingway’s Nick Adams has to repudiate both parents, first his mother and then his father, in order to mature and find a place for himself. Parental influences, as the stories seem to imply, are either stifling or misguided, and thus ultimately threaten the development of selfhood. DeFalco similarly argues that “the tremendous task of self-discovery requires the loss of all former attachments that indicate infantile dependence” (39). The journey in Hemingway’s stories, then, foregrounds the individual character and his individuation process, which differs from the route Ernest Gaines’s fictional boys follow. In a significant departure from Hemingway, Gaines’s heroes attempt to bring their parents together and, if this proves impossible, to replace the missing parent, and
thus provide balance to the other. They thus vicariously play the role of father or mother. In addition to the emphasis on familial cohesion, Gaines’s works also stress reaching out to the larger community and establishing an awareness of communal resources and history as prerequisites for the characters’ search for sustenance to be successful.

This profound difference in the conceptualization of the father-son relationship, the importance of the father as a source of self-definition, and the son’s relationship to his parents and the larger community in general will be illustrated by a detailed discussion of some of the earliest stories the authors wrote. As we will see, the two authors’ stories comment in interesting ways on one another. Ernest Gaines’s first two published stories (“The Turtles” and “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit”) introduce a boy named Max. Max’s reappearance (evocative of Hemingway’s Nick Adams stories), the presence of the father without the mother, and the importance of male bonding and fishing in “The Turtles” are just a few of the evident parallels between the authors’ works. A brief overview of their earliest stories shows many other parallels between the two authors in terms of the boys’ ages and their roles:

Table 1: The Hero’s Maturation in Hemingway’s and Gaines’s Short Stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE OF HERO</th>
<th>HERO’S ROLE</th>
<th>HEMINGWAY’S STORY</th>
<th>GAINES’S STORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>passive</td>
<td>“A Long Day in November”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>passive</td>
<td>“Three Shots”</td>
<td>“Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>first signs of a mind of his own</td>
<td>“Indian Camp”</td>
<td>“The Sky Is Gray”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>first actions</td>
<td>“The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife”</td>
<td>“My Grandpa and the Haint”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 1 continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>14</th>
<th>sexually active</th>
<th>“Ten Indians”</th>
<th>“The Turtles”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>on his own</td>
<td>“The Indians Moved Away”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>on his own</td>
<td>“The Light of the World” “The Battler”</td>
<td>“Three Men”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A second table illustrates the significant overlaps in some of the themes in these childhood stories:

Table 2: Parallel Themes in Hemingway’s and Gaines’s Short Stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>HEMINGWAY’S STORY</th>
<th>GAINES’S STORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>father as guide</td>
<td>“Three Shots” “Indian Camp”</td>
<td>“The Turtles”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parental conflict; flawed father figure</td>
<td>“The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife”</td>
<td>“A Long Day in November” “My Grandpa and the Haint”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>failure of communication between father and son; absence of mother</td>
<td>“Ten Indians”</td>
<td>“Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mother as guide</td>
<td></td>
<td>“The Sky Is Gray”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boy’s sexual initiation</td>
<td>“Ten Indians” (“Fathers and Sons”)⁶</td>
<td>“The Turtles”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At their youngest point, the child protagonists are still in a state of innocence, which is the only time the authors grant them the right to be and behave like children. Both Hemingway and Gaines chronicle their fictional boys’ growing awareness of life’s
complications and their ensuing loss of innocence in connection with the same three interrelated themes: the boys’ relationships to their parents, especially to their fathers, their awareness of love and sexuality, and their exposure to and encounters with another culture.

The remainder of this section will illustrate the connection among these three thematic aspects as well as analyze the different ways in which Hemingway and Gaines depict the relationship between the child and his parents. Concomitant to the child’s journey into adulthood, both authors deconstruct traditional notions of gender, family, and race, thus forcing their protagonists, and the reader, to interrogate conventional views on these matters.

**Chapter Two**

**The Deconstruction of the Traditional Nuclear Family in Gaines’s Short Stories**

In Gaines’s earliest stories, the characters’ innocence stands in stark contrast to their harsh and hostile environment. For example, Max in “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit” is still playful in his attitude toward girls and sexual matters. After Sunday church, while his prospective stepmother Mrs. Adele is discussing with the preacher how to win over his father, Max “would be trying to figure out a way to get that little old funny looking girl around the church somewhere so I could yank her hair or do her something” (“Boy” 4-5). Likewise, on the segregated bus in “The Sky Is Gray,” James spends his time flirting surreptitiously with the girl sitting across from him: “I don’t look right at her, ‘cause I don’t want all them people to know I love her. I just look at her a little bit, like I’m looking out that window over there. But she knows I’m looking that way, and she kind of look at me, too” (*BL* 92).
This innocent exchange is sharply contrasted with the seriousness of the situation the boys find themselves in, a seriousness the reader is constantly reminded of through Gaines’s skillful use of imagery and symbolism. For example, “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit” contains many subtle hints about the family’s and community’s poverty, and also illustrates Max’s spiritual deprivation due to the absence of the mother, while “The Sky Is Gray” takes place on a bleak and extremely cold and gray winter day. As a consequence, rather than diverting attention from life’s struggles, the emphasis on innocence and playfulness reinforces the harsh circumstances of the boys’ lives. Max can live out his childhood and openly show his emotions only when in company of the motherly and affectionate Mrs. Adele, whereas his stern and emotionally cold father would not tolerate any signs of childishness. The necessity of Mrs. Adele in Max’s upbringing is thus made clear, but since his wish for her to become his stepmother stays unfulfilled, the reader must wonder about his future. Similarly, James’s innocent “love” for the girl on the bus stands in clear contrast to the segregated environment on the bus itself and the grayness outside. Later that day, he will find himself confronted with a racist environment in which physical sensations of hunger, cold, and pain have to be suppressed since, as a black boy, he is not allowed access to their remedies.

The boys’ naïveté and innocence in sexual matters notwithstanding, both Max and James have an intuitive appreciation of the importance of love in their lives and sense the necessity of parental harmony. Thus, Max expresses his joy when he discovers Mrs. Adele and his father “lying across the bed playing with each other, and [he] was so happy [he] started crying” (“Boy” 4). Tellingly, the father forbids Max to openly express his emotions, as he will later prevent Max’s dream of having a two-parent family again from
coming true. Similarly, James in “The Sky Is Gray” frequently expresses his love and admiration for his mother, in spite of her strict discipline: “I love my mama and I want to put my arm round her neck and tell her. But I’m not supposed to do that. She say that’s weakness and that’s crybaby stuff, and she doesn’t want no crybaby round her” (*BL* 84).

Sonny in “A Long Day in November” also displays an innocent view of sexual matters, but he intuitively grasps the concept of love and protection derived from a stable family. He is deeply disturbed when he witnesses a severe argument between his mother and father; as a consequence, he not only fails to know his lesson and thus “wee-wees” on himself in school, but he also loses his school-sweetheart Lucy, who breaks up with him out of shame. Without being able to rationalize it yet, Sonny clearly loves both his mother and his father and understands the importance of his parents to his upbringing and psychological health. Hence he expresses his appreciation for having a family by saying that he is glad that he is not a pig because “[t]hey ain’t got no mama and no daddy and no house” (*BL* 9). Nor does he want to be like the birds which likewise have “[n]o daddy, no mama” (*BL* 38).

Earlier Sonny had already illustrated a child’s sound instincts in his assessment of three other characters. Thus, he loves his caring and kindhearted Uncle Al but doesn’t like his Gran’mon because she was always critical of his father: “I can feel his [Uncle Al’s] hand on my shoulder. I like Uncle Al because he’s good, and he never talk bad about daddy. But Gran’mon’s always talking bad about Daddy” (*BL* 20). Even more pronounced is his aversion to Mr. Freddie Jackson, who tries to exploit the parents’ marital problems by making advances to Sonny’s mother:

“I don’t like Mr. Freddie Jackson,” I say.
“How come?” Uncle Al asks.
“I just don’t like him,” I say. “I just don’t like him. I don’t like him to hold my mama, neither. My daddy suppose to hold my mama. He ain’t suppose to hold my mama.” (BL 36)

These negative thoughts are contrasted with his heartfelt enjoyment when seeing Juanita and Bill, two older pupils in his school, walking close together: “I like to see Bill and Juanita like that. It makes me feel good” (BL 29). At the end, he will feel “warm” and “good” again after his parents get reconciled and he “hear[s] the spring on Mama and Daddy’s bed” (BL 79).

Gaines’s choice of the most common verbs and adjectives reinforces the intensity of Sonny’s feelings. Simple verbs such as “like” or its negation and adjectives such as “good” and “bad” constitute a child’s basic vocabulary but nonetheless express heartfelt and pure emotions. Gaines thus creates Sonny’s voice as a conduit for an undiluted portrayal of life’s basic necessities, a technique learned both from studying Benjy’s section in William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* and Hemingway’s use of understatement and simple but precise vocabulary to render emotions.

In “A Long Day in November,” Gaines allows a happy ending by reconciling Sonny’s parents. However, rather than celebrating the concept of the nuclear family, the story emphasizes, as will be shown later, the redefinition of the father’s role and support from the community in order for the marriage to survive. In the portrayal of Sonny’s angst, “A Long Day in November” depicts the emotional impact of parental disharmony on a child, thereby underlining the value of a child’s having a mother, father, and larger community living in harmony. Naïveté and innocence in sexual matters are juxtaposed with the boy’s clear longing for an unbroken family and community life. In most of Gaines’s stories, however, no such happy end is possible.
In “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit,” Mrs. Adele plays the surrogate mother for a limited time after the death of Max’s mother. Max will miss her warm and protective influence on him after his father’s break-up with her. Gaines emphasizes the importance of Mrs. Adele’s motherly role by references to her frequent smiles and the warmth she exudes on Max: “[E]very once in a while she would look at me and smile and I would look at her and grin, and she would lay her hand on my shoulder and I would feel so good” (“Boy” 4). If his father, Oscar Wheeler, is a harsh, authoritarian figure who is prone to violence, Mrs. Adele is the softening influence necessary for Max’s balanced upbringing. Her influence on Max is symbolized by the double-breasted suit she buys him as a present one day. When his father ends the relationship to Adele and orders Max to return the suit, Max refuses and insists on keeping it: “‘I don’t want to take it off. . . . I want my double-breasted suit’” (“Boy” 7). In the end, Mrs. Adele is successful in persuading Oscar to let Max keep the suit. According to Mary Ellen Doyle, this conclusion “suggests [that] the boy will also retain the cultivation and good manners he has learned from her [and] the ‘Sunday connection’ to the community, all symbolized by the suit. But if she does not regain Oscar’s affection and regular contact with his son, the boy, it is implied, may grow up equating harshness and an unbending spirit with manly dignity” (Voices 31).

The last sentence of the story depicts the boy following his father, not wearing the suit, but “with the double-breasted suit tucked under [his] arms” (“Boy” 9). This ending leaves little room for optimism, especially when read in conjunction with the final scene of “The Sky Is Gray,” in which James likewise has only one parent, only this time it is the mother. James’s mother Octavia is in spirit much closer to Oscar than to Adele. She is
incredibly tough on the boy and instills in him the lessons of dignity and pride in the face of extreme circumstances. Like Oscar, she is stern, spare with words, and opposed to a display of sentimentality or even affection. In spite of her toughness, however, James clearly understands the reasons for her harshness; he loves her and worries about her: “I look up at Mama. I love my mama. I love my mama. And when cotton come I’m go’n get her a new coat” (BL 99). Max, in the conclusion of “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit,” carries his suit tucked under his arms, and James in the freezing cold “turn[s] up [his] coat collar to keep [his] neck warm” (BL 117). Yet, Octavia instructs him to “turn it right back down”: “‘You not a bum,’ she says. ‘You a man’” (BL 117).  

Twice we thus see an article of clothing used to connote protection and warmth, both physical warmth and, metaphorically, human or parental (motherly) warmth. Twice the warmth and protection are being denied to the boys. Both the motherless Max and the fatherless James are deprived of the comfort ordinary children would have, a testament both to the hardships suffered as a result of a parent’s absence and to the consequences of poverty and discrimination that force on the boys a premature awareness of adversity and a high tolerance level of pain. The consequences of living in such circumstances are dire, as the boys cannot behave like children, do not know the security of familial stability, and thus have to assume the role of “men” at an early stage in their lives.  

In “The Turtles,” we learn the fate that awaits a boy who grows up with a single parent only. As a consequence of Oscar Wheeler’s rejection of Adele in “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit,” the older version of Max, now 14, is still motherless. “The Turtles” describes Max’s initiation into sexuality and thus, according to the misguided view of Max’s father, into manhood.
The day starts innocently enough with Max and his “old man” going fishing together with Mr. James and his son Benny, who are the foils of the two main characters. Clearly the two father-son pairs are intended to be contrasts, with the former representing a strong father and a relatively mature son and the latter illustrating a somewhat effeminate man and immature son. The relationship between Max and his father, whom he calls only “my old man,” deserves special notice.\(^9\) In many ways, Max’s attitude toward his father is comparable to James’s relationship to his mother in “The Sky Is Gray.” Like James, Max is able to read and interpret his father’s thoughts and knows how to behave to avoid provoking the parent’s ill will: “I knew my old man was mad because I had gone to sleep and not caught anything. I wanted to say I was sorry, but my old man didn’t like for me to say I was sorry about anything” (“Turtles” 93). Again, as in “The Sky Is Gray,” we see a parent’s “tough love” and the child’s intuitive understanding of its necessity, as the harshness of the social environment dictates that life’s lessons be taught harshly.

We are to understand that Max is not afraid of his father but respects his authority. Their relationship is further illuminated when, after the fishing trip, they visit the house of Mrs. Diana Brown and her grown-up niece Amy, two local prostitutes. This is the day Max’s father has set aside to introduce his son to women. When he orders Max to go into Amy’s room, Max at first hesitates and then refuses to stay in Amy’s room. His father, however, warns him to go back if he doesn’t want to get whipped. Importantly, Max obeys but not out of fear of corporal punishment:

I looked at Amy, and I wanted to leave the room again, but I thought about my old man. Not that he would whip me. I knew he had been bluffing out on the porch. He had never whipped me, and I doubted if he ever would. But that wasn’t what I thought about. I thought about our friendship and
our partnership. I had been his partner since mom had died, and that had been a long time. And nothing had broken it up, because I had always obeyed him. And I knew as long as I obeyed him the partnership would last. When I didn’t, it would end. I wasn’t ready for that to happen. (“Turtles” 95)

Three things stand out in this remarkable passage. First, Max is introduced to sex with Amy because he wants to obey and please his father, not out of any curiosity or interest of his own. In addition, Max views his relationship toward his father as a “partnership,” a bond he cherishes too much to risk breaking it by disobeying. And finally, and most importantly, in many ways Max has replaced his dead mother and assumed her role. Not only does he trace the beginning of his partnership with his father to the time of his mother’s death, but he also fulfills her daily tasks. Thus, for example, he has to “clean the fishes for supper,” a chore usually associated with women in Gaines’s fiction (“Turtles” 97). And now, Max also has to fulfill a sexual role, on his father’s command, which could be read as an indication about the nature of the father’s attitude toward sex with his wife, especially when we see the parallel to Eddie, who similarly expects sexual pleasures on demand from his wife Amy in “A Long Day in November.” However, in spite of his reluctance to follow his father’s command, Max is still portrayed as being proud of his father and presents him in a positive light. Not unlike Nick’s fond memories of his father’s keen eyesight and skills as a marksman in “Fathers and Sons,” Max portrays his father as a successful and experienced fisherman.

In contrast to Max and his father, Max’s friend Benny and his father, Mr. James, are the traditional foils; they fail in their respective roles as father and son. When climbing on a dead tree that had fallen on the lake, Max buoyantly walks on it, “hoping my feet might slip so I could fall in” (“Turtles” 90). Benny, by contrast, is afraid to fall
and “get his clothes wet.” Furthermore, he doesn’t “know how to fish too good,” catches only turtles instead of trout, and finally even loses his pole with line and hook (90). At Mrs. Diana Brown’s house, when it is his turn to go to Amy, Benny refuses to budge. Although one year older than Max, he’s crying and “poking] in the ground with the little stick” (96).

Just as Max is more courageous and mature than Benny, so Max’s father is, presumably, a better man and father than Mr. James. As Max interprets Benny’s panic: “I knew if he was my old man’s son, my old man would have butt his head against that tree and then picked him up and threw him in the room where Amy was. But Benny was not my old man’s son, and Mr. James was not like my old man, and so Benny just sat against the tree and cried and jabbed in the ground with the little stick” (96). If Max’s father is too stern with his son, the implication is that Mr. James is too soft on Benny.

Like Max’s father, Mr. James threatens to use violence to make Benny go to Amy, but Benny does not obey since he does not have the same respect for his father’s authority that Max has for his. Benny is more afraid of his mother. He worries about her reaction if he gets his clothes wet and when Max tries to convince him to go to a baseball game rather than to church the following Sunday. Thus, the implication seems to be that Mr. James is ineffectual as a father, too submissive as a husband, and less of a man than Max’s father both in terms of authority and success as a fisherman. Of course, Max’s father is faulty too. As Doyle states, “The unyielding control of the ‘old man’ over Max may be as detrimental as Mr. James’s flabby authority over Benny” (Voices 30).

Gaines’s implied comments on the themes of manhood and sexuality are more complex than they seem. If Max’s father regards instruction into sexual knowledge as the
decisive step toward manhood, Max’s reaction challenges this view, as the end of the
story shows:11

“I guess you think you’re a man now?” my old man said.
“Sir?”
“You heard me,” my old man said.
“No sir,” I said. “I didn’t think I’m a man.”
“Well, you are,” my old man said.
I didn’t say anything and my old man didn’t say any more. The sun was
getting down, and the cool dust felt good under my bare feet. (“Turtles”
97)

As in the end of Hemingway’s “Indian Camp,” the upbeat last sentence seems to
indicate that the father-son relationship is still intact; however, it rests on a precarious
foundation now that Max has his first doubts about the authority of his father. In regard to
this final scene Doyle argues that “[i]f independence of moral choice is a true signal of
manhood, then Max’s achievement is less than his father’s declaration implies” (Voices
30). However, I would like to posit that a close reading and Bakhtinian approach reveals
that Max’s negating response and his final silence do illustrate a degree of
“independence” and can thus be interpreted as first signs of his nascent manhood.

In fact, Max’s reply that he doesn’t consider himself a man yet bespeaks a
considerable level of maturity even though he professes to be uninterested in sex. The
question then is how manhood is defined in the story. Clearly gender issues are more
complicated and less polarized than in Doyle’s analysis of “The Turtles.” According to
her, the story conveys that “[b]eing a man . . . is being unafraid of women in any
circumstance, being able either to use or to control them” (27). Instead of such a
monologic reading, I would like to suggest that Gaines subtly presents us with a case of
Bakhtinian double-voicing on the issue of manhood.

65
First of all, it is important not to forget that the absence of a female voice and Max’s ensuing dependence on his father’s quite obviously misguided views already serve as an implicit critique of one-sided, purely masculine notions of upbringing and concomitant male definitions of courage and manhood. In addition, as I shall explain in a moment, Max’s father’s position on sex and his view of women as commodities is counteracted and parodied not only by Max’s response, “No sir . . . I didn’t think I’m a man,” but also by Max’s final silence on that point. Moreover, the last two sentences become even more significant if one keeps in mind that Max is telling the story in retrospect.

The penultimate sentence “I didn’t say anything and my old man didn’t say any more” acts as a continuation of the previous, terse dialogue. However, the two characters’ silence has a different meaning. Max’s silence expresses his repeated disagreement about his status as a man, a disagreement he cannot venture to voice again, if he wants to maintain the “partnership” with his father. His father’s silence, by contrast, serves as reinforcement of his view, a silent threat not to disagree. Gaines thus uses Max’s silence to parody his father’s view and the father’s silence to parody Max’s disagreement, thereby establishing the tension between the two viewpoints that is typical of double-voicing.

The final sentence, then, also gains additional weight. Since it is Max’s story, the positive atmosphere, with its emphasis on the “cool dust” with the “sun . . . going down” and Max “feel[ing] good,” allows Max’s view to emerge as victorious. This last sentence stresses the way he remembers the episode; Max emerges unharmed from the episode and is in tune with nature. Paralleling the final scene in “Indian Camp,” he foregrounds his
innocence and childhood state, not an emerging awareness of troubled adolescence or
doubt about the father’s authority. Gaines thus plays Max’s view and his innocence
against his father’s rather sexist views and presents a typical case of double-voicing, in
which he grants each voice full authority, thus forcing the reader to figure out the
dynamics between the two characters’ attitudes.

Gaines’s double-voicing on what makes a man or a woman extends beyond “The
Turtles” into the other stories discussed so far. “The Sky Is Gray” can be read as an
answer to charges that stories like “The Turtles” commodify women. Clearly, Octavia is
a powerful figure and perfectly able to take care of herself. When James and his mother
escape the freezing cold for a few minutes inside a café, Octavia is approached by a man
who rudely asks her to dance with him, an expression of his view of her as an object only.
But Octavia is capable of rejecting the man, and James is immediately willing to defend
his mother: “‘Fore you know it, Mama done sprung open her knife and she’s waiting for
him. ‘Come on,’ she says. ‘Come on. I’ll gut you from your neighbo to your throat. Come
on.’ I go up to the little man to hit him, but Mama makes me come and stand ‘side her”
(BL 111). Both her language and behavior demonstrate Octavia’s courage and complete
self-reliance. The fact that it is the mother who instills in James the values of strength,
discipline, and self-respect in the face of a hostile environment clearly counters any
reading of women as necessarily weak.

Gaines further deconstructs the traditional view of women as the “weaker” gender
in “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit.” Even though Adele is depicted as the necessary
softening influence on Max, as opposed to his father with his stern and authoritarian
manner, she is far from being a stereotypical figure. A positive role model for women and
mothers, Adele also teaches Max other important values, such as the need to be connected to the community and the importance of self-respect. Her necessary presence serves to illustrate that manhood and fatherhood are not incompatible with gentleness and emotion. Both mothers and fathers can be strong or weak, effective or ineffective guides for the child. Taken together, then, Gaines’s stories deconstruct any clear-cut division of character traits according to gender lines. What matters, so Gaines implies, are the values themselves, not the gender of the one who is teaching them.

The stories discussed so far illustrate Gaines’s parodying the ethnocentric concept of the nuclear family as standard or normal. None of his stories advocates that his black families should strive for attaining a nuclear family structure. Thus, Gaines’s stories respond to and refute the infamous 1965 Moynihan report “The Negro Family: A Case for National Action,” which established a connection between the disproportionately high rates of single-parent families and poverty, unemployment, welfare dependency, and crime. The study concluded that “the internal matriarchal structure of black families was ‘at the center of the tangle of pathology and was mainly responsible for the problems in the black community’” (qtd. in Thompson 56). Inspired and encouraged by the success of his own familial upbringing, Gaines portrays the black one-parent family as resilient and functional if certain conditions are met. Even though growing up in a nuclear family might facilitate a balanced education for the child, Gaines seems to imply that a one-parent upbringing does not have to fail if the proper lessons are taught to the child and if the support of the extended family and community are secured. Therefore, we have to read Gaines’s stories in terms of the effectiveness of the behavior that individuals such as the mother or father display. That the presence of both parents is no guarantee for a
successful family is illustrated if one takes a closer look at Sonny and his parents in “A Long Day in November.”

Sonny’s father, Eddie, appears as an irresponsible and selfish man for most of the story. He spends more time on his newly-acquired car than with his wife and son, thus abandoning his responsibilities as a husband and a father. He expects his wife Amy to take care of the household in addition to helping with Sonny’s school work. Furthermore, he assumes Amy should be ready for sex when he wants her, thus reducing the concept of love to mere sex on demand. Therefore, Eddie is a father and husband by title only; he is both physically and emotionally absent from his family.

Eddie’s interest in material possessions over wife and child recalls Macon Dead in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*. Both characters derive their identity from property rather than from connectedness to other people. However, just as Macon Dead’s obsession with property is also an expression of his attempt to accumulate economic power and thus put himself beyond the control of a racist economic system, so we have to read Eddie’s preoccupation with his car and his enjoyment of the physical freedom it provides as direct consequences of and substitutes for society’s devaluation of the black man and its denial of black manhood. Analogous to the male fascination with flying in the fiction of Richard Wright and Toni Morrison, the automobile here functions as a symbol for vicarious masculinity and freedom. This is especially true for a society in which the black male is denied his mobility and where professional opportunities are limited. To the black male, the car thus serves as a device for demonstrating his power and control of his own destiny. Eddie, however, erroneously believes that the car is the only recourse left for him to preserve a degree of self-esteem.
Eddie’s failures as a husband and father are obvious and are pointed out by a number of voices in the story. Among them are the local hoodoo woman, Madame Toussaint, who tells him to burn his car; his mother-in-law, who dislikes him because of his self-centeredness and lack of integrity; and the older boy Bill, who is a kind of surrogate father for Sonny. As Karen Carmean correctly evaluates him, “Bill is a nurturing figure, helping Miss Hebert, the teacher, by assisting her with the younger children. He shows understanding and kindness to Sonny, protecting him from the taunts of older children, and inspires Sonny’s admiration” (141). Bill is a good example of Gaines’s double-voicing on fatherhood, as his actions and supportive words stand in remarkable contrast to, and thus serve as an indictment of, the neglect and lack of reassurance Sonny receives from his father after the incident at school.

Acting upon Madame Toussaint’s advice, Eddie begins the process of his redefinition of fatherhood. The burning of his beloved car is the personal sacrifice that initiates his becoming a more responsible man. Next, Amy will teach him to take a regular part in Sonny’s education by telling him to accompany their son to school to speak with his teacher. Gaines’s idea of fatherhood thus implies more than being merely a breadwinner; it means making sacrifices and taking an active interest and participating in familial matters, including the raising of the son, roles traditionally and stereotypically associated more with women than with men.

Eddie’s one-sided perceptions of fatherhood and manhood are linked to the views of other flawed men in Gaines’s stories, as for example Oscar Wheeler’s suppression of emotions in “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit,” the objectification of women that is displayed by the pimp in “The Sky is Gray,” and Max’s father’s mistaken definition of
manhood as being sexually active in “The Turtles.” These voices are offset by the values that are exhibited by strong and influential female characters, such as Adele, Octavia, and Amy.

However, Amy’s views on manhood contain an additional twist. While she instills in Eddie the values of parental responsibility and sacrifice, she also, in a surprising turn at the end, insists on his beating her, as punishment for having left him, as well as to save his standing as a “man” in the community. Gaines thus juxtaposes, on the one hand, a public view of manhood, which stipulates that the man upholds a position of power as the head of the household to the point of physically dominating his wife, and, on the other hand, a private view according to which the man’s role is redefined to include domestic responsibilities, which entails that the woman often tells the man what to do. Eddie’s beating of Amy is indeed a precarious scene for Gaines to portray, as it has brought him charges of perpetuating stereotypes. However, to reduce Amy’s insistence on Eddie beating her to an instance of sexism or even domestic abuse is to misread Gaines’s dialogic text as a monologic one. Clearly one cannot overlook Amy’s role in this scene: Amy commands Eddie to beat her. Gaines obviously portrays Amy as the stronger one of the two adults. I would like to suggest again that Gaines parodies the two concepts of manhood, the public and the private one, against each other, with the extremity and irrationality of physical punishment, enforced against the will of the “punisher,” underlining the anachronism and absurdity of the public perception of manhood.

This technique of double-voicing is reinforced by the fact that the story is narrated from Sonny’s perspective. Sonny is not able to know the reason for his parents’ quarrel or to interpret the significance of the car-burning; he merely records all his sensory
experiences with the minuteness and impartiality of a direct observer, almost in the manner of a reporter. As a consequence, Gaines achieves an authorial distance, which allows the characters’ voices to be autonomous. Gaines’s voice never blends with any of the characters. Yet, at the same time, the child’s perspective also registers the actions in all their vividness and in their direct repercussions, as Sonny is the one who is primarily affected by his parents’ problems. Importantly, whereas Sonny is not in a position to judge most of the actions and remains passive throughout most of the story, he finally does react to his father’s beating of his mother: “‘Leave my mama alone, you old yellow dog,’ I say. ‘You leave my mama alone.’ I throw the pot at him but I miss him, and the pot go bouncing ‘cross the floor” (BL 74). Through double-voicing, here in the form of the bouncing pot, it becomes clear that the community’s presumable sanction of such behavior as wife-beating is not shared by Gaines, even though Gaines never reduces the authorial distance to his characters.12

“A Long Day in November” develops the father-son theme by demonstrating that being a father is integral to being a man. Sonny can only become a man if he has an appropriate model to imitate. Only when Eddie transcends his selfishness does he set an example for his son to emulate. Barbara Puschmann-Nalenz likewise notices the mirror-like relationship between father and son:

If the father is presented as a person who is emotionally still a child and then through the events of the story achieves a new kind of manhood, his son resembles him in many respects, the basic difference being, of course, that he is a child whereas his father acts like one. . . . [T]he end of the story shows a parallel development in both. The boy, too, has “grown up” and found a new strength to master his problems, and a new self-confidence through his father. (165-66)
Sonny’s growing self-confidence at the end is important: “I know my lesson. I ain’t go’n wee-wee on myself no more. Daddy’s going to school with me tomorrow. I’m go’n show him I can beat Billy Joe Martin shooting marbles. I can shoot all over Billy Joe Martin. And I can beat him running, too” (BL 79). The transformation in his relationship to his peers from timid and nervous to confident and daring is a direct consequence of Eddie’s reconstruction of paternal identity. With the assurance deriving from the knowledge of having a protective father by his side, Sonny not only dares to face his schoolmates again but is even ready to challenge them. In this sense, “A Long Day in November” stresses the interdependency of the destinies of the father and the son: the well-being of one directly affects and results from the other.

On still another level, the story also extends into the community, as Eddie has to enlist the services of friends who lend him money and the advice of Madame Toussaint, who represents both folk wisdom and the spirit of previous generations, to woo back Amy. The community is thus supportive in Eddie’s quest for redefining his role as father and husband. The willingness of Eddie’s friends to trust him with their hard-earned money and the general wisdom and knowledge about human nature displayed by the hoodoo woman are important lessons for Sonny to learn on his way to becoming a responsible man/father himself.

“A Long Day in November” thus exemplifies the African American concept of the extended family and community. Discussing the historical development of the African American family, sociologist Sadye Logan lists several distinctly African values that have influenced the black family in America. Among them are “the extended family’s precedence over the nuclear family,” “the viewing of children as the
responsibility of parents and extended family,” “the precedence of family needs over individual needs,” and “cooperation among all family or community members, with the sharing of responsibility for the well-being of others” (qtd. in Thompson 59). These four influences are all illustrated in Gaines’s stories, thus demonstrating the author’s deconstruction of the traditional nuclear family structure and his construction, in its place, of the extended African American family.

Another one of Gaines’s often-overlooked early stories, “My Grandpa and the Haint,” sheds additional light on his deconstruction of traditional gender roles and redefinition of the family as anchored in the community. In particular, “My Grandpa and the Haint” develops the themes of “A Long Day in November” and combines several of the loose strands in the other stories by weaving together the boys’ previous experiences and allowing the child protagonist to assume an active role in the resolution of a marital conflict.

In the absence of his parents, the 12-year-old Bobby is raised by his grandmother and grandfather. Consequently, they assume a parental role for him, as indicated by his chosen names for them, “Mom” and “Pap.” Clearly, Bobby considers himself to be in the position of a responsible “son,” and he therefore feels called upon to act when he sees his grandparents’ marriage in jeopardy. After his frequent fishing trips with Bobby, Pap regularly insists on making a stop at Miss Molly Bee’s house, a woman with a questionable reputation, to wash her feet and indulge in other playful activities with her. Although they do not engage in sexual activity, Bobby does sense that “it wasn’t fair to Mom for Pap to be acting like this behind her back” (“Grandpa” 152).
Thus, the boy finds himself in a precarious situation, for as “their only little grandchild, I thought it was my duty to see that nothing ever separated them” (153). However, he loves both his grandparents. He does not want to be complicit in betraying the one (Mom) by remaining silent nor in hurting the other (Pap) by playing the informer and telling Mom about Pap, but he knows he must act.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, he enlists the services of his friend Lucius, who is to inform Mom—in a well-rehearsed “accidental” remark—about Pap’s whereabouts after his fishing trips. The ploy works, and Mom immediately acts to get her man back. As in “A Long Day in November,” the help and wisdom of Madame Toussaint are enlisted, who casts a spell and teaches Pap a lesson in the form of a terrifying “haint” that chases him out of Miss Molly Bee’s house and across the fields, until he temporarily loses his sanity. After Pap recovers from his shock a few weeks later and confesses his lies to Mom, Bobby feels guilty for having caused his Pap so much pain and trouble. He thus resorts to his resourcefulness for a second time. In another set-up with Lucius, Bobby further solidifies the bond between his grandparents by having Lucius inform Pap that Miss Molly Bee has found another willing replacement to make her laugh.

Like Amy in “A Long Day In November” and Octavia in “The Sky Is Gray,” “My Grandpa and the Haint” features a typical Gainesian female protagonist who is both strong and active in getting what she wants. These female characters effectively counter any view of women as victimized and weak. On the other hand, Pap, like Eddie in “A Long Day in November,” is depicted as an immature, if not childish, man who has to learn his lesson and change his ways. During most of the story it is Pap who behaves like a child, whereas Bobby conducts himself in a wise and mature way. The story, therefore,
underlines again the interdependence of the father’s and the son’s roles, with the son becoming a guide to the father’s maturation.

In yet another significant parody on “A Long Day in November,” Mom’s motives and actions display both similarities and differences to Amy’s. Her decision to have a spell cast on Pap and possibly hurt him are motivated by her concern for Pap’s standing in the community: “‘I hate what I’m doing,’ she said. ‘But I can’t help it. Letting that yellow woman make a fool of him like that’” (“Grandpa” 157). Thus, comparable to Amy’s insistence on Eddie beating her, it is his dignity she is concerned with more than hers. But unlike Amy, Mom separates her role and views from the community’s by insisting on taking care of Pap during the weeks of his recovery: “People told Mom she ought to get him a doctor, but Mom said Pap was her man, not theirs, and she knowed how to look after him. People wouldn’t argue with Mom; nobody ever argued with Mom. But they kept on dropping by to look at Pap. Everybody dropped by” (159).

“My Grandpa and the Haint” marks a significant development in Gaines’s portrayal of child characters, as the boy here becomes an active participant in the resolution of the plot. Bobby’s values are clear. Having enjoyed the stability of his upbringing by his grandparents, he wants to preserve the familial bond. Importantly, he needs to be able to respect his Pap and does everything to restore him to that status. Both Pap and Bobby have become men by the end of the story, as both act responsibly and are motivated by care for others.

In addition, Bobby’s well-planned scheme and resourcefulness have to be read in the context of the African American trickster tradition. By showing his versatility as a trickster figure, Bobby is tied to the larger community and history, a development from
the first signs of education in communal matters that Max has received in “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit” and that Sonny has witnessed by visiting Madame Toussaint’s house. Bobby is Gaines’s richest child character so far, a boy who respects and loves his elders but who can also speak up and act in a responsible manner, and who knows how to use communal resources to achieve his ends.

Stories like “A Long Day in November” and “My Grandpa and the Haint” conclude with happy endings, in which the marital conflicts have been resolved. As we have seen, however, in “The Turtles” and “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit,” no such happy ending is possible, as the fate of the boy remains precarious. The difference, however, is not necessarily one’s upbringing in a nuclear family. While it can certainly be advantageous for the child if both mother and father are present, it is more important for the parents to recognize and overcome their weaknesses. Only then can the child benefit, as in “A Long Day in November” and “My Grandpa and the Haint.” By contrast, “The Turtles” and “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit” feature faulty and misguided father figures who, in the absence of powerful, guiding mothers, might educate their sons in deficient ways. Importantly, the fathers in both stories are not involved in community life and thus unable to benefit from the community’s possible support. Not only is the mother absent in the two stories, but so is the community, and thus the surrogate family, which creates a void too big for one parent to fill. The void left by an absent father and the devastating effects of his absence on the son are described in “The Sky Is Gray” and “Three Men.”

Written from the perspective of the 8-year-old James, “The Sky Is Gray” deals with his early awareness of adulthood and the attendant responsibilities that are forced
upon him as a consequence of the father’s absence. As Gaines’s father was forced to join the army and leave behind his wife and children, so was James’s father. Whether he volunteered because of a lack of other job opportunities or whether he was drafted is not known; it is clear, however, that the story implies a strong criticism of a society that disregards the welfare and needs of the family that is left behind.

As the oldest of the three children, James has to assume the role of male head of the family at a very early age, which means that he has to suppress his most natural feelings: “I’m the oldest and she [his mother] say I’m the man. . . . I can’t ever be scared and I can’t ever cry” (BL 84). Not allowed to openly show his emotions, he has to prematurely take on the behavior and duties of an adult. This is most vividly described in the scene when he has to kill two little redbirds because the family needs the food. Even though he loves the birds and would rather play with them, his mother forces him to kill them with his fork. When James refuses to do so and starts to cry, Octavia beats him until he prongs them. Looking back, James comprehends his mother’s motives:

I’m still young—I ain’t no more than eight; but I know now; I know why I had to do it. (They was so little, though. They was so little. I member how I picked the feathers off them and cleaned them and helt them over the fire. Then we all ate them. Ain’t had but a little bitty piece each, but we all had a little bitty piece, and everybody just looked at me ‘cause they was so proud.) Suppose she had to go away? That’s why I had to do it. Suppose she had to go away like Daddy went away? Then who was go’n look after us? They had to be somebody left to carry on. I didn’t know it then, but I know it now. (BL 90)

This little incident, couched in typical Gainesian understatement and rendered in the jazz-like “playing-around-the-note” technique, is both the author’s compelling indictment of a society that does not provide for families in need and his unadorned portrayal of the bitter consequences the absence of a father causes for the child. It is
important to note, however, that the mother’s harshness by itself is not sufficient for teaching the child strategies for survival. Rather, it is “Auntie and Monsieur Bayonne [the preacher] [who] talked to me and made me see” (*BL* 90). Thus, words of explanation are necessary to make clear the reasons for the whipping. Here it is the extended family and the community that intervene, thereby personifying the above-quoted African American family principle of “the viewing of children as the responsibility of parents and extended family.”

The ideas of utter deprivation and perseverance are reinforced when James and his mother travel to Bayonne to go to the dentist’s office. Formally an initiation into the segregated society, the trip to town also constitutes James’s premature arrival at adulthood. During the dentist’s lunch-break, Octavia and James are forced to spend their time wandering the cold wintry streets, avoiding the whites-only facilities. Aware of their lack of money and his mother’s many sorrows, James cannot express his most primary emotions because he wants to spare his mother worries:

> I’m so cold now I’m ‘bout ready to say it. . . . My stomach growls and I suck it in to keep Mama from hearing it. . . . I want stand close ‘side her, but she don’t like that. She say that’s crybaby stuff. She say you got to stand for yourself, by yourself. . . . I’m so hungry and cold I want to cry. . . . I’m hungry, I’m almost starving I’m so hungry, but I don’t want her spending money on me. (*passim*, *BL*104-10)

Gaines here not only demonstrates that a father’s absence often results in financial constraints and poverty, but he also shows James’s exceptionally mature awareness and comprehension of his mother’s worries. Like Max in “The Turtles” and “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit,” James understands his parent well enough to manage his behavior. Intuitively, he grasps that Octavia is trying to teach him that the only way to survive in a racist and segregated world is by maintaining one’s self-worth and dignity.
Although Octavia appears to be an unsentimental and harsh mother who denies her son his right to be a child, her behavior stems less from a disposition to cruelty than from her primary concern to teach James the necessary survival skills, which includes first and foremost the upholding of one’s dignity and pride. As Todd Duncan remarks, “In the tradition of many a black mother under the South’s system of caste and class, her own system may be stern, but it is consistent and understood by her son, hence a reliable guide for his development” (91). Thus, while Marcia Gaudet rightly remarks that Octavia “lacks warmth and the ability to show love openly,” this lack of showing love seems to be less a human deficiency, but rather a basic necessity in this world in order to avoid succumbing to the propagated image of black inferiority (“Black Women” 144). Ernest Gaines himself points out that the first duty of a mother who loved her children was “[t]o show us how to live, to show us how to survive” (Gaudet and Wooton 65).

In their study of the relationship between the black mother and son, Joyce Elaine King and Carolyn Ann Mitchell emphasize that the learning process for the African American boy in a racist environment is “not a harmonious, modulated, paced experience but one fraught with tension played out against a backdrop of poverty, extremity, pain and ubiquitous racism” (20). Consequently, the lessons of perseverance, pain, and toughness need to be taught in unconventional ways. Thus, Octavia teaches less through words than through her own actions. Interestingly, King and Mitchell link “The Sky Is Gray” to Langston Hughes’s poem “Mother to Son.” In the poem, the mother warns her son that “life . . . ain’t been no crystal stair” and admonishes him not to “turn back” or “set down on the steps,” but to follow her “a-climbin’ on/ And reachin’ landin’s,/ And turnin’ corners” (Hughes 187). King’s and Mitchell’s conclusion about the mother can be
applied to Octavia as well: “In a beautiful irony, the mother ‘crystallizes’ in her words of encouragement and advice the essence of her life. She says, in effect, ‘All I have to give you are my deeds, my words and my faith’” (21). Octavia tries to instill the same lessons when she admonishes James: “‘You not a bum . . . You a man’” (BL 117).

Octavia’s sternness is, of course, also a result of the absence of the father, which exacerbates the already difficult situation a black child faces in an oppressive society. Because of the paternal void, James is deprived of the vital nurturing link of his father that would sustain him in his encounters with racism and discrimination. As a compensatory device, this void has to be offset by an abnormally high emphasis on dignity and manhood, which in this case means that James is denied his childhood, or, as Craig Werner phrases it, he “has bought his manhood at the cost of his youth” (Paradoxical 37).

In the absence of the father, it is thus the mother who teaches James how to grow up. In addition to imparting to her son the harsh lessons concerning pride and dignity, Octavia also proves very resourceful in other ways. By closely observing his mother, James learns how to resist effectively society’s constant attempts at dehumanization. Thus, for example, he watches his mother’s trickster-like astuteness in feigning interest in an ax while dealing with the hardware store owner, in order to provide her son with a few moments of warmth in the cruel winter. Later he witnesses her obstinate refusal to accept more meat than she can pay for by a friendly-minded white woman, thus showing her son not to depend on others or to take things for granted.15

In addition to Octavia’s leadership, James is also exposed to two surrogate father figures, who will introduce him to two different approaches to dealing with reality. While
sitting in the dentist’s waiting-room, James overhears a conversation between a
conservative preacher and a young student. The latter totally rejects any conventional
moral or religious beliefs and questions all traditionally held assumptions, starting from
the color of grass to the existence of God: “‘We don’t question is exactly our problem. . . .
We should question and question and question—question everything. . . . Question
everything. Every stripe, every star, every word spoken. Everything. . . . Question Him,
too’” (BL 95-96). With rational argumentation and cold logic the young man divests
every word of its conventional meaning. His excess of logic is illustrated in the following
absurd dialogue between him and the lady sitting next to him:

“You really don’t believe in God?” the lady says.
“No,” he says.
“But why?” the lady says.
“Because the wind is pink,” he says. [. . .]
“Grass? Grass is black. . . . You believe it’s green because someone told
you it was green. If someone has told you it was black you’d believe it
was black. . . . Prove to me that it’s green,” the boy says.
“It’s green because the people say it’s green.”
“Those same people say we’re citizens of these Unites States,” the boy
says. (BL 100-01)

Whereas the student is right in his observation that words in themselves have no
meanings and that meanings depend on handed-down conventions, this scene
nevertheless demonstrates the necessity for such conventions if any meaningful
communication is to be ensured.16 James has to learn to distinguish between intelligent
questioning and mere relativism. On the one hand, the impulse to free oneself from “the
prison house of language” and to start investigating the connotations behind the
traditionally unreflected use of words may be a laudable effort. On the other hand,
however, an exaggeration of this tendency leads to total relativism and a lack of order.
The student’s problem is that his abundance of information and facts is not adequately matched by wisdom and feelings.

In the ensuing controversial debate with the preacher, the student verbally attacks the minister for his submissive obedience to God and his all-encompassing trust in God to set things straight in the end. In a typical Gainesian inversion of expected behavior, it is the preacher who, deprived of the black minister’s traditional eloquence, resorts to violence and strikes the young man, whereas it is the young man who then turns his other cheek. In this scene, Gaines effectively parodies both the absolute relativism of the student and the powerless preacher’s unquestioning, faithful belief.

Finally, the student’s nihilistic vision is challenged by the lady sitting next to him. Recognizing that the student lacks a genuine concern and feelings for others, she tells him: “‘Let’s hope they ain’t all like you, though, . . . Done forgot the heart absolutely’” (BL 102). The young man’s final words also suggest that, although he may be largely correct in his logical views, his way of seeing things leaves him rather empty and unhappy: “‘I haven’t anything. For me, the wind is pink, the grass is black’” (BL 102).

James is thus confronted with three views he has to explore and negotiate—blind religious faith, cold logical questioning, and emotional capacity. These ideas, in addition to the lessons taught by his mother, have to substitute for the absence of the father. Compared to the boys in the other stories we have seen, James seems most equipped to deal with the harsh environment he lives in. James is also the only protagonist so far who is depicted outside the protective confines of the quarters. Yet, he is fatherless, and the absence of a male role model could make him vulnerable to developing ill-conceived ideas about manhood. This seems to be Gaines’s implication because “The Sky Is Gray”
in *Bloodline* is followed by “Three Men,” which features the 19-year-old Procter Lewis, who is likewise without a father and who recalls James in his suppression of his emotional self.

Procter turns himself in to the sheriff for having killed another black man in a bar fight. He is desperate and hopes that the white plantation owner Roger Medlow will release him. When Procter reflects on his predicament, his mind turns to his parents: “Where is my father? Why my mama had to die? Why they brought me here and left me to struggle like this?” (*BL* 147) Again we see the absence of the father as detrimental to the son’s life. However, his cellmate Munford Bazille becomes Procter’s surrogate father and mentor; Munford prepares Procter to change his mind about allowing a white man to bail him out.

With his violent behavior towards other blacks and his disrespect for women, Procter so far has internalized society’s definition of blacks as animals and thus collaborated in his own emasculation. Munford explains to Procter that some whites like to employ bonded-out blacks, whom they can then treat as slaves because the only alternative for them would be to return to prison. Reduced to such dependency, blacks function only as pawns, used by whites as members of an inferior species from which they can distance themselves and thereby confirm their own humanity: “‘Cause they grow niggers just to be killed, and they grow people like you to kill ‘em. That’s all part of the—the culture. And every man got to play his part in the culture, or the culture don’t go on” (*BL* 142). Munford then admonishes Procter to assume responsibility for his crimes and, unlike himself, to accept his jail sentence if he ever wants to be considered a man.
Importantly, unlike the student in “The Sky Is Gray,” with whom Munford shares a certain cynicism as well as the rejection of conventions and religion, Munford proves to be a constructive mentor, as he actually takes care of a fellow human being, thus preventing somebody else from wasting his life the same way he has. In the absence of a real father figure, Munford thus provides an appropriate model for Procter to imitate.

Instead of allowing the white plantation owner to bail him out, Procter now needs to assume responsibility for his behavior by staying in jail and by accepting his punishment. That way he can break the cycle of dependency on the white world. Furthermore, Procter starts to evaluate his previous life and admits to himself that he has only used women and that he will never change if he does not stand up now and accept his punishment. He painfully acknowledges that he has never loved anyone apart from his now deceased mother. Again he wonders about the whereabouts of his father. Significantly, by retracing the origin of his problems to his parents’ absence and the lack of love he received and gave, Procter arrives at a pivotal point of self-recognition as he implicitly acknowledges the necessity of human relationships for providing strength and self-esteem.

Apart from Munford’s mentorship, the third man in the cell also proves influential, albeit in an indirect way. Even though Procter refers to the homosexual Hattie Brown only as a “freak” and “sad woman” and abhors his open display of feelings and sympathy, Hattie’s genuine concern for and understanding of Procter’s fate are further factors in Procter’s transformation and redefinition of manhood.

The decisive event for Procter’s change occurs when a 14-year-old boy is put into the same prison cell. Observing the boy’s fear and pain as well as Hattie’s genuine care,
Procter feels reminded of his own youth and the deep sense of rejection and overall lack of comfort he experienced during his childhood. The boy thus awakens the emotional side in Procter. By washing the wounds on the boy’s back, he now symbolically assumes the role of a surrogate father, as Munford had done to him, and becomes a “proctor.” Thus, the vital intergenerational link is established. By extension, the relationships among Munford, Procter, and the boy also serve to establish a larger bloodline, one which extends beyond the individual’s life. Here the bloodline alluded to in the title of the short story collection stands as a metaphor for the “shared historical suffering that knits individuals together in families and as a community” (Luscher 68).

Like Sonny’s newly-found self-confidence at the end of “A Long Day in November,” which stems from his father’s reunion with his mother, Procter similarly derives an all-encompassing equanimity. By actually giving something to somebody else, he not only discovers his self-worth, he also gains a measure of self-control over his life as well as the strength to face the future:

And if I didn’t go with Medlow [the white plantation owner], I surely had to go with T. J. [the racist sheriff] and his boys. Was I going to be able to take the beatings night after night? I had seen what T. J. could do to your back. I had seen it on this kid and I had seen it on other people. Was I going to be able to take it? I don’t know, I thought to myself. I’ll just have to wait and see. (BL 155)

“Three Men” thus illustrates Gaines’s belief that fatherhood is empowering both to the father and to the son. However, there can be no happy ending if people don’t assume personal responsibility but instead evoke history as an excuse for their behavior. One may conclude, then, that for Gaines, becoming a father is not only integral to becoming a man but also a way to arrive at a recognition of one’s own self and freedom.17
More than any other story discussed, “Three Men” exemplifies Gaines’s concept of the African American extended family. In the absence of any blood relations, Munford, Hattie, Procter, and the nameless boy form a community that takes care of itself. Significantly, it is in jail, the place that symbolizes failed life, that Procter’s new life and positive identity begin. This idea is highly important if one considers that the high rate of black men’s incarceration is often cited as a major reason for the dysfunctional state of the black family. Gaines clearly revises this picture, as he not only refutes the idea that the black family is disintegrating but also presents a powerful and functional surrogate family amidst the most severe circumstances.

Summarizing Gaines’s portrait of the family, one might see it as an entity that does not measure itself against the white nuclear family, but that is culturally distinctive in its combination of African and American values. Influenced by historical, economic, social, cultural, and political forces, the black family adapts, proves resilient, and survives. It might be useful here to consider a model proposed by several sociologists who see “black families as a social subsystem mutually interacting with other subsystems of the black community and in the wider (white) community.” According to this theory, black families are depicted as a circle embedded within concentric circles of the two larger systems: 1. external subsystems in the wider society (i.e., societal forces and institutional policies), 2. external subsystems in the black community (i.e., schools, churches, peers), and 3. internal subsystems in the family (i.e., husband-wife, parent-child). (qtd. in Thompson 58)

Gaines’s stories illustrate the constant interaction among the three subsystems. Rather than understanding the black family as a monolithic system, whose success and failure can be measured by comparing it to the white nuclear family, his works propose a
holistic approach that analyzes the combined effects of the forces impacting the black family. Focusing on the problematic black father figure, the stories show the African American community’s versatility in dealing with pressures on the black family as a result of the historical (slavery), economic (sharecropping, job-related discrimination), and social (Jim Crow laws) developments.

**Chapter Three**

**Rejection/Deconstruction of the Father/Race in Hemingway’s Nick Adams Stories**

Comparing Gaines’s portrayal of sons to the Hemingway stories that feature Nick Adams as a pre-adolescent reveals a large number of interesting parallels and equally significant differences. These differences reflect the two writers’ divergent concepts of the father and his importance for the son’s identity formation. Gaines’s fictional sons seek reunion with the father; in order for the father-son relationship to work, they need to be able to believe in him and have respect for him. The father’s and the son’s fate are dependent on each other, and where the father is absent, the son suffers. However, as the discussion of Gaines’s short stories has demonstrated, the paternal void is often filled by the surrogate family, consisting of the extended family and community.

Hemingway’s Nick Adams, by contrast, will grow more and more disillusioned with both parents. He quickly severs his ties from his mother and eventually has to reject his father. The rejection of home, however, leads to a life of restlessness and wandering. In the absence of familial and social relationships, Nick expends his energy on nature and the Indian world, both of which are depicted as being in a state of decline, thus complicating Nick’s search for identity.
In both authors’ works, the process of identity construction is directly related to the environment in which the child is raised. As seen, Gaines’s fictional boys have to learn early to maintain their self-esteem in a racist society that tries to reduce them to second-class citizens. On the other hand, Hemingway’s Nick Adams encounters a supposedly primitive Indian world in the Michigan woods. Where Gaines’s characters have to reject the ideology of white supremacy, Nick seeks to embrace Indian culture as a response to his leaving “civilization” behind. In either environment, the father, or his absence, plays a pivotal role in the son’s development.

Hemingway’s interest in Native Americans goes back to his earliest boyhood experiences when he was taken to see Pawnee Bill’s Wild West Show. Ernest liked to masquerade as Pawnee Bill and dreamed of being the “White Chief of the Pawnees.” In addition, as Carlos Baker writes, young Ernest “took to dramatizing passages from Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*, with Marcelline as the dark-eyed daughter of the old Arrow-maker in the Land of the Dacotahs” (*Hemingway* 5). In the family’s summer home in northern Michigan, Hemingway came into contact with neighboring Ojibway and Ottawa Indians, who would form the basis for his Indian stories.

Peter Griffin mentions that Ernest worked on an “Indian Passion Play” called “No Worst Than a Bad Cold,” during his junior year, which was based on Longfellow’s poem (27). As Griffin evaluates *Hiawatha’s* impact on Hemingway: “Longfellow was his favorite poet, and *Hiawatha*, with its lyrical beauty, its themes of love and death in a pristine world, and its powerful mythic overtones, was Ernest’s favorite poem” (233). Assessing the importance of the Indians for Hemingway, Baker argues that “he was
constantly aware of their presence, like atavistic shadows moving along the edges of his consciousness, coming and going without a sound” (Hemingway 13).

The fascination with Indians is, of course, more than just innocent playing. Citing the frequent Wild West shows and re-creations of battles with Native Americans at the beginning of the 20th century, Linda Helstern argues that “[g]iven their mass appeal, it is perhaps not surprising to find Indians at the heart of the decade’s purported solution to the ‘boy problem’: in prototypical American youth organizations, Indians were formally implicated in the construction of white masculinity” (61). Hemingway was thoroughly familiar with the Woodcraft League of America and the “anti-nationalist and anti-materialist” philosophy of its founder, Ernest Thompson Seton, which aims at “placing true civilization in the realm of the primitive” (Helstern 63). Helstern states that Hemingway “owned six individual titles” by Seton, which rank him among Hemingway’s favorite writers. Likewise, Jeffrey Meyers confirms that “Hemingway had fifty-seven books on Indians in his library and was well read in anthropology” (304).

Given his fascination for and knowledge of Native American culture, it is important to analyze both Hemingway’s personal attitude toward Native Americans and his portrayal of his Indian characters in the context of the present discussion of “whiteness studies.” We can thus see how much his fiction corresponds to or deconstructs the contemporary image of Indians. On the one hand, there is Hemingway’s repeated, but unsubstantiated, claim to have been one-eighth Indian himself: “I was the first and only white man or 1/8 Indian who was ever a Kamba, and it is not like President Coolidge being given a war bonnet by a tame Blackfoot or Shoshone” (qtd. in Lewis 480 n.1). In several letters, he specified his Indian origins as “Cheyenne” or “Northern Cheyenne.”

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Well documented is also his occasional adoption of a “stage-Indian dialect” or his use of “Choctaw lingo” (cf. Lewis 201). Such behavior is certainly based on his position of power as “white,” which privileges him to embrace an other, exotic identity. As Lawrence Oliver remarks, “[R]acial identity in the United States is often beyond an individual’s control, is socially over-determined,” but “whites may generally choose their ethnic identity (Irish-American, Italian American, etc.)” (1272). In that light, Hemingway’s “going Indian” is just as problematic as his later “going native” in his African safaris.

On the other hand, however, his fascination with Native American culture exemplifies his honest interest and belief in primitivism as a solution to modern society’s ailments. Hemingway’s views followed contemporary anthropological thought in its blend of cultural and chronological primitivism. According to Lewis, cultural primitivism “places value on the simplicity of social forms and finds sophistication a companion of cultural degeneration and even evil. The cultural primitive wishes to restructure society and all aspects of it, from art to family, along lines that are felt to be more natural and better suited for the capacities and desires of human beings” (207-08). Cultural primitivism, then, is “Utopian,” whereas chronological primitivism is “Arcadian” in its looking backward to the past “when the human condition was if not Edenic at least holistic and characterized by reverence for life, high moral purpose, humane dealings, and beauty” (Lewis 208). Hemingway’s fiction embodies both aspects of primitivism in that the early stories seek the embrace of Indian culture as a solution to the disillusionment encountered in Nick Adams’s home, whereas Hemingway’s later fiction manifests a nostalgic look back in its search for places that permit the reconstruction of
the idyllic nature of the Michigan woods. As the discussion of his stories demonstrates, Hemingway’s portrayal of the Indian culture is never stereotypical but successful in its stark realism. In many ways, Hemingway’s characterization of his Indian characters anticipates our current debate about the construction of ethnicity.

His first Indian stories are “Indian Camp” and the deleted early section “Three Shots,” which had been cut before In Our Time was published. “Indian Camp” is a highly complicated story, and critics have read it in many different, and often contradictory, ways. Much revolves around the interpretation of the end of the story. Nick has to witness how his father delivers the baby of an Indian woman by performing a Caesarian with a jackknife and without using any anesthetic, while at the same time the Indian husband slits his throat with a razor, presumably because he can’t bear his wife’s screams any longer. After a brief conversation between father and son, in which Dr. Adams tries to reassure Nick that dying is “pretty easy,” the story ends with the much-discussed sentence: “In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die.” Critics have responded in different ways to this note of optimism at the end of the story. Their responses will be discussed here in the context of three interrelated thematic elements in “Indian Camp”: the impact of the events on Nick’s maturation, the nature of the father-son relationship at the end of the story, and the idea of race that is conveyed in this story.

As a tale of initiation, “Indian Camp” is unsuccessful, Joseph DeFalco argues, because “Nick reverts to infantile dependence” at the end and refuses “to accept the terrors of pain and death and the father’s inability to cope with them” (32). Joseph Flora is more lenient in his assessment, as he explains Nick’s “ability to dismiss death” and his
belief in immortality as not “unusual” for a child his age (28). Philip Young pursues the same line of thought when he reads Nick’s reaction as Hemingway’s successful answer to what the author had once identified as a problem faced by every serious writer, that is, how to know and put down “what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel” (*Death in the Afternoon* 2).21 Interpreting the ending of “Indian Camp,” Young concludes that “[w]hat you were supposed to feel has given over to something subtler and deeper. Children don’t really believe in their own demise. Death is obviously something that happens to other people” (“Big World” 7).

If one considers that “Indian Camp” originally followed “Three Shots,” Nick’s reaction at the end can be better evaluated. In “Three Shots,” Nick spoils his father’s and uncle’s nightly fishing trip by firing three shots because he can’t bear his fear of the stillness of the night any longer. His terror, however, is deeper than that; it is his growing awareness of his own mortality. A few weeks earlier at church “Nick had realized that some day he must die. It made him feel quite sick. It was the first time he had ever realized that he himself would have to die sometime” (*NAS* 14). Significantly, it was while singing the hymn “Some day the silver cord will break” that Nick’s terror set in. Later, he spent all night reading *Robinson Crusoe* “to keep his mind off the fact that someday the silver cord must break” (*NAS* 14).

Both Nick’s decision to read and the book of his choice are highly significant. Reading may keep his mind off unwanted thoughts, but it also functions as a first indication of his predilection for solitude and individuality.22 In his fear of mortality, we also see the source of Nick’s lifelong aversion to the stillness of nights and his attempts to stay awake that become the central plot elements of “Now I Lay Me.” Defoe’s novel
allows him to escape into the adventures of Robinson Crusoe, but ironically, Robinson’s
decision to go to sea is a consequence of his deliberate rejection of his father and the
pressures and responsibilities of middle-class society that he is unwilling to accept. The
small detail of Nick reading Robinson Crusoe assumes, therefore, a major significance, as
it foreshadows Nick’s later antagonistic or ambiguous relationship with his father and his
ensuing, lifelong struggle for emotional peace.

“Three Shots” thus plays a pivotal role in the Nick Adams saga. A discussion of
Robinson Crusoe’s most significant themes and scenes will show an abundance of
parallels to the Nick Adams stories. First of all, it cannot go unnoticed that Dr. Adams’s
values are remarkably close to the celebrated “middle station” virtues displayed by
Robinson’s father, who emphasizes “that the middle station of life was calculated for all
kinds of vertues and all kind of enjoyments; . . . that temperance, moderation, quietness,
health, society, all agreeable diversions, and all desirable pleasures, were the blessings
attending the middle station of life; that this way men went silently and smoothly thro’
the world . . .”23 Later, Nick will recognize the virtues of Crusoe’s father in his own
father’s behavior, especially his “temperance” and “moderation” in relation to sexuality
(“The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” “Ten Indians”) and alcohol (“The Three-Day
Blow”). In addition, Dr. Adams’s “quietness” becomes obvious in his silent acceptance
of his wife’s destruction of his artifacts in “Now I Lay Me.” Robinson recollects in detail
the lengthy discourse of his father, described as “a wise and grave man,” who warns him
against going to sea (RC 5). Importantly, Robinson also observes how his father’s “tears
run down his face very plentifully” and that “he was so mov’d, that he broke off the
discourse, and told me, his heart was so full, he could say no more to me” (RC 7). Again
Nick will see the parallel to his own father’s sentimentality and failure of communicating effectively.24

Supporting the father’s argument against Robinson’s going to sea, Robinson’s mother refuses to take or even see Robinson’s side. Robinson remembers his mother insisting that “I might depend I should never have their consent to it: That for her part she would not have so much hand in my destruction; and I should never have it to say, that my mother was willing when my father was not” (RC 8). Similar to the acts of treason committed by Nick’s mother in “The Last Good Country,” Robinson’s mother sides against her son. As in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” the mother smothers her son’s ambitions and thus proves to be an ineffective guide for him. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that Robinson’s “rambling thoughts” and “wandring inclination” win over his parents’ warnings and he leaves his father’s house and native country (RC 5).

As a consequence of Robinson’s disobedience, he becomes an isolated man whose life is dominated by fear and restlessness. For Robinson, as for Nick, traveling amounts to escape without a definite goal. G. A. Starr’s analysis of Robinson’s motivation to leave home seems applicable to Nick, if one disregards the implied religious message of Defoe’s novel:25

In a sense, Crusoe’s original sin does cause his later misfortunes; from another point of view, it is merely the first overt expression of a more fundamental source of trouble; the natural waywardness of every unregenerate man. . . . The running off to sea is not, in other words, the direct cause of all his later vicissitudes, but it does initiate a pattern of wrongdoing which has far-reaching consequences. (79-80)26

As a consequence of both Robinson’s and Nick’s wanderings, however, the alienation from the father and mother manifests itself in the heroes’ ultimate inability to connect with other people. As J. Paul Hunter summarizes Crusoe’s fate,
Crusoe’s isolation epitomizes the Puritan version of the plight of man. Fallen man is alienated from God—separated from him by a wide gulf as a result of sin. He is lonely and isolated in a world for which he was not in the first place intended, but into which he is cast as a result of sin. . . . His relationship to God disrupted, Crusoe finds a similar disordering of his relationship to his fellow man and to his environment. (142-43)

Whereas Crusoe ultimately finds himself on an island, deprived of human contact for two decades, Nick’s isolation is expressed by his short-term alliances, the absence of a permanent love relationship, and his final inability to form a close bond with his own son. In each case, however, the longing for affiliation is explicit and a direct consequence of the heroes’ wandering and paternal void. Both Robinson’s and Nick’s lives are driven by the hope of rescue from their solitude. Their desire for relationships with and connections to other people thus runs parallel to Gaines’s emphasis on communities, but remains largely unfulfilled.

Interestingly, Robinson Crusoe’s lengthy sojourn on his island, as well as his continued adventures after his rescue, and Nick’s endless pursuit of adventures and places can be seen as different manifestations of the same void. Robinson’s repudiation of his father—for, like Nick, he is largely silent on his separation from his mother—corresponds to Nick’s loss of security after rejecting his father. Conversely, when Robinson assumes a fatherly role toward Friday, he, like Procter Lewis in Gaines’s story, gains a sense of renewal and empowerment.

While these complications are yet far away in the future for young Nick in “Three Shots,” his reading of Robinson Crusoe is important for his later development, as Crusoe’s fate in certain ways foreshadows Nick’s later experiences. Moreover, the specific time and setting of “Three Shots” certainly evoke Robinson’s island setting. When Nick is alone in the camp at night, he might very well recall having read about
Robinson’s fear during his first night on the island: “[N]ight coming upon me, I began with a heavy heart to consider what would be my lot if there were any ravenous beasts in that country, seeing at night they always come abroad for their prey” (RC 39). Unlike Robinson, Nick has a gun and fires the shots that will take away his fears for the time being. Yet, when he begins to explain his fright to his father, he recalls Robinson’s horror and makes up an excuse by referring to the sound of animals as the cause of his fear.

Nick, by this time, has become familiar with the notion of death, which is a prevalent theme in Robinson Crusoe. And while Robinson “resolv’d to set all night, and consider the next day what death I should dye, for as yet I saw no prospect of life,” Nick is just hours away from witnessing death himself at the Indian camp (RC 39).

It becomes clear from the sequence of events in “Three Shots” that Dr. Adams’s decision to take Nick with him on his emergency trip to the Indian camp is based on Nick’s fear of being alone at night.27 If one considers that Nick witnesses a violent birth and shocking suicide, the story’s optimism at the end, Nick’s feeling “quite sure that he would never die,” does indeed sound ironic. Paul Strong surmises that there might be a “connection between the hymn, ‘Some day the silver cord will break,’ and Nick’s duty in the shanty—holding a pan for the afterbirth, with its severed cord” (83). However, Strong does not explain this connection beyond the obvious allusion to the afterbirth.

Interpreting the conclusion of “Indian Camp” in the context of the hymn and Nick’s reading of Robinson Crusoe, I would suggest that “the silver cord” between Nick and his father has not broken yet. Because of the strong father-son bond, Nick feels reassured after the horror he has witnessed. The optimism of “Indian Camp” may thus be ironic, but
it is also understandable and a tribute to the power of paternal love, not unlike the positive ending of “A Long Day in November.”

That this feeling of immortality is at least partly the result of his father’s presence can also be supported by a syntactical analysis of the story’s last sentence. Paul Smith, who was first to draw attention to the syntax of the story’s final sentence, convincingly argues that the “four introductory phrases are more than adverbial. They serve as necessary conditions for the rest of the sentence: only in the early morning and on the lake and sitting in the stern of the boat and with his father rowing, could Nick ‘feel quite sure that he would never die’” (Reader’s Guide 39). The father’s presence alone, however, would not be sufficient for Nick to feel secure, which can be illustrated by juxtaposing this final scene to the earlier trip across the lake when they were rowed by an Indian and “Nick lay back with his father’s arm around him.” At that point, “[i]t was cold on the water” (NAS 16). In spite of the physical contact between father and son in this scene, Nick feels uncomfortable and cold. The mood is tense and apprehensive, which is heightened by the frantic rowing of the Indian, by Nick’s boat losing ground to the other boat in the darkness, and by Nick’s disquieting question, “‘Where are we going, Dad?’” (NAS 16). Thus, we may conclude that one of the reassuring factors for Nick is not only the father’s presence but his actual guidance, as Dr. Adams in the final scene has replaced the ineffective Indian in rowing them back.

In addition, the penultimate paragraph underscores that Nick finds solace in nature; he prefers the lake and the “bass jump[ing]” to the eerie stillness of the man-made camp, and, most certainly, the rising sun and daybreak to the dead of the night (NAS 21). We can observe here Hemingway’s characteristic paralleling of a character’s inner
feelings with images from nature, a device the author would use frequently, as for example in “Ten Indians,” “The End of Something,” and “The Three-Day Blow.”

This optimistic note at the end of the story is reminiscent of the harmonious endings in Gaines’s “A Long Day in November” and “The Turtles.” The former concludes with an emphasis on the warmth Sonny experiences as a result of hearing his parents’ bedsprings, whereas in the latter Max receives a pleasant feeling from his “bare feet” in the “cool dust” while “the sun was going down” (“Turtles” 97). Sonny’s and Max’s confidence are noteworthy after the traumatic experience they have undergone in the story. Clearly, the relationships between son and father are repaired or still largely unharmed. It is also important, however, that Nick poses challenging questions about death to his father, and Max, as we have seen, displays the first signs of disagreement with his father’s narrow-minded views. These reactions by the sons mark the beginnings of troubled father-son relationships, as from now on the fathers will struggle to communicate effectively with their sons.

Furthermore, it needs to be pointed out that Sonny’s and Max’s confidence seem to be more stable and enduring than Nick’s, as theirs shines through at the end of the day when it is usually more likely for children to worry or to be afraid. By contrast, Nick’s feeling of immortality is clearly restricted to the morning light. Later stories such as “Ten Indians” and “Now I Lay Me” also illustrate that the night for Nick is always associated with fear and death. We thus see in nature’s cyclic rhythm a correspondence to Hemingway’s life-and-death theme. Renewal and reassurance come in the morning, but just as the bass are “making a circle in the water,” so the morning will inevitably be followed by night and its corresponding fears (NAS 21).
The life-and-death theme and the importance of the father figure in this respect become even clearer if we take into account Hemingway’s treatment of the Indian world and thus, by extension, his conceptualization of race in “Indian Camp.” On one level of reading, if night and day are linked to death and life, then the Indian camp as a site at night connotes death in both a literal sense (the Indian husband’s suicide) and a figurative one (the decline of Indian culture).

The dichotomy between the civilized and scientific world of Dr. Adams and the primitive and dark Indian world is implied from the beginning, as the screams in the camp are countered by Dr. Adams’s stoic and professional demeanor: “‘[H]er screams are not important. I don’t hear them because they are not important’” (NAS 18). Applying Greek mythology, DeFalco compares the trip across the lake to the entrance into Hades: “The classical parallel is too obvious to overlook, for the two Indians function in a Charon-like fashion in transporting Nick, his father, and his uncle from their own sophisticated and civilized world of the white man into the dark and primitive world of the camp” (29). Amy Strong supports this reading by adding two further elements from mythology. Thus, the dogs that greet them upon arrival in the Indian camp “recall Cerberus, the many-headed dog who challenged spirits trying to enter or leave Hades” (19). More significantly, when Dr. Adams and Nick leave camp again, we are reminded of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness. The evocation of Lethe, according to Strong, “helps illuminate Nick’s final thoughts of immortality” and “implicates both father and son in a larger historical pattern of forgetting” (19-20). Strong further explains that “Indian Camp” serves as a metaphor for “overlooking the Indians’ role not only in this story, but in the making of American identity.” Consequently, as she proposes, we need to “come to
terms with the way the identities of Nick and his father are constructed in relation to the Indians’ presence, and vice versa” (20).

Certainly, Hemingway’s portrait of Indians in this story is neither romanticizing nor dehumanizing. In fact, as Lewis argues, “The superficial so-called primitivism and the easy patronizing of Indians . . . from a position of privilege were what Hemingway parodied” (209). Hemingway’s choice to have a party of white men invited to an Indian camp serves as the beginning of an effective parody of cultural imperialism and the dichotomy between civilized and uncivilized societies. As David Roediger remarks, just as the term *white* arose “as a designation for European explorers, traders and settlers who came into contact with Africans and the indigenous people of the Americas,” so the concept of “[c]ivilization’ continued to define itself as a negation of ‘savagery’—indeed, to invent savagery in order to define itself” (21-22). The civilization-savagery dichotomy and its resultant imperialist ideology, which led to the dispossession of Native American land, are some of the concepts Hemingway deconstructs in this story.

The construction of racial identities, and specifically, the interrelationship of whites and Indians in Hemingway’s Indian stories, has been insufficiently discussed so far. Disappointingly, Amy Strong argues that in “Indian Camp” Hemingway “presents race simply as a biological feature,” whereas in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” he “revises this model to create a complex, shifting depiction of race that anticipates the essentialist/constructionist debates waged today” (18). However, I agree with Linda Helstern that “there is also an instability of racial identity in ‘Indian Camp,’” but unlike Helstern, I suggest using Bakhtin’s concept of metaparody to explain the ways Hemingway destabilizes racial assumptions and deconstructs the father-figure (64).
Central to a discussion of racial assumptions is Hemingway’s treatment of the birth scene, as the doctor’s operative procedure is an important cultural marker. Jürgen Wolters suggests that Dr. Adams’s performing a Caesarean “connotes authority, imperialism, assumption of power, and even tyrannical dictatorship” (92). Such a reading is also supported by Kenneth Bernard, who interprets Dr. Adams’s “stoicism [as] the indifference of the newer civilization to the death of the older” and concludes that “progress can ignore human values” (291). The story, then, becomes, according to G. Thomas Tanselle, a “parable of the gradual supplanting of one culture by another” (Item 53).

However, while such a reading is certainly appropriate, it is important not to overlook Hemingway’s simultaneous metaparodying on cultural imperialism. For example, supporting the imperialist interpretation, Amy Strong argues that Dr. Adams’s post-operative exhilaration and his remark that his feat was “one for the medical journal” recall the “ways explorers conquered the ‘new world’” and are thus further signs of white imperialism (23). However, such a view is parodied both by George’s sarcastic answer (“Oh, you’re a great man, all right” [20]) and by the unexpected discovery of the “proud” father’s gruesome suicide. In addition, the inappropriate comparison of Dr. Adams’s elation to “football players . . . in the dressing room after a game” exposes the doctor’s vanity and is thus a clear instance of Hemingway’s double-voicing, that is, the author’s ironic way of distancing himself and thus interrogating his character’s supercilious attitude (NAS 19).

There is further evidence of how Hemingway parodies readings of the story as an instance of metaphoric imperialism only. The Indian woman and her husband are not
merely depicted as victims. The woman’s screams are not only “the screams of the death of a civilization, a way of life,” as Bernard claims, but also an unmistakable form of protest against the intrusion of white culture (291). Furthermore, the woman actively defends herself by biting Uncle George, which triggers the latter’s racist and sexist remark, which, in turn, prompts the sarcastic laughter of the Indian man who had rowed Uncle George. In this single scene, we see a complex exchange of gestures and signs, replete with political overtones. The biting and sarcastic laughter effectively parody Uncle George’s racism and sexism and illustrate Hemingway’s technique of using gestures and bodily behavior as effective carriers of parody.

In addition, while it is true that the white men in the shanty are trying to help the Indian woman by saving her and her child’s life, her three-day-long struggle to deliver the baby can also be read as a desperate attempt to hold on to the old ways of life, which are now being threatened by the intrusion of a new order. Moreover, the scene describing the men holding down the woman inevitably brings to mind the picture of white men raping Indian women, as Amy Strong argues when she explains the scene as “a woman’s body as a territory under complete control of white men” (22).

In the events taking place in the shanty, then, Hemingway gives us one of his richest examples of metaparodies. He explores the structures of domination associated with the white usurpation of Indian land and culture without rendering the Indians as mere stereotypical victims. Given the sparse dialogue, protest is rendered via parodies through screams, laughter, silence, and, especially, the suicide. But not only does Hemingway present a complex interplay of dominator and dominated, he also challenges prevailing notions of “white” and “Indian,” thus illustrating the fluidity of racial identity.
In this context it is important to remember that medicine is traditionally a field of Native American expertise. It is unusual for the Indian midwives in the camp to be unable to help deliver the child for three days. As Helstern remarks, “[T]he need to summon the white medicine man is the most obvious sign of the decay of traditional Indian culture” (65). In this sense, “Indian Camp” is the first of Hemingway’s several stories that signal the larger decay of Indian culture, as most clearly exemplified in the short piece “The Indians Moved Away,” in which the narrator summarizes that “[t]here were no successful Indians [on Horton’s Creek]” (NAS 35).

The apparent impotence of the Indians is exemplified by the husband’s suicide. His self-inflicted leg injury stems from his ineptitude with an ax, which forces him to lie helplessly in his bunk and witness his wife’s screams. Yet, like his wife, he shows various signs of rebelliousness. Thus, as Helstern also mentions, he refuses to smoke one of Uncle George’s cigars, “the traditional symbol of white male politics and privilege,” preferring instead to smoke the pipe, which is the traditional Indian way of smoking (65). More importantly, the Indian husband’s suicide itself must not only be read as a sign of weakness or defeat but also as a courageous act with political overtones. Accepting the interpretation that Uncle George is the father of the baby, Gerry Brenner believes that the suicide “aims to inflict a strong sense of guilt on Uncle George, becomes a dignified act that affirms the need to live with dignity or not at all, and lays at the feet of another treacherous white man the death of yet one more of the countless, dispossessed native Americans” (239 n.15). Even without considering the question of the child’s paternity, the suicide is an expression of protest against the white intrusion into and taking over of Indian land and women. Moreover, his not making any noise while slitting his own throat
powerfully counteracts any notions of weakness and certainly qualifies him as brave. Significantly, the Indian husband uses a razor, a tool of the “civilized” white world to cut his throat silently. The use of the razor, in combination with the ax that started his misery, thus incriminates the white world in his death and, figuratively, connotes its guilt in the decay of the Indian world. By inflicting bodily harm and death, the ax and the razor join alcohol, an important factor in “Ten Indians,” and the passing out of cigars as tools used to contaminate Indian culture.

Rather than a mere portrayal of Indian culture in decline, “Indian Camp” is the first of several Hemingway stories that destabilize the notion of race by rendering traditional or stereotypical racial characteristics as shifting. Dr. Adams’s stoicism and skillful handling of the jackknife in delivering the baby mark him as the true “medicine man” in the story and thus as “Indian.” At the same time, the Indian husband’s suicide makes him “white” in the sense that suicide at that time was unusual among Native Americans and that the use of the razor implicates the white world. In the portrayal of the doctor and the Indian husband, Hemingway thus anticipates the current debate about the instability of racial markers and the social construction of race.

“Indian Camp” ranks as the first in a series of stories that link Nick’s father with the Indian world. As many critics have noted, Dr. Adams is connected to Indians in all the stories in which he appears. Besides exhibiting his medical skills in “Indian Camp,” he is known to have hired Indians to bring lumber (“The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife”), reports the infidelity of Nick’s Indian girl-friend Prudie (“Ten Indians”), and possesses an Indian arrowhead collection (“Now I Lay Me”). He is also frequently associated with Indian smells (“Fathers and Sons”). By being repeatedly linked to the Indian world,
Nick’s father becomes symbolically “Indianized.” However, it is an Indian world that is not sentimentalized but portrayed as being in a state of decline. This link establishes a parallel in Nick’s mind, as the father’s qualities are proportionately diminishing with the qualities exhibited by the Indian culture. Without going so far as to read a foreshadowing of Dr. Adams’s suicide in the Indian husband’s suicide, I would like to argue that Nick’s confidence in his father has taken its first blow in spite of the reassuring end of “Indian Camp.” As in the end of Gaines’s “The Turtles,” the seams begin to show in the father-son bond. The memory of the suicide Nick has witnessed will stay with him, as his troubling questions in the boat indicate.

The thematic strands of Nick’s relationship to his father, the father’s link to the Indian world, and Hemingway’s destabilizing of the notion of “race” continue in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” which in many ways is Hemingway’s parody of “Indian Camp.” Paul Strong lists numerous similarities and reversals between the two stories. In this context, three such parallels and reversals are especially significant for the father-son context. First, as in “Indian Camp,” “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” ends with father and son together in a presumably close bond. This time they are leaving behind the cottage and wife/mother to look for black squirrels in the woods. Second, the relationship between Dr. Adams and his wife parallels the one between the pregnant Indian woman and her husband in “Indian Camp,” thus strengthening both the link of Dr. Adams to the Indian world and our observation of his helplessness. And third, as in the relationship between the doctor and the Indian husband in the first story, the exchange between Dr. Adams and the half-breed Dick Boulton indicates Hemingway’s deconstruction of racial markers and assumptions of power conventionally associated with race.
If in “Indian Camp” the son is still impressed by his father’s skills and reassured by his presence, the father-son relationship at the end of “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” has developed to a different level. Many critics have read the end of the story as a primarily positive portrayal of a father-son bond. Philip Young, for example, argues that the story “teaches Nick something about the solidarity of the male sex” (*Ernest Hemingway* 33), and Carlos Baker remarks that “Nick’s sympathy [lies] with his father’s shame and anger” (*Writer as Artist* 134). Others have referred to Hemingway’s strained relationship with his own father and read Dr. Adams’s humiliations as a reflection of the shortcomings of Clarence Hemingway. Myler Wilkinson offers a typical misreading of this sort, as he states that “Nick Adams watches as his father is humiliated and shown to be powerless, first in front of the Indian Dick Boulton and then in front of his mother (93). However, as Robert Fulkerson demonstrates in detail, these interpretations ignore the important fact that Nick is not present during these humiliations.

It is quite significant that Nick is not part of the first two scenes of the story. He neither witnesses in person his father’s humiliation by Dick Boulton nor does he hear the dialogue between his parents in the cottage. Nick is in the woods by himself reading. Again, as in “Three Shots,” the significance of the act of reading should not go unnoticed. While it may be argued that the act of reading serves here as Nick’s escape from some bitter truths about his parents and the adult world in general that he is not yet ready to face, I would like to assert that reading is also meant to be metaphorical. Nick does not need to be present at the two scenes to understand their implications; he seems to be able to read the signs and interpret the situation without witnessing any details. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that Nick appears only at the end of the story, thus
making “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” the only Nick Adams story in which he plays a subordinate role. His only words and actions, therefore, must be taken as meaningful. Arthur Waldhorn agrees: “Nick has not even been present and, one suddenly realizes, need not have been, for, like any perceptive child, he has already on like occasions watched, absorbed, and formed his preference. When called upon to choose, he does so unhesitatingly” (56).

To better understand Nick’s decision to go with his father instead of obeying his mother, we need to look more closely at the preceding dialogue with his father and the previous scene between his parents. When Dr. Adams leaves the cottage, his wife instructs him to tell Nick that “his mother wants to see him” (NAS 26). Once Dr. Adams finds his son, the following exchange takes place:

“Your mother wants you to come and see her,” the doctor said.
“I want to go with you,” Nick said.
His father looked down at him.
“All right. Come on, then,” his father said. (NAS 26)

This scene illustrates well Hemingway’s theory of omission, as the things omitted here are certainly significant but can be inferred from the context. Nick intuitively and instantly rejects his mother, who lies ailing in her dark room. DeFalco interprets her illness as an indication that she is “ineffectual in her role as wife and mother and even as a social entity” (36). Nick, therefore, must disobey and avoid the “fatal or terrible mother figure who would lure her son back to the womb to be smothered by her protective nature” (36).

Such a reading is supported by the mother’s behavior during her conversation with Nick’s father. The darkness of her room, her religious affiliation (she is a Christian Scientist), her habit of quoting from the Bible to deal with life’s problems and advise her
husband, and her repeated denial of the reality of the nature of her husband’s and Dick Boulton’s argument are all indications of how cut off from reality she is. Her distance is also exemplified by the particular way she words her request to see Nick, referring to herself in the third person: “If you see Nick, dear, will you tell him his mother wants to see him?” (NAS 26). Given these details, we understand better why it is crucial for Nick not to obey his mother’s command if he wants to mature and grow up as an individual.

Since the mother is not a possible guide for Nick, we must look closer at his relationship with his father. The fact that Nick is by himself reading for most of the story is significant in that it implies his disinterest in witnessing his father’s dealings with the three Indians. One can thus look at Nick’s solitude as a conscious decision to reject the world of the adults. His early penchant for solitude will later become a characteristic trait of Nick’s. His eventual decision to go with his father is, then, primarily the result of Nick’s realization that he must give up his solitude for the time being. And if he must give it up, his father’s company is preferable to his mother’s. His father seems to understand this, as his momentary silence, “He looked down at him,” illustrates. Dr. Adams seems to grasp that he is only second choice here, the lesser of two evils, but he also seems to realize the reason that Nick decides to disobey his mother, the wife who has just stifled Dr. Adams’s own manhood.

It is very significant that Nick tells his father where to go; he knows where the black squirrels are. Robert Gajdusek describes the habitat of the black squirrels as “the place of primitive and potent sexuality” (61 n.2). As we will see in “Fathers and Sons,” it is where the black squirrels are that Nick is having sexual encounters with Prudie. Given the obvious sexual overtones in Dr. Adams’s encounters with Dick Boulton (“’Don’t go
off at half cock, Doc,’ Dick said. He spat tobacco juice on the log. It slid off, thinning in
the water”) and his wife (“He pushed the magazine full of the heavy yellow shells and
pumped them out again. They were scattered on the bed”) and considering that Dr.
Adams was challenged twice in his masculinity in these scenes, the fact that Nick is
leading his father to a place where he can restore his manhood is highly significant (NAS
24-25). The picture we get of Nick is that of a young boy who is at home in the woods, as
his father used to be. Nick assumes the role of a guide here, whereas his father is treated
like a boy in his confrontation with his wife. Thus his wife has to call his name twice to
get his attention, before she inquires about what had happened. The wording of the
dialogue recalls the conversation a mother would have with a son, not the conversation
between two adults:

“Henry,” his wife called. Then paused a moment. “Henry!”
“Yes,” the doctor said.
“You didn’t say anything to Boulton to anger him, did you?”
“No,” said the doctor.
“What was the trouble about, dear?”
“Nothing much.”
“Tell me, Henry. Please don’t try and keep anything from me. What was
the trouble about?” (NAS 25)

Six times Mrs. Adams refers to her husband as “dear” in the short conversation, which
ends with Dr. Adams’s frustrated departure, slamming the door, for which he has to
apologize. Given the behavior of both parents, we understand Nick’s decision to be by
himself reading. As Gerry Brenner remarks, “From such contrasting types a child would
have a hard time getting the unified parental approval needed to develop a secure sense of
pride” (99).

In contrast to his father, Nick appears as mature and wise. When Nick allows his
father to pocket his book, the role reversal becomes complete. Nick has read enough to
know what to do; it is his father’s turn to read now, as we will indeed find him reading in “Ten Indians.” De facto, Nick has already become his father’s guide.36

Read alongside Gaines’s “My Grandpa and the Haint,” “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” signals an important difference in the two authors’ concept of the parents-son relationship. As shown before, Bobby acts out of filial duty; he feels obligated to bring his grandparents together. His behavior is motivated by responsibility and love. By becoming a trickster, he also makes use of cultural resources to achieve his ends, thus connecting to the larger African American community and history. Compared to him, Nick acts in an opposite manner. He rejects the mother and escapes familial obligations in the woods. His act of reading—Robinson Crusoe again? Or, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn?—stands as a metaphor for the cultural resources he uses and the virtues he cherishes: separation, distance, individuality, and independence.

In the context of later stories, such as “Ten Indians” and “Fathers and Sons,” it is significant that Nick’s desire for independence parallels his increasing attraction to the woods and the Indian world. Hemingway here also alludes to the stereotype of the male Indian as independent. As Roediger remarks, “[T]he mythical/historical Native American male was seen as independent, so much that he was used, oddly enough, as a symbol of the American Revolution” (22-23). If one considers the state of his parents’ marriage and his father’s dubious morality, Nick’s attraction to the wilderness and the Indian way of life becomes understandable. We will see later how Hemingway parodies the concept of the Indian’s independence by depicting many of them as getting drunk on the Fourth of July; even worse, one of them gets killed on Independence Day.
Concerning Nick’s increasing longing for independence, it is also very important that there are no stories in which Nick appears in his mother’s presence. In fact, the only two other pieces in which his mother appears are “The Last Good Country” and “Now I Lay Me.” In the former story, written in the 1950s, the mother is again depicted lying ailing in a dark room. What’s more, it is the mother who essentially betrays Nick by tipping off the game wardens about Nick’s illegal trout fishing and even entertaining them while Nick is on the hideout. In the latter story, she acts as revengeful destroyer of her husband’s valuable Indian collections and appears again, in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” as an emasculating figure. Since her presence is so rare, we must look closer at the memories Nick has of his mother in “Now I Lay Me,” and at her influence on Nick’s view of his father.

In “Now I Lay Me,” one of the war stories, Nick is recuperating from a psychic shock he suffered after he “had been blown up at night” (NAS 144). He is afraid of falling asleep while it is still dark, for, as he explains, “[I]f I ever shut my eyes in the dark and let myself go, my soul would go out of my body” (NAS 144). Trying to stay awake by any means, he occupies himself with detailed memories about fishing the trout streams of his youth. Yet, on two occasions his mind wanders back to his childhood and centers on his father and mother. His earliest memory is of “the attic of the house where I was born and my mother and father’s wedding cake in a tin box hanging from the rafters, and, in the attic, jars of snakes and other specimens that my father had collected as a boy” (NAS 146). Using a Freudian approach, Richard Hovey argues that “the tin box symbolizes the female genitals—emphatically so when it contains the wedding cake” and “the snakes symbolize the male organ—emphatically so, for a Caucasian, when their whiteness is
recollected” (185). Read in the context of Nick’s war wound, a wound that came close to emasculating him, this memory expresses Nick’s childhood fear of emasculation, which is especially clear when Nick remembers how “those jars from the attic [were] being thrown in the fire” (NAS 147). Specifically, Nick recalls “the snakes burning in the fire in the back yard.” While no people appear in this memory, it is clear from the context—the grandfather had died, the family moved to a new house, the new house was “designed and built” by the mother, and “things that were not to be moved were burned”—that the fire was started by the mother (NAS 146-47). The image of the burning phallic snakes is thus linked to Nick’s war wound, two traumatic scenes involving fear of emasculation.

In his second childhood memory, Nick recalls that his mother “was always cleaning things out and making a good clearance” (NAS 147). At one point, she was burning her husband’s artifacts and collected items while he was away. On his return, “my father raked very carefully in the ashes. He raked out stone axes and stone skinning knives and tools for making arrowheads and pieces of pottery and many arrowheads. . . . My father raked them all out very carefully and spread them on the grass by the road” (NAS 147). Again we see the willful destruction by the mother of various phallic symbols. In addition, here we also get an idea of the father’s submissiveness, his reluctance to fight back. The father’s rational and calm manner in the face of his wife’s atrocious act, as well as his meticulous attempt at saving the burned remains, indicates Dr. Adams’s suppressed emotions. In this memory, he clearly appears subdued and submissive, a man who is afraid to assert his will and who has been effectively emasculated by his wife.

Considering Nick’s war trauma and his occasional inability to imagine fishing the stream, Hovey argues that “[t]his impeding of Nick’s fishing fantasies is unmistakably
analogous to ‘resistance’ in the psychoanalyst’s patient” (184). “Such resistance,” Hovey explains, “alerts the psychoanalyst because it usually indicates that some still unrevealed part of the psyche may be pushing toward consciousness and meeting resistance, some feelings and memories which lie deeper and are harder to dig up.” These deeper memories are Nick’s childhood recollections, specifically those haunting episodes related to his parents.

In this regard, it is also important to consider the story’s title, “Now I Lay Me,” which, on the one hand, alludes to the child’s fear of death: “Now I lay me down to sleep;/ I pray the Lord my soul to keep./ If I should die before I wake/ I pray the Lord my soul to take.” On the other hand, however, this night prayer also expresses “a longing to return to the imagined security of early childhood” (Hovey 182). This longing, then, relates the recently suffered traumatic war experience and its wound to the emotional wounds suffered as a child. In particular, the adult Nick is haunted by his memories of and experiences in childhood, his fears of mortality that we have seen in “Three Shots,” the fear of an emasculating mother smothering him and his father, and the shock of seeing an emasculated and defeated father. As Gerry Brenner summarizes the connection between childhood and war trauma:

Nick’s recent trauma of being blown up at night and feeling his soul leave his body has activated his repressed infantile conflicts, ones that came to a head in the artifacts-burning episode. Nick’s insomnia, then, mirrors at a distance those nocturnal fears and puzzlements that he had had after he witnessed his father’s submission, an equally explosive event in his psychic life. (17)

The shock at his father’s lack of response to the burning of his collections and the memory of the mother as destroyer help explain both Nick’s reluctance to marry in the second part of this story and his inability or hesitation to commit to marriages in other
Nick Adams stories. For Nick, to get married would be tantamount to putting himself in the position of the father, that is, putting himself at the mercy of a woman/wife.

This portrait of the mother in both “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” and “Now I Lay Me,” reinforced by the mother’s acts of betrayal in “The Last Good Country,” is very different from the way Gaines presents his mother figures. Whether they are predominantly gentle and affectionate (as in “Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit”) or, as is most often the case, strong and authoritarian, they always have the son’s love and understanding. We thus see the two writers as diametrically opposed in their view of what it takes for the son to mature and find his own voice. The Hemingway hero must reject first the mother and, ultimately, the father; however, to do so will eventually haunt him. The Gaines hero must preserve familial stability through reinforcing the bond with his parents, even though the historical reality of the absence of the fathers may not always make this union possible.

Although Nick at the end of “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” bonds with his father and escapes into the woods, the father-son relationship depicted is different in quality to the one at the conclusion of “Indian Camp.” As we have seen, it is Nick who actually leads the father into the woods. Nick’s knowledge of the woods and his feeling at home in them must be read in the context of his conscious repudiation of his parents’ home. Thus, Nick’s actions can be seen as moving toward embracing the Indian world.

However, the idea of seeking refuge in the Indian world is less an instance of romanticizing it than an expression of Hemingway’s belief in the ideas of the Woodcraft League of America, which emphasized the teaching of Indian values as an answer to the decay of civilization. As Helstern writes, “Seton saw his project of training boys in the
ways of Indians as a step beyond James Fenimore Cooper’s mere recognition of the import of woodcraft. . . . To Seton, saving civilization meant saving Indian ways from extinction” (63). Applying Seton’s philosophy to “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” Helstern summarizes, “In the woods where, according to Seton, mankind learned bravery and independence, Nick asserts sufficient knowledge of woodcraft to become his father’s guide, and together man and boy light out to find their salvation in the realm of the black squirrel” (71).

At the same time that Nick lights out for the woods, Hemingway continues the destabilization of racial markers we have observed in “Indian Camp.” In this sense, it is necessary to look closely at the confrontation between Dr. Adams and Dick Boulton, which shows how Dr. Adams’s identity as a white man, which he was so proud of in “Indian Camp,” is further deflated.

When Dick Boulton, his son Eddy, and another Indian called Billy Tabeshaw arrive in Dr. Adams’s yard, they are supposed to saw up some logs to repay the doctor for a favor he did for Dick’s wife. The setting and circumstances operate thus as a complete reversal of the three white men’s arrival at the Indian camp and their helping the pregnant woman in the earlier story. It is important to note that the story takes place in, as DeFalco calls it, a “border zone area,” a place in the woods between the Indian camp and the civilized world (33). It is at the edge of the wilderness, in a virtual no man’s land, where the two worlds collide and where ethics become uncertain.

The encounter between Dick Boulton and Dr. Adams continues the earlier story’s parody on racial markers. Dick Boulton is described as “a half-breed and many of the farmers around the lake believed he was really a white man” (NAS 23). Dick Boulton’s
status as partly Indian and partly white allows him to know both worlds and to speak their language. Thus, he can converse in Ojibway with Billy Tabeshaw and Eddy, but he is also able to understand the white man’s language and sees through Dr. Adams’s rationalization of his actions. Dick correctly identifies as theft the doctor’s practice of snatching driftwood from the shore, having it sawn up before it can be recaptured by the owners, and using the chunks as firewood. When Dick confronts him with the charge of stealing, the doctor first becomes “uncomfortable,” before his face turns “red” and he angrily sends the Indians away again (NAS 23-24). Helstern rightfully remarks that “[t]hrough Boulton, Hemingway interrogates one of the most common Indian stereotypes: the thieving Indian . . . [T]he thieving Indian becomes a thieving white man” (69).

Dick Boulton here appears as confident and confrontational, catching the white man at his own game of appropriating natural resources and claiming them as his own. But not only is Dick outspoken, he is also not afraid of the doctor. Rather than averting his gaze, he looks the doctor straight in the eyes when the latter threatens violence. Dick knows the doctor is bluffing.

Hidden beneath his defiance, however, are Dick’s personal motives for being confrontational with the doctor. From the narrator’s description we learn that Dick can be both “very lazy” and “a great worker once he was started” (NAS 23). Therefore, we have to attribute some truth to the doctor’s words when he later explains to his wife what the argument with Dick Boulton was about: “Dick owes me a lot of money for pulling his squaw through pneumonia and I guess he wanted a row so he wouldn’t have to take it out on work” (NAS 25). Certainly, Boulton appears aware enough of his greater physical
powers, as well as of the doctor’s lack of courage, to successfully devise a scheme that would allow him to get out of working off a debt. The story also implies that it was not the first time that the Indians did this kind of work to repay the doctor. Previously, the doctor had “always assumed” that the company owning the logs did not care enough to pick them up so that they would be “left to waterlog and rot on the beach” (NAS 22). Therefore, we can infer that the Indians in the past did not have any moral qualms about sawing up the logs. Given this ambiguity, I agree with Stephen Fox in his assessment that the story does not promote either Boulton’s charge of theft or the doctor’s accusation of Boulton’s idleness. Both the doctor and Dick Boulton appear as morally ambiguous; both are flawed to some extent. The point of the story is thus not whether the doctor is defeated on moral grounds. Instead, as Fox argues, “[T]he story must be intended to focus on his reaction to the charge rather than on the charge itself” (20).

The doctor’s reaction to both Dick and his wife helps to clarify his character in relation to Nick and further develops Hemingway’s deconstruction of typical racial markers. As we have already seen, Dick’s ability to beat the whites at their own game marks him as “white,” especially since he is considered a “half-breed.” As such, he cannot be classified clearly in racial terms. Besides the language of Ojibway, he seems not to have much in common with Billy Tabeshaw, the other Indian present, from whom Dick is clearly distinguished by both Billy’s extreme timidity and profuse sweating. In addition to defying racial categorization and his display of a confrontational attitude, Dick also uses, as Amy Strong explains, “textual evidence, the ultimate [white] source of ‘truth’ and legality” to support his claim that the logs are stolen (25). Dick has the sand washed off the log to read the owner’s name, which, ironically, is “White and McNally.”
This reference to the printing of the rightful owner’s company name effectively parodies the doctor’s wish to have his jackknife Caesarean recorded in a medical journal in “Indian Camp” (A. Strong 26). In the earlier story, the doctor relies on textual evidence for his achievement; in the second story he is defeated by the same authority.

Certainly, in view of the white man’s robbery of Native American land and resources, this scene is full of irony and historic reversals. As Thomas Strychacz remarks, “The doctor has no ground to stand on because the ground is, morally speaking, not his; the fence around the garden is as morally indefensible as stealing the logs” (250). To accentuate the doctor’s unsupported views, Dick Boulton symbolically leaves the gate open when he exits from the doctor’s yard, whereas he had closed it on his arrival.

Faced with these unpleasant truths, the doctor not only feels “uncomfortable”; his face turns “red” (NAS 23-24). To be “red” here connotes anger, embarrassment, and defeat. Skin color as a racial marker is effectively deconstructed as the Indian Boulton becomes “white” by winning a moral argument and embarrassing the white “Indian” Dr. Adams. It certainly needs to be pointed out, however, as Amy Strong has, that Hemingway’s concern here is mainly to parody behavior and mechanisms of power stereotypically associated with race; he does not deny the reality of race itself. As Strong summarizes, “[T]o be humiliated is to be red and to be victor is to be white. In this scenario, then, the tag ‘race’ remains stable, because ‘white’ equates with power and ‘red’ equates with submission, but the individuals move fluidly between these markers” (29).

The scene between Boulton and Dr. Adams thus powerfully illustrates the idea of racial markers as socially constructed. In addition, Hemingway parodies the traditional
stereotype of the “lazy Indian” by making Boulton half-white. One must remember that the stereotype was used by white settlers to justify the robbing of Native American land. As Roediger reminds us,

[T]he images developed by colonists to rationalize dispossession of Native Americans from the land had a strong connection to work and discipline. Settler ideology held that improvident, sexually abandoned ‘lazy Indians’ were failing to ‘husband’ or ‘subdue’ the resources God had provided and thus should forfeit those resources. Work and whiteness joined in their argument for dispossession. (21)

It is highly ironic, then, that the “lazy” Dick Boulton, a “white Indian,” accuses the white Dr. Adams of stealing a piece of nature that belongs to another “White.”

Dr. Adams’s anger stays with him when he joins his wife in the cottage. Still embarrassed by Boulton’s humiliation, Dr. Adams is faced with his wife’s religious platitudes and denial of reality. He appears cowed and releases his anger by playing with his gun: “Her husband did not answer. He was sitting on his bed now, cleaning a shotgun. He pushed the magazine full of the heavy yellow shells and pumped them out again. They were scattered on the bed” (NAS 25). In lieu of a meaningful conversation with his wife, the doctor’s only release is his gun. In addition to the sexual connotations of the scene, Robert Davis sees two other meanings in the doctor’s cleaning of the gun:

It is in the first place the doctor’s means of compensating for his lack of aggressiveness in dealing with Boulton, and his loading and unloading of the gun before he cleans it indicates that he is indulging in a fantasy of violence. Secondly, his fondling of the gun objectifies his resistance to his wife; as she counsels peace and mildness, the doctor prepares his weapon. (Item 1)

Clearly, Dr. Adams appears as helpless and defenseless as with Dick Boulton earlier. His only sign of protest is slamming the door when he leaves, for which he apologizes immediately when he hears his wife catching her breath.
These repeated humiliations by and submission to his wife tie Dr. Adams to the Indian husband in “Indian Camp,” who likewise is utterly helpless in the face of his wife’s agony. The Indian resorts to the razor; Dr. Adams uses his gun, an early foreshadowing of his later suicide. The parallel to the Indian husband and the reference to “redness” contribute to the weakening of Dr. Adams’s status as a powerful white father figure; instead, he becomes more and more like an “Indian.” This development is reinforced by both his disregard for the unopened medical journals in the cottage, which once were testament to his power and profession in the “civilized” world, and by his resolve to take refuge in the woods, leaving behind wife and journals.

In the stories discussed so far, the deconstruction of Dr. Adams as a powerful father figure runs parallel to Hemingway’s destabilization of racial markers. Both developments have direct consequences for Nick. Dr. Adams loses two arguments and appears intimidated by Dick Boulton and his own wife, which lead to his escape into the woods while being guided by his son. And even if Nick has not directly observed his father’s humiliations, it becomes clear why his father cannot be an effective guide for Nick to become a man. At the same time, Nick gradually moves away from the civilized world, rejects the home of his estranged parents, and embraces the natural world of the Michigan woods and its Indian culture. While not yet directly involved in the lies and half-truths of the adult world, Nick already intuitively knows the value of solitude and renewal through nature, thus foreshadowing some of the therapeutic experiences the older Nick Adams will make in the streams and banks in “Big Two-Hearted River.” Nick’s entrance into the woods and the Indian world is thus an expression of his search for
authentic living, illustrating Hemingway’s belief in cultural primitivism, which “places value on the simplicity of social forms” (Lewis 207-08).

Nick’s increasing rejection of the “civilized world” and attraction to the Indian world are further developed in “Ten Indians.” This attraction is played out in the story’s theme of interracial sexual relationships, as we learn about Nick having an Indian girlfriend named Prudence Mitchell. This story also parodies the common stereotypes of Indian drinking and promiscuity and thus provides a powerful criticism of white imperialist assumptions.

“Ten Indians” starts with Nick riding home in the wagon with the Garner family from Petoskey’s Fourth of July celebrations. The majority of critics read the scene as establishing a contrast to the single-parent home of Nick’s father. Thus, Robert Fleming argues that “[t]he wholesome family relationship of the Garners will serve as a contrast with the relative bleakness of the Adams home, where no mother or siblings wait for Nick” (107). Referring to the bantering atmosphere during the wagon ride, Charles Nolan likewise suggests that “the Garners’ warm family life and healthy sexuality” stand in contrast to “the doctor’s essential loneliness” (69). While the comments about Dr. Adams’s unhappy life may be accurate, the positive observations about the Garners can hardly be justified considering the blatantly racist slurs spoken by both parents and sons. Therefore, I would like to argue that, if the scene with the Garners does indeed serve as a contrast to the later scene at Nick’s home, then it is not in the sense that one household is sanctioned over the other. Rather, my argument holds that Nick will have to leave behind both families on his solitary journey to manhood.
But there is an additional contrast implied that refers to the two families’ differing approach to nature. Thus, we see the Garners’ “practical-domesticated” values distinguished from Nick’s and his father’s “esthetic-natural values” (Thurston 173). The former look at their surroundings in terms of utilitarian value, a perspective which can be seen as representative of the white man’s belief in progress that caused the dispossession of Indian land and the destruction of Indian culture, whereas the latter are depicted as living in harmony with nature, as being experts at fishing and knowledgeable in finding their ways through the woods.

In spite of the outwardly easygoing atmosphere and the Garners’ jocularity, the opening scene is rather serious, as it illustrates both the Garners’ racism and the decline of the Indian culture in that area. Joe Garner is contemptuous of the nine drunken Indians they pass along the road. Like his wife, who repeatedly utters her condemning generalization “‘Them Indians,’” he objectifies and belittles Indians, as for instance in his remark that “‘[a]ll Indians wear the same kind of pants’” (NAS 27). Not surprisingly, their two boys mirror the same denigrating attitude. Thus, when the conversation turns to Nick’s ability to spot skunks, Carl replies: “‘You ought to . . . You got an Indian girl’” (NAS 28). Joe Garner laughs when his son remarks that Indians and skunks “‘smell about the same’” (NAS 28). And even though the mother apparently chides Carl for his remark, she continues the demeaning slurs by declaring that “‘Carl can’t get a girl . . . not even a squaw’” (NAS 29).

These offensive remarks are effectively parodied by two different devices Hemingway uses. On the one hand, the setting of the story and Hemingway’s understatements function as a powerful counterdiscourse to the Garners’ attitude. And, on
the other hand, Nick’s and his father’s behavior, while ambiguous, reflect their honest love of nature and familiarity with the Indian world.

Hemingway’s decision to have the story set on Independence Day is, of course, highly ironic, considering that independence for white Americans was tantamount to defeat and dependence for Native Americans. It is, however, also a fitting setting, since it is on this day that Nick will reject more ties and make a huge step toward becoming independent, both from his first true love and from his father.

Ironically, we learn from the narrator that all the Indians have gone to town to get drunk on the white man’s alcohol as their way of celebrating the Fourth of July. Their lying drunk “along the road,” another instance of Hemingway’s irony, is symbolic of the treatment they have received and the standing they have in society. In his convincing analysis of the Garner family’s blatant racism, Jarvis Thurston summarizes the involvement of families like the Garners in the fate of the Indians:

Joe Garner does not realize that the drunken Indians are a by-product of his own white civilization. They are drunk on white men’s whiskey, lying in the ruts made by the wheels of the white men’s machines, their faces literally in the dirt of white men’s progress. Ironically they have been in town celebrating Independence Day, the beginning of a nation that defeated and debased them. (173)

Furthermore, from the short piece “The Indians Moved Away” we learn that the Indians in Northern Michigan were poor and lived by gathering berries and selling them, as for example to Nick’s family. At one time, there actually were successful Indian farmers, such as Simon Green, but after his death his sons sold the farm. That was the fate of most of the Indians, and now there are “no successful Indians” anymore: “They lost money and were sold out. That was the way the Indians went” (NAS 36). This rather sober but realistic view, together with the ironic presentation of the Indians’ behavior in
“Ten Indians,” provides a powerful counter-discourse to the condescension we witness with the Garners. At the same time, Hemingway deconstructs the stereotype of the Indian male as independent, which, as we have seen, was an important factor in Nick’s attraction to the wilderness and Indian culture.

The plight of the Indians is reinforced by the much-debated allusion of the story’s title “Ten Indians.” Since there are only nine drunken Indians according to the Garners’ count, speculation arises as to the identity of the tenth. Altogether, there are at least four different answers. Thurston is representative of those critics who think that Prudence is the tenth Indian: “By her immoral behavior and her unfaithfulness to Nick, Prudence becomes the tenth Indian, as worthless as the nine drunken Indians passed on the road, that is, from the point of view of the white people in the story” (173). Referring to Dr. Adams’s function, and failure, as Nick’s guide to adulthood, DeFalco identifies Nick’s father as the tenth Indian because “[t]he tenth Indian in this case is the one who forces home the consciousness of a dark world of uncertainty” (52).

However, I would like to suggest that two other possibilities are more convincing. Reading “The Indians Moved Away” alongside “Ten Indians,” one finds a direct source for the missing Indian. Discussing the shack Nick’s Grandpa Bacon had rented to the Indians, the narrator of “The Indians Moved Away” states that “no more Indians rented it because the Indian who had lived there had gone into Petoskey to get drunk on the Fourth of July, and, coming back, had lain down to go to sleep on the Pere Marquette railway tracks and been run over by the midnight train” (NAS 35). Hemingway had used a similar plot detail before in “Sepi Jingan,” his first story dealing with Native Americans, written during his years at Oak Park High (cf. Baker, Life Story 40). Certainly, if the dead Indian
is the missing one in “Ten Indians,” this would add even more irony since he dies at midnight, the end of Independence Day, killed by the machine whose unstoppable path through Indian land caused so many wars.

While the dead Indian may very well be “the thing omitted” by Hemingway, I would like to argue that he also intended for Nick to be seen as the tenth Indian. There are a plethora of links that align Nick with the Indians. In “The Indians Moved Away,” for example, we learn that the Indian who had killed himself “had made Nick an ash canoe paddle” (NAS 35). The canoe paddle, which evokes the father-son image in “Indian Camp,” and the fact that the Indian lived in a shack that belongs to Nick’s grandfather allow the interpretation that he was some kind of father figure for Nick. We also find out that Nick and his father were well known among the Indians. For example, the brief dialogue between Nick and the Indian farmer Simon Green reveals that they knew each other well enough for conversations about such common interests as fishing and birds. In addition, we have seen that Nick’s father performed medical services for the Indians in the camp. More importantly, in “Fathers and Sons” Nick remembers that his father “had many friends among them” (NAS 267). We can, therefore, certainly conjecture that there was an important relationship between Nick and the Indians—enough evidence at least to make him a candidate for the identity of the missing tenth Indian.

Linda Helstern adds another very convincing piece of evidence for the argument that Nick is the tenth Indian. After he has received the news of Prudie’s unfaithfulness, Nick appears “immobilized and alone, like the other nine Indians, [and] is thus likewise the victim of his Fourth of July celebration. And like the typical drunk, he discovers when he wakes up that he cannot for some time remember what happened to him” (73).
And then there is, of course, Nick’s sexual relationship with Prudie itself, which is one of the central concerns in “Ten Indians.” Nick feels genuine love for the Indian girl and thus crosses racial barriers, a logical development of his having witnessed birth and death in the Indian camp and having repudiated the Victorian world of his mother and father. In addition, Nick appears to be completely at home in nature now. The short passage after Nick leaves the Garners and before he reaches his father’s home is worth quoting because it is here, in the woods, away from civilization, that Nick appears happiest and carefree, far removed from the Garners’ questionable good-humouredness and the bleak home of his father:

Nick walked barefoot along the path through the meadow below the barn. The path was smooth and the dew was cool on his bare feet. He climbed a fence at the end of the meadow, went down through a ravine, his feet wet in the swamp mud, and then climbed up through the dry beech woods until he saw the lights of the cottage. He climbed over the fence and walked around to the front porch. Through the window he saw his father sitting by the table, reading in the light from the big lamp. (NAS 30)

This passage powerfully illustrates Nick’s familiarity and ease with nature. Paul Wadden likewise comments that Nick is “Indian-like in the barefoot ease with which he crosses the smooth path through the dewy countryside” (5). Wadden is surely amiss, however, when he states that Nick “is equally comfortable in the communal glow of the Garners’ kitchen or solo in the natural world—nature’s son at one with settlers and natives” (5). Considering the sinister assumptions behind the Garners’ humorous remarks, we certainly must disagree with Wadden’s positive assessment of the Garners, and Nick’s politeness with them might be more a sign of his upbringing than of his comfort. Certainly, we do sense more love between him and his father even though it is blurred by the negative news that Nick will receive.
Seen in the context of Nick’s overall development, I would like to suggest that the placement of Nick’s wandering midway in the story hints at the significance of this passage. Nick has just left a deceptively harmonious family and turned down a warm supper. He returns to his lonely father, who waits for him with a plate of cold chicken and who will shock him with the news that his girlfriend has betrayed him. It is only during the short span of time when he is by himself that Nick can be free. This is the lesson Nick has to learn, as “Ten Indians” is the last story in which he appears in the physical presence of his father. The story thus makes it clear that Nick must leave behind both the Garners and his home. I agree, therefore, with Margaret Tilton’s comment that “Nick seems most liberated at the point in the story when he is walking through the woods. For a few moments he is an orphan, free of both Mrs. Garner, his surrogate mother, and of his own father, who will soon wound him deeply” (87). In order to fully understand Nick’s decision to reject all ties, we must take a closer look both at Mrs. Garner, his surrogate mother, and at his father, as well as analyze their motives for the way they deal with their children.

Although I don’t share Tilton’s negative interpretation of Dr. Adams, I agree with her perceptive analysis of Mrs. Garner. In addition to her denigrating remarks about Indians, Mrs. Garner is also highly ambiguous in her role as mother, both biological and surrogate. Several passages in the story reveal her true character. For example, when Mr. and Mrs. Garner whisper something to each other about Prudie, it has very likely to do with Prudie’s history of promiscuity, but Mrs. Garner admonishes her husband: “‘Don’t you say it, Garner . . .’” (N/A S 29). This secretive remark is preceded by Joe Garner’s ambiguous advice to Nick: “‘You better watch out to keep Prudie, Nick’” (N/A S 29). Thus,
it seems quite probable that the Garners are aware of Prudie’s character, but choose not to
tell Nick. Whether their motivation is to protect Nick, which is unlikely given their
hypocritical banter right in front of him, or whether they don’t take Nick’s genuine
feelings seriously, they do impede Nick’s process of growing up by withholding
important information and by not treating him as an adult. The Garners’ behavior thus
stands in stark contrast to Dr. Adams’s painful but necessary revelation of the same news,
news that he feels he must give even though he knows it will hurt his son.

In addition to withholding information from Nick, Mrs. Garner also exerts a
negative influence on her own children. Tilton discusses several examples in which Mrs.
Garner goes beyond “maternal protection” to “quash” her children’s “attempts at growing
up,” thereby “relegat[ing] [them] to the world of the child” instead (80-82). Her “malice”
is best exemplified by her remark that “‘Carl can’t get a girl . . . not even a squaw.’” This
remark amounts to nothing less than a “symbolic castrat[i]on,” according to Tilton (83).
Considered in this light, Mrs. Garner is obviously a harmful influence on her children.
Certainly her son Carl must feel hurt and betrayed by her because with her attack on his
manhood Carl’s mother “wields her knife in public, in front of his peers” (81).

Although critics have pointed out the warm atmosphere in the Garners’ house and
Nick’s politeness toward the adults, there is further textual evidence that clearly indicates
that Mrs. Garner is a negative influence, which Nick intuitively understands and thus
avoids. When Nick is about to leave, Mrs. Garner tells Nick to “’[s]end Carl up to the
house’” (NAS 30). Nick then relays the message to Joe Garner in the following words:
“‘Will you tell Carl his mother wants him?’” (NAS 30). The phrasing of the request
recalls the words Nick’s mother had used on him in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife.”
Nick thus seems to grasp intuitively the threat Mrs. Garner represents for Carl, especially in light of what has happened during the wagon ride home. Clearly the earlier story’s lesson for Nick is reinforced: mothers can be smothering and threatening and they may hinder the process of maturation. Again he has to leave such a confining household.

However, freedom and carelessness for Nick are short-lived. After his “Edenic” passage through the woods, Dr. Adams awaits him with the news that he has seen Nick’s “friend” Prudie with Frank Washburn in the woods. The shock grows bigger when Nick asks where he has seen them and then learns that Prudie has betrayed him in their own trysting place. Nick’s halting questions and struggle for words (“‘Were they—were they—’”) are as much signs of his confusion as of his pain. In contrast to the Garners, Nick had been “unconscious of racial distinctions or assumptions of superiority or inferiority” in his relationship with Prudie (Thurston 174). When teased about Prudie earlier, he had felt “hollow and happy inside himself” (NAS 29). We can infer that Nick’s pure and innocent love is at least in part the consequence of his father’s education, as we know that both had friendly ties to the Indian world. His reaction after the news is likewise innocent: “‘My heart must be broken,’ he thought. ‘If I feel this way my heart must be broken’” (NAS 32).

The scene in which the father reveals the news about Prudie’s promiscuity is pivotal for an understanding of Nick’s relationship to his father. Robert Fleming summarizes the three strands of opinions on Dr. Adams: “[F]irst, the doctor may be displaying a calculated cruelty toward his son; second, impelled by love for the boy, he may be acting for Nick’s own good; and finally the doctor may have been created to embody an ambiguity—he is motivated on one level by altruistic principles and on
another by an underlying hostility in his nature” (101). While each of the three interpretations can be argued to some extent, new light has been shed on Dr. Adams’s motives by Paul Smith’s study of the various manuscripts and the crucial omissions and changes Hemingway made. It becomes clear that in some of the manuscripts the father appears in a much more sympathetic light. One of the so-called “Madrid versions” includes the following significant passage, which appears after Dr. Adams has told Nick the news about Prudie:

His father blew out the lamp and went into his own room. He undressed and knelt down beside the bed. “Dear God, for Christ’s sake keep me from ever telling things to a kid,” he prayed. “For Christ’s sake keep me from ever telling a kid how things are.”

Then he got into bed. He lays crossways in the big double bed to take up as much room as he could. He was a very lonely man.

(qtd. in Smith, “Tenth Indian” 61)

The decision to omit this part in the published version of the story may have been due to Hemingway’s concern with keeping a consistent narrative point of view, as Smith surmises. Importantly, however, if we consider this deleted passage, the story’s working title “A Broken Heart” seems to apply to both father and son, as both of them are “men without women” (Smith, “Tenth Indian” 62).

Once we understand the father’s agony, we may excuse the cold dinner and his stumbling efforts to communicate with his son. Dr. Adams appears as a desperate man who has given up on the world, as other deleted passages illustrate. Given the manuscript evidence, one can hardly argue, as Ann Edwards Boutelle does, that Dr. Adams is “[s]lowly and sadistically drawing out the torture” when he informs Nick about Prudie (138). Citing his “big shadow” on the wall and the knife he uses to cut Nick a piece of huckleberry pie, Boutelle sees Dr. Adams as “[p]sychologically . . . castrating his
son” (138). Such an interpretation seems forced, though, given that the doctor is attending to his son’s needs and seems aware of the pain he is causing. Rather, the father’s offering of another piece of pie is the best he can do in terms of showing love and care. We can, therefore, infer that the father’s actions and conversation are the strained efforts of a man who has always been struggling with communication, as in the two previous stories, but that he is also motivated by love for his son, rather than by any malicious intentions. The father’s honest if clumsy and painful way of imparting the bad news certainly appears in a more sympathetic light than the cruel and hypocritical banter in the Garners’ wagon. By juxtaposing these two scenes, Hemingway presents a good example of his technique of double-voicing.

The father’s attitude is crucial in understanding Nick and his further development. Dr. Adams may act in good faith and may indeed want to spare his son as much pain as possible, but as a responsible adult he also knows that Nick has to experience pain occasionally if he wants to be adequately prepared for the world. Moreover, this is the same pain he is experiencing himself in his failing marriage; therefore, the father’s view is extremely pessimistic. The ineffectiveness with which Dr. Adams talks to his son, however, makes us understand that Nick may feel betrayed, both by Prudie and by his father.

Considering his parents’ estrangement, for his mother is conspicuous in her absence in this story, Nick must intuit what the future has in store for him. As Paul Smith argues,

That Nick would have recognized the similarity between his and his father’s situation would have been a natural consequence of maturation. If a boy’s first sexual experience calls forth questions about his father’s sexual life, then his first disappointment in love might as naturally
summon up a darker analogy between their experiences. ("Tenth Indian" 65-66)

Sensing the similarity of fates, Nick truly feels empty and without hope: “‘If I feel this way my heart must be broken’” (NAS 32).

During the night Nick hears “the wind in the hemlock trees outside the cottage and the waves of the lake coming in on the shore,” ominous signs of mortality (NAS 33). Yet, “[i]n the morning, there was a big wind blowing and the waves were running high upon the beach and he was awake a long time before he remembered that his heart was broken” (NAS 33). This unexpected ending has been described both as Hemingway’s “detached and amused” final look at Nick (Flora 50) and as “reflect[ing] a childish denial of the efficacy of the experience as a step toward maturation” (DeFalco 52). More profoundly, however, we can also detect a sign of Nick’s own betrayal of his love for Prudie. Thurston concludes his overall very perceptive analysis of the story with the too-succinct comment that “if Nick is betrayed, he also betrays: his failure to remember sooner that his heart is broken symbolizes his reconciliation with an unjust and ugly reality” (176).

It is true that one must certainly wonder at Nick and his ability to forget that soon about his pain. There are two important factors that explain his behavior. On the one hand, as in many other stories, Nick experiences a sense of renewal through nature. He realizes that the end of his relationship with Prudie is not the end of the world. It is a new day. On the other hand, the story’s conclusion also reflects, to an important degree, Nick’s tendency to deny an experience and its lessons. Even though I would not go as far as Paul Wadden who argues that Nick’s reaction is similar to the one in stories like “Indian Camp” and “The Killers” and “illustrate[s] the psychological mechanism of denial,” I do
certainly agree that we cannot read the end as evidence for Nick having successfully transcended the pain of Prudie’s betrayal (13).

To some extent, Nick is even responsible for his fate as he himself has also been betraying his relationship to Prudie, albeit in a different way. Wadden is justified in pointing out that Nick does not defend Prudie against any of the Garners’ offensive remarks. In fact, he denies three times that she is his girlfriend. Therefore, according to Wadden, “Nick’s own words—and silences—implicate him in the impending betrayal, for he repeatedly fails to acknowledge his bond with Prudy [sic]” (5). Nick’s silence at the offensive remarks about Prudie can also be read as a decisive impediment to his ongoing embrace of the Indian world. As such, his silence indicates the impossibility of becoming an “Indian” himself, that is, the impossibility of leaving behind completely his heritage and home. In this sense, Nick’s lack of total commitment foreshadows his later posture as staunch defender of white womanhood against Trudy’s half-brother in “Father and Sons.” Nick, in this sense, does betray his ideals and shows his “white” heritage. As a consequence, he cannot find emotional peace in this ambiguous world, a world which inflicts pain and forces separation but simultaneously offers renewal and hope, a cycle of pain and joy he cannot break without fully committing himself to one side. Having rejected his home and unable to completely assimilate into the Indian world, Nick remains “hollow and happy inside himself.”

The Indian stories discussed here foreshadow Nick’s lifelong cycle of happiness and disappointment, a reflection of Hemingway’s larger life-and-death theme. Nick has to face living in a world where, as Flora suggests, “marriage might prove even more awful than the predicament of the wounded Indian husband who is trapped in the shanty
with his suffering wife” (51). Since neither one of his parents turns out to be an effective
guide for Nick’s maturation, he rejects his home and embraces nature and the Indian
world. However, as we have seen in “Ten Indians” and as we will see more clearly in the
discussion of “Fathers and Sons,” there is a limit for Nick’s process of acculturation, as
he cannot completely renounce all parental influence and ultimately has to reject the
Indian world as well. Thus starts Nick’s lifetime search for values and stability, a search
necessitated by the imposed parental gap.

The relationship with his father continues to occupy Nick in other stories as well,
most notably in “The Three-Day Blow,” when Nick ruefully discloses to his friend Bill
that his father “‘missed a lot himself’” (NAS 211). And, as we have seen, in “Now I Lay
Me” Nick tries to hold on desperately to his memories and thoughts, including the scene
between his parents, because he’s afraid of falling asleep in the dark. In “Big Two-
Hearted River,” by contrast, we meet Nick in his attempt to avoid all thinking: “He felt he
had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs” (NAS
179). But such an escape can only be temporary; in “Fathers and Sons” Nick must come
to terms with his relationship with his father. Since we do not learn any details about
Nick’s and Prudie’s relationship in “Ten Indians,” “Fathers and Sons” also provides a
necessary piece of the puzzle concerning Nick’s sexual maturation, in addition to
revealing further details about his ambivalent feelings toward his father.45

This first section of this study has demonstrated some key differences between
Hemingway’s and Gaines’s fictional treatment of the father-son relationship. Whereas
Nick Adams rebels against his parents, Gaines’s child protagonists attempt to reunite
their parents. As a consequence, the former finds himself in an existential void, Hemingway’s famous “nada,” which he will try to fill through the constant search for other places and cultures that allow him to recreate his childhood experiences. Similar to Robinson Crusoe’s life, Nick’s life is characterized by wandering and restlessness. His independence is bought at the price of peace and stability.

For Hemingway, grounding one’s identity means leaving the family and searching elsewhere. The search will occupy the adolescent Nick as well as Hemingway’s other protagonists, as the loss of the father leaves a spiritual and ensuing geographical void that cannot be filled. More often than not, however, this search turns out to be futile, or its success short-lived, thereby ever-increasing the risk of the son eventually repeating the mistakes of his father. As will be evidenced by a reading of “Fathers and Sons,” one of Hemingway’s later stories, alongside “Indian Camp,” one of his earliest, Hemingway’s view of the rejection of the father reflects his cyclical view of time. The individual, all by himself, can always move on to other places, but is unable to connect to others and find peace. An exile from home, the wanderer is always displaced, and his search never ends. Self-discovery might require the loss of all previous attachments, and it is accompanied by a relatively bleak outlook on life in general.

On the other hand, a reunion between father and son or the bridging of generational gaps in general is a fundamental goal for Gaines and his characters. Celebrating the African American concept of the extended family that includes multiple generations and the community, Gaines’s works emphasize rootedness, as familial and communal ties are the only way to ground one’s identity in a solid foundation. The
closing of generational gaps and the connection to others ensure that self-definition takes place in the context of the ever-important awareness of the past.

In Gaines’s works, the gap between fathers and sons often has historic roots, and it is up to the fathers, who have to live up to the sons’ expectations, to break out of the endlessly repeating cycle of history and close the gap with the sons. Becoming a father amounts to a powerful renewal of the self and establishes the vital link to a better future. Section two will focus on the fathers’ perspective and illustrate the two writers’ different concepts of history and time as it applies to the father-son relationship.

1 For an example of Gaines’s expressed pride in his family’s accomplishments, see Gaudet and Wooton 70.

2 As Anne K. Simpson writes, “Though Gaines does not explain his father’s departure, he has said that such a situation was not uncommon at that time. A man who left his family need not have been an irresponsible person, but more often one who could no longer tolerate working in the sharecropper system.” Disappointingly, Simpson’s biography does not further analyze Gaines’s hesitation about his father. Cf. Anne K. Simpson, A Gathering of Gaines: The Man and the Writer (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1991) 1.

3 To this day, Gaines prefers not to talk about his father, and interviewers have generally honored that request. For an example of his hesitation to discuss private matters, see Gaudet and Wooton 68.

4 Most of the ideas on the complex influence of both Grace and Clarence Hemingway on Ernest are taken from Kurt Müller, Ernest Hemingway: Der Mensch, Der Schriftsteller, Das Werk (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999) 5-14.

5 Whereas the age of the boys in Gaines’s stories is usually given, Nick’s age can often only be approximated.

6 “Fathers and Sons” does not qualify as a childhood story in a strict sense since Nick Adams is a grown man with a son of his own. However, in its flashbacks the story features young Nick’s actual initiation into sexuality. “Fathers and Sons” also brings to a conclusion many of the thematic strands in the earlier Nick Adams stories. Since it is a story covering three generations, with Nick in his role as a father reflecting on himself as a son, it will be discussed in detail in the second part of this study.
This idea of the mother teaching harsh lessons to the son has been described as common practice by Gaines: “[S]he loves her children. Oh, yes, she loves her children. But to show that kind of thing in an overt way was something that was just not done” (Gaudet and Wooton 65).

The consequences of a boy being forced to assume the role of a man are also shown in Gaines’s novel *In My Father’s House*, which will be discussed in the second part of this study. In this novel, Etienne has to replace his father after the latter deserts the family. As the oldest child, he is burdened with responsibilities that will later lead to the demise of the family.

Whether intended or not, Max’s calling his father “my old man” certainly brings to mind Hemingway’s eponymous story. In fact, there are a number of parallels between “The Turtles” and Hemingway’s “My Old Man.” Both stories deal with a son’s pride in and love for his father and his achievements (fishing in “The Turtles,” horse-racing in “My Old Man”). In both stories, too, the father appears as a morally ambiguous figure and the sons have to start negotiating their mixed feelings when they narrate the story. In addition, the mother of both child protagonists is dead. Finally, the sons have their first encounters with the other sex.

In “My Grandpa and the Haint,” after Bobby and his father return from fishing, “Mom cleaned the fishes” (“Grandpa” 153). See also *A Gathering of Old Men* where Mat “hand[s] [his] sack of fishes to Ella,” his wife (34). And Chimley, Mat’s partner when fishing, had just told his wife the “‘food better be ready when I got back home’” (*GOM* 39).

The idea of Max’s father that sexual activity defines manhood is also parodied by Munford Bazille, the father figure to Procter Lewis, in “Three Men”: “[F]ace don’t make a man—black or white. Face don’t make him and fucking don’t make him and fighting don’t make him—neither killing. None of this prove you a man. ‘Cause animals can fuck, can kill, can fight—you know that?” (*BL* 138)

Gaines’s double-voicing and authorial distance in this scene also create author-reader irony at the expense of the narrator, as is often the case in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

In both “The Turtles” and “My Grandpa and the Haint” we see a connection between father and son going fishing and the theme of sexuality. This connection evokes Hemingway’s use of fishing in stories like “Out of Season,” “Big Two-Hearted River,” and especially “The End of Something.” The first story draws an analogy between fishing out of season and the theme of abortion, whereas in the second story fishing serves as an escape for Nick from disillusionments in war and love. In “The End of Something,” Nick uses a fishing trip with Marjorie to break up with her. Of course, in many Hemingway stories the theme of sexuality is also linked to hunting. In “My Grandpa and the Haint,” Gaines correlates the bent fishing poles with the state of marriage between Pap and Mom.
While it is very unlikely that Gaines read Hemingway’s “The Denunciation,” first published in *Esquire* in 1938, it is quite interesting to see that the moral dilemma faced by the protagonists in these two stories is similar. Both narrators have to betray somebody they admire; they thus opt to use a third party to clear their conscience. Bobby wants to save his grandparents’ marriage, whereas Hemingway’s narrator wishes to preserve the spirit of Chicote’s bar for which “all of us who used to hang out there had a great affection” (*Complete Short Stories* 420). Hemingway’s narrator, Henry Emmunds, feels that it is his responsibility to denounce Luis Delgado, a fascist, but also a comrade-in-spirit, as he used to be a regular client of Chicote’s, the sanctity of which the narrator wishes to protect by any means. By giving the waiter the phone number of the Loyalists’ counterespionage bureau, Henry commits his act of “Pontius Pilatry” (426). Quite interestingly, Henry later calls up Pepé, the head of the bureau, to have Luis told that it was he who had denounced him, not the waiter. For, as Henry explains, “I did not wish him [Luis] to be disillusioned or bitter about the waiters before he died" (428). This call to Pepé is comparable to Bobby’s second ploy at the end of Gaines’s story in which he makes use of his friend Lucius for the second time to reassure Pap that Miss Molly Bee is not worth worrying about. That both Gaines and Hemingway chose to write about such a comparable moral dilemma and that they handle the plot in such a similar way are further proofs of their shared interest in the moral ambiguity of the world.

Craig Werner reads the scene in which Octavia chooses dignity over food as “a break with the perspective of even the ‘well-disposed’ whites committed to the Faulknerian South” (*Paradoxical* 37).

Linguistically speaking, the student’s excessive logic is, of course, quite reasonable. His argumentation illustrates Ferdinand DeSaussure’s concept of the signifier and signified. A single word, or linguistic sign, is, according to Saussure, a two-sided psychological entity; it consists of the union of a signifier (*signifiant*) and a signified (*signifié*). The signifier is the speech pattern or the written marks of the sign, whereas the signified refers to the conceptual meaning of the sign. Therefore, a linguistic sign, for example the word “sun,” is not simply a link between the thing (the bright yellow body in the sky) and a name (the letters s + u + n). Rather, it is the link between a concept and a sound pattern, with one always triggering the other. The word “sun” has meaning for us because each time the word is produced, we link the signifier with the signified, or vice versa, we relate our concept of what a “sun” is to the patterns or marks with which we conventionally express this concept.

The last two stories in the *Bloodline* collection, the title story “Bloodline” and “Just Like a Tree,” contrast the violent and slightly demented Copper and the community-sanctioned Emmanuel. In “Bloodline,” the confrontational Copper Laurent is looking for his “birthright” (*BL* 205). As the son of a white plantation owner and a black woman, he was rejected by his biological father and now claims from his uncle, Frank Laurent, what is rightfully his. His vision of an organized army fighting for its rights on his uncle’s plantation borders on madness and anticipates Billy’s apocalyptic vision in *In My Father’s House*. Copper’s mistake, though, is not to reach out to the black community; he
fails to establish a relationship with them. Copper’s manner is as military and commanding as the one displayed by his white forefathers. His fight is bound to fail, however, unless he rediscovers his heart first and establishes a connection to other people. Like the young student in “The Sky Is Gray,” Copper is too preoccupied with himself and his personal concern of reclaiming his “bloodline”; he forgets about the larger community and thus cannot be an instrument in closing the intergenerational gaps. Emmanuel in “Just Like a Tree,” on the other hand, is almost a complete opposite of Copper. Emmanuel appears as a responsible agent of change who acts with the support of the community and especially of his grandmother Fe. He draws his strength for his non-violent approach from his rootedness and knowledge of his ancestors’ and the community’s past. The relationship between Fe and Emmanuel exemplifies the strength derived from intergenerational bonds.

“No Worst Than a Bad Cold” is, according to Griffin, an “unfinished satire of Indian clichés foreshadowing The Torrents of Spring” (480 n.1). As such, I would claim that it also foreshadows Hemingway’s parodies on Indian stereotypes in the stories that are discussed in this chapter.


Ernest Hemingway, The Nick Adams Stories, ed. Philip Young (1972; New York: Scribner’s, 1999) 21. All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be indicated in the text, preceded by the abbreviation NAS.

The full sentence in Death in the Afternoon reads: “I was trying to write then and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing truly what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, was to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced” (2). Hemingway was concerned throughout his career with writing “true” statements and with techniques that would render the “truth.”

The motif of reading will appear two more times in the stories discussed in this chapter. In “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” Nick is reading by himself in the woods while his father is facing two humiliating encounters. And in “Ten Indians,” it is the father who is reading by himself before he imparts the devastating news of Prudie’s betrayal to Nick.

Daniel Defoe, The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1719; New York: Penguin, 2001) 6. All quotations are from this edition and are incorporated in the text, preceded by the abbreviation RC.

The scene in Robinson Crusoe finds an almost exact equivalent in For Whom the Bell Tolls, when Robert Jordan recalls with disgust his father’s sentimentality at the train station.
Of course, Defoe’s novel follows the Christian pattern of disobedience, punishment, repentance, and deliverance. When Robinson defies his father’s authority, he simultaneously defies the divine order. As J. Paul Hunter explains, “Obedience to an earthly father, God’s deputy in the family, preserves the divine order, and rebellion against him is equivalent to rebellion against God” (37). Other critics interpret Crusoe’s running away as an example of “economic individualism” (cf. Ian Watt 66). I would like to argue, however, that in spite of the religious and economic overtones in Defoe’s work, there are obvious and significant parallels between Crusoe’s repudiation of home/family and his later life, on the one hand, and Nick Adams’s rejection of home and subsequent adventures, on the other hand.

I am indebted to Professor Kevin Cope for his assistance in researching Robinson Crusoe’s motives for leaving home.

“Three Shots” also explains why Dr. Adams has to perform the Caesarean in “Indian Camp” with his jackknife and without any anesthetic. Dr. Adams, his brother, and Nick are camping in the wilderness, and it would certainly be unusual for him to have with him a complete doctor’s bag. Thus, “Three Shots” exonerates Nick’s father from charges of being unprofessional or cruel.

Amy Strong discusses in detail the imperialist assumptions implied in Dr. Adams’s post-operative remarks. She refers to “Dr. Adams’s wish to have this event written down in a medical journal” as crucial: “His medical journals represent an ultimate authority: a removed, consecrated sign of medical, legal, and institutional power, not unlike the proclamations sent back to the crown by Columbus as a form of institutional domination over the colonies” (23). To support such a reading, Strong states that the story “does not offer a single Indian voice, only the pregnant Indian woman’s screams.” However, both the screams and the biting are obvious signs of protest. In addition, Hemingway’s most effective parody on the imperialist assumptions is certainly the Indian husband’s suicide, a plot element Strong does not see as a sign of protest.

Such a reading gains additional weight if one buys into the assumption of some critics that Uncle George is the father of the Indian woman’s child. If George is the father, this would explain his handing out cigars and provide a reason for the husband’s suicide. See Larry Grimes’s “Night Terror and Morning Calm” (414) and Kenneth Bernard’s “Hemingway’s ‘Indian Camp’” (291) for further details that support the view that George is the father.

Jeffrey Meyers has a more sophisticated explanation for the Indian husband’s suicide. Meyers argues that the Indian husband practices “couvade” to affirm his fatherhood and protect his child: “In an act of elemental nobility, he focuses the evil spirits on himself, associates his wife’s blood with his own death wound, and punishes himself for the violation of the taboo [of his wife’s defilement by whites]” (308).
In his article “Hemingway and Prudence,” Donald St. John traces the origins of Hemingway’s use of Indian characters by interviewing locals, such as Ottawa Indians. They affirm that Indians “not kill selves for anything. Indian no commit suicide. No believe in suicide” (83). At the time the story is set, then, an Indian man committing suicide had to be seen as unusual and sensational.

It is appropriate to mention in this context that Hemingway’s father was reputed to have spent some time among the Indians. As Peter Griffin writes, “Clarence told Grace he was a collector of arrowheads and spearheads, clay bowls and stone axes of the Pottawatomie Indians . . . He spoke of Indian friends he had made on a two-month visit to a mission school for the Dakota Sioux” (6).

According to a rumor, Clarence Hemingway also became an honorary Indian. Apparently, he was called Nec-tee-ta-la or “Eagle Eye” because of his extraordinary vision by the Dakota Sioux (cf. Griffin 6). In addition to specific plot elements, Paul Strong also lists the structural parallels between the two stories: “Both stories break into three parts: (1) a meeting of whites and Indians away from the shanty/cottage; (2) a central scene indoors, where distressed husbands deal with ill wives; (3) a coda, in which pressure is released, as Dr. Adams and Nick leave the shanty/cottage and retreat into a comforting natural setting” (“The First Nick Adams Stories,” 90 n.3).

Richard Fulkerson discusses the connection of the story to Hemingway’s own father, which is based on Philip Young’s quotation of Hemingway’s remark that “this story was about the time he discovered his father was a coward” (Ernest Hemingway 33n). Fulkerson, however, refutes this “biographical fallacy” on the grounds of Nick not having witnessed any of the humiliations Dr. Adams undergoes in the story (see “The Biographical Fallacy and ‘The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife’”). He concludes that this story is more about Dr. Adams than about Nick: “It is . . . about the life the doctor leads and Nick’s response to it. The story is complete and significant in the Nick Adams saga even when read without the distortion caused by excessive biographical interpretation” (65).

Consider also in this context that Dr. Adams’s medical journals are unopened and still wrapped in the cottage. Unlike Nick, Dr. Adams is not a reader (any more). For him the woods are the only escape from responsibilities.

The significance of fishing to ward off unpleasant thoughts is beautifully rendered in “Big Two-Hearted River,” in which fishing has a therapeutic function for Nick after his disillusionments in war and love.

As with the names Dick Boulton in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” and Simon Green in “The Indians Moved Away,” Hemingway continues to give Indians non-
traditional names, thus further countering racial stereotypes, or, as one could argue, reflecting the effacement of native culture.

39 The title, of course, refers to the minstrel song “Ten Little Indians.” The fate of the last of the ten little Indians links the story to the loneliness of Nick’s father: “One little Injun livin’ all alone, He got married and then there were none” (qtd. in Smith, “Tenth Indian” 69).

40 According to Tilton, both Mrs. Garner and Dr. Adams “symbolically castrate” their sons (83). However, I do not agree that Dr. Adams’s motives are the same as Mrs. Garner’s; his behavior can therefore not be described as malicious. Furthermore, Dr. Adams does not display anything close to bigotry in his attitude toward the Indians, whereas Mrs. Garner certainly does.

41 For a summary of the differing views on Dr. Adams’s motives, see Robert Fleming’s essay “Hemingway’s Dr. Adams—Saint or Sinner?” esp. 101-03.

42 Cf. the Madrid manuscript, in which the following dialogue occurs:
“I’m sorry, Nickie,” his father said, looking at Nick, “But that’s the way people are.”
“They don’t have to all be rotten,” Nick said. His voice hurt him to talk.
“Just about,” his father said. “It’s a fairly rotten place, Nick.”
The scene ends with Nick’s admission that “‘[t]hey’re all rotten to hell’” (qtd. in Smith, “Tenth Indian” 61).


44 One does not have to go as far as Gerry Brenner, who accuses Dr. Adams of “intended sexual treachery.” Thus, he attributes “dishonorable reasons” to Dr. Adams and explains the father’s wandering into the Indian camp with his hope of “find[ing] Nick’s girl for himself” (18). Such a reading, however, is hard to confirm in either the published version or the manuscript versions.

45 In Hemingway’s Nick Adams, Joseph Flora makes a convincing case of considering “A Day’s Wait,” “Wine of Wyoming,” and “Fathers and Sons” as a Nick Adams trilogy, similar to “Indian Camp,” “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” and “Ten Indians.” In the first two stories, however, the narrator is unnamed; they are, therefore, not included in Philip Young’s collection of Nick Adams Stories. A Day’s Wait is especially interesting, as it deals with issues familiar from other stories, such as the father’s problem of communicating with the son, the theme of death, and the significance of hunting, which all feature prominently in “Fathers and Sons.” In addition, a manuscript version of “Fathers and Sons” identifies Nick’s nameless son as Schatz, the name used for the narrator’s son in “A Day’s Wait.” Furthermore, both “Wine of Wyoming” and “A Day’s
Wait” hint at the presence of the narrator’s wife, which could be the reason why the narrator is not identified as Nick Adams. Overall, Flora successfully demonstrates the numerous links among the three stories and concludes that “Hemingway intended the reader to recognize ‘A Day’s Wait’ and ‘Wine of Wyoming’ as Nick stories” (236). Since my chapter is mostly concerned with Nick Adams as a child and with the role of the Indians in connection to his father, and since the setting and themes of the two stories are largely different from the Nick Adams stories analyzed in this chapter, I will not discuss the two stories any further.
PART TWO
RECLAIMING THEIR VOICES: FATHERS LOOKING FOR THEIR SONS

We have already seen in previous chapters that the alienation between fathers and sons has occupied Gaines and Hemingway from the beginning of their literary careers. Yet, although the father-son relationship constitutes such a pervasive theme in the authors’ early short stories, both writers must have felt that there remained too much unsaid, that the problems ran too deep, which necessitated their return to the issue in their later works. In an intriguing parallel between Hemingway and Gaines, both authors decided to write a major piece of fiction that is, as the title signals, primarily devoted to the father-son predicament. However, in Hemingway’s “Fathers and Sons” and Gaines’s In My Father’s House, their seminal works on the father-son subject, the emphasis is no longer on the son’s perspective alone but rather shifts between fathers and sons, as in Hemingway’s case, or predominantly centers on the perspective of the father, as in Gaines’s case. That these works were of paramount significance to the writers manifests itself in different ways. Whereas Gaines found himself struggling with his novel over an extended period of seven years, Hemingway expressed the importance of the subject by making it the theme of the last Nick Adams story that was published during his lifetime.

Ironically, however, both authors were only partly successful in their endeavor to bring together fathers and sons. As this section will demonstrate, neither Hemingway’s “Fathers and Sons” nor Gaines’s In My Father’s House could resolve the father-son dilemma satisfactorily. The feeling of dissatisfaction may be best uncovered by an analysis of the conclusion of each work, which seems unconvincing, if not forced, considering the content of the story and novel. In another fascinating parallel between the two writers, Hemingway and Gaines therefore felt compelled to write yet another major
piece of fiction on the father-son issue. Gaines would wrestle with fathers and their attempts to reach out to their sons in *A Gathering of Old Men*, a novel which is even more powerful and complex if read as a sequel to *In My Father's House*. Hemingway returned briefly to the son’s perspective in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, before he would focus on a powerful father figure in *The Old Man and the Sea*, which features complex father-son relationships on different levels.

**Chapter Four**

**Like Father, Like Son: Breaking the Cycle in Hemingway’s “Fathers and Sons,” *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and *The Old Man and the Sea***

In “Fathers and Sons,” Nick Adams has become Nicholas Adams, a 38-year-old man with a son of his own. On their way through the Southern countryside, a landscape heavy with the past, Nick is reminded of his childhood experiences in the Michigan woods. His memory circles back and forth between past and present, connecting his sexual experiences with Trudy¹ in front of the hemlock tree, his ambivalent love-hate relationship with his father, images of hunting in the Michigan woods, and his own son, who is sleeping next to him in the car.

It is noteworthy that “Fathers and Sons,” Hemingway’s only story set in the American South, focuses on familial or generational relationships, which are, of course, such a pivotal feature in all Southern fiction, from Faulkner to Gaines. At the same time, the idea of family is undermined by the emphasis on fathers and sons only, to the exclusion of both mothers and wives.² Nick does not refer to a wife or his son’s mother, nor does his memory ever circle back to his own mother. The story’s exclusive male focus thus undermines the idea of home, family, and stability, just as the car ride from an undisclosed starting-point to an unidentified destination imubes the story with a sense of
“uprootedness,” as Flora remarks (247). This impression of uprootedness is reinforced by Nick’s seemingly unrelated string of childhood memories.

However, the automobile trip takes second place to the other, more important journey that is going on inside Nick’s mind, for Nick is not only hunting the country in his mind, he is also hunting the country in his mind, in an attempt to impose some order on his mental chaos, which is the result of his ambiguous and unresolved relationship to his past. As we shall see, Nick’s memories are linked in that they revolve around the interrelated themes of hunting, sexuality, and the father-son relationship. Nick is clearly divided between, on the one hand, genuine love for his father and admiration for his skills and, on the other, his profound disappointment in him because of his failure to communicate effectively and his submission to his wife, Nick’s mother.

The Southern countryside he is driving through takes Nick back to the country of his childhood and the hunting trips he enjoyed with his father. Although Nick is not able to express his love unequivocally, his admiration for his father shines through when he remembers his keen eyesight: “When he first thought about him it was always the eyes. . . . They saw much further and much quicker than the human eye sees and they were the great gift his father had. His father saw as a bighorn ram or as an eagle sees, literally” (NAS 257). As if to convince us, the narrator gives us an example. While standing on one shore of the lake, the father points out the flagpole and Nick’s sister Dorothy on the other side of the lake, neither of which Nick can see. Then the father asks,

“Can you see the sheep on the hillside toward the point?”
“Yes.”
They were a whitish patch on the gray-green of the hill.
“I can count them,” his father said. (NAS 257-58)
The “whitish patch on the gray-green of the hill” stands metaphorically for Nick’s inability to see the past clearly, for his failure to interpret the individual memories and attribute meaning to his childhood years in the woods. Nick’s inability to see his sister Dorothy, in addition to the lack of any reference to the mother, illustrates an important component of his personality, as he obviously is not able to acknowledge the female influences of his life. To Nick, then, even though he tries to make sense of it, the past remains an indistinct, blurry terrain he cannot read properly and connect to the present. For example, not only is Nick incapable of admitting his feelings for his father; he also avers that “[a]fter he was fifteen he had shared nothing with [his father]” (NAS 265).

However, his memories and the omnipresence of the father in them belie this statement. In fact, the whole story can be taken as a testament to the father’s continued importance in Nick’s life.

Nick’s admiration for his father is evident in the fusion of nature and father, in the inextricable link in Nick’s mind between the beloved Michigan country and memories of him:

His father came back to him in the fall of the year, or in the early spring when there had been jacksnipe on the prairie, or when he saw shocks of corn, or when he saw a lake; or if he ever saw a horse and buggy, or when he saw, or heard, wild geese, or in a duck blind; . . . His father was with him, suddenly, in deserted orchards and in new-plowed fields, in thickets, on small hills, or when going through dead grass, whenever splitting wood or hauling water, by grist mills, cider mills and dams and always with open fires. (NAS 264-65)

This memory effectively underlines the bond shared by father and son when together in nature, away from the “civilized” world, away from wife and mother, in the country they both loved, and where they could live according to their own rules.
Nick’s memories of the wilderness thus blend naturally with the memory of his father, which demonstrates the importance of both for Nick. This identification of the wilderness with the father, which was only hinted at in the concluding scene of “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” establishes a parallel between the vanishing of the woods and the fate of the father, as the story is permeated with Nick’s sense of loss over both. In addition, Nick’s melancholy is compounded by the fact that just as the Michigan wilderness was gradually destroyed by technology, so the Indians, who lived in and from the wilderness, suffered a similar fate.

As Susan Beegel demonstrates, Hemingway was well-informed about the long-term ecological damage inflicted on the primeval forest, the wounds of which are apparent throughout Hemingway’s stories (cf. 101-03). In his mind, Nick contrasts the wilderness of his youth, when “there was still much forest then, virgin forest where the trees grew high before there were any branches and you walked on the brown, clean springy-needled ground with no undergrowth and it was cool on the hottest days” (NAS 261), to the scene outside his car window, “the highway that rose and fell straight away ahead with banks of red dirt sliced cleanly away and the second-growth timber on both sides” (NAS 256). His Michigan woods suffered a similar fate as the landscape he drives through. Highways were built, and the hemlock forest was destroyed as a consequence of ruthless exploitation. At the same time, new forms of transportation, mill technology, and other forms of industry terminated the Indians’ way of life, for, as Beegel explains, “The Indians used the forest in a sustainable way for fruit and nuts, bark, sap, dyes, medicine, and arrow wood, cutting only dead or dying trees for firewood” (85). Ironically, the Indians became dependent on and participated in the very industry that was annihilating
their traditions. As Nick recalls, “They left the logs in the woods to rot, they did not even clear away or burn the tops. It was only the bark they wanted for the tannery at Boyne City; hauling it across the lake on the ice in winter, and each year there was less forest and more open, hot, shadeless, weed-grown slashing” (N 261).

These childhood memories enable the reader to fill in background information to the other Indian stories and thus arrive at a better understanding of Hemingway’s portrait of Indian life. The extinction of the traditional Indian way of life and the resultant impoverished state of living (“The Indians Moved Away”) are what is behind the squalor and helplessness of “Indian Camp” and provide the conditions for the stealing of logs in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” as well as the alcoholism and promiscuity depicted in “Ten Indians.” Hemingway’s familiarity with and sympathies for the Ojibway tragedy, however, did not lead him to a romanticized portrayal of the Indians; rather, his sorrow and regret are submerged in Nick’s memories of the country and the father, all of which are permeated with a profound sense of love as well as disappointment in the impossibility of returning.

From the sad fate of the country, Nick’s memory returns to his father. Nick’s love for his father and appreciation for his teaching him about the country and how to hunt and fish in it are mitigated by his disappointment in his father’s attitude toward sexual matters, which results in a comically-ineffective instruction about “buggers” and “mashing” (N 259).6 Certainly, the humorous tone of the discussions between father and son masks Nick’s resentment at his father’s summary view of sex as “a heinous crime” and his injunction that “the thing to do was to keep your hands off of people” (N 259). Yet, it becomes clear that the father’s old-fashioned, Victorian ideas about sexuality have
unintended consequences, as they push Nick into the opposite direction. Whether out of curiosity or rebellion, Nick’s sexual experimentation with Trudy is rather aggressive with its overtones of miscegenation and incest.

The scene at the “trunk of a hemlock wider than two beds are long” would certainly be shocking to Nick’s father, as Nick and Trudy have sex in the presence of Trudy’s brother Billy. It is even hinted that Trudy may have had sex with her own brother. Nick thus acts contrary to his parents’ lessons of conforming to traditional standards of morality. As Richard McCann expresses it, Nick deliberately “embraces the world his father warned against” by enjoying “a sexuality without inhibition or shame” (12).

Yet, interestingly enough, Nick cannot completely shed his father’s ideas of morality. When Billy mentions that his older half-brother Eddie has expressed a desire to sleep with Nick’s sister Dorothy, Nick immediately assumes the conventional and romantic role of defender of his sister’s honor: “‘I’d kill him like this.’ Nick cocked the gun and hardly taking aim pulled the trigger, blowing a hole as big as your hand in the head or belly of that half-breed bastard Eddie Gilby” (NAS 262). Not only that, he would also “‘scalp him and send it to his mother’” or, since the mother is dead, as Trudy informs him, “‘throw him to the dogs’” (NAS 263). The comic element of this scene notwithstanding, Nick’s seriousness is illustrated by his actual firing of a shot. Since we know that he was only given three shots by his father to teach him discipline and responsible decision-making, the actual firing of one of the valuable bullets demonstrates the seriousness of his feelings on the matter of his sister having sex with an Indian, while simultaneously linking his traditional reaction to his father’s conservative attitude. Nick does become “old-fashioned,” as he “instantly assumes the role of Indian killer and
defender of white womanhood,” as Helstern evaluates the scene (73). This moment, then, clearly ties Nick to his father’s Victorianism and his notion of sex as “a heinous crime,” and puts him in stark contrast to the prelapsarian innocence of his Indian friends regarding sexual matters. While Trudy and Billy are unaware of “crimes” like incest and voyeurism, Nick employs a double standard, as he is not willing to allow his sister to get involved with Eddie, at the mere thought of which he regresses to racism, calling Eddie a “half-breed” and drawing a violently enforced line between himself and the Indians.

After Nick has dispensed with his imaginary foe, he has sex with Trudy again, but, significantly, this time he wants Billy to leave first. Nick thus moves one step closer to his father’s concept of sex as shameful, and one step away from his original experimental and rebellious state and the unfettered and unabashed attitude of Trudy and Billy. When Trudy mentions her desire to “‘[m]ake plenty baby,’” Nick further retreats into himself: “Something inside Nick had gone a long way away” (NAS 264). Sex with Trudy no longer has the same innocent appeal to Nick, for he seems to realize a sinister side of sexual experimentation he had not considered before. Afraid that sexual rebellion could have long-lasting consequences, he first pretends to be more interested in Billy’s hunting before he suddenly decides to go home for supper.

The sequence of events thus illustrates the validity of some of Dr. Adams’s cautionary ideas; Nick shares more things with his father than a passion for hunting, for he becomes aware of himself caught between accepting his father’s ideas and rejecting them. Nick may not realize this consciously, but as a reader we understand the falseness of his statement that “[a]fter he was fifteen he had shared nothing with him.”
Nick’s double standard in sexual matters is related to his earlier toleration of and silence at the Garners’ rude and offensive remarks about his girlfriend Prudie in “Ten Indians.” Just as his behavior then implicated him in the impending betrayal and identified him as “white” after all, so his defense of his sister’s honor against an imaginary Indian lover shows where his loyalties are and reinforces the impossibility of his becoming completely integrated in the Indian world.7

If one aspect of the adult Nick’s reconnecting to his childhood is his attempt to recapture a sense of innocence and lost paradise, then the scene with Trudy and Billy thwarts his plan, as he must own up to the ultimate differences between him and his Indian friends. As a reader, we understand that Billy’s disappointment (“Billy was very depressed” [NAS 263]) after Nick’s display of violence against Billy’s half-brother Eddie is the consequence of Nick’s betrayal of their previously shared ideals. Nick thus is, in Beegel’s words, “the serpent in the Ojibway Eden” because he introduces “[s]exual shame, the incest taboo, possessiveness, jealousy, miscegenation, segregation, perhaps even bastardy and prostitution . . . to the native inhabitants of the once virgin forest” (88-89).

Nick is more like his father than he wishes to admit in other ways too. If the father possesses exceptional eyesight, Nick is gifted with an extraordinary sense of smell, which are two qualities that are very valuable for Nick’s and his father’s shared love of hunting. Yet, the motif of smell is also related to the father via Nick’s blooming sexuality. Thus, Nick remembers his father’s smell in the summer when the latter enjoys working in the sun: “Nick loved his father but hated the smell of him and once when he had to wear a suit of his father’s underwear that had gotten too small for his father it had made him feel
sick and he took it off and put it under two stones in the creek and said that he had lost it” (NAS 265). Even though the underwear is freshly washed, Nick feels it repugnant to wear it and prefers to be whipped for losing it. Afterwards, he sits in the woodshed and aims his shotgun at his father, who sits on the screen porch reading the paper: “‘I can blow him to hell. I can kill him’” (NAS 265). Feeling guilty about wishing his father dead, Nick tries to get rid of the smell by walking to the Indian camp, presumably to have sex with Trudy.  

This complicated sequence of events shows once more Nick’s rejection of the father and his ideas about sexuality, symbolized by the underwear he cannot accept. Of course, as Flora remarks, “The underwear is a particularly horrifying object for a male just coming into his manhood—although probably on an unconscious level. Underwear becomes unspeakably intimate in this context—to have the son’s sex where the father’s used to be is a violation of an ancient taboo” (243-44). Flora goes on to explain that “[t]he underwear functions symbolically to force the young Nick into some awareness of his father as a sexual being” (244).

This scene receives added significance if one considers manuscript evidence of a deleted passage, which “detail[s] the exposure of the father’s sexual frustration to his unwitting son” (Beegel 80). In an inversion of the scene in “Indian Camp” when the father and son are alone in the boat, the father asks the son to take over the oars because it is “too uncomfortable” in “the hot weather” and with “the exercise” (qtd. in Beegel 80). Nick doesn’t understand yet the father’s reference to an erection and doesn’t know yet “what it was that made him so uncomfortable” because he “had not started to be uncomfortable that way yet.” However, the father’s sexuality, especially when this
deleted segment is considered in conjunction with the passage about the underwear, does seem threatening to Nick. As Susan Beegel summarizes the importance of the deleted passage, “[T]here’s a suggestion, if not of an unwanted impulse to homosexual incest on the father’s part, of some unspoken way in which Dr. Adams’ sexual frustration in marriage makes him appear dangerous to the child” (81).

We have already seen in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” how Dr. Adams vents his sexual frustration by pumping the shells of his gun and how Mrs. Adams symbolically emasculates her husband by burning his phallus-like artifacts in “Now I Lay Me.” In addition, the father proves incapable of communicating effectively about such issues as birth and sexuality in “Indian Camp” and “Ten Indians.” His distorted views on sexuality in “Fathers and Sons,” the scene about the underwear, and the deleted passage in the boat emphasize once more the father’s sexual bewilderment and threat to Nick. We therefore understand why Nick’s memory of his father is so ambivalent, as the father’s positive attributes are undermined by his serious flaws.

Another of Dr. Adams’s flaws, his violence, is revealed when Nick is whipped after he lies about losing his father’s underwear. The father’s violent nature accounts at least partly for Nick’s violent outburst in the woods with Billy. Nick’s inconsistent and contradictory behavior with his Indian friends, then, has to be read in the context of the father’s peculiar views on sexuality and his tendency to revert to violence to compensate for his insecurity. And just as Nick is ready to kill his sister’s potential seducer in the virgin forest, so he imagines shooting his father. Nick’s Oedipal urge to kill his father results from the emotional conflict that centers around his awareness of the father’s sexuality and the father’s inability to communicate properly about such matters. He aims
the gun at his father out of “the frustration he feels in response to assuming manhood . . . within the pattern held up for him by his father” (Benson 17). The subsequent feeling of shame and guilt represents Nick’s overall attitude toward his father. Part of him wants to love and forgive him, but the other part wants to hate and destroy him. This ambiguity is what prevents Nick from writing about his father at the time of the story. As the narrator states, “Nick could not write about him yet, although he would, later . . .” (NAS 258). And later, “If he wrote about it he could get rid of it. He had gotten rid of many things by writing them. But it was still too early for that” (NAS 259).

The last remark inevitably raises questions about what exactly he “had gotten rid of” by writing about it. Certainly one can explain the absence of the mother in this way, as Nick, or Hemingway, had successfully written about her damaging influence on his father in previous stories. Because of her emasculating and stifling nature, he perceives her as a threat to his father’s and his own health. Implicitly, Nick has always blamed her for the failure of his parents’ marriage and his father’s distorted views and sexual frustration. Even though this may be a one-sided portrayal of his mother, such a completely negative view may make it easy for Nick to rationalize her absence, for, as he says, “There was only one person in his family that he liked the smell of, one sister. All the others he avoided all contact with” (NAS 265-66). The mother, then, is among “the others,” whose contact he avoids.

Whereas he “had gotten rid of” the mother, Nick can’t escape thinking about his father. Nick may not be able to write about his father, yet his father is the true subject of all his memories. He is in the hunting scenes, deeply associated with every facet of nature in the Michigan woods, implicated in Nick’s memory of his sexual activity, and tied to
the present through Nick’s son’s questions about his grandfather. When the unnamed son asks Nick to tell him about his childhood and his hunting experiences with the Indians, Nick’s reaction is significant, as his hesitation links him again to his own father’s stumbling efforts at communication. Nick first prevaricates and then gives a matter-of-fact answer: “I don’t know.’ Nick was startled. . . . ‘I went with a boy named Billy Gilby and his sister Trudy. We used to go out nearly every day all one summer’” (NAS 266). Yet, the son wants to know more:

“But tell me what they were like.”
“They were Ojibways,” Nick said. “And they were very nice.”
“But what were they like to be with?”
“It’s hard to say,” Nick Adams said. [emphasis added] (NAS 266)

With his hollow answers, Nick illustrates his vagueness and withholds any information that could be useful to his son. In addition to imparting to his son his father’s passion for hunting, Nick regrettably also duplicates his own father’s inability to share feelings and knowledge. Nick thus makes his father’s prayer come true (“For Christ’s sake keep me from ever telling a kid how things are”), as he fails to communicate with his son about how things were when he was a boy. Unfortunately, in that way Nick denies his own child the vital connection to the past.

After this failed attempt at a father-son dialogue, Nick relives in his mind his first sexual experience with Trudy, which is followed by a metaphorically rich reflection on the smell associated with the Indians. Nick then ponders the decline of the Indians in that region and remembers what it feels like to go hunting. But all these wonderfully detailed and elaborately described events are relived in thoughts only; Nick cannot communicate or share any of these experiences and emotions. To his son’s question about what the Indians were like, he can only respond, “‘You might not like them, . . . But I think you
would’” (NAS 267). In his elusiveness and vagueness Nick thus replicates his own father’s inability to communicate with him, which was manifest in both “Indian Camp” and “Ten Indians.”

The link to “Indian Camp” becomes directly established when Nick’s son actually asks about his grandfather, who, as we can deduce from Nick’s various pieces of recollection, has committed suicide as the Indian husband had in the earlier story. The motives for the suicide remain unclear, but presumably Dr. Adams “couldn’t stand things” any more, just like the Indian husband (NAS 20). We learn that Nick’s son can’t wait until he reaches the age when he can become a hunter too, like his father and grandfather. The final dialogue of the story is crucial for an understanding of the continuing cycle of three generations and their failure to communicate with one another, thus perpetuating a pattern of “concealment and silence, betrayal and denial” (Wadden 16). The following table illustrates both Nick’s son’s repeated requests to visit his grandfather’s tomb and the pattern of hesitation with which Nick unconvincingly responds:

Table 3: Nick’s Evasiveness Toward His Son

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE SON’S REQUESTS</th>
<th>NICK’S ANSWERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Why do we never go to pray at the tomb of my grandfather?”</td>
<td>“We live in a different part of the country.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think I ought to go to pray at the tomb of my grandfather.”</td>
<td>“Sometime we’ll go.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I hope we won’t live somewhere so that I can never go to pray at your tomb when you are dead.”</td>
<td>“We’ll have to arrange it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Well, I don’t feel good never to have even visited the tomb of my grandfather.”</td>
<td>“We’ll have to go.” “I can see we’ll have to go.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NAS 268)
Just as Nick cannot write about his father yet, so he is unable to commit himself to visiting his father’s tomb any time soon. His answers to his son are without force or conviction. Nick’s attempts to connect with his own past, which are already tentative enough, are thus further complicated when he denies his son the opportunity to close the intergenerational gap. Importantly, the son’s questions about death and his grandfather also take us back to Nick’s questions at the end of “Indian Camp.” Just like the father then was trying to assuage Nick’s fears about dying, so Nick tries to reassure his son. Neither father, though, succeeds, as both struggle to communicate meaningfully and decisively.

Yet at the same time, in spite of his hesitation, we do sense Nick’s love for his son, just as we did sense Dr. Adams’s love for Nick. However, we have to doubt whether Nick will be a more successful father than Dr. Adams. Neither father seems able to impart to the son vital information about life, death, and the past, knowledge of which would better prepare the son for adulthood. Thus, a difficult road is paved for Nick’s son; like his father he will have to make his experiences by himself, by traveling. However, as a young exile who has already lived in another country, he is without a real home, separated from his mother, deprived of an extended family, and excluded from his father’s inner thoughts. Even worse, he is deprived of the invigorating experience of the Michigan woods that constituted the deeply treasured bond between Nick and his father.

The talk about the grandfather’s death at the end of the story raises even larger questions than the concern with visiting his grave. When Nick remembers his father’s death, he refers to the “handsome job the undertaker had done on his father’s face,” a face that, as we learn, “had modeled fast in the last three years” (NAS 260). The undertaker’s
work on Dr. Adams’s face would point toward the father’s self-inflicted gun wound, an eerie fulfillment of Nick’s wish to shoot his father. In another instance, Nick expresses some kind of understanding for his father’s lifelong struggle and depression:

Like all men with a faculty that surpasses human requirements, his father was very nervous. Then, too, he was sentimental, and, like most sentimental people, he was both cruel and abused. Also, he had much bad luck, and it was not all of it his own. He had died in a trap that he had helped only a little to set, and they had all betrayed him in their various ways before he died. (NAS 258)

We can sense here again Nick’s inner turmoil in his attempt to forgive his father. On the one hand, there is his understanding and love for his father, combined with his hope to be a good father himself. Yet, on the other hand, this love conflicts with his awareness of his father’s weaknesses and the circumstances of his father’s death, and even Nick’s silent acknowledgement of his own guilt for harboring patricidal impulses. If “the trap” and the “betrayals” allude to Dr. Adams’s suicide, then Nick has every reason to worry, for he shares so many of his father’s traits: the sentimentality, the sensitivity, the sudden impulse to violence, the superior skill (smell), sexually ambiguous feelings, as well as the inability to communicate properly with his offspring. In addition, the conspicuous absence of Nick’s wife, or the mother of his son, indicates that he also followed in his father’s footsteps with regard to the father’s unsuccessful marriage.

Nick’s ambiguous attitude toward Dr. Adams exemplifies well Jackson Benson’s description of the central issue in Hemingway’s works: “Hemingway’s view of man’s powers is not so much dualistic as indecisive, a matter continuously under consideration. He can never really make up his mind whether man is defeated by his own lack of will, a matter of shame, or by those forces inside or outside man which involuntarily rob him of his will, a matter of sorrow” (15). Certainly, Nick empathizes with his father, who
became a victim of outside forces, such as his marriage to a domineering and emasculating wife as well as the larger deterioration of nature and culture in the Michigan woods. On the other hand, Dr Adams’s misery was also partly due to his own failures, especially his puritanical moral views and his attitude of submission. Nick’s view of his father, therefore, is continuously shifting between “a matter of sorrow” and “a matter of shame.” Nick’s own hope to “triumph,” then, is “conflicted with the circumstances of his father’s death” (Benson 15). Such a reading leaves not much hope for Nick and his son, and we are once again reminded of the end of “Indian Camp.” As Boutelle compares the setting of the two stories, “The closed car in which the father and son drive is itself a hearse, carrying past and future corpses inevitably onward. And the rowing boat in which father and son traveled across the lake at the end of ‘Indian Camp’ was an earlier version of this closed car” (Boutelle 146). 13

With “Fathers and Sons,” the last Nick Adams story published during Hemingway’s life, the theme of the father-son relationship that began in “Three Shots,” comes full circle. The fact that almost all of Nick’s memories revolve around his father indicates the significance of the paternal link. Unconsciously or not, Nick senses the importance of the past (his father) for the future (his son). However, he is too much like his father in his inability to openly admit affection and reveal his thoughts. Rather than embracing the father retroactively, he is torn between admiration and disapproval, between love and hatred.

Nick’s remembering the past is an attempt both to come to terms with the father and to exorcise the father from his mind. In this sense, Wirt Williams’s concept of Hemingway’s “tragic art” applies: “Nick is revealed as having lived under the catastrophe
of having lost his father by failing to be aware of his father at the base of his own
continuity. His son brings him to that awareness and thus restores his father to him” (105).
The last remark, however, might be too optimistic, as the son, with his persistent
questions, also makes the reader aware of Nick’s inability, in his evasive answers, to link
the future to the past. Thus, the presence of Nick’s son emphasizes both the necessity of
reclaiming the ancestral link and the seemingly unbridgeable distance between the
generations. Far from allowing for optimism, the end of the story implies that it is more
likely that, in Paul Wadden’s words, “the inexorable post-Edenic sins of the father will be
visited upon the son in yet another generation” (16).

In addition, the son’s presence beside Nick, which remains unacknowledged for a
long part of the story, not only illustrates the unresolved generational problems, but also
points toward Nick’s own inner split. Just as the son is asleep for most of the story, so
Nick has not awakened yet to the meaning of his own childhood. As McCann describes
this central dilemma, “[I]f Nick’s son represents the third generation of parenting in
‘Fathers and Sons,’ so he also represents Nick’s own child-self, a self which sleeps beside
him as he travels through memory, a self which finally wakes” (13). However, to see any
“waking” of Nick’s self again depends on a positive interpretation of his final “promise”
to visit the grandfather’s grave, which is textually hard to justify. One can sense that
becoming a real father to his son, that is, assuming an active role in closing the
generational gaps, would also liberate Nick in his relationship to his own childhood and
his attitude toward his own father. Until he does so, however, he remains divided
between Nick, the boy, who both loves and hates his father, and Nicholas, the adult, who
tries to avoid repeating the same mistakes with his own son.
Unlike Eddie in Gaines’s “A Long Day in November” and Procter Lewis in “Three Men,” Nick has not yet experienced the self-empowering effect of responsibly fulfilling the father role, which would eventually allow him to come to peace with his own past experiences. Nick’s inability to acknowledge candidly the meaning of the past and apply its lessons to the present and future causes his emotional restlessness, which in turn makes him susceptible to being constantly haunted by memories. Nick thus “becomes both hunter and hunted within his own search,” as McCann remarks (13).

“[T]he hunt for the father,” McCann explains, “also becomes a hunt for the father within the self—the father internalized in Nick.” As a consequence, Nick needs to become not only a father to his son, but “a father also to himself . . . to become the father he lost” (17).

To make his peace with the past, he needs to recognize that his inability to own up to his feelings—which manifests itself, on the surface of the story, through Nick’s unconscious circumvention of his true emotions via his disassociated memories—is not much different from the problems his father had. As a reader, we understand that he resists coping with emotionally difficult situations, just as his father did. If Dr. Adams “failed” in his explanations about birth and death in “Indian Camp,” in the unnatural repression of his emotions after his confrontations with Dick Boulton and his wife in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” in the agonizing manner in which he told Nick about Prudence in “Ten Indians,” and in his ludicrous explanations about sex in “Fathers and Sons,” so Nick “fails” to admit to his son his true emotions concerning his father, his former girlfriend Trudy, his Indian friends, and his experiences in and love for the Michigan woods.
Most of all, however, Nick is incapable of dealing with his father’s suicide, an issue he cannot yet write about because “it was still too early for that. There were still too many people” (NAS 259-60). Critics have observed the many similarities between Dr. Adams and Hemingway’s own father, Dr. Clarence Hemingway. Kenneth Lynn, for example, refers to “the portrait of Clarence Hemingway in ‘Fathers and Sons’” (408). Richard Hovey regards “Fathers and Sons” as “so close to the facts and so frankly confessional that it is hard not to take this piece as one of Hemingway’s most explicit efforts to set down his feelings about his own father” (44). And Robert Fleming sees one motive for writing the story in that “Hemingway felt that he might have been partially responsible for his father’s depression” (“Treatment of Suicide” 121). The story, then, can be read as Hemingway’s therapeutic attempt to “come to terms psychologically with what he could only regard as an act of cowardice, committed by the member of his family for whom he had the most love and admiration” (Fleming 121). Similarly, pointing at Nick’s wish to kill his father and his ensuing feeling of guilt, Boutelle reads “Fathers and Sons” as “as a public confession of Hemingway’s complicity in his father’s suicide” (141).

However, Hemingway’s attempt to come to terms with his father’s suicide is only as successful as Nick Adams’s coping with his own past. Nick, the writer, knows that his father’s suicide “was a good story but there were still too many people alive for him to write it” (NAS 260). Hemingway must have felt the same way in 1932/33 when he composed “Fathers and Sons,” only four years after his father’s death in 1928. In this story, Nick cannot yet call his father’s death what it really was: suicide. The suicide thus becomes “the thing omitted,” a convenient convergence of literary strategy and
biographical necessity. Not yet being able to deal with his feelings about the suicide and not ready yet to discuss the issue openly, Hemingway had to return to the theme of suicide and the hunt for the father in his later works. As we will see, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and the novella *The Old Man and the Sea* mark a clear development in Hemingway’s treatment of the father’s suicide and his portrait of the father-son relationship.

Published in 1940, 12 years after Clarence Hemingway’s suicide, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* includes several motifs that Hemingway used in his short stories. In particular, there are many links between the protagonist Robert Jordan’s experiences and Nick Adams’s experiences, and thus, by implication, Hemingway’s own life. Robert’s dangerous involvement in the Spanish Civil War recalls Nick’s participation in the First World War (“Chapter VI” of *In Our Time*, “Now I Lay Me,” “A Way You’ll Never Be,” and “In Another Country”); his insomnia ties him to Nick’s nightmares (“Now I Lay Me” and “A Way You’ll Never Be”); his meticulous way of doing his demolition work reminds us of Nick’s methodical trout fishing (“Big Two-Hearted River”); and his recurrent brooding about his father’s suicide picks up where Nick left off in “Fathers and Sons.” *For Whom the Bell Tolls* marks Hemingway’s most conscious attempt to deal with the circumstances of his own father’s death, as well as with his divided feelings toward his father in general.

Richard Hovey remarks that Hemingway fictionalized his mixed feelings toward his father by creating “two contrasting father figures” in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*: Anselmo, Robert Jordan’s closest and most reliable ally, and Pablo, a powerful but
treacherous leader of the guerrilla band (163). In their character traits as well as their age, 
the two characters indeed evoke parallels to Dr. Adams and Dr. Hemingway.

Samuel Shaw similarly argues that “if anyone in the book may be said to speak 
for Hemingway, it is Anselmo” (100). Anselmo is a skilled hunter, like Dr. Adams, who 
does not like to kill except out of necessity.\(^{14}\) Anselmo’s views on killing are important; 
they illustrate that he has his own individual philosophy, which he does, however, 
subordinate for the greater good of the group. When Robert asks him whether he has 
killed before, Anselmo responds: “Yes. Several times. But not with pleasure. To me it is 
a sin to kill a man. Even Fascists whom we must kill.”\(^ {15}\) When he has to kill the guard to 
set off the explosion of the bridge, he does so with “tears . . . running down [his] cheeks” 
(\textit{WBT} 435). Anselmo’s tears are not to be read negatively, as a sign of sentimentality or 
weakness, but as an expression of his genuine philanthropy. Robert contrasts his final 
goodbye to Anselmo before the blowing-up operation with his memory of the 
embarrassingly sentimental farewell at the train station, when Robert left his father to go 
away to school for the first time. He remembers when

\begin{quote}
his father had kissed him good-by and said, “May the Lord watch between 
thee and me while we are absent the one from the other.” His father had 
been a very religious man and he had said it simply and sincerely. But his 
moustache had been moist and his eyes were damp with emotion and 
Robert Jordan had been so embarrassed by all of it, the damp religious 
sound of the prayer, and by his father kissing him good-by, that he had felt 
suddenly so much older than his father and sorry for him that he could 
hardly bear it. (\textit{WBT} 405-06)\(^ {16}\)
\end{quote}

By contrast, the parting between Anselmo and Robert is devoid of any such 
sentimentality, as the two men understand each other and each other’s feelings. They 
separate with only a few words: “‘Then until soon,’ Robert Jordan said and the old man 
grew off, noiseless on his rope-soled shoes, swinging wide through the trees” (\textit{WBT} 410).
In Anselmo’s character, Hemingway succeeds in portraying emotions as a positive character trait and not as a sign of weakness. Richard Hovey argues that “[i]nto the characterization of Anselmo went Hemingway’s filial warmth and respect, and even such tenderness as we saw in ‘My Old Man’” (163). This warmth and respect are reflected by the reliability and trust the two men feel for each other, as well as in their spiritual rapport. In addition, Anselmo’s thoughts immediately prior to the dangerous detonation of the bridge illustrate his loyalty to Robert as well as his poise and mental strength under pressure, which are attributes Robert Jordan and Hemingway miss in their own fathers:

But there was no lift or any excitement in his heart. That was all gone and there was nothing but calmness. . . . He was one with the wire in his hand and one with the bridge, and one with the charges the Inglés had placed. He was one with the Inglés still working under the bridge and he was one with all of the battle and with the Republic. . . . [H]e was not happy but he was neither lonely nor afraid. (WBT 443)

When Anselmo dies in the aftermath of the explosion, Robert cannot bring himself to look at his friend’s face. This scene is quite unlike Nick’s complimenting the undertaker for “the handsome job [he] had done on his father’s face” in “Fathers and Sons” (NAS 260). Nick still couldn’t freely express his feelings for his father, and he identified himself with the false face created by the undertaker, whereas Robert Jordan expresses his feelings toward Anselmo openly. Robert feels “anger,” “emptiness,” and “hate”: “Now it was over he was lonely, detached and unrelated and he hated every one he saw” (WBT 447). In Robert’s “despair” and “sorrow” for Anselmo, Hemingway has created the hitherto fullest expression of a son’s feelings for a (surrogate) father.

Unlike Anselmo, Pablo is a dangerous and unreliable character. Sarah Unfried’s characterization of Pablo illustrates his link to the selfish side of Robert’s father, who did
not consider the feelings of others when he killed himself: “Pablo fails in the eyes of the band because he, once a strong if brutal man, has placed his own selfish interest in riches before that of his people” (82). An even worse flaw than his interest in riches, however, is his treachery. Pablo also steals Robert’s exploder and detonators and throws them into the river, which prompts his wife Pilar to compare Pablo to “the famous Judas Iscariot” \(WBT\ 391\).\(^{17}\)

However, Hemingway allows Pablo to redeem himself to some extent by having him come back and bring men and horses to help in the maneuver. Pablo is even given the opportunity to repent his previous betrayal of the group: “I do not like to be alone. \textit{Sabes?} Yesterday all day alone working for the good of all I was not lonely. But last night. \textit{Hombre! Qué mal lo pasé!}” \(WBT\ 391\). In spite of his repentance, however, Pablo remains a suspicious character, an untrustworthy counterpart to Anselmo’s reliability. Taken together, then, in their opposing character traits, Anselmo and Pablo may well be said to express the two sides of Dr. Adams/Dr. Hemingway. They can thus be seen as fictional equivalents of Hemingway’s ambivalence toward his own father.

More important than the surrogate fathers Anselmo and Pablo, however, is the relationship between Robert Jordan and his own father. That Hemingway deliberately relates Robert Jordan’s father to the Dr. Adams from “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” and “Now I Lay Me” becomes obvious when Robert recalls his feelings about his father’s lack of courage: “I’ll never forget how sick it made me the first time I knew he was a cobarde. Go on, say it in English. Coward. . . . He was just a coward and that was the worst luck any man could have. Because if he wasn’t a coward he would have stood up to that woman and not let her bully him” \(WBT\ 338-39\). Robert Jordan’s hatred for his
father’s submissiveness and suicide clearly parallels Nick Adams’s haunting memories of his father’s weakness. In fact, Robert speaks out about those feelings and thoughts Nick could not yet write about in “Fathers and Sons.”

Whereas Robert cherishes the memory of his grandfather, who was a heroic Civil War leader and soldier in Indian battles, he feels embarrassed by his father’s cowardly suicide. Pondering the danger of his own mission to blow up a bridge, Robert evokes his grandfather’s heroism as a source of strength, but his thoughts inescapably wander back to his father: “I wish Grandfather were here instead of me. Well, maybe we will all be together by tomorrow night. If there should be any such damn fool business as a hereafter, . . . Then, as he thought, he realized that if there was any such thing as ever meeting, both he and his grandfather would be acutely embarrassed by the presence of his father” (WBT 338).

Robert struggles to attribute any dignity to his father’s act. The disparity between the heroism of the grandfather and the cowardice of his father exemplifies the larger generational conflict that Robert is caught in. If the almost mythic figure of the grandfather represents the masculine values of the pioneers and the frontier, the father embodies the increasing erosion of these values by a new, more timid, more worried, and more selfish generation. For Robert, then, the betrayal of his grandfather’s values by the father is tantamount to the loss of the home and country that embodies these values. In other words, Robert’s struggle is similar to Nick’s in “Fathers and Sons.” Just like Nick, who could not write about his father’s suicide yet, let alone mention the word, Robert is an exile, a wanderer who searches for a place to belong. As Kurt Müller suggests, his participation in the Spanish Civil War becomes a “quest” for a lost system of values and
beliefs, an attempt to re-connect to the grandfather’s values of courage and duty and leave behind the father (138). The motif of the suicide thus assumes a central function, as it is by this act that the rupture between the generations was finalized. The father’s “misuse” of the gun can only be corrected if Robert behaves heroically in this generational conflict that is transplanted from the mountains of Montana, Robert’s home, to the mountains of the Sierra de Gredos (WBT 338).

Robert first mentions his father’s suicide in a joking manner when Maria and Pilar discuss the fate of their respective families. When Maria informs them that her father was shot for being a republican, Robert replies that his father was a Republican too, not mentioning that it is neither heroic nor life-threatening to be a Republican in the US:

“My grandfather was on the Republican national committee,” Robert Jordan said. That impressed even Maria. “And is thy father still active in the Republic?” Pilar asked. “No. He is dead.” “Can one ask how he died?” “He shot himself.” “To avoid being tortured?” the woman asked. “Yes.” Robert Jordan said. “To avoid being tortured.” (WBT 66-67) Robert’s use of “tortured” ironically refers to his mother as the torturer, of course, rather than any political enemy, but he quickly loses interest in his joke, as the memory of his father makes him uncomfortable. Maria’s tears and genuine sorrow for her father’s heroic death make him realize the cowardly status of his own father, and he abruptly expresses his wish to “talk about something else” (WBT 67).

His dismissal of his father notwithstanding, both grandfather and father are powerful influences on him, as Robert finds himself in a situation in which his dangerous acts, planting dynamite to blow up the bridge, might force him to choose between his grandfather’s heroism and his father’s cowardice. Throughout the novel, Robert is
plagued by thoughts about suicide, while he simultaneously hopes that he will have more strength than his father. As Robert Fleming summarizes Robert’s dilemma: “Although Robert Jordan has rejected his father and his selfish, wasteful death, Jordan’s life has nevertheless been profoundly influenced by him. Jordan frequently wonders if he has been tainted by his father’s cowardice, and he is very much aware of the possibilities of committing suicide” (“Treatment of Suicide” 131).

Fleming rightly observes that the issue of suicide is more than a minor theme in the novel. Maria, who has been raped before, carries a razor blade with her and demonstrates to Robert how she would kill herself in case of another assault. The newspaper correspondent Karkov informs Robert of the poison he has hidden on his body in case he is captured and in danger of being tortured. In addition, rather than killing himself, Robert Jordan’s predecessor, the Russian dynamiter Kashkin, opts for a mercy killing, a variant form of suicide, by asking Jordan to shoot him to avoid revealing secrets under torture in captivity. The dignity and determination with which these characters express their willingness to commit such acts illustrates to Jordan that suicide can be a valid choice. Yet, these examples of militarily expedient suicide and his own experiences in the Spanish Civil War also make him aware of the comparable triviality of his father’s act. Robert’s ambivalence on the issue is expressed in the following monologue: “Any one has a right to do it, he thought. But it isn’t a good thing to do. I understand it, but I do not approve of it. Lache was the word. But you do understand it? Sure, I understand it but. Yes, but. You have to be awfully occupied with yourself to do a thing like that” (WBT 338).
The phrase “Yes, but” reflects Robert’s split, just as it might summarize Nick Adams’s love/hate relationship to his father. Even though the views of Maria, Karkov, and Kashkin and the circumstances of their envisioned suicides or mercy killing differ from the cowardly and selfish act of Robert’s father, Robert ultimately “cannot simply accept a mercy killing nor can he kill himself without feeling guilt” (Fleming 131).

Robert’s rejection of suicide as a way out signals his gradual coming to terms with the issue. After blowing up the bridge, he can calmly decline Agustín’s offer to shoot him when he is baldy injured and has to be left. And at the end, while defenseless and waiting for the enemy, he rejects suicide one final time: “Oh, let them come, he said. I don’t want to do that business that my father did” (WBT 469). In spite of his ensuing inner turmoil (“Maybe I’ll just do it now. I guess I’m not awfully good at pain. Listen, if I do that now you wouldn’t misunderstand, would you? Who are you talking to? Nobody, he said. Grandfather, I guess” [WBT 469]), he remains steadfast and resolves to live on a few more hours in order to delay his fascist pursuers: “And if you wait and hold them up even a little while or just get the officer that may make all the difference. One thing well done can make—” (WBT 470). By staying alive and getting involved in a final combat with the enemy, he not only buys some time for his friends to escape, but he also rejects his father’s selfishness and thus paves the way for future sons and generations. Robert puts the life of others before his own interests. As Fleming explains,

Because he is a man he must make a moral choice; thinking first of the continent that is mankind rather than of his own fear and pain, he rejects the choices of his father, Kashkin, and Maria. By exchanging his life for the time his friends need to escape, Jordan shows that he has finally come to terms with his father’s death. He does not refuse suicide simply to put himself in opposition to his father; instead, he makes a positive choice for a positive reason and allies himself with those who, like El Sordo, sell their lives dearly (131).
The end of the novel signals a clear shift from previous Hemingway works in that the individual hero’s fate is less important than that of mankind, thus fulfilling the promise of the book’s epigraph, taken from John Donne’s poem: “No man is an Ilanđ, intire of it selfe; every man is a peecē of the Continent, a part of the maine.” In this regard, the selfish act of Robert Jordan’s father violates the principle of mankind, whereas Robert’s selfless death does not. As for the old men in Gaines’s novel _A Gathering of Old Men_, active participation in a battle is a means to prove oneself, to win back one’s dignity, and to create a positive identity. Just as Charlie stops running away from abuse, so Robert has finally stopped denying the past. At the end, while dying, Robert feels “integrated” (*WBT* 471).

To further illustrate the difference in behavior between Robert Jordan and his father as well as previous father and son figures, Hemingway makes use of the gun as a recurring, yet complex, symbol. Throughout Hemingway’s work, the nature of the father-son relationship is metaphorically represented by the gun. On the one hand, the gun is the tool that father and son can use to hunt together; it thus expresses the vital bond they share. On the other hand, however, the gun is also the means by which Nick wants to kill his father. In addition, in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” Dr. Adams also uses the gun as a release for his sexual and psychological frustration. In “Fathers and Sons,” Nick’s son says that he can’t wait until he is 12-years-old, when he will get a shotgun from his father so that he, too, can hunt, while Nick grapples with the memory of his father’s having directed the gun against himself. In _For Whom the Bell Tolls_, Robert Jordan’s father ironically kills himself with the pistol Robert’s grandfather had carried in his heroic battles. Significantly, however, Robert opts to throw the pistol into a deep lake,
thus putting an end to the ritual passing on of this symbol of the divisive nature of the father-son relationship.

Importantly, while he declines the pistol and thus his father’s inheritance, Robert Jordan accepts Kashkin’s German submachine gun as inheritance from his dynamiter-predecessor. If one agrees with Fleming’s interpretation of Kashkin as a “surrogate father” to Jordan, Robert’s decision not to direct the gun against himself but to use it in aiding his friends can be read as supporting evidence that Robert Jordan has successfully revised his father’s “misuse” of the gun.

Robert thus seems to have come closer to exorcising the demon of the father’s suicide that haunts him, Nick Adams, and Hemingway himself: “He understood his father and he forgave him everything and he pitied him but he was ashamed of him” (WBT 340). Jordan’s composure at the end illustrates that he will die in peace and is therefore a testament to the liberating effect of becoming “a father” to himself, that is, to bringing to a close a younger, unresolved version of the self. Robert Jordan thus becomes the father that is not internalized in Nick; he sacrifices himself and thereby “gives birth” to others, by assisting in the escape of his friends. It is in this sense that Robert Jordan resembles Procter Lewis in “Three Men” and, as we shall see, the old men in A Gathering of Old Men, as they either take care of someone in need or unselfishly risk or sacrifice their own lives for somebody else.

The parallel to A Gathering of Old Men holds true on another, important level. It is certainly apparent that For Whom the Bell Tolls is uncharacteristic for Hemingway in its length, as the author here abandons his usual economic style. More than in any other work, Hemingway stresses the importance of storytelling as a means for the characters to
process their individual anxieties, as well as to establish group solidarity. As does *A Gathering of Old Men*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* emphasizes the healing function of language, talking, and community. In both works, sharing one’s story has a therapeutic function for the teller as well as for the audience.

Of central significance in this context is Pilar’s detailed eye-witness account of the massacre of the fascist village, which was carried out by her husband Pablo. As Müller argues, it is listening to Pilar’s story that enables the young Joaquín to talk about the murder of his own family members (136). The tears he sheds illustrate his gradual release from his previous emotional paralysis. In addition, Pilar’s story is also pivotal for Maria’s process of recovery from both her parents’ violent death and her subsequent rape by fascist troops. Even Robert Jordan is subject to the power of storytelling. After Joaquín informs them that they “‘shot my father. My mother. My brother-in-law and now my sister,’” Robert reflects:

> How many times had he heard this? How many times had he watched people say it with difficulty? How many times had he seen their eyes fill and their throats harden with the difficulty of saying my father, or my brother, or my mother, or my sister? . . . You only heard the statement of the loss. You did not see the father fall as Pilar made him see the fascists die in that story she had told . . . Pilar had made him see it in that town. (*WBT* 134)

The stories Robert listens to contribute to his coming to terms with his own family history; however, Robert is still far from sharing his feelings and stories as openly as the Spanish characters. The passages involving him mainly consist of reflections, stream-of-consciousness segments, and inner monologues. The style and voice in the passages dealing with Robert coincide with the novel’s overall emphasis on Robert rather than on the group; together these two aspects constitute key differences to Gaines’s *A Gathering*
of Old Men. At the end, when Robert is dying and waiting for the pursuers to arrive, he feels “completely integrated now” (WBT 471). Yet, the focus is on him, not his escaping friends. Thus, although For Whom the Bell Tolls reaches out to the community more than any other Hemingway novel, it is still a book focused on strong individuals, such as Pilar, Anselmo, El Sordo, and Robert Jordan. It is in this sense that Cheryl Mueller’s term of “humanitarian individualism” characterizes well what Hemingway was trying to achieve in this book.19

Hemingway’s successful fictional treatment of the theme of suicide as marker for the generational rift allows him to come to terms with one aspect of the father-son estrangement that was haunting him.20 However, since Robert Jordan is still “ashamed” of his father, we sense that his, and Hemingway’s, dilemma has not really come to an end yet. Therefore, the father-son relationship would remain a major concern in Hemingway’s writing until his death. It is in The Old Man and the Sea, however, that he presents his most direct and most optimistic portrayal of the strength and power of the bond that can exist between a father and a son.

The father-son relationship in The Old Man and the Sea works on several levels, the most important of which is the bond between Santiago and his youthful fishing partner Manolin, who represent a positive, albeit symbolic father-son relationship. Conversely, the relationship between Manolin and his real father is portrayed as problematical through Hemingway’s use of contrasting value systems and such familiar motifs as sharp eyesight and superior fishing skills.

Santiago himself is an uncharacteristic Hemingway hero. Both his old age and mental tranquility contrast him sharply from other, more angst-ridden Hemingway
protagonists, as for example Jake Barnes, Frederic Henry, Robert Jordan, or Richard Cantwell. His endurance and bravery, though, align him clearly with such undefeated heroes as Manuel Garcia (“The Undefeated”) and Jack Brennan (“Fifty Grand”). Leo Gurko points out that Santiago “is the only major character in Hemingway who has not been permanently wounded or disillusioned” (67). In addition, his exceptional status is reinforced in that he “is the first of the main figures in Hemingway who is not an American, and who is altogether free of the entanglements of modern life” (Gurko 70).

In fact, Santiago’s virtues and attitudes—his closeness to nature, the combination of pride and humility, his dignity and indomitable spirit of self-reliance—relate him to Gaines’s elderly protagonists, as for example Miss Jane Pittman and Mathu. For instance, Santiago frequently talks to the animals, such as the warbler bird or the marlin, in a way reminiscent of Miss Jane Pittman’s talking to the oak tree. In both cases, there is an implied brotherhood or spiritual kinship with the world of animals and plants. As Miss Jane Pittman explains, “[W]hen you talk to an oak tree that’s been here all these years, and knows more than you’ll ever know, it’s not craziness; it’s just the nobility you respect.” Miss Jane’s veneration of the oak tree recalls the practice of the Ojibways who “very seldom cut down green or living trees, from the idea that it puts them to pain, and some of their medicine-men profess to have heard the wailing of the trees under the axe” (Frazer 113).

Similar to Miss Jane Pittman’s respect for the permanence and dignity of rivers and trees, Santiago regards the sea as mother and its inhabitants as brothers:

He always thought of the sea as la mar which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her. . . . Some of the younger fishermen, those who used buoys as floats for their lines and had motorboats, bought when the shark livers had brought much money, spoke of her as el mar which is
masculine. They spoke of her as a contestant or a place or even an enemy. But the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she couldn’t help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman, he thought. (OMS 29-30)

Likewise, Miss Jane Pittman worships the strength of rivers and trees in the manner the Indians did when they “used to catch fish out the river and eat the fish and put the bones back” (AMJ 148). Sir James Frazer corroborates the accuracy of this custom. For example, “[T]he Ottawa Indians of Canada, believing that the souls of dead fish passed into other bodies of fish, never burned fish bones, for fear of displeasing the souls of the fish, who would come no more to the nets” (527). However, Miss Jane laments that when the white men conquered the Indian land, they sought to control, subjugate, and economically exploit the rivers in a way reminiscent of the younger generation’s attitude toward the sea that Santiago bemoans in the passage above. Santiago respects the sea and addresses the marlin as his “brother,” thus treating him as equal: “You are killing me, fish, the old man thought. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother” (OMS 92). Later, when he cannot defend the marlin against the sharks, Santiago realizes that he may have ventured out too far and thus dishonored both himself and the marlin. He no longer feels worthy to address the marlin: “He could not talk to the fish anymore because the fish had been ruined too badly” (OMS 115). In their respectful and reverential views of nature and the animal world, then, Miss Jane Pittman and Santiago are related characters, a tribute to their authors’ understanding of and kinship with nature.

In addition, Santiago’s character shares similarities with Mathu in that both men live a life of utter simplicity and place a high value on dignity. Both live by themselves in
shacks that are sparse but orderly, reflecting their inhabitants’ loneliness. Both men’s wives are deceased, with few reminders of them left behind. Even though Mathu’s and Santiago’s lives are reduced to basic necessities, they still lead a life based on dignity. Their physical and mental strength and obvious self-assurance make Santiago and Mathu brothers-in-spirit, if one ignores Mathu’s air of superiority and slight cynicism, which Santiago does not share. In addition, their relationships to the larger community are comparable, as both Santiago and Mathu are distant toward the people of the fishing village and quarters respectively, even though the community members do admire their strength.

All three characters, Miss Jane Pittman, Mathu, and Santiago, are further linked in that they possess a concept of freedom and a life-affirming spirit, according to which defeat is a mental attitude that can be controlled. As a consequence, they do not surrender to their harsh circumstances; they believe, in Santiago’s words, that “man can be destroyed but not defeated” (OMS 103). For these characters, giving up is not an option.

This unassailable faith in themselves and indomitable spirit of self-reliance make all three characters apt role models for parenthood. Even though they are without any biological children, they do have adopted “surrogate sons” in whom they try to instill their virtues of permanent faith and dignity. In fact, it can be argued that large parts of both novels revolve around the protagonists’ relationships to their various surrogate sons.

The absence of an immediate family or any close friends among the fishermen effectively illustrates Santiago’s loneliness. The lack of any relatives or family members, the simplicity of his shack, and the rare visits from others emphasize his isolation and, at
the same time, underline the significance of the one close contact he cherishes—his relationship to Manolin. Santiago’s isolation is also illustrated by the single reference to his wife in the description of the shack: “Once there had been a tinted photograph of his wife on the wall but he had taken it down because it made him too lonely to see it and it was on the shelf in the corner under his clean shirt” (OMS 16). A typical Hemingway understatement, it powerfully conveys the idea of Santiago’s solitude, which is also reinforced, *ex negativo*, by the absence of any memories of his deceased wife: “He no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of great occurrences, not of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor of his wife” (OMS 25). The fact that his wife is mentioned last in a list of former sources of strength and joy suggests his utter loneliness and her insignificance for Santiago at his present stage in life, not his lack of love for her. His only dreams revolve around young lions on the beach, a reminder of his youthful strength and optimism. His dreams about the lions and his daytime thoughts on baseball and the indefatigable Joe DiMaggio function as metaphors for his continued faith and as expressions of hope for breaking his streak of bad luck in fishing.

Santiago’s greatest source of strength, however, is his relationship to Manolin. In Manolin’s unadulterated admiration and tenderness for Santiago, Hemingway has created the most positive expression of filial feelings in his works. It is clear that Manolin prefers Santiago’s company to his own father’s, as a direct comparison between the two father figures illustrates. Similar to Gaines’s juxtaposition of the two father figures in “The Turtles,” Manolin’s father is an obvious foil for Santiago, as the two fishermen’s values and character traits are diametrically opposed. Whereas Santiago does not waver in his faith that his streak of bad luck will end, Manolin’s father does not possess “much
faith” and orders his son to leave Santiago and go fish with another man (OMS 10). In addition, Manolin’s father “does not like to work too far out”; by contrast, Santiago feels strong enough and is willing to go “[f]ar out” and face the dangers (OMS 14). Significantly, Hemingway emphasizes the poor eyesight of Manolin’s father, who is “almost blind.” By contrast, even though Santiago goes “turtle-ing” and thus exposes his eyes to the glaring sun, his vision, like Dr. Adams’s, is still excellent (OMS 14). Like Max in Gaines’s “The Turtles,” Manolin is treated with respect when he is allowed to carry Santiago’s fishing gear, whereas Manolin’s father “never wants anyone to carry anything” (OMS 27). Likewise, Santiago treats Manolin as equal when he wakes him in the early morning; however, Manolin does not like for his father to wake him because “[i]t is as though I were inferior” (OMS 24).

Fordyce Richard Bennett argues that “Manolin’s father signifies values of security, order, common sense, safety, practicality, prudence, and routine. His is the kingdom of Body, Stomach, or the Mundane.” Conversely, “Santiago’s [kingdom] is of Spirit, Heart, or the Heroic” (418). Bennett summarizes his brief comparison of the two father figures by making a distinction between Manolin’s father, his “physical father,” and Santiago, who fulfills the role of Manolin’s “spiritual [father] in a line with Saint Peter and Joe DiMaggio’s father” (418).

In spite of his role as “son,” Manolin is treated as an equal by Santiago. Manolin’s maturity, however, is not only demonstrated by the respectful way Santiago behaves toward him, but also by Hemingway’s deliberate equivocation about Manolin’s exact age. For example, based on the length of the partnership and Manolin’s “strength and confidence,” Carlos Baker perceives Manolin to be “on the edge of young manhood,”
rather than a boy (Writer as Artist 305). Although C. Harold Hurley goes to some length to “prove” that Manolin is “neither a teen-age boy nor a young man but a lad no more than ten years old,” Hemingway intentionally confuses the matter by portraying Manolin as extraordinarily mature in his relationship with and treatment of Santiago (95).

It is certainly true that Manolin does not act like a boy, a fact that becomes especially evident in his willingness to keep up the appearance of certain rituals, such as Santiago having regular meals and Manolin himself asking for the nonexistent cast net: “There was no cast net and the boy remembered when they had sold it. But they went through this fiction every day. There was no pot of yellow rice and fish and the boy knew this too” (OMS 16). Manolin pretends not to know any better so as not to hurt Santiago’s feelings by drawing attention to his poverty; he thus understands how to respect the dignity of an older man.

Such scenes also illustrate Hemingway’s interest in the constructive quality of language that we have seen in For Whom the Bell Tolls. Converging establishes social relations and helps people to connect with others. Speech is therapeutic and cathartic. Santiago is well aware of the fictional quality of the conversation, but it has the same functions for him that dreaming about lions has: healing, regeneration, and positive identity-formation. Manolin reveres Santiago and does everything to make the old fisherman feel good.

However, Manolin does more than merely uphold certain illusions: he regularly brings him food and clothing and provides for him the way a son would for his own father: “Where did you wash? the boy thought. The village water supply was two streets down the road. I must have water here for him, the boy thought, and soap and a good
towel. Why am I so thoughtless? I must get him another shirt and a jacket for the winter and some sort of shoes and another blanket” (OMS 21). In his overall compassionate behavior toward Santiago, then, Manolin is indeed more like a man than a boy, reminiscent of young James’s maturity in Gaines’s “The Sky Is Gray.”

In spite of Manolin’s remarkable level of awareness, though, Hemingway’s and Santiago’s repeated reference to him as “the boy,” as well as the movie version’s casting of an 11-year-old in the role of Manolin, hints at what age Hemingway might most likely have had in mind. However, even if C. Harold Hurley’s explanation about Manolin’s age is convincing,²⁶ I would like to posit that Hemingway deliberately withholds Manolin’s exact age in order to lend more significance to Manolin’s character and the bond between him and Santiago.²⁷

Manolin’s admiration and care for Santiago stand in direct contrast to his repudiation of and dislike for his own father. Similar to Huck Finn, who chooses Jim as his surrogate father because of Pap’s cruelty, Manolin finds in Santiago the love and respect he needs. The powerful bond between father and son is illustrated at the end of the novella when Santiago hands Manolin his spear, with which he had heroically defended the marlin against the attacking sharks. The spear becomes equivalent to Dr. Adams’s gun and the pistol of Robert Jordan’s father, a symbol of manhood that is awarded to Manolin for his continued trust and loyalty.

His faith in Santiago reinforced at the end, Manolin is ready to take his relationship with his surrogate father to another level by openly rebelling against his biological father’s orders:

“Now we fish together again.”
“No. I am not lucky. I am not lucky anymore.”
“The hell with luck,” the boy said. “I’ll bring the luck with me.”
“What will your family say?”
“I do not care. I caught two yesterday. But we will fish together now for I still have much to learn.” (OMS 125)

Certainly Müller is correct in pointing out the illusory quality of this conversation, as Manolin skillfully alludes to Santiago’s role as a teacher to boost his morale after the loss of the marlin (167). And Santiago may well be aware of the boy’s strategy, but he also “noticed how pleasant it was to have someone to talk to instead of speaking only to himself and to the sea” (OMS 124). Again, we see Hemingway’s interest in language as socially constructive, liberating, and healing. The talking is what matters, not necessarily the content of the conversation.

In spite of the fictional quality of his promise, however, Manolin’s determination to oppose his father’s orders reveals the power of his love, a love which transcends mere blood lines, but which is nonetheless authentic because it is firmly grounded in mutual respect and love. It is a love which Hemingway may have wanted to express for a long time, whether as a fictionalized portrayal of his own feelings for his father or as a wishful picture of his own sons’ feelings for him. The wishful component of this filial love prompted Philip Young’s negative remark that “[r]edolent of self-admiration, Manolin’s boyish worship of the old man is harder than ever to take” (Reconsideration 274). To better assess Hemingway’s personal involvement in the novella, it becomes important to look closer at Santiago and his feelings for Manolin, as Santiago represents Hemingway’s most powerful portrayal of a father figure.

As we have seen, Santiago treats Manolin as an equal from the beginning. For example, he sits with him on the Terrace and allows Manolin to buy him a beer “[b]etween fishermen” (OMS 11). Santiago refers, albeit jokingly, to Manolin as “already
a man” (OMS 12) and looks at him “with his sun-burned, confident loving eyes” (OMS 13). Although he respects the orders of Manolin’s parents and the luck Manolin has with his current fisherman, Santiago would like nothing better than to continue fishing with Manolin.

During his three days out alone on the sea, Santiago’s relationship with Manolin undergoes an important transformation, as he becomes more conscious of a need for his surrogate son’s company, and, importantly, of his need for conversation. Before the beginning of his adventure, Santiago gathers strength by dreaming “of places . . . and of the lions on the beach” (OMS 25). The lions are connected in Santiago’s mind to his youth, and thus, by extension, to the boy. Both the lions and the boy function as a source of rejuvenation for Santiago, not unlike the way the “daughter” Renata (which means ‘reborn’) does for Richard Cantwell in Across the River and into the Trees. Santiago loves the lions “as he loved the boy,” but “[h]e never dreamed about the boy” (OMS 25). The separation from the boy in times of need, however, makes Santiago understand what his greatest source of strength is.

While out on the sea, Santiago’s first reference to the boy occurs when he becomes aware that he has unconsciously started to talk aloud, thus violating the fishermen’s code “not to talk unnecessarily at sea”: “He had probably started to talk aloud, when alone, when the boy had left. But he did not remember. When he and the boy fished together they usually spoke only when it was necessary” (OMS 39). The frequent interruption of his thoughts when he directly addresses the fish, the sea, or his own hands signals his need for communication, which is intensified by the boy’s absence. Santiago’s inner monologues and interspersed utterances are thus a powerful reminder of the
therapeutic function of language and reinforce the impression of his loneliness without
the boy.

Moreover, during the first two days out by himself Santiago’s repeated evocation
of “the boy” develops into a narrative theme. After he hooks the giant marlin, Santiago
repeatedly returns to thoughts of the boy as inspiration, expressions of hope, and direct
calls for help. The following two sequences illustrate Hemingway’s careful arrangement
of Santiago’s references to the boy:28

“I wish I had the boy,” the old man said aloud (OMS 45).
Then he said aloud, “I wish I had the boy” (OMS 48).

“I wish the boy was here,” he said aloud . . . (OMS 50).
Aloud he said, “I wish I had the boy” (OMS 51). [emphasis added]

In these passages, the utterances and the speech tags are arranged in pairs of two and in
the form of a chiasmus. Mimicking a dialogue, the second utterance in each pair
resembles a “response” that repeats the initial “call.” In each context, the utterance
interrupts Santiago’s ongoing meditation on his predicament, a break that is visually
rendered through Hemingway’s use of the quotation mark. The last wish is followed by
“But you haven’t got the boy, he thought,” a sort of resigned, silent denouement to the
intense segment (OMS 52).

Similarly, the second sequence of expressions of longing for the boy also ends in
resigned closure. James Mellard correctly points out that this sequence is “narratively
more complex as the old man’s situation becomes more trying” (137):

“I wish the boy were here
and that I had some salt,”
he said aloud (OMS 56).

If the boy were here
he could rub it for me
and loosen it down from the forearm,
he thought (OMS 62).

If the boy was here
he would wet the coils of the line,
he thought.
Yes. If the boy were here.
If the boy were here (OMS 83).

In this sequence, Hemingway moves “from the shorter, three cola form to longer, four-
and five cola forms,” as illustrated by Mellard’s lineation (137). The careful repetition
and rhythmic arrangement of Santiago’s wishes for the boy demonstrate Hemingway’s
exact phrasing of these thematically pivotal passages, which reinforce both the boy’s
central significance to the old man’s struggle, and the need for company and social
relations.

Santiago’s thoughts and spoken words are developments of Nick Adams’s silent
memories in “Fathers and Sons.” The difference is that Santiago is closer to realizing the
healing quality of language, its potential to help people reach out to others and stabilize a
relationship. In his calls for “the boy,” Santiago expresses his desire to connect with
others; it is this desire that gives him strength during his solitary struggle with the marlin.

Interspersed in these utterances and thoughts about the boy are two memories
Santiago has of the two of them fishing together. In the first one, they had hooked the
female of a pair of marlin and sadly witnessed the loyalty of the male that would not
leave the female behind (OMS 49-50). In the second memory, Santiago recalls that he
once admitted to Manolin that he “was a strange old man,” a memory Santiago uses as
incentive to prove to both the fish and Manolin “what a man can do and what a man
endures” (OMS 66). The first memory reflects Santiago’s need for Manolin’s continued
loyalty and faith in him; once more Manolin provides Santiago with necessary hope,
reassurance, and resolve. The second memory makes obvious Santiago’s role as hero and model for his disciple, which furnishes a further motive for him to endure.

After Santiago’s last cry for the boy’s assistance and his resignation that he isn’t available to help, Santiago can move on and admit directly what the boy means to him: “The boy keeps me alive, he thought” (OMS 106). Here we come close to Gaines’s portrayal of the life-inspiring quality of fatherhood we witnessed at the end of “Three Men.” It is certainly the right moment for such an expression of hope, as Santiago is trying to build up his strength in between fights with the sharks.

Santiago’s last thought about Manolin before his return expresses his now-achieved peace of mind about his relationship with his surrogate son, as he is confident that Manolin has not given up on him: “I hope no one has been too worried. There is only the boy to worry, of course. But I am sure he would have confidence” (OMS 115).

Immediately following is Santiago’s only positive thought on the village people: “Many of the older fishermen will worry. Many others too, he thought. I live in a good town” (OMS 115).

It is important that the two referents of Santiago’s positive thoughts, Manolin and the “good town,” are mentioned in the same context. As we will see in more detail in Gaines’s In My Father’s House, there is an inextricable link between the father-son relationship and the relationship to the community. The Old Man and the Sea, however, does not explore this angle any further. The novella’s lack of emphasis on the community thus marks a key difference from Gaines’s works.

Hemingway once explained the absence of the fishing village as an example of his iceberg theory: “All the stories I know from the fishing village I leave out. But the
knowledge is what makes the underwater part of the iceberg” (Plimpton 126). It is therefore telling of Hemingway’s emphasis on the individual struggle that he is not interested in portraying the village as a character or important source of inspiration for Santiago. The decision to omit the community directs the focus toward the old fisherman and further underlines Santiago’s pervasive concern with Manolin. As Hemingway explained his interest, “The Old Man and the Sea could have been over a thousand pages long and had every character in the village in it and all the processes of how they made their living, were born, educated, bore children, etc. That is done excellently and well by other writers” (Plimpton 125). Clearly, Hemingway’s focus on one “good man” and one “good boy” and “the ocean” as protagonists is very different from Gaines’s concept of trying to depict a whole community and write a “folk autobiography” (Rowell 47).

The Old Man and the Sea therefore both continues and revises the trend in Hemingway’s preceding novels. On the one hand, Santiago’s need for Manolin is a logical development of another fisherman’s plea, the mortally wounded Harry Morgan’s final words in To Have and Have Not: “‘One man alone ain’t got. No man alone now. . . . No matter how a man alone ain’t got no bloody fucking chance’” (225). For Harry, however, the rejection of individualism comes too late. By contrast, Santiago’s recurring calls for the boy fulfill the epigraph of For Whom the Bell Tolls that “No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe” and bring to a conclusion Robert Jordan’s efforts at building solidarity with humanity. In Santiago’s optimism and embracing of all things living, and in his un-Hemingwaysque lack of cynicism, Hemingway has created a protagonist whose humanity and attitude toward others are more positively portrayed than those of most of his other protagonists.
However, *The Old Man and the Sea* also demonstrates that Hemingway does not abandon his focus on the individual. To argue that Hemingway has undergone a change from his focus on personal responsibility and individualism to social responsibility and solidarity with humanity is to misinterpret or read too much into Santiago’s expression of brotherhood with all things living. Santiago’s relationship to Manolin provides a happy ending with regard to the father-son predicament, but, as mentioned, it does little to celebrate solidarity with the larger community, the fishing village. It is true that *The Old Man and the Sea* puts a greater emphasis on the importance of language and conversations than most of Hemingway’s preceding works, but at the end Santiago is even less “integrated” than Robert Jordan.

Richard Hovey states that Santiago “is lonely but not alienated. He has not rejected the world, nor has he cut himself off from his fellows” (200). However, in contrast to Mathu’s transformation at the end of *A Gathering of Old Men*, Santiago is still primarily individualistic-minded and not an active member of the community. As in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway’s interest in solidarity with humanity remains clearly subordinated to his concern with the father-son relationship.

As mentioned before, however, Santiago is indeed more related to Gaines’s characters than to Hemingway’s previous protagonists in his age, simplicity, and understated dignity. His poverty and concern with daily things, such as the latest baseball scores and where his next meal comes from, also make him more representative of most people than, for example, expatriates, war heroes, or bullfighters. In this sense, Hovey is correct in remarking that Santiago’s heroism strikes the reader as more germane and significant than that of other Hemingway protagonists: Santiago’s heroism is “unforced
and unassuming[,] [and] Hemingway has nowhere else given us a better example of its
dignity” (199). And as Hemingway remarked, “‘It’s as though I had gotten finally what I
had been working for all my life’” (qtd. in Young, Reconsideration 132).

Such a positive reading seems justified if one looks more closely at the novella’s
conclusion. After Santiago’s return, Manolin again tends to Santiago by bringing him
food and wood. Once he accepts Santiago’s spear as symbol of their father-son
relationship, he pledges his faith in his surrogate father and promises to fish with him
against his own father’s wishes. Hemingway then ends the father-son relationship on a
happy note, with Santiago resting peacefully at the conclusion of the novella. As Baker
summarizes Manolin’s importance for Santiago, “Through the agency of Manolin he is
able to recapture in his imagination, and therefore to a certain degree in fact, the same
strength and confidence which distinguished his own young manhood as a fisherman,
earning him the title of El Campéon” (Writer as Artist 305). As in Gaines’s “A Long Day
in November” and “Three Men,” the father figure is liberated and redefines himself
through his relationship to his son. Santiago’s “liberation” is illustrated by Hemingway’s
bringing together the two metaphors of Santiago’s youth, when Santiago is sleeping and
“dreaming about the lions,” while Manolin is “sitting by him watching him” (OMS 127).

Significantly, Hemingway allows Manolin to cry unabashedly when he observes
Santiago’s wounds and exhaustion and when he sees the heartbreaking skeleton of the
gigantic marlin. In Manolin’s tenderness, as well as in Santiago’s frequent admissions
that he needs the presence and help of his surrogate son, Hemingway seems to have
further modified his previous view, as last seen in For Whom the Bell Tolls, which
equated sentimentality with weakness. Both father and son are allowed to show emotions.
In Santiago, then, Hemingway has succeeded in creating a character who is both proud and modest, who is self-reliant but also acknowledges his need for others, and who is strong but also emotional. Young argues that this novel, more than anything else Hemingway wrote, stands symbolically for the author’s “veneration for humanity, for what can be done and endured, and this grasp of man’s kinship with the other creatures of the world, and with the world itself, is itself a victory of substantial proportions” (*Reconsideration* 131). With the positive father-son relationship in *The Old Man and the Sea*, therefore, Hemingway adjusts the lack of familial commitment of previous characters and brings closure to Nick Adams’s and Robert Jordan’s divided feelings toward their fathers.

In spite of such positive and optimistic statements concerning the depiction of the father-son relationship, however, one must not forget that there is a more sinister undercurrent in the novella. Love and caring go hand in hand with pain and misery. Life and humanity may well be affirmed, but just beneath the surface lurks death in the form of the undefeatable sharks. This duality of life and death also relates to the father-son relationship, as probing psychoanalytic readings have demonstrated.

Moving beyond the symbolic father-and-son bond between Santiago and Manolin, psychoanalytic critics have also read the novella in terms of its author’s parricidal thoughts, which were reflected in previous stories by the death of the Indian husband in “Indian Camp” and by Nick’s aiming his gun at both the father and the father’s totem animal, the eagle, in “Fathers and Sons.” Two of these critics’ interpretations, Gerry Brenner’s and Richard Hovey’s, deserve a brief summary, as their readings shed more light on the problematic father-son relationship in Hemingway’s overall work.
Gerry Brenner argues that in his portrait of Santiago Hemingway created a character whose attributes (courage, durability, gentleness) make him “an idealized Papa” (176). He goes on to advance a rather complex reading of Hemingway’s intentions in creating Santiago. Thus, he hears in Santiago’s repeated wishes for the boy’s presence not only “prayers” but also “resentment and anger[,] harbor[ing] unconscious wishes that are incongruent with the phosphorescent nimbus that circles, like a halo, his skiff” (177). According to Brenner, a wise and experienced fisherman would not have ventured out that far all by himself, knowing that any catch would most likely attract sharks. Neither does Brenner see any reason for Santiago’s unyielding determination to haul in the mutilated carcass; instead, congruent with his much-avowed “brotherhood” with the marlin, Santiago should have “unleashed” the fish at sea, thus saving its dignity before it gets completely devoured by the sharks (177). For all these reasons, the critic suspects “self-serving” motives behind Santiago’s actions (179).

In support of this reading of Santiago’s unconscious motives, Brenner cites the novella’s conspicuous emphasis on brotherhood. Santiago continuously refers to his brotherhood with all things living, even with the stars and his own hands: “Although Manolin is a boy, Santiago treats him as a brother, an equal, and acknowledges their interdependency. . . . Manolin’s concern for Santiago portrays him as a good brother, too” (Brenner 178). The fraternal motif, however, Santiago’s “wish to be brother’s keeper to virtually all creation,” is, according to Brenner, the result of “[t]he absence of parents, wife, and children[,] [which] eliminates filial, conjugal, or parental obligations.” This absence “also frees Santiago from compulsory duties to his fellow man” (179). As a consequence, Santiago is granted “a measure of irresponsibility not available to people
who must fulfill the role of parent, spouse, or child,” which makes his “apparent altruism . . . self-serving” (179).

Applying Freud’s theories, Brenner reads Santiago’s esteem for the marlin as a “reaction formation that conceals hostility” (181). As a version of the parricidal son, Santiago projects his parricidal wishes against Manolin’s father and the other fisherman onto the marlin. As Brenner explains in more detail,

> [B]ecause the marlin’s “power and his beauty” complement Santiago’s qualities, the old man and the huge marlin form a double image of an idealized father whom this novella applauds. Nevertheless, from a slightly altered perspective Santiago and the marlin are the ancient antagonists, son and father, of the Oedipal struggle. If we rightly interpret killing bulls and shooting large animals as displaced enactments of parricidal wishes, then the logic of identifying oversized creatures with father images must apply here too. (259-60 n.5)

According to such a reading, “by slaying the gigantic marlin Santiago figuratively executes the fathers who have demanded Manolin’s obedience and who have impugned his own abilities” (180). The sharks, however, “avenge the wrongs committed” in the parricidal fantasy (182). Santiago’s “exaggerated defense of the marlin’s carcass,” then, is another “instance of reaction formation” and “makes evident his guilt” (180).³¹

Brenner then relates his analysis of Santiago’s motives to the author’s life and posits that “[s]purred by his own affiliative wish, Hemingway insists that his old fisherman . . . be well liked” and thereby sentimentalizes him (183). Hemingway, according to Brenner, experienced guilt for neglecting his sons and also felt responsibility for his father’s suicide (187). To make “fictional amends,” Hemingway creates “a father image refulgent with benevolence, courage, and harmlessness” and projects his wish for reconciliation “in Manolin’s worshipful attitude toward Santiago” (259 n.5). In Santiago, then, Hemingway seeks to become both the father he has lost and the father he has failed
to become for his own sons, as Hemingway increasingly suffered because he was alienated from his three sons, John, Patrick, and Gregory (cf. 185).

Hemingway’s anxiety over losing his sons is represented by Santiago’s fear of losing Manolin, which explains his perseverance with the marlin, Manolin’s double. Like Santiago, Hemingway wanted “to believe that he would go far out to regain his sons or his influence over them” (185). The marlin, therefore, is alternatively brother, father, and son, depending on whether one reads the story as an instance of fratricide, parricide, or filicide. Because of his feelings of guilt for his father’s suicide, the filicidal wishes are also directed against Hemingway himself, which is represented by the “lachrymose Manolin [who] flagellate[s] himself for not having vowed discipleship earlier to Santiago” (187).

Hemingway’s ambiguous relationships with his own father and his sons are therefore expressed in the shifting dynamics of the novella, with Santiago being both son (to the marlin-father) and father (to Manolin). On the one hand, Santiago’s relationship with the marlin, which Santiago identifies as male, reflects the Oedipal need to kill the father. On the other hand, Santiago’s efforts to maintain Manolin’s esteem express the father’s need to keep his sons’ love.

The father-son dilemma can be further elucidated if it is connected to the novella’s pervasive Christian symbolism. In a Christian context, Santiago is the last in a line of martyr figures, who, according to Richard Hovey, “spring from Hemingway’s absorption in his own father-son conflict: the son’s need to keep his father’s love and at the same time to overthrow and replace him” (197). It is true that Hemingway’s heroes have always been associated with Christ crucified, as Jake Barnes, Frederic Henry, Harry
Morgan, Robert Jordan, and Richard Cantwell are all, to some extent, portrayed as martyrs with various wounds. Yet it is in *The Old Man and the Sea* that the Christian analogy is elaborated furthest, culminating in Santiago’s carrying his mast, or cross, uphill to his shack and falling five times, until he finally reposes on his bed in a crucified position.34

David Gordon argues that “[t]he Crucifixion is, in fact, the supreme representation in Western mythology of this basic psychological conflict between the son’s need to retain his father’s love and his need to overthrow and replace him” (136). Gordon points to Freud, who interprets the crucifixion in Christianity as a metaphor of the father-son conflict. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud clarifies the origins of Christianity:

> Its main doctrine . . . was the reconciliation with God the Father, the expiation of the crime committed against him; but the other side of the relationship manifested itself in the Son, who had taken the guilt on his shoulders, becoming God himself beside the Father and in truth in place of the Father. Originally a Father religion, Christianity became a Son religion. The fate of having to displace the Father it could not escape. (175)

Hemingway’s identification of Santiago with Christ throughout the novella can therefore be seen as an expression of the ambivalence inherent in the father-son relationship, rather than an indication of Santiago’s embracing of Christianity. In the crucifixion of his aging fisherman, Hemingway sought to express his ambivalent desires of embracing the father while simultaneously displacing him.

However, Santiago’s many virtues—his magnanimity, his compassion, his kinship with and reverence for all living creatures as well as his endurance and capacity for suffering—cannot only be interpreted as Christian virtues. Instead, I would like to propose that Santiago displays the same values the author found among the Ojibway in
the Michigan woods. Santiago is the Indian father Nick Adams sought to embrace but
couldn’t, and the open sea is the last American wilderness, Nick’s “last good country.”

Hovey poses the question whether Hemingway, in *The Old Man and the Sea*, is
not “telling again the story of himself as a little boy, whose father was a big fine
fisherman and gave him his first rod when he was three—the father whose suicide later
so burdened him” (202). If this is indeed the case, then Santiago’s recurring dream of the
lions is significant. The lions at the end, according to Hovey, are no longer “the fierce
beasts, symbols of the terror and hate inspired by the father, which once stalked the
child’s nightmares,” but have been transformed into “playful and affectionate cats,” thus
indicating the author’s “reconciliation with the image of the father” (202-03).

Concerning this reconciliation, however, it is again important to emphasize that,
except for Santiago’s single reference to other village inhabitants, the relationship
between Santiago and Manolin remains cut off from the larger community. If embracing
the father is finally possible for Hemingway, it seems to be so only in the isolated
environment of the open sea or in seclusion, far removed from any ties to others. As
demonstrated by the ignorant remarks made by the tourists at the end of the novella, who
mistake the skeleton of the marlin for that of a shark, Santiago’s feat of strength is not
understood by others, nor does it have any meaning besides arousing some isolated local
compassion. This sober end is quite different from the final implications of Gaines’s *A
Gathering of Old Men*, in which the forming of generational ties signals meaningful
change for the entire society.

In addition, the father-son relationship takes place in an exclusively male
environment, not much different from Hemingway’s other settings, such as the hunting
grounds of Michigan, the bullrings of Spain, or the plains of Africa. Hemingway’s pervasive theme of “men without women” thus runs parallel or provides the background to the father-son theme, as the two themes are not integrated with each other. Again we will see a key difference in Gaines’s works, as the latter’s solution for the generational gap requires the participation of the entire community and thus entails the integration of female voices.

Chapter Five
The Struggle to Find a Voice and Reclaim the Son in Gaines’s In My Father’s House and A Gathering of Old Men

As we have seen in the discussion of Ernest Gaines’s short stories in chapter two, the absence of the father has a morally and physically detrimental effect on the son. The separation between fathers and sons and its far-reaching effects play a crucial role in Gaines’s entire oeuvre. In addition to his stories, all of Gaines’s novels either have the father-son predicament as an important background motif or as a central theme. The absence of any powerful father figures is especially conspicuous in his earliest novels, and it is not until Gaines returned to his native parish for regular visits in the late 1960s and thereafter that he formed the close bonds with the elder male population who are reflected in his later novels, most notably in In My Father’s House and A Gathering of Old Men.

In his first novel, Catherine Carmier, the black Creole Raoul Carmier, a fierce individualist, has always wanted a son, yet he cannot accept Jackson Bradley as his son-in-law due to jealousy and prejudice against people of color. Similarly, Jackson is missing paternal guidance, but his restlessness, cynicism, and distance from the community do not allow him to settle and work toward accepting Raoul as a father-figure.
Their final intense physical battle is indicative of the gap that exists between the fathers and sons in the African American community.

In *Of Love and Dust*, Marcus Payne, a more fully developed avatar of Procter Lewis, is similarly fatherless. Isolated from the community, he finds a surrogate father in the plantation worker and mechanic Jim Kelly. In the course of the novel, the father-son roles may be said to shift, as they teach each other important lessons about responsibility and the relationship between the individual and the community. As is typical of Gaines’s works, the absence of the biological father is counterbalanced by the nurturing role the larger African American community plays.

Although the father-son relationship surfaces as a theme in all of his works, it is in *In My Father’s House* that Gaines devotes an entire book to the issue. The novel features a number of unidentified, rootless, or misguided sons who have lost their paternal lineage. Karen Carmean lists the number of fatherless characters in the novel: “Robert, the unclaimed body frozen in a ditch, the murdered Vietnam veteran, Turner, and Billy all appear in this novel to illustrate the dire consequences of unrecognized and unreconciled sons” (92).

In addition to further developing the sons’ dilemma, the novel’s main emphasis is on the father, who seems to be at an equal loss concerning the question of how to bridge the generational gap. While this complex novel reiterates and elaborates on some of the points discussed in the short stories, it also expands the father-son theme by applying it to the larger generational differences within the African American population and especially within the civil rights movement. In addition, its shift of focus to the father’s perspective further broadens some of the ideas first dealt with from the son’s point of view in “A
Long Day in November,” “The Sky Is Gray,” and “Three Men.” At the same time, the novel’s concern with the entire community builds on the pivotal importance of the community we have already seen in “My Grandpa and the Haint” and “A Long Day in November.”

Like Hemingway’s “Fathers and Sons,” In My Father’s House is a literary piece Gaines had to write, as he was trying to come to terms with his own father’s desertion of the family. Gaines’s parents separated when he was eight, and even though his father lived nearby while Gaines was still in Louisiana, there was no contact between them after he left the family. That the problematical relationship with his father preoccupied Gaines, and continues to be a haunting issue for him, is not only illustrated by the lengthy process and inner turmoil involved in the writing of In My Father’s House, but also manifests itself in the author’s lifelong reluctance to discuss the issue of his biological father. And although Gaines did enjoy a positive relationship with his stepfather, the latter was frequently absent because he was in the merchant marine. “It is a book I had to write,” Gaines explains, “because I was haunted by the idea. It cost me more time (seven years) and pain than any other book I’ve ever written” (Doyle, “Interview” 162).

The origin of the African American father-son predicament can be traced back to slavery and its auction blocks, when families were torn apart. As Gaines clarifies,

The father and son were separated when they were brought to this country over three centuries ago. The white man did not let them come together during slavery, and they have not been able to reach each other since. Despite the revolution, the black father is in a position of non-respectability, and the white is still in control. The black man is seldom the owner, still is not the public defender in court, not the judge. . . . So the son cannot and does not look up to the father. The father has to look up to the son. That is not natural. And the cycle continues, and continues, and continues. A few of our black fathers have made it, but the majority do not—and I doubt they will in our time. (Doyle, “Interview” 162-63)
Gaines’s reference to “the cycle” illustrates his connection to Hemingway, for whom, as we have seen, breaking out of the cycle of failed father-son relationships was also a central concern. As both the previous discussion of Gaines’s short stories and the author’s explanation above have made obvious, the son’s respect for the father is the prerequisite for gaining a wholesome father-son relationship. In In My Father’s House, Gaines relates the historical explanation of the father-son rift to a mid-20th century background, as he attempts to account for what it takes to break the unnatural cycle of the father-son separation that Hemingway was unable to break in “Fathers and Sons.”

Gaines first dealt with the historical roots of the separation between fathers and sons in the chapter “The Hunter” in his third novel, The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman. Having left their plantation in Louisiana after emancipation, young Jane and Ned encounter a man who is looking for his father, from whom he was separated when the family was broken up and the father was sold in Mississippi. The brief chapter illustrates the fragmentation of the African American family as a consequence of slavery. The novel in general, a “folk autobiography,” as Gaines has called it, is conspicuous in its absence of father figures, especially if one considers that it covers a period of 100 years (Rowell 47). It is important to remember that Miss Jane herself has been diagnosed as “barren” as a consequence, she explains, of having been “hit or whipped in a way that had hurt me inside” (AMJ 77). Because of Miss Jane’s inability to have children and the resultant impossibility of father figures, Gaines directly indicts the cruelty of slavery for its destructive and far-reaching consequences on African American family life.

It is significant, however, that while it is an explanation for the existing gap between fathers and sons, Gaines rejects the historical cause as an answer to the father-
son problem. The nightmarish vision of a continuing cycle of separation between fathers and sons is what has haunted both Gaines and Hemingway. Unlike Hemingway, however, Gaines makes his characters reconnect to their past; they have to rediscover their roots and reach out to their offspring to provide a viable link to the future.

*In My Father’s House* and Hemingway’s “Fathers and Sons” comment in many interesting ways on each other. Whereas the novel starts with the son looking for his father, most of the plot concerns the father’s belated search for clues to his son’s whereabouts. Conversely, in Hemingway’s story, the son attempts to keep the father out of his thoughts and memories, but the latter appears unremittingly in Nick’s mind. As Nick harbors a desire to kill his father, the son in Gaines’s novel also comes to town to kill his father. However, he ends up drowning himself, thus forcing the father to analyze his own behavior and take a journey into his past. In contrast to Hemingway’s stories and *The Old Man and the Sea*, Gaines’s novel allows the mothers and other women a voice; they are a pivotal part of the community and a source of wisdom and strength. The individual father-son relationship is thus seen as an inextricable part of the larger African American community, and it is this very interconnectedness that allows for individuals to break out of the cycle of repeating the father’s sins.

As we have seen in Hemingway’s “Fathers and Sons,” Nick runs the risk of repeating the same mistakes his father made. The presence of his young son does not necessarily allow for optimism, as the past is not processed and dealt with in a meaningful way and thus not linked to the present. Similarly, Gaines’s fathers and sons cannot communicate with each other either. The end of *In My Father’s House* is also
ambiguous. One son is dead; however, there is hope because the father can reach out to another son and thereby avoid making the same mistakes with him.

*In My Father’s House* centers on Reverend Phillip Martin and his double betrayal of his son, who is introduced as Robert X. Phillip Martin is a highly respected civil rights leader in his parish. His successful demonstrations, aimed at desegregating local businesses and institutions, have made him a hero reminiscent of his namesake Martin Luther King, Jr. Like Dr. King, Phillip Martin is also a minister in the local church and uses it as a platform to advocate non-violent resistance.

With his unquestioned leadership qualities Phillip Martin appears to be an ideal father figure. However, beneath his virile and powerful exterior, he is primarily a selfish man, whose private concerns in the past have taken priority over the interests of others. Twenty-one years before, he had abandoned his lover Johanna and their three children. His oldest boy had come to the house where he lay with another woman, but Phillip had sent him away with three dollars. Acting on his mother’s command, the boy then brought the money back. This was the last he saw of his family, as Martin shunned parental and marital responsibilities. After years of sinful lust and selfish pleasures, Phillip Martin discovered God and started a new life and a new family. However, following a great speech delivered at a party in his house, Martin is finally confronted with his past life. Among the crowd he detects one of the children—his oldest son. Robert X has left his California home to come to Louisiana to take revenge on his father. As a testament to the paternal guide and fatherly tie that was denied to him, Robert bears an X in his name, which is, of course, reminiscent of Malcolm X and his symbolic allusion to the theft of black history and tradition in the United States. Since his father is both a minister and a
much-beloved local civil rights leader, the generational rift between Phillip Martin and Robert X also alludes to the larger political and philosophical differences between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, whose relationship, symbolically speaking, assumes a father-son quality.

In addition to the X, Robert has also changed his first name in order to further emphasize his alienation from his father and his perceived lack of family identity. Robert, whose real name is Etienne, blames his father for having been the catalyst for a series of calamities that befell the family as a consequence of Martin’s betrayal and the loss of paternal love. By abandoning the family, Martin has set in motion years of poverty and unhappiness. Etienne himself has no dignity left after he failed to avenge the rape of his sister by one of his mother’s lovers, an obligation he perceives to have had as the oldest male in the family. Because of the absence of the father, Etienne, like James in “The Sky Is Gray,” was forced to prematurely assume the responsibilities of head of the family, even though he was still a boy himself. When his sister was raped, Antoine, the younger brother, tried to give the gun to Etienne to kill the rapist. Since Etienne refused, Antoine himself shot the rapist. Consequently, Etienne blames himself for Antoine’s prison sentence, caused by his defaulting on his perceived responsibility toward his family, as well as for not having been able to protect mother and daughter. From then on, Etienne “wasn’t the man of the house no more, and he didn’t want act like he was.” He feels emasculated and lives a very secluded life. When he happens to learn about his father’s whereabouts, he decides to take revenge.

When Reverend Martin recognizes his son among the crowd in his house, he has a second chance to be a father to him. However, instead of assuming his obligations and
acknowledging Etienne as his son, Martin literally stumbles and falls. He allows his white allies to first keep him down and then to make him “lean on them,” rather than asserting himself (*MFH* 42). Like his Biblical namesake, Phillip Martin does not understand the role of the father:

“If you knew me you would know my Father too. From now on you do know him; you have seen him.”

Philip said to him, “Lord show us the Father and we ask no more.”

Jesus answered, “Have I been all this time with you, Philip, and you still do not know me?” (John 14:7-9)

The Biblical context discusses the fate of the disciples after Jesus’s departure, and Jesus reassures his disciples that they are not orphans. It is highly ironic, therefore, that Phillip Martin, as the leader, does not understand the significance of the situation and cannot offer a place for his own son in his own house. Unlike Jesus’s disciples, Etienne thus remains an orphan, an X. Jesus departs to prepare a place for his disciples in his Father’s house and to make room for others, that is, for his followers. Martin, by contrast, is far removed from being the leader of his “disciples”; he cannot show the members of the civil rights movement the way to deliverance.

Unlike Procter Lewis in “Three Men,” who finally asserts his manhood by assuming responsibility for his past behavior and by taking care of someone in need, Phillip Martin is too weak to publicly embrace his son and admit his private failures of the past, which would threaten both his reputation of moral integrity and his undisputed position as a public leader. Having failed his son twice, however, Phillip Martin must reevaluate his present and past life if he wants to reclaim his son. He must learn the history behind Robert X, whose real name he cannot remember.
Critics have remarked that *In My Father’s House* is very different from Gaines’s other novels in setting, tone, and style. The reasons for this difference are directly related to the father-son theme and illustrate important connections to Hemingway. To begin with, the novel is set in St. Adrienne, a fictional suburb of Baton Rouge, which makes *In My Father’s House* the only Gaines work not to take place primarily in the countryside. The urban setting signals the characters’ rootlessness and separation from familial ties. As Frank Shelton explains, “The association of characters with urbanism and technology reflects their alienation from the nurturing sources of life” (“Machines” 23). Nature imagery in the novel reveals the loneliness of the characters. Thus, Phillip Martin’s inner state is mirrored by what he sees outside his office window: “The lawn was white with frost. The pecan tree in the open pasture across the street stood bare and alone” (*MFH* 68). The various characters in the novel and their hapless fate illustrate the consequences of such alienation from one’s roots.

Phillip Martin has become completely “urbanized.” As the leader of the nonviolent civil rights movement, he is able to communicate effectively with the city folks and his white supporters, but he finds himself virtually at a loss when he is forced to search for his roots and visits his nanane at the Reno plantation. His godmother, Angelina Bouie, heard that Martin had fallen. Since he has not visited her in a long time, Angelina immediately senses that something is wrong. Phillip’s visit home, though, illustrates the distance that has come between him and his godmother: “He loved her very much, and he wished he could tell her everything. But just as he had been unable to say it to anyone else, he couldn’t say it to her either” (*MFH* 109). Phillip’s inability to speak, to find a
voice in the midst of family and friends, recalls the failure of Nick Adams’s father to communicate with wife and son.

Since Gaines’s works are usually heavily invested in orality, Martin’s inability to speak is significant. His speechlessness is especially ironic because, as a preacher and leader, he relies on words to motivate others. When his nanane inquires about his health, Martin is evasive and once more attributes his fall to just having been “‘[t]ired’” (MFH 108). All he can do is “turn from her and . . . look down at the fire again” (MFH 109). The fire and its warmth and intimacy are symbolic of what is missing in Martin’s life. Rather than unburdening himself by sharing his problem with his godmother and thereby benefiting from her advice, he retreats into himself:

Phillip could hear the men laughing and talking while they chopped wood behind the house. He would have liked to go out there and take his turn with the axe. It had been like that once—years ago. He and other young men had gone from house to house to help out each other. It was always easier and more fun than working alone. Together they could laugh and talk. The work was never too hard, and the weather was never too cold. (MFH 110)

This passage underlines both Martin’s psychological and emotional distance from his former home and friends and the loss that comes with not being a part of a vibrant community. Communal work empowers and is fun; adversities can be overcome easier.

Not only is his alienation from the community a major source of his unhappiness, Martin is also depriving himself of the richest source of wisdom and strength the community possesses. His godmother Angelina is an ancestor figure whose importance Toni Morrison describes in the following words: “The presence or absence of [the ancestor] determine[s] the success or happiness of a character” (343). In her rootedness in both the community life and its history, the ancestor is the vital link between the past and
the present. She can point the way into the future. As Morrison warns, “When you kill the ancestor you kill yourself” (344).

Significantly, it is his godmother who provides Martin, even if inadvertently, with an important hint about what to do. She mentions the name of Chippo Simon, Martin’s old friend and “[s]oul brother,” as he remembers him (MFH 114). Angelina informs Martin that she has heard from Louis Patin, another community member, that Chippo saw Johanna in California. It is important to consider the chain of messengers here. Chippo, who, unlike Phillip Martin, is still an active member of the community even though he has moved away, has given the information to Louis, who relays it to Angelina. As we will learn later, Chippo himself got the information from a store keeper whose trust he could win by virtue of his belonging to the community. The number of characters involved illustrates the vitality of community life and the importance of community as a source of information and as a potential healer. As soon as Martin hears about Chippo, his demeanor and behavior liven up, and he becomes excited at the prospect of searching for an old friend. While he is still not able to communicate openly with his godmother, “he lay[s] his head in her lap” and thus takes a first step toward closing the gap to his family and the community from which he has grown estranged (MFH 115).

Like his father, Robert X is similarly uprooted and, consequently, a rather lifeless and ghostlike character. Everything about him suggests sickness and decay: “He was too thin, too hungry-looking. . . . He looked sick. His jaws were too sunken-in for someone his age. His deep-set bloodshot eyes wandered too much” (MFH 3-4). His fingers are described as “long and skeletal” (MFH 15). He himself compares his soul to “garbage, broken glass, tin cans. Any trash” (MFH 25). His perceived lack of identity, the direct
consequence of the severing of familial bonds, has led to a “cancer of the soul,” a psychic fragmentation, that makes him a seemingly lifeless creature without a will of his own (MFH 82). His ghostlike image is reinforced when Chippo visits Johanna in her basement apartment in San Francisco. Even though Chippo visits twice, he never sees Robert and hears him but once. Significantly, it is when Chippo informs Johanna about Phillip Martin’s whereabouts that Robert gives his only sign of life, as Chippo hears a “screeching of the bed when he [Robert] turned over” (MFH 191). Other than that, he lives completely retired in his room, which Chippo describes as a “crypt” (MFH 193).

After the tragedy that befell his sister and brother, Robert aka Etienne has not only given up on his manhood, calling himself a “eunuch,” but also on life in general (MFH 99). As Velez Wilson summarizes his life, Etienne “is shown to have profound love for his errant mother, his brother, and his sister. Moreover, he takes his responsibility to them seriously—so seriously that the one time he defaults on that responsibility, he imposes a death-in-life sentence upon himself” (45-46). Etienne’s dilemma, then, is the result of having had to fill the gap his father had left. His lifelessness is exemplified both by being ghost-like and by his self-imposed loss of language, his denying himself a voice that would allow him to still be a part of the familial or social fabric.

Abandoning one’s son, however, is not only a personal sin in Gaines’s novel; it is also equated with a transgression against community and society. In what constitutes a key difference compared to Hemingway’s father-son relationship, Gaines draws a clear parallel between an individual’s fate and the community at large. For just as Phillip Martin betrays Etienne, so he also betrays the community by abandoning his son, as each
member constitutes a vital piece of the whole social fabric. This connection between the father-son relationship and the community becomes evident when Martin strikes a deal with the racist Sheriff Nolan, who has previously arrested Etienne for loitering. Realizing Martin’s desperation and his intense wish for reconciliation with his son, Nolan forces the Reverend to cancel the scheduled march on the white segregationist Albert Chenal’s store in exchange for Etienne’s freedom. In spite of the immense betrayal this constitutes of his people and their fight against segregation, Martin grudgingly concedes to the plan, thus compromising the ideals of his community for his personal desires. Etienne and the community thus suffer the common fate of betrayal by Phillip Martin. Betraying the son leads to betraying the community.

When the community members learn about the canceled march, they take Martin to task. Howard Mills, the head deacon in the Reverend’s church, and Peter Hebert, a member of the St. Adrienne Civil Rights Committee, accuse him of having acted egotistically:

“We all have sons,” Mills said. . . . “Peter got a son in that same jail right now. I’m sure Nolan would let him out this minute, this minute, if all us went up there and told him we wouldn’t demonstrate here no more.” “I couldn’t do that,” Peter Hebert said, looking cross the room at Phillip. “Not long as we got one Chenal left. No one man got a right to do that.” “I wanted my son, Peter,” Phillip said. “I want mine too,” Peter Hebert said. “I want mine out of that jail right now. But I know I don’t have no right to ask the people to sacrifice everything for him. No one person can come before the cause, Reverend. Not even you.” (MFH 122)

Ernest Gaines here ties the father-son estrangement to an analysis of the correlation between private integrity and public leadership. Both issues are inextricably linked. Since Martin did not fulfill his familial responsibilities in the past, he seems no longer apt for a position of public leadership. Unlike Santiago, who behaves heroically
and thus wins a disciple and son in Manolin, Martin behaves cowardly and thus loses his disciples. Consequently, he is demoted from his leadership position. As Karla Holloway summarizes, “In My Father’s House thematically represents how a fragmented community’s loss of creativity is due in great measure to its individual members’ pursuit of personal identity and individuation” (182). In his preoccupation with personal desires and his disregard for communal needs, “Martin has abandoned his African community by behavior that consistently underscores what is a characteristically Western allegiance to the self” (Holloway 183). To regain his standing in the community, then, Martin needs to atone first for his past irresponsibility. In addition, both he and Etienne need to rediscover the power of their individual voice in order to communicate with each other.

Such is the gap between fathers and sons, however, that, at least in this particular case, it can no longer be bridged. After Martin has bailed Etienne out of jail, they are unable to connect. Etienne tells his father that it was revenge that made him come to Louisiana, revenge “[f]or destroying me. For making me the eunuch I am. For destroying my family: my mama, my brother, my sister” (MFH 99). He describes himself as being merely “‘a moment of [his father’s] lust’” (MFH 99). Etienne realizes, however, that killing his father would neither amend any wrongs nor restore his manhood: “‘Get yourself a ticket and go kill him,’ she [that is, Johanna] told me. ‘Sew back your nuts by killing your father.’ But I can’t sew them back by killing you, can I? Can I, Father?” (MFH 99)

Etienne’s angry words notwithstanding, “his eyes [are] showing more pain than hatred” (MFH 99). Father and son are not able to communicate with each other, with the father being ignorant about the family’s fate and his own role in it and with the son being
too much in pain to hope for reconciliation. Their inability to talk to each other is illustrated both by Etienne’s sarcastic use of the term “Father” and by Martin’s not knowing his son’s real name: “‘Say my name,’ he [Etienne] said. ‘Don’t call me boy no more, Father. Say my name.’ Phillip could not” (MFH 104).

Like the “trees [which] looked like an impenetrable black wall from the distance,” the wall between father and son seems impossible to break down (MFH 97). This impasse mainly stems from Martin’s unwillingness to assume personal responsibility for his past refusal to commit to Johanna and the children. He blames history for not having had the strength to leave his lover 21 years ago and for not having been able to accept his role as husband and father:

“I was paralyzed. Paralyzed. Yes, I had a mouth, but I didn’t have a voice. I had legs, but I couldn’t move. I had arms, but I couldn’t lift them up to you. It took a man to do these things, and I wasn’t a man. I was just some other brutish animal who could cheat, steal, rob, kill—but not stand. Not be responsible. Not protect you or your mother. They had branded that in us from the time of slavery... But I had to break the rules, rules we had lived by for so long, and I wasn’t strong enough to break them.” (MFH 102)

It is important to realize that, even though Phillip Martin refers to the same origin of the father-son alienation as Gaines does in the interview cited earlier, Martin’s resorting to history as an apology, if not justification, for neglecting his familial duties is not sanctioned by the author. The difference between the two positions is that Martin could have stood. His abandoning the family was not caused by the socio-economic pressures that have forced many African American men to move away from their families in search of a job; Phillip Martin’s motives were primarily selfish. Thus, the historical roots of the black father-son rift, as explained by Gaines, are not applicable here. Putting the blame
on history presents Martin with an all-too-easy escape from accepting personal responsibility.

Interestingly enough, using history as an excuse is an attitude usually reserved for those white characters in Gaines’s fiction who prefer to hide behind their legacy rather than make painful but necessary changes. Similar to Frank Laurent in “Bloodline” and Jack Marshall in *A Gathering of Old Men*, who are resigned to inheriting an unjust, racially divided system even though they could help improve society by making personal sacrifices, Martin “prefer[s] the path of least accountability, using history to justify the mistakes of individuals” (Babb 104). For him, history “is not the vivid, personal, oral history that such characters as Jane Pittman use to actualize themselves; it is an empty justifier, an abstract concept used to shift personal responsibility for actions from ‘I’ to ‘they’” (Babb 104).

Martin’s former irresponsibility imposed an unnatural burden on his son, who was made Johanna’s surrogate partner, a development we have seen in earlier stories. In “The Turtles,” Max has to assume the role of his dead mother, and in “The Sky Is Gray,” James is forced to be the “man” in the family. He has to literally provide food by killing his beloved redbirds. The father’s betrayal, therefore, is shown to prematurely terminate the childhood of the boys, thus forcing them into a precarious manhood. This manhood, however, rests on a weak foundation, as the desertion of the father inevitably entails a larger loss of faith in other authorities, such as religion and the law. Etienne’s response to Martin’s suggestion that he should have allowed the law to take care of his sister’s rapist is telling: “There ain’t no law. Why should the law protect us when the father won’t?
You think the law should care more for the family than the father? By law she wasn’t even raped. Black girls don’t get raped, black girls entice their rapist” (MFH 103)

Simultaneous with the loss of an essential authority figure, the father’s departure also brings about the danger of nihilism in the sons left behind. Etienne experiences a complete loss of faith in law, religion, and country. This parallel between faith in the father and in other authorities can also be seen in Hemingway’s Nick Adams stories, in which the father is identified with America. In “Fathers and Sons,” Dr. Adams is associated both with the American flag and with America’s symbol, the eagle. He also stands for stern Victorian religion and a dubious sense of law and morality, all of which Nick rejects. Offsetting the lack of family, religion, and law, Nick can, at least, seek refuge in nature, an option the uprooted and urbanized Etienne does not have. As we have seen, Etienne blames himself for not having fulfilled his duties and for having allowed his brother Antoine to kill the rapist and go to prison in his place.

Rejecting paternal duties and leaving sons behind thus lead to severe moral and physical damage for all involved. Trying to reconnect to the past, Phillip Martin must search for Chippo, his link to his lost self. The search for Chippo, his “soul brother,” therefore becomes the search for Phillip Martin’s own soul. During that search, he encounters several other figures of the Baton Rouge “underworld.” Each one of them provides him with valuable insights into the principles upon which he has constructed his life, which lets him finally realize “how erroneous his entire concept of manhood has been” (White 165).

Martin’s most important encounter is with the young radical Billy. A 24-year-old Vietnam War veteran, Billy, reminiscent of “Bloodline’s” Copper, is trying to organize
an army that will “‘[b]urn this country down’” (MFH 162). Billy represents the extreme, violent faction of the civil rights movement that is completely disillusioned about the kind of progress Martin’s approach has achieved: “‘Just because I can eat at the white folks’ counter with my daddy, just because I can ride side him in the front of the bus don’t mean we any closer,’ Billy said” (MFH 166). At this moment Martin has to realize that civic activism and progress in political and social matters have not improved personal and familial relations. As Gaines himself once remarked, “Sitting at a counter with whites does not bring father and son together. Just because they are sitting there does not mean they are communicating” (Doyle, “Interview” 163). The confrontation with Billy serves as a mirror to Martin of his relationship with his own son. Martin learns an important lesson when he inquires after Billy’s father:

“Y’all get along, you and your daddy, Billy?”
“I guess so. ’Bout average.”
“What’s average, Billy?”
“I don’t bother him, he don’t bother me.” (MFH 165)

Martin thus has to realize that his commitment to the civil rights movement, however worthy a cause, does not and cannot make up for the betrayal of his family. Billy’s attitude toward his father exemplifies the lack of authority and pride black sons feel for their fathers: “‘My daddy got to catch up with me,’ Billy said. ‘I can’t go back where he’s at’” (MFH 166). The black father, therefore, first has to be in a position of respect and authority for the son to look up to him.

Looking for solutions to close the gap with his son, Martin has to reject further aspects of his personality. The encounter with Reverend Peters allows him to see that complete faith in God often serves as an excuse for an all-too-passive attitude. As Martin tells Peters, “‘There’s a gap between us and our sons, Peters, that even He,’ Phillip said,
nodding toward the Bible, ‘even He can’t seem to close’” (MFH 154). The subsequent meeting with Adeline Toussaint, one of his former lovers, exposes Martin’s selfish use of women in the past and present. Adeline tells Martin that she often lied to him when she said she was in love with him. When Martin protests, she asks, “‘How many times you yourself have said that to a woman? You mean it every time?’” (MFH 177)

What Martin comes to realize more and more is that, rather than having started a new life by turning to communal needs, he has continued his selfish pattern by excluding Alma, his present wife, from his confidence and political decisions. Previously, Alma has criticized her husband for coming to her only for sexual pleasure: “‘I’m in here all the time,’ she said. ‘But you don’t come to me. You go in that room [his office]. You go out there in the yard. I’m in here—but you never come to me’” (MFH 71). Alma, like Johanna before, represents the silenced and repressed part of Martin’s life and the community. It is furthermore significant that Johanna never appears directly, as a speaking voice, in the novel. Thus, Martin, and, by implication, the civil rights movement in general, suffer from the lack of female representation; they have to allow women a voice. This becomes underlined at the end of the novel, when it is two women and their advice that will point Martin and the civil rights movement into the right direction.41

Having been confronted with the sins of his past and made aware of his continuing self-deception, Phillip finally meets Chippo to learn the complete story of Johanna, who was wasting her life on worthless lovers while continually waiting for Martin to come back. It is Chippo also who tells Martin the names of his children as well as the missing facts about Justine’s rape and Antoine’s imprisonment. Gaines’s choice for Chippo to tell the complete story is significant. Neither Martin nor Etienne can, as we
have seen, tell the whole story because neither one of them possesses the voice and power to look into his own mind, let alone somebody else’s. Each one is too concerned with his own fate to be able to connect to and understand others. Their loss of language thus goes hand in hand with their loss of creativity, the loss of the ability to tell a story.

Chippo, by contrast, is a vital member of the community despite living in the city. Obviously modeled after Gaines’s stepfather, Chippo’s frequent travels as a member of the merchant marine have acquainted him with many people all over the country. It is this connectedness that has brought him to California, where he happens to see Johanna and thus learns about her life. Chippo is, therefore, a prime example of a character who possesses his own liberating voice as a consequence of his involvement in community life. Fittingly, he is described as “a person who did not worry much; he would take life as it came” (MFH 180).

However, after having learned about Johanna’s and her children’s history, Chippo briefly feels burdened by his knowledge. He refrains from visiting his folks on Reno plantation, as he does not know how to impart such painful news. Clearly we see how the lack of communication, the absence of the liberating voice in one family (Johanna, Etienne, Phillip Martin) has a destabilizing and paralyzing effect on others in the community. The father’s selfish abandonment and its consequences upset the entire community. After Chippo has shared the story with Martin, he immediately feels relieved of a burden. He is “glad” that he has told Martin: “I can go to Reno now and see the old people, and I don’t have to feel guilty ’bout holding nothing from them. I feel good about it. Yes. Like somebody done gone to confession” (MFH 199).
This telling of the truth provides a kind of catharsis for Chippo. Like Simon of Cyrene, who was forced to carry Jesus’s cross, Chippo Simon’s knowledge of Martin’s sins and his having been made privy to all the misery that his former friend had caused, weighed like a cross on his shoulders. As far as Martin is concerned, “[h]e was just as tired as Chippo. But where Chippo’s mind had been relieved of a burden by talking about it, Phillip now felt a heavier burden by hearing it” (MFH 200). He now realizes that running away from the past, turning to religion, and getting involved in the struggle for equality could not rectify the wrongs he had committed. As he admits to Chippo, “‘I thought the good work I was doing with the church, with the people, would make up for all the things I had done in the past’” (MFH 201). Martin has to acknowledge that his past behavior is an integral part of him that he cannot escape from but has to deal with in the present time. Ironically, it is at this point, when Martin is about to leave and look for Etienne to claim him as his son, that he is informed about Etienne’s suicide, a grim and final reminder that the past cannot be changed.

On the edge of desperation, he now has to apply to his own life the King-inspired ideals he used to preach to his parishioners: endurance, getting up again, love, and persistence. The lesson Martin has learned and the pain he now experiences must be transformed into positive energy and channeled into constructive action. The “grief” and “fury” inside him, however, first misdirect him toward Adeline, but his friends and wife intervene by showing him that he has to take care of his young son Patrick and continue to struggle for civil rights. Similar to the way Robert Jordan tries to come to terms with his father’s suicide by getting actively involved in a group-sanctioned endeavor, so
Phillip Martin must cope with his son’s suicide by actively embracing the future and connecting to others.

In the novel’s overall context of the generational rift, it is important that two of the younger people in his parish, the teacher Shepherd and particularly his fiancée Beverly Ricord, try to convince Martin of the necessity to carry on the struggle.

In the wake of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination, the communal spirit and faith in the civil rights movement have reached their nadir in St. Adrienne. Unlike some of their bitter contemporaries, who regularly meet and drink in the Congo Room, a local bar, Shepherd and Beverly are devoid of the rampant cynicism among the young. Having previously been inspired by Martin’s speeches and his unswerving fight against discrimination, Beverly now urges the Reverend to get back on his feet, not only for himself but especially for future generations:

“You wanted the past changed, Reverend Martin,” she told him. “Even He can’t do that. So that leaves nothing but the future. We work toward the future. To keep Patrick from going to that trestle. One day I’ll have a son, and what we do tomorrow might keep him from going to that trestle. That’s all we can ever hope for, isn’t it, Reverend Martin? That’s all we work for, isn’t it?” (*MFH* 213)

Patrick, Martin’s son with Alma, gives Martin a third chance to be a father. The final word of the novel, though, belongs to his wife Alma, “whose name,” as Karen Carmean points out, “means ‘soul’” (86). To Martin’s desperate “‘I’m lost,’” Alma responds with strength and hope: “‘We just go’n have to start again’” (*MFH* 214). Martin thus needs to focus his attention from his “soul brother” to his “soul,” that is, from Chippo to Alma, and start a new life based on a more egalitarian relationship with his family and the rest of the community.
However unconvincing this optimistic ending may appear in light of the book’s overall gloomy tone, the novel illustrates the necessity of assuming personal responsibility for past failures as the only way to make possible a viable future. Martin’s odyssey into his past life is, as Alvin Aubert describes it, “his movement toward self-reintegration through self-confrontation which terminates in a reconciliation of past and present, of private and public man” (133). Martin has to learn that giving to a community cannot compensate for not giving to a son. He has to be a father first, before he can be a man or even a public leader. The roles of the father and leader are therefore connected. Typical of Gaines’s work and indicative of how the nuclear family is inextricably linked to the communal family, the father-son bond can only work within a communal context, just as the communal respect for the father is the prerequisite for regaining the son’s faith. Once Phillip Martin has gained full knowledge of his past and accepted his responsibility in it, this newfound rootedness may serve him as a starting-point both for a more successful relationship with his son Patrick as well as for a more effective leadership position in the community.

*In My Father’s House* is typical of Gaines’s work insofar as a tragedy eases the way for the slow but steady advance of progress. This optimistic belief may be explained by Gaines’s notion of time as a spiral, which extends into the past and winds its way via many twists into the future. The spiraling movements take the searcher deeper and deeper into the past, with the past being both a chronological and a spatial concept. Phillip Martin has to go back to and analyze his earlier life and come to terms with his sins, just as he has to revisit the place of his origins, to re-establish the link to others and thus discover his true self.
The spiral seems to be quite different from Hemingway’s concept of time, which, in most of his works, resembles endlessly repeating cycles, from which, so it seems, one cannot escape except by suicide. In stories like “Fathers and Sons” and “Now I Lay Me,” past and present are not allowed to come together, as Nick either tries to suppress memories of his father, as in the former story, or evokes memories to suppress the present, as in the latter. Likewise, during his fishing trip in “Big Two-Hearted River,” memories are excluded and replaced by meticulously described rituals. As we have seen in Gaines’s novel, however, memory and the past are necessary constituents of the present and must be integrated with it to provide a basis for a different future. As Jack Hicks summarizes Phillip Martin’s lesson, “[H]istory paralyzes us only if we deny it, and we can and must act on the personal consequences of ancient outrage, if only to assure that it is not repeated” (137). In contrast to Nick Adams, Phillip Martin comes to realize that his personal behavior in the past has a direct impact on the present, and that he will commit the same mistakes again if he does not learn from the past. Assisted by friends, family, and the community, Phillip Martin can move toward a new beginning. By contrast, Nick’s search by himself is bound to fail. He does not take a conscious journey into the past, like Martin, but “falls into it, falling into himself,” as McCann aptly describes it (12).

The interrelation between the private and the public man in Phillip Martin signals another important difference between Gaines and Hemingway, as for the former the individual is an integral part of a larger community. Just as Martin betrays his son, so he betrays his community. The personal and the public cannot be separated, for the personal is political, as Martin must learn after his betrayal of the community and subsequent demotion. Conversely, by reaching out to his other son, he will behave like an exemplary
and responsible father and thus prove himself worthy of the respect that is necessary for him to be reintegrated into the community. The importance of the community and the link to an enriching and empowering history are what Hemingway’s characters lack, even though Hemingway slightly moved toward that ideal both in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Significantly, Karla Holloway equates Martin’s selfishness with a “Eurocentric quest for individuation[,] [which] requires the sacrifice of the community’s wholeness and power” (187). In his egocentrism, according to Holloway, Martin separates past from present, the private from the public, the physical from the spiritual, and the male from the female aspect of his personality. Only when he learns to strike a balance between these seeming bipolarities does Martin achieve a wholesome definition of himself. Only then can he break out of history’s cycle, as he no longer has to blame history for his failures but can assume personal responsibility.

As we have seen, the issues of voice and speech are fundamental. Neither Phillip Martin nor Etienne possesses his own voice that would allow him to connect his story to others. This is the reason Gaines felt compelled to write the story from a third-person point of view:

> You cannot tell that story from the minister’s point of view because the minister keeps too much inside him. He does not reveal it—he won’t reveal it to anybody. It would be totally impossible to tell this story from anyone else’s point of view—or should I say, have anyone else tell the story. So the story has to be told from that omniscient point of view. (Rowell 41-42)

The omniscient point of view, however, is not typical of Gaines, as his works ordinarily celebrate orality and multiple voices. As he explains in another interview, “Usually, once I develop a character and ‘hear’ his voice, I can let him tell the story” (Desruisseaux 113).
The point of view chosen in *In My Father’s House* is therefore a consequence of the special father-son dilemma and the characters’ struggle to find the power of the voice.

It is quite interesting in this context that Gaines does not consider *In My Father’s House* as suitable for public readings: “*In My Father’s House* I could never read in public, never wanted to read” (Gaudet and Wooton 57). This may be partly due to his reluctance to speak about fathers in general, and because the novel is too personal a narrative, as it was inspired by his own troubled relationship with his father. However, I would like to argue that Gaines’s discomfort also stems from the lack of orality in the novel, the absence of the power of different voices that so distinguishes his other books. Even his only other novel narrated from a third-person point of view, *Catherine Carmier*, is more of a testament to orality, as it contains the familiar porch setting as site for the exchange of voices, as well as characters like Aunt Charlotte and Madame Bayonne who embody the rich wisdom of the community. Quite fittingly, Gaines originally considered telling *In My Father’s House* from Chippo’s perspective, the only character who could have narrated the story; however, this plan was abandoned because even Chippo cannot look inside the reticent Etienne and Philip Martin.

This generative and healing power of multiple voices is notably absent in Hemingway’s works. In the Nick Adams stories, neither father nor son can reveal their innermost feelings. Dr. Adams is unable to communicate his feelings, and Nick is in denial of or unable to come to terms with his feelings. Even though Robert Jordan and Santiago make a greater effort at reaching out to others, their thoughts are primarily revealed through a modernist stream-of-consciousness technique and inner monologues. Hemingway, as a representative of the Western tradition of storytelling and in tune with
modernism’s tenets, emphasizes a fragmented view of subjectivity and history. Therefore, in its focus on the individual and his quest, as well as in its absence of the oral element, *In My Father’s House* bears distinct traces of a Hemingway novel.

Parallel to the omniscient perspective, the subject matter and tone in *In My Father’s House* echo for a long time the bleakness of Hemingway’s writings and his vision of time as cyclical. Certainly, Etienne’s suicide and the devastating consequences of Martin’s abandonment of his first family leave the reader unprepared for an ending that offers hope for its characters to break out of history’s endlessly repeating cycle. I would therefore like to suggest that the positive ending of *In My Father’s House* is no more convincing than Nick’s promise to his son to visit the grandfather’s tomb at the end of “Fathers and Sons.” Both endings seem forced and are most likely instances of the authors’ wishful thinking rather than compelling plot developments.

Alma’s statement at the end (“‘We just go’n have to start again’”) seems indeed not much more than an expression of hope, if one considers Martin’s inadequacies as both husband and father. Gaines, however, felt that the novel was “complete” (Rickels 129). The author’s optimism that the cycle has been broken is illustrated in his conjecture about what Phillip Martin might do next: “I would think that after this he would reach out to her [Johanna], go to California, explain to her, then come back and start over with Alma” (Doyle, “Interview” 165).

Maybe it is indicative of the authors’ inner doubts about the integrity of these endings that both felt obliged to return to the issue of fathers and sons in an additional work. Hemingway resolved the father-son dilemma more successfully, as we have seen, in passages in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Likewise,
Gaines would portray positive and heroic action by father figures in *A Gathering of Old Men*.

The issue of finding one’s voice takes center stage in Gaines’s sequel to *In My Father’s House, A Gathering of Old Men*. In this later novel, Gaines succeeds once more in allowing his characters to take over and tell their own stories, as 15 different narrators combine in 20 narrative segments to make this Gaines’s most oral novel. *A Gathering of Old Men* picks up where *In My Father’s House* ends, as in the more recent novel Gaines gives the older men a chance to change their behavior, atone for the past, and leave a legacy that will allow them eventually to reclaim their sons. The novel successfully brings together three generations of African American men.

The plot takes place in the quarters of a Louisiana plantation on a single October day in the late 1970s, thus making it the most contemporary work in Gaines’s oeuvre. The novel’s focus is on a group of black octogenarians, men and women, in addition to a few grandchildren who have been left behind by their parents. Thus, the generational gap is obvious from the beginning. Fathers and mothers are virtually absent in this novel, as they have either moved away to the cities in search of jobs or have died in the wake of the South’s violent and racist climate. Only the elderly have remained on the land they have inhabited for generations, and their livelihood is increasingly threatened by the advancing Cajun machinery and their aggressive exploitation of the land.

When the novel opens, Beau Boutan, the son of the ruthless Cajun Fix Boutan lies dead in the quarters. He has been shot in front of Mathu’s house, the only black man who has always stood his ground and never relinquished his pride and dignity in spite of society’s racism and discrimination. Naturally, he is the primary suspect, especially since
the other men have spent their lives in an attitude of silent acceptance of racial injustice, ready to “crawl under the[ir] beds” whenever there was the least sign of trouble.\(^\text{42}\)

In the course of the novel, however, each one of the old men comes forward to confess to the killing of Beau Boutan. Since there is no black family in the quarters that has not, at one time or another, been ill-treated by the Boutans, Beau’s death serves as a chance for the people to take revenge, to transcend their previous subservience and to defend themselves against previous and future wrongs. Their taking a stand is therefore not only motivated by revenge but perceived as a purgative exoneration of their guilt for their passivity.

Significant in this respect is the men’s initial gathering at their ancestors’ cemetery. In a symbolic action, Dirty Red eats the pecans that lie on and around his brothers’ and parents’ graves. Red’s “communion with the past” constitutes not only “a mythic vision of man’s union with the earth,” but also reestablishes the necessary intergenerational link: “Humans literally grow out of their family, whose bodies nourish them. And although the individual dies, mankind is immortal, and our lives can be seen as part of a great, endless cycle of birth and death and birth” (Rickels and Rickels 221-22). Gaines’s emphasis on the African American concept of the extended family is amplified here through the inclusion of the ancestors, whose interrelationship with the community is the underpinning of many African religions. According to an African worldview, the ancestral spirits affect the destinies of the living. By eating the pecans, the men partake in a symbolic communion and celebrate their unity with their ancestors.

The graveyard in this scene therefore functions as the site of cultural memory, history, and ancestry. The conscious knowledge of that history, of their ancestors’
suffering and survival during slavery and its aftermath, is pivotal for the old men’s regaining of a wholesome sense of self. Valerie Babb summarizes the significance of this scene: “The burial plots are reservoirs of ancestry that activate the floodgates of the men’s heretofore-unknown strength, creating a current between their history, their present resolve, and the legacy they hope to leave” (120). By reconnecting to their families, the old men gather the strength and determination to stand united and to break out of their cycle of submission. The old men thus fulfill Toni Morrison’s concept of “rootedness,” as they empower themselves by reclaiming their ancestral link.

In addition, as Anissa Wardi states, “[T]he ancestral ground inscribes the earth as a visible textualization of African American history” (39). Therefore, “the maintenance of the gravesites is a necessary act in the preservation of ancestry” (Wardi 39). The loss of the gravesites to the advancing machinery would be tantamount to the loss of ancestral space and history, and thus their own identity. Strengthened by communion with their ancestors, the old men realize that the preservation of history depends on their successful effort at community-building. The gathering at the cemetery thus serves as the catalyst for the old men’s resolve to bond and form a united group.

The old men’s transformation into heroic figures manifests itself in their march toward Mathu’s house and their unprecedented stand against the official and unofficial representatives of white power: the sheriff, his deputy, and Luke Will and his racist gang. The old men thus demonstrate the virtues Phillip Martin lacks in In My Father’s House. Not only have they renewed their bond with their ancestors, but they also find their own voice to tell their story, not withholding the feelings of shame that result from lifelong silence and conformity to suffering, humiliation, and oppression.
Speaking for many others, Cedrick Tucker bemoans the Cajun encroachment that is responsible for the violent death of his brother Silas, the last black sharecropper on the plantation. When he and his mules outperformed the Cajun tractors, Silas was beaten to death. Cedrick’s shame and guilt for not having intervened and stood by his brother have led to a paralytic passivity that has lasted all his life. Until this day he had not been able to speak about these events: “‘We all knowed he was supposed to lose. Me, his own brother, knowed he was supposed to lose. He was supposed to lose years ago, and because he didn’t lose like a nigger is supposed to lose, they beat him. And they beat him, and they beat him. And I didn’t do nothing but stand there and watch them beat my brother down to the ground’” (*GOM* 97). Unlike Phillip Martin, Cedrick is finally able to ask for forgiveness for his past behavior: “‘Forgive me!’ He had both hands over his head, the gun in one hand, the other hand clenched to a fist. ‘Forgive this nothing!’ he called. ‘Can you hear me, Silas? Tell me, can you hear me, Silas?’” (*GOM* 97)

Calling his brother’s name, Cedrick is communicating with the spirits of the departed and acknowledges the African concept of the family. As John Mbiti explains,

> The family also includes the departed relatives, . . . the living-dead. These are, as their name implies, ‘alive’ in the memories of their surviving families, and are thought to be still interested in the affairs of the family to which they once belonged in their physical life. Surviving members must not forget the departed, otherwise misfortune is feared to strike them or their relatives. (107)

Silas’s power to affect the living is manifested both negatively by the prolonged anxiety and depression his brother Cedrick suffered from, and positively by the new-found absolution and determination Cedrick obtains after his confession. Cedrick’s ability to acknowledge and connect with the spirits of the past is what Phillip Martin has to learn if he wants to come to terms with his own past.
In addition, unlike Phillip Martin, the old men allow the women to share their stories. Even though there are no female narrators, Gaines allows characters like Beulah and Glo to take a stand with the men and talk. Thus, Beulah sheds her previous fear and confronts Sheriff Mapes: “‘You want me to start?’ she asked Mapes. ‘You want any woman here to start? I can tell you things done happened to women round here make the hair stand on your head’” (GOM 106-07). Similarly, Glo, in spite of her age, is “‘ready to go [to jail]’” with the others, thus demonstrating the courage she finds in the new solidarity with the group (GOM 109).

Although the old men’s and women’s strength derives from their unity in standing together, each one of them maintains his or her individuality. Each man has a different motive and personal reasons for joining the group. Their various motives for having killed Beau range from violent crimes committed against them or family members, such as rapes, lynchings, and murders, to the more subtle deprivation of their human status resulting from constant social confinement and economic exploitation. Thus, while they did not literally kill Beau Boutan, their confessions are psychologically true. For example, Johnny Paul is concerned with the destruction of their history, and thus the memory of their existence, by the Cajun tractors: “‘I did it [i.e., killing Beau] ’cause that tractor is getting closer and closer to that graveyard, and I was scared if I didn’t do it, one day that tractor was go’n come in there and plow up them graves, getting rid of all proof that we ever was’” (GOM 92).44

The other old men and women can relate to Cedrick Tucker and Johnny Paul: the cowboy Yank, who lost his job and livelihood by the advent of technology; the World War I veteran Coot, who was decorated as a hero for his bravery in Europe but relegated
to second-class status and stripped of his medals back home; and Uncle Billy who silently watched while his son was beaten insane. Yet, it is on this day that the old men and women assume personal responsibility for their shortcomings. And it is with their individual dignity reestablished and with their personal respect regained that the conditions for bridging the intergenerational gap are fulfilled.

When, at the end of the novel, Charlie, who actually shot Beau in self-defense, returns to assume responsibility for the killing, his courage and assertiveness become a source of moral strength for the people around him, especially for future generations. The grandchildren, who are witnessing the events of the day, will carry on what Charlie and the others have begun. In this sense, Charlie becomes a father figure, as he successfully demonstrates what Phillip Martin could not: he takes a stand and assumes personal responsibility for his actions, thereby laying the foundation for a more promising future for his surrogate sons and the rest of the community.

The grandchildren play a crucial role in the novel, and it should not go unnoticed that Snookum, Glo’s grandchild, is the only African American character who narrates two chapters of the novel. It must, therefore, be concluded that Gaines’s choice of Snookum as narrator, of both the very first chapter and of the important segment describing the shooting, is indicative of the author’s intention to emphasize the boy’s overall significance in the events.

Consequently, it is important to look closely at the process of maturation that Snookum undergoes on this single day. Representative of the young generation that is left behind without parental guidance, he behaves like the boy he is at the outset of the novel. Playful and with little awareness of his surroundings, his innocence is illustrated when he...
admits to having played “mama and papa in the weeds” with his sister, and when he is concerned about his brother Toddy telling on him. In addition, his childlike expressions and playful behavior (“I shot out of there, headed up the quarters, spanking my butt the way you spank your horse when you want him to run fast” [GOM 6]) make him an innocent Adam at the beginning. Yet, significantly enough, he evinces early signs of having a mind of his own and early indications of rebellion. For example, he disobeys his grandmother, and he refers to the white people as “Lou” and “Candy,” as opposed to “Mr. Lou” and “Miss Candy,” as social decorum requires (GOM 8). In addition, he does not respect the authority of Reverend Jameson: “Me and Reverend Jameson didn’t get along too good. He was always getting on me, saying I should be in the church serving the Lord instead of shooting marbles and playing ball” (GOM 7). Importantly, it is Snookum who initiates the gathering by rounding up all the old men in front of Mathu’s house. Snookum thus figuratively commences the process of change in the community by setting in motion the old men’s transformation into responsible and courageous men, which in turn will have such a profound influence on his future.

In a symbolic communion with the men, Snookum eats the pecans Dirty Red hands to him, thus celebrating his bond with the older generation. Snookum also shares his pecans with the other children, thereby completing the intergenerational union. Firmly anchored in the community, he feels proud of the others and dares to stand up to Deputy Griffin and even “start[s] toward Mapes” to prevent the latter from beating the old men (GOM 70). Witnessing the old men’s heroic standing in spite of the sheriff’s brutal intimidation, Snookum is ready to form a line with the old men when they are questioned
and beaten by Sheriff Mapes. He becomes brave and even speaks up to the sheriff but does not fall for Mapes’s trick and blunder out the truth:

“I don’t know about Toddy, but I’m ready to go [to jail],” Snookum said. He cracked his knuckles. “Wish I was just a little older so I coulda shot him [Beau Boutan].”
“I thought you did, Mapes said. “Or was it you who went up to the front and called everybody?”
“I ain’t got no more to say,” Snookum said. “You can beat me with a hose pipe if you want.” (GOM 109)

Snookum’s behavior has undergone a significant change from a few hours earlier, when he was still concerned with his brother’s telling on him. As David White assesses Snookum’s behavior, “He may not know precisely why he is standing up to the sheriff, but he is acting courageously nonetheless—because he has seen the old men acting courageously” (172). Snookum is therefore proof of Gaines's claim that the old people’s regaining of self-respect is the prerequisite for forging intergenerational bonds.

Significantly, Snookum is also present inside Mathu’s house when Charlie completes his transformation from what the journalist Lou Dimes stereotypically describes as “the quintessence of what you would picture as the super, big buck nigger” to, as Charlie refers to himself, “‘a man’”: “‘I’m a man,’ he said. ‘I want the world to know it. I ain’t Big Charlie, nigger boy, no more, I’m a man. Y’all hear me? A man come back. Not no nigger boy. A nigger boy run and run and run. But a man come back. I’m a man” (GOM 186-87). Hearing Charlie’s words and observing him taking responsibility, Snookum witnesses what it takes to be a man and thus finds in Charlie a source of strength and a model to emulate. Echoing Manolin’s ministrations for Santiago, Snookum brings Charlie water. In this symbolic baptism, Charlie is reborn as a father figure to Snookum.
During the climactic shooting between the old men and Luke Will’s racist group, Snookum is sitting under the front steps of Mathu’s house and observes Sheriff Mapes’s cowardice and Lou Dimes’s helplessness. Both men stand in stark contrast to the old men’s courage and Charlie’s willing confrontation with death. After Charlie’s death, Snookum and his brother touch the dead body, thus reinforcing Charlie’s status as a martyr. The touching of Charlie’s corpse signals the successful bridging of the generational gap and thus constitutes the basis that is necessary for establishing a new direction for the father-son relationship. Having found an appropriate role model in Charlie as a surrogate father, Snookum and Toddy will later embody the strength and respect necessary to become father figures themselves. Charlie’s becoming a father figure for Snookum and Toddy thus marks the beginnings of the father-son relationship that Phillip Martin hopes to find with his son Patrick.

In a parallel father-son development, the relationship between Mathu and Charlie undergoes an equally important transformation. In the absence of a father figure, it was Charlie’s godfather, or parrain, Mathu, who was trying to teach Charlie the virtues of dignity and bravery that so distinguish him. In spite of his many virtues, however, Mathu is flawed in his condescension toward the other community members. His aloofness and air of superiority are based on two factors. On the one hand, he harbors too much pride in his pure Senegalese lineage and looks down on those who are less black than he. In his eyes, mixed blood is a sign of weakness. As Clatoo assesses Mathu’s attitude: “He acted like he didn’t care if we was even there. Mathu was one of them blue-black Singaleese niggers. Always bragged about not having no white man’s blood in his veins. He looked
down on all the rest of us who had some, and the more you had, the more he looked down on you” (*GOM* 51).

On the other hand, Mathu despises the other men because of their submissive and passive attitude. Mathu is the only one among the old black men who has always stood his ground and thereby gained the respect of the white people, including the sheriff:

“Mathu had never backed down from anybody, either. Maybe that’s why he [Mapes] liked him. To him, Mathu was a real man. The rest of us wasn’t” (*GOM* 84). As the only one courageous enough to resist dehumanization, Mathu is an important source of strength and inspiration for others in spite of his condescending attitude.

In addition, his age and wisdom make Mathu a repository of African American history and the male embodiment of what Miss Jane Pittman represents. Linked to the past and firmly holding his ground in the present, Mathu is the only hope for change the community has. Therefore, when Mathu is accused of killing Beau Boutan, the old men are willing to risk their lives to defend the only symbol of manhood they have.

However, Mathu’s independence and exclusiveness go hand in hand with his bitterness and anger, which are the result of both his condescending views of the other community members and the consequence of rampant racism outside the quarters. Mathu has lost the capacity to feel and express affection for others. It was particularly his godson Charlie who had to suffer his anger, as Mathu beat him for not standing up as a man. Impressed by the unexpected heroism of the other old men, as well as by Charlie’s return to assume responsibility for killing Beau, Mathu is finally able to admit his own failures to the others:

“I never thought I woulda seen this day,” he said. “No, I never thought I woulda seen this day.” [. . .]
“And I thank y’all. And I look up to you. Every man in here. And this the proudest day of my life.” [. . .]
“I ain’t nothing but a mean, bitter old man,” he said. “No hero. Lord—no hero. A mean, bitter old man. Hating them out there on that river, hating y’all here in the quarters. Put myself above all—proud to be African. You know why proud to be African? ’Cause they won’t let me be a citizen here in this country. Hate them ‘cause they won’t let me be a citizen, hated y’all ’cause you never tried. Just a mean-hearted old man. All I ever been, till this hour.” [. . .]
“I been changed,” he said. “I been changed. . . . I been changed by y’all.” (GOM 181-82)

As a result of the old men’s transformation, Mathu undergoes a similar change; he rediscovers his heart and is able to ask for forgiveness. The relationship between Mathu and the community thus illustrates the interdependence between the individual and the community, which is one of the cornerstones of Gaines’s philosophy. Mathu realizes that he cannot exist outside the group. His and the other men’s attitudes at the end exemplify the African view of man described by Mbiti: “Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: ‘I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’” (108-09).

As a consequence of his reintegration into the community, Mathu’s relationship to Charlie can heal. Charlie understands why Mathu was tough on him: “I know Parrain was beating me for running when I was six. . . . You tried to make me a man, didn’t you, Parrain? Didn’t you?” (GOM 188-89) When earlier that day Mathu pushed the gun into Charlie’s hands to shoot at Beau, Charlie “didn’t want take the gun, but I could tell in Parrain’s face if I didn’t, he was go’n stop Beau himself, and then he was go’n stop me, too” (GOM 191). Unlike Etienne who refused the gun and let his brother kill their sister’s rapist, Charlie does take a stand. However, he runs away after shooting Beau, and forces
Mathu to take the blame. It isn’t until Charlie returns and confesses that he really
becomes a man in everybody’s eyes. At the end, Mathu is “proud of Charlie” upon
witnessing his godson’s maturation (GOM 193).

When he returns to face the charges and later, when he fearlessly confronts Luke
Will’s violent gang and thus willingly accepts his own death, Charlie not only becomes
“a man,” but he also becomes a “father.” His martyr-like death is analogous to the
Crucifixion. In addition, when Charlie first shows up, he stops the sheriff from arresting
Mathu: “‘You don’t have to go nowhere, Parrain’” (GOM 183). Charlie thus takes the
place of the father, Mathu, both in a literal sense, by not allowing his parrain to go to jail
in his place, and in a figurative sense by becoming the “father” to the entire community
whose collective guilt he bears on his shoulders. As seen, the others look up to him and
from this time on use him as a source of strength and as a role model, similar to the role
Mathu has played before.

Simultaneously, Charlie also becomes a father figure to Snookum and Toddy,
reminiscent of Santiago’s “crucifixion” and subsequent embrace of Manolin as surrogate
son. Fittingly, after Charlie has ended his confession and made his peace with Mathu and
the others, he feels a burden lifted off his shoulders, like Chippo in In My Father’s House,
and his facial expression suggests a religious conversion experience: “He was breathing
heavily, his closely shaven head was covered with beads of sweat. He was exhausted. But
there was something in his face that you see in faces of people who have just found
religion. It was a look of having been freed of this world” (GOM 193).

In a crucial departure from The Old Man and the Sea, the successful father-son
relationships in A Gathering of Old Men have an important effect on the entire
community. This is best portrayed by Mathu’s change at the end of the novel. Having been aloof and distant for most of the time, he now assumes his place in the midst of the community. Thus, he rejects Candy’s offer to ride home with her after the trial and joins the other men in the less comfortable but more communal truck. Importantly, Mathu rejects his role as surrogate father to Candy, the niece of the plantation owner, whom he had helped to raise after her parents’ death. The relationship between Mathu and Candy has been complex in the sense that Mathu used his association with her as proof of his difference from his own people, whom he looked down upon. Likewise, Candy treated Mathu in a well-meaning, but overly protective and condescending way, reminiscent of the “benevolent slaveholders” in the past. Both Mathu and Candy are freed of this unnatural bond at the end and are thus able to form a more natural and lasting connection with each other and with others. Just as Sheriff Mapes has changed his view of the old men after their brave stand, so Candy has come to realize the men’s independence. The union of the old men and its effect on both the African American community and the white community demonstrate that Gaines’s interest is not so much in the individual, but in the whole society. The father-son relationship must therefore be seen as taking place in the context of and affecting the whole community, an aspect which makes the end of Gaines’s novel very different from *The Old Man and the Sea.*

Complicating Gaines’s treatment of the father-son dynamic is an interesting parallel plot development in the novel. The Cajun Boutan family is also torn by generational dissonances. Whereas Beau and his brother Claude have perpetuated their family tradition of subjugating and tormenting blacks, the other two brothers, Gil and Jean, are opposed to vigilante action and to taking revenge for their brother’s death. Both
Gil and Jean have personal reasons for opposing violence against blacks, as Gil depends on his black teammate Cal to become an “All-American” football player and Jean needs his black customers for his butcher shop. In spite of their personal motives, however, Gil and Jean are courageous enough to oppose their strong-willed father. They represent a new generation of white Southerners who believe in the interdependence of blacks and whites, a development that offers hope of breaking the cycle of perpetual violence and racism. As Gil explains his opposition to his father’s will,

“Papa,” Gil said, rubbing his knuckles again. “Papa, I want to be an All-American at LSU. I have a good chance—Cal and me. The first time ever, black and white, in the Deep South. I can’t make it without Cal, Papa. I depend on him. Every time I take that ball, I depend on his block, or his faking somebody out of my way. I depend on him, Papa, every moment I’m on that field.”  

In the end, Gil is successful in preventing the patriarchal Fix from riding to Mathu’s house and starting a fight. However, he pays for it by being expelled from the family. Gil is reminiscent of an earlier, enlightened white character in Gaines’s novels, Tee Bob Samson in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, but unlike the latter, Gil is stronger and manages to openly confront his father and his family’s handed-down values. In his belief in racial cooperation as the prerequisite for progress, he thus acts as a role model, not only on the football field where he depends on his black fullback, but also in a larger social sense as harbinger of a more egalitarian South. When the patriarchal Fix, who still regards family honor as the highest value, threatens to expel Gil from the family circle, Gil, to his credit, clings to his conviction and prefers to play football rather than to subscribe to outdated notions of family revenge. Yet, indicative of Gaines’s optimism and belief in the possibility of change, the final courtroom scene
depicts the Boutans as reunited, as sitting next to each other, thereby implying a successful reconciliation between father and son.

Comparing the two gatherings, the African American gathering in front of Mathu’s house and the Cajun gathering in their family home, one could conclude that the father-son relationships progress in opposite ways. While the black father-son relationship improves as a consequence of the old men’s reclaiming their manhood and thus setting an example to the young, the white father-son relationship undergoes a contrary process. In the Boutans’ case, the son initiates progress by first separating himself from his father, which is the condition for coming together again. Whereas it is up to the older black generation to take a stand, the opposite is true in the Cajuns’ case. With the older generation too much mired in the past, it is up to the young to put an end to the old order and to forge a new tradition of cooperation and harmony, thus forcing the older generation to reevaluate its ways. Gil’s success as a collegiate football player allows him to become a role model and a father figure to his dead brother’s son, Tee Beau, and thus a symbol for a brighter future.

* A Gathering of Old Men constitutes Gaines’s successful fictional solution to the problems between the generations that were unearthed in *In My Father’s House*. The old men effectively take a stand and implement the lessons Phillip Martin has learned in the earlier novel. Assuming personal responsibility for one’s behavior and reclaiming one’s dignity are the primary steps for achieving integrity. Once integrity and dignity are reestablished, the respect of others, particularly the young, seems guaranteed. This respect provides the basis for cross-generational ties that are built on mutual appreciation and responsibility.
The novel’s successful bridging of generational ties is similar to what Hemingway tried to achieve in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Santiago, who in his age, character traits, and values would fit in perfectly with Gaines’s old men, is able to win Manolin’s respect and faith, which is illustrated in the latter’s rebellion against his real parents. Both writers thus seem to have arrived at a positive fictional resolution to the father-son dilemma that was haunting them.

However, whereas Gaines’s father-son reconciliation takes place in the context of the entire African American community, Hemingway’s father-son relationship remains isolated from the larger social fabric. In a quite telling difference between two novels that have so many things in common, there are altogether at least 39 different characters, according to one critic’s count, in front of Mathu’s house, whereas the fishing village in *The Old Man and the Sea* is represented by only a few isolated voices.48 There is, then, a degree of camaraderie in Gaines’s novel that is not found in Hemingway, not even in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the work that best expresses Hemingway’s concern with humanity. Gaines’s novel focuses on the group as a quasi composite protagonist, whereas Hemingway focuses on Santiago as an individual, fighting a battle of his own, by himself.

Therefore, it also becomes clear that Gaines moves beyond a mere focus on the nuclear family that is Hemingway’s concern, and stresses the importance of the communal family, which includes ancestral spirits. Gaines’s most polyphonic novel, *A Gathering of Old Men* celebrates multiple perspectives and orality, which is quite unlike Hemingway’s novels, which are written in the context of Euro-American modernism and present a fragmented view of human subjectivity and history. Gaines’s interest in the community and society as a whole and in the reintegration of the past into the present
constitute his most important differences from Hemingway, and the authors’ different
treatment of the father-son relationship illustrates, as seen, this key distinction.

1 Critics generally agree that Trudy Gilby in “Fathers and Sons” is the same girl as
Prudence (Prudie) Mitchell in “Ten Indians.” She is based upon a Native American girl
named Prudence Boulton, who worked in the Hemingway household, was rumored to
have had Hemingway’s baby, and eventually committed suicide. Margaret Tilton even
surmises that the title of the story “Ten Indians” refers to Prudie’s suicide even though
there is no evidence that Hemingway knew that Prudence Boulton had committed suicide
(88 n.1).

2 The biographical impulse behind the story is explained by Carlos Baker. Hemingway at
that time was driving through the South with his son Bumby to visit his second wife
Pauline in Piggott, Arkansas: “The fourth anniversary of his father’s suicide was less than
a month away. Then as now he had been traveling alone with Bumby. The germ of a
story on the theme of fathers and sons was already taking shape in his mind.” Driving
through the fall countryside reminded him of “both hunting and death” (Hemingway 235).
“Fathers and Sons” does not mention the name of Nick’s son, but a manuscript version
refers to him as “Schatz,” thus linking the story to “A Day’s Wait.”

3 Richard McCann first noticed the pun implied in Hemingway’s phrase “the country in
his mind,” which “reinforces the sense of the landscape as mental” (13). Although my
reading of “Fathers and Sons” shares many of McCann’s intriguing thoughts, I have
arrived at them independently and will pay tribute to McCann’s essay only at those
instances when I consciously borrow an idea from him.

4 Examples of how the destruction of nature informs Hemingway’s stories include the
burned over terrain near Seney, Michigan in “Big Two-Hearted River”; the abandoned
mill town and second-growth in Horton’s Bay in “The End of Something”; the clearcuts
in “The Last Good Country”; and the “open, hot, shadeless, weed-grown slashing” in
Fathers and Sons.” Beegel argues that Hemingway “understood the loss of primeval
forest as irrevocable, and comprehended second growth—the terrain Nick drives through
in this story as he revisits the past in his mind—not as renewal but as the aftermath of
permanent injury to the land’s generative or procreative capacity” (102).

5 Anthropologists confirm the importance of trees for the Ojibway. See Basil Johnston
32-33 and Sir James George Frazer 113, both also quoted by Beegel.

6 Interestingly, the humor in the discussions about sex recalls Gaines’s use of humor in
“A Long Day in November.” In both cases, the author-reader irony comes at the expense
of the naïve child and stands in stark contrast to the serious issues at hand: the father’s
repression of his son’s sexual curiosity in Hemingway’s story, and the negative effects of
parental strife on the child in Gaines’s story.
The scene in the hemlock forest also evokes, as Beegel remarks, John Rolfe’s marriage to Pocahontas: “The gendered imagery in this sentence [“You want Trudy again?”], with its virgin forest and willing Indian girl, is classically American, classically Edenic, and classically exploitative” (87). However, rather than seemingly propagating the exploitation and possession of Indian women by whites, Hemingway parodies this imperialist notion by showing Nick’s hypocrisy. Nick’s recollection of this childhood scene can thus be regarded as an instance of Bakhtinian double-voicing.

Peter Hays suggests that the smell of the father is “an objectification of his father’s cowardice that Nick is reacting to” (32).

We also need to keep in mind that there is a second passage in which Nick—at least vicariously—is aiming the gun at his father. One time when he is hunting with his father, “an eagle dropped through the whirling snow to strike a canvas-covered decoy rising, his wings beating, the talons caught in the canvas” (NAS 265). The parallels between eagle and father are not only restricted to their unnaturally good eyesight. Susan Beegel interprets the connection as follows: “[T]he father’s spirit animal—deceived, entangled, caught in Nick’s sights, subject to execution as a predator on the young and helpless—is at least vulnerable to destruction by the son” (91).

Cf. the following deleted passage from the manuscript, in which the narrator presents an extremely negative picture of his parents’ marriage: Whoever “in a marriage of that sort wins the first encounter is in command and, having lost, to continue to appeal to reason, to write letters at night, hysterically logical letters explaining your position, to have it out/again/before the children—then the inevitable making up, . . . everything that had been told the children cancelled, the home full of love, and mother carried you, darling, over her heart all those months and her heart beat in your heart. Oh yes and what about his / poor bloody / heart and where did it beat and who / beats it now and what a hollow sound it makes./” (qtd. in Smith, Readers Guide 308).

On a different level, however, and this is maybe a less permissible approach, one could argue that his mother is present in spite of her absence. If Nick wants to “get rid of” his mother and if writing is a vehicle to achieve this, then one must also remember that it was the mother who actively encouraged and supported Hemingway’s, or Nick’s, writing from the beginning. Viewed in this light, the mother may always be present, in this and in all the other stories.

There are several passages that hint at Nick’s incestuous desire for his sister. In “Fathers and Sons,” when Nick is walking to the Indian camp “to get rid of the [father’s] smell,” he admits that “[t]here was only one person in his family that he liked the smell of, one sister. All the others he avoided all contact with” (NAS 265-66). The incestuous overtones of this passage become clear when read in context with the sexually-charged scene about the father’s underwear that is preceding it. In addition, Nick’s more-than-affectionate relationship to his sister Littless in “The Last Good Country” also corroborates such a reading. Nick’s incestuous desires for his sister thus link him to the
references to Dr. Adams’s incestuous feelings both in the deleted passage discussed above and in the scene with his underwear.

13 Ann Edwards Boutelle takes “Fathers and Sons” to another level by equating Nick and his son with Hemingway and Bumby. She concludes her—at times melodramatic—reading with the following intriguing thoughts: “By killing his father, in fantasy and in reality, Hemingway became him—the ‘Papa’ who in turn is to be killed. He died when Bumby was almost thirty-nine, the age of Hemingway when his father died. And the climactic suicide has a compelling and strange logic about it, almost an inevitability. The becoming of the father, in death as in life. The payment of a father’s life for a father’s life. Atonement and re-enactment in one” (146). Earlier, Boutelle called “Fathers and Sons” “a public confession of Hemingway’s complicity in his father’s suicide” (141).

14 Anselmo and Clarence Hemingway seem to share a similar attitude toward hunting. Discussing Clarence Hemingway’s expert marksmanship, Kenneth Lynn emphasizes that “[v]irtually everything that Dr. Hemingway taught his children to kill he taught them to eat (35).” Both “Three Shots” and “Fathers and Sons” allude to Dr. Adams’s discipline and high standards in hunting. Hunting, therefore, was an activity undertaken with respect for its prey, and not for sheer fun.

15 Ernest Hemingway, For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940; New York: Scribner’s, 1968) 41. Page numbers in the text will refer to this edition and will be included parenthetically, preceded by the abbreviation WBT.

16 This farewell scene between father and son brings to mind another tear-jerking father-son departure. Robinson Crusoe remembers his father’s sermon not to leave home: “I observed the tears run down his face very plentifully, and especially when he spoke of my brother who was kill’d; and that when he spoke of my having leisure to repent, and none to assist me, he was so mov’d, that he broke off the discourse, and told me, his heart was so full, he could say no more to me” (RC 7). In both Robert’s and Robinson’s case, the father’s emotions do not stop the son from leaving. In fact, Robert feels all the more confirmed in his decision to leave, whereas Robinson merely postpones his departure for a few weeks.

17 If Pablo can be seen as a father figure onto whom Hemingway projected some of his own filial feelings, then Pilar also exhibits some traits of Hemingway’s mother. Pilar is domineering toward her husband and the band and displays both masculine and feminine traits. She also exhibits lesbian feelings for Maria, just as Grace Hemingway was reputed to have a lesbian attraction toward one of her former voice pupils (cf. Lynn 100-01). Unfried characterizes Pilar as "a paradox of ugliness and beauty, brutality and gentleness, and femininity and masculinity” (84).

18 El Sordo takes advantage of the tradition of militarily expedient suicides and lures his pursuer into a trap by pretending to have killed himself. Later, he fights until the end
against the fascist planes, thus rejecting suicide as an option. Robert Jordan’s decision at the end of the novel, therefore, parallels El Sordo’s selfless act of heroism.

19 Mueller’s thesis is that “before the Spanish Civil War, Hemingway had begun formulating his ideology about man’s responsibility to others, which asserted his unequivocal belief in basic inherent human rights, an ideology which may be termed his Humanitarian Individualism” (ii). In particular, Mueller argues that To Have and Have Not “signaled that Hemingway, whose writings until that time had glorified the individual, was finally ready to expand his vision to the wider community of mankind” (125). Yet, as Mueller continues, “Hemingway never abandoned his ideas about the individual” (126).

20 Both Ann Edwards Boutelle and Robert McCann comment on the sad irony of Hemingway’s own suicide. Boutelle describes Hemingway’s suicide as having “a compelling and strange logic about it, almost an inevitability. The becoming of the father, in death as in life. The payment of a father’s life for a father’s life. Atonement and re-enactment in one” (146). McCann wonders “if Hemingway’s suicide was a desperate attempt to embrace the father, or if it was an admission of what he shared with his father and the possible distance he failed to create” (18).

21 Ernest J. Gaines, The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman (1971; New York: Dial, 1972) 148. All further quotations are from this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text, preceded by the abbreviation AMJ.

22 For a comparison of the similarities in the description of Mathu’s and Santiago’s shacks, see A Gathering of Old Men 178 and The Old Man and the Sea 15-16.

23 Ernest Gaines has commented that the structural division of The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman into four books corresponds to the four men in Miss Jane’s life: her adopted son Ned, her husband Joe Pittman, the white plantation owner’s son Tee Bob Samson, and the Civil Rights leader Jimmy Aaron, another one of Miss Jane’s surrogate sons (cf. Lowe 303). In A Gathering of Old Men, the relationship between Mathu and his godson Charlie and Charlie’s attempt to win his godfather’s respect provide the background to Charlie’s killing and subsequent return to face the charges.

24 Manolin’s idolization of Santiago may only be rivaled by Joe’s veneration for his father in “My Old Man,” one of the few stories in which the son clearly loves and admires his father. However, the father’s moral ambiguity, his involvement in fixing horse races, is very different from Santiago’s concern with ethical behavior toward all things living. In addition, it is questionable how much Joe still loves his father at the end of the story.

25 Gerry Brenner points out that Santiago has to “wrest Manolin from two fathers, his legitimate one and the fisherman he had been ‘ordered’ to fish with” (185).

26 Hurley examines the following passage, spoken by Manolin: “‘The great Sisler’s father was never poor and he, the father, was playing in the Big Leagues when he was my age’”
Hurley convincingly demonstrates that the second “he” refers to Dick Sisler, not his father George. Dick was ten years old when George retired; therefore, Manolin cannot be older than ten (96-97).

Interestingly, Hemingway also provided contradictory information about Nick’s age in “The Last Good Country,” written in the years after the publication of The Old Man and the Sea. The confusion about the age of the young protagonists may be indicative of Hemingway’s wish to hold on to their youth, while thematically dealing with more mature issues.


Brenner also comments on the name “Manolin,” which literally means ‘little hand.’ Both Santiago’s hands and the marlin are repeatedly addressed as “brother” (178).

Sigmund Freud defines “reaction-formation” as the “development of a character trait that keeps in check and conceals another one, usually of the exactly opposite kind” (Moses and Monotheism 178).

Taking the novella to yet another level of interpretation, Brenner regards the marlin also as a symbol of the phallus in an erotic fantasy taking place in the currents of la mar: “Whereas the giant marlin is the father in the parricidal fantasy, in an incestuous one it is the phallus” (181).

Note the similarity between the “marlin” and the name “Manolin.”

Robert Weeks, who criticizes Hemingway for his deliberate “fakery” in The Old Man and the Sea, goes so far as to cite an ichthyologist to prove that it is impossible to discern whether the marlin is male or female until one performs internal dissection (189). Thus, according to Weeks, Hemingway consciously falsified the facts to have his male protagonist measure himself against a male fish, similar to the kudus, lions, bears, and bulls, all of which are male, in Hemingway’s other writings. Cf. Robert P. Weeks, “Fakery in The Old Man and the Sea,” College English 24.3 (December 1962): 188-92.


Robert W. Lewis likewise sees a return to “the theme of cultural primitivism in The Old Man and the Sea” (210).
That the father-son relationship continued to occupy Hemingway until his death becomes clear with the posthumous publications of *Islands in the Stream* and *The Garden of Eden*. Because of the decisive editorial changes that were made from the lengthy manuscripts, neither work can be discussed with certainty. For a thorough analysis of the father-son conflict in *Islands in the Stream*, see Gerry Brenner 188-206. Brenner discusses Thomas Hudson, the novel’s protagonist, and his three sons in terms of their relationship to Hemingway and his three sons, as well the novel’s connection to *The Old Man and the Sea*, which was originally planned to be the fourth book of *Islands in the Stream*. Because of its complexity—its many father figures (Thomas Hudson, Roger Davis, Eddy), sons (Tommy, David, Andrew), and doubles (the cat “Boise,” the three German sailors)—a discussion of the novel would exceed the scope of this study. Suffice it here to summarize that in *Islands in the Stream*, Hemingway reacts to his increasing fear of losing his sons, which, mixed with his own guilt of having left his father, leads to a complex interplay of filicidal, patricidal, homicidal, and suicidal impulses. For a brief discussion of the similarities and differences between the father-son theme in *The Garden of Eden* and the works discussed in this study, see Peter L. Hays, “Hemingway, Nick Adams, and David Bourne: Sons and Writers,” *The Arizona Quarterly* 44.2 (Summer 1988): 28-38.

Ernest Gaines, *In My Father’s House* (1978; New York: Vintage, 1992) 199. All subsequent references to *In My Father’s House* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text, preceded by the abbreviation *MFH*.

The title of the novel is, of course, a satirical allusion to the Biblical “There are many dwelling-places in my Father’s house” (John 14:2).

Nick’s rejection of all paternal influence and other authorities, including family, morality, and the law, is best portrayed in “The Last Good Country,” in which Nick runs away from home, defies morality with his ambiguous relationship with his sister Littless, and breaks the law by poaching.

If Robert X evokes the separatism of the Black Muslims, then Billy’s violent approach recalls the Black Panthers. Together, the two alienated sons form the counterpart to the Dr. King-like ideals embraced by St. Adrienne’s Civil Rights Movement and thus illustrate the generational differences concerning the question about which direction the fight for equality should take.

Karla Holloway criticizes that “Gaines’s women characters suffer an ephemeral quality that underscores their peripheral status” (190). In particular, she claims that in *In My Father’s House* the women’s “serviceability and posture in reference to the male characters” is revealed by the way Gaines “uses women characters to give the reader further insight into Martin’s psyche” (194 n.4). However, Holloway’s polarizing article overlooks several important factors. Even though Gaines’s women characters may sometimes be used peripherally, they are usually the stronger characters who send the males in the right direction. Rather than belittling their role, the strategic placement thus emphasizes the thematic importance of women. In addition, Holloway obviously ignores
The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman or the many strong female characters in Gaines’s other works, from Madame Bayonne in Catherine Carmier to Miss Emma in A Lesson Before Dying.


43 In his superhuman struggle against the tractors, Silas, of course, evokes another mythic ancestor—the railroad worker John Henry. Like Silas, John Henry challenged a machine, the steam drill, and won. Gaines uses this mythic ancestor in other novels as well. Thus, one can regard John Henry as the prototype for characters like Raoul Carmier in Catherine Carmier and Joe Pittman in The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman. Anissa Ward relates Silas to King Barlo from Jean Toomer’s story “Esther” (cf. 50).

44 Gaines himself has taken great strides in preserving the gravesite of his people in Cherie Quarters, Oscar, Louisiana. When he, his wife Dianne, and some friends started work on the cemetery, it was overgrown with vines, dogwood trees, and brush. Gaines states that his “folks have been buried there for at least the last five generations” and that he intends to be buried there too. Cf. Chris Frink, “Burial Ground a Reminder of Life in Cherie Quarters,” The Advocate [Baton Rouge] 27 Oct. 1999: 1A.

45 Besides Snookum, there are only two other narrators who appear more than once. The Irish-American Sully, Gil’s college friend, narrates two sections, allowing the reader access to the Boutan family and providing the necessary background information about Gil at college. Lou Dimes, the journalist from Baton Rouge, narrates four sections. While somewhat distanced and ironic, if not occasionally misguided and ignorant, the Lou Dimes segments also contribute a certain degree of objectivity to the novel that heightens the sense of extraordinariness that surrounds the events that are going on.

46 Tee Bob Samson, the plantation owner’s son, is, like Gil, an LSU student and caught between the generations. The impossibility of his love for Mary Agnes LeFabre, a black Creole teacher, illustrates the dichotomy between the old order’s static and repressive values and the new generation’s more tolerant and progressive ideas. A captive of the rigidity of his ancestors’ rules, Tee Bob commits suicide, surrounded by the father’s library and the pictures of his forefathers.

47 In an interesting side note, both Hemingway’s “Fathers and Sons” and Gaines’s A Gathering of Old Men are ambiguous in their titles. In Hemingway’s story, both Dr. Adams and Nick are fathers, and both Nick and his own son play the role of sons. Similarly, Gaines’s novel may be said to refer to two gatherings, the African American gathering in front of Mathu’s house and the Cajun gathering of old Boutans in their family residence.
Karen Carmean states that "A Gathering of Old Men is deliberately crowded with characters who push the sequence of action forward even as some characters reach back in time more than fifty years to recall acts justifying their presence at Mathu’s house. In fact, as many as thirty-nine characters come to Mathu’s house during the course of this October afternoon and evening, and most of them remain until the climactic action" (102-03).
The first two parts of this study have examined in detail the generational dissonances and movement toward reconciliation in the father-son relationship, as portrayed in selected works by Ernest Hemingway and Ernest Gaines. It was my attempt to demonstrate how the eventual, crucial differences that exist between the two writers in their treatment of this pervasive subject are indicative of their larger concerns and respective philosophies. Building on these findings, this final section will move beyond the literal father-son relationship to the metaphorical and literary father-son relationship that exists between Hemingway and Gaines. As such, I will illustrate Gaines’s embracing of and eventual distancing himself from his literary predecessor during the course of his career. In particular, I will argue that Gaines found in Hemingway one of his most important literary ancestors, a father-figure whom the son eventually had to repudiate, in Hemingwayesque fashion, to find his own individual voice and place in the African American literary tradition.

The connection between Hemingway and Gaines will be further illustrated by a discussion of their relationship toward another literary figure, a writer both claimed to have been an essential influence on them: Ivan Turgenev. Turgenev is a predecessor they both admired, emulated, and finally departed from in order to create their own artistic space. Focusing on the depiction of the generational conflict, this chapter will compare and contrast Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* with Hemingway’s “A Soldier’s Home” and *The Sun Also Rises* and Gaines’s *Catherine Carmier* and *A Lesson Before Dying* to outline the three writers’ shared vision and eventual distinctiveness, thereby delineating a classic example of literary influence transcending time and places.
Harold Bloom’s study of the “anxiety of influence” proves to be a useful theoretical model upon which to base this analysis of three writers from different generations and cultures, whose works, similar to Bloom’s model, share a distinctly masculine vision of identity. Bloom’s model presupposes that each poet begins his career with a melancholic awareness of being late in the literary tradition:

For every poet begins (however ‘unconsciously’) by rebelling more strongly against the consciousness of death’s necessity than all other men and women do. The young citizen of poetry, or ephebe, as Athens would have called him, is already the anti-natural or antithetical man, and from his start as a poet he quests for an impossible object, as his precursor quested before him. (10)

According to Bloom, “[w]eaker talents idealize,” whereas “figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves” (5). Such strong poets “misread one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves.” The stronger the new poet, or latecomer, is, the greater “the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursor” (5).

Bloom’s theory is all the more appropriate in this context as it is partly based on Freud’s concept of generational and oedipal conflicts. According to Bloom, writers engage in the mortal struggle between poetic fathers and sons, as the latecomer desperately tries to insist on priority by misreading his predecessor. As Bloom clarifies Freud’s influence on his theory, “Freud’s investigations of the mechanisms of defense and their ambivalent functionings provide the clearest analogues I have found for the revisionary ratios that govern intra-poetic relations” (8). Just as each son struggles to create an identity and define himself against the overpowering and threatening voice of the father, so each writer attempts to find his voice and create a space of his own in the artistic tradition by telling the literary predecessor’s story anew.
The fiercely combative tone of Bloom’s model seems especially fitting given the remarks both Gaines and Hemingway have made when asked about their literary influences. Gaines, for instance, has repeatedly denied any influence by African American writers.¹ It is certainly true that no one in the academy was teaching African American literature when Gaines was going to college and graduate school in California. Gaines’s creative writing teachers were all white and put forward white models. However, Gaines later did study some African American writers (Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Alice Walker, James Alan McPherson, to name a few) and familiarized himself with the slave narrative tradition, whose influence can be seen in The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman. Thus, while Gaines may not have been influenced by any African American writer during his formative years as a writer, his later repudiation of black writers as models, particularly Ellison, qualifies him as an apt candidate for Bloom’s anxiety-of-influence theory.²

In addition, the very denial of any influence by African American writers makes Gaines, ex negativo, part of the tradition of male African American writers.³ As Keith Byerman aptly remarks,

Each generation of African-American writers seems to need to create a space for itself by claiming kin to no black predecessor or by citing the influence of European and white American artists, such as Joyce, Hemingway, or Turgenev. By defining their background in such a way, Gaines and [James Alan] McPherson, as well as others, can use a variety of techniques to render African-American experience without being seen as limited to a particular racial tradition. (41)

Following the same line of thought, Herman Beavers argues that the “act of negating the influence of earlier African American writers, or de-emphasizing the importance of race to literary enterprise altogether, likewise functions as affirmation. These writers intimate
their connection to tradition as innovators as they dissociate themselves from its more confining aspects” (40). Although it does not refer to Bloom’s model specifically, Beavers’s study *Wrestling Angels into Song* performs a Bloom-like study of influence, which firmly positions Ernest Gaines and James Alan McPherson within African American literary tradition by illustrating their indebtedness to Ralph Ellison in their common attempt to explore the complexities of American identity and citizenship. In particular, Beavers argues that “there are numerous moments in the fiction of [Gaines and McPherson] where Ellison’s work is the call to which they respond” (26). Given Beavers’s convincing study of Gaines’s kinship with Ralph Ellison and the axiom that no writer creates in a vacuum but always defines himself or herself against literary tradition, one could therefore argue that Gaines’s insistence on not having been shaped by any African American authors can be seen as illustrating the strength and vitality of African American literary tradition rather than weakening it.

Gaines’s rather positive comments about and open embrace of non-African American writers, such as Hemingway and Turgenev, are therefore less an indication of his standing outside African American literary tradition and more a necessary maneuver in the formative process of his literary career. His admiration of white European and American authors goes hand in hand with his distancing himself from African American writers, which are two simultaneous steps in Bloom’s theory of revisionary ratios that a writer has to undergo to create his own narrative space, that is, before he can be placed firmly within any tradition.

Similar to the situation with Gaines, Hemingway’s relationship to literary tradition also serves as a good illustration of Bloom’s model of influence. Hemingway’s
own ideas about writing and tradition bear remarkable parallels to Bloom’s anxiety-of-influence theory. As Hemingway explains the relationship between the individual artist and tradition in *Death in the Afternoon*,

> The individual, the great artist when he comes, uses everything that has been discovered or known about his art up to that point, being able to accept or reject in a time so short it seems that the knowledge was born with him, rather than that he takes instantly what it takes the ordinary man a lifetime to know, and then the great artist goes beyond what has been done or known and makes something of his own. (100)

Reminiscent of the combative tone of Bloom’s argument, Hemingway’s comments have frequently been fiercely antagonistic when discussing his literary forebears. In fact, Hemingway’s remarks about other writers he knew and admired recall Bloom’s explanations of a strong poet’s denial of his predecessors. Thus, in a letter to William Faulkner, Hemingway refers to history as an extended boxing match in his attempt to belittle his indebtedness to Dostoyevsky: “Dos I always liked and respected and thought was a 2nd rate writer on acct. no ear. 2nd rate boxer has no left hand, same as ear to writer, and so gets his brains knocked out and this happened to Dos with every book” (Baker, *Selected Letters* 623). More drastically, and very much in line with Bloom’s antagonistic mode, Hemingway celebrates his victory over two other predecessors in a letter to Charles Scribner: “I started out trying to beat dead writers that I knew how good they were. (Excuse vernacular) I tried for Mr. Turgenieff first and it wasn’t too hard. Tried for Mr. Maupassant (won’t concede him the de) and it took four of the best stories to beat him” (Baker 673).

In his study of Turgenev’s influence on Hemingway, Myler Wilkinson argues that reading Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* while writing *The Sun Also Rises* forced Hemingway into an awareness of his “lateness”: “Hemingway was confronted with a
novel which prefigured many of the thematic concerns and stylistic devices which he wanted to explore in *The Sun Also Rises*. In order to clear space for his own imaginative vision, the projected sensibility in *Fathers and Sons*—what it said both about life and art—had to be superseded” (24). With *The Sun Also Rises* almost completed, Hemingway felt the need to disparage his predecessor’s achievement. The writer’s desperate struggle for priority is therefore the reason for the outright repudiation of an admired source and allows us to read between the lines of Hemingway’s negative comments, made in a letter to Fitzgerald: “Have read Fathers and Sons by Turgenieff and the 1st Vol. of *Buddenbrooks* by Thomas Mann. Fathers and Ch-en isn’t his best stuff by a long way. Some swell stuff in it but it can never be as exciting again as when it was written and that’s a hell of a criticism for a book” (Baker 176).

In spite of these comments, it is clear that Turgenev was one of Hemingway’s most admired writers. Noel Fitch has studied the library cards of Sylvia Beach’s bookstore in Paris and compiled a list of books Hemingway borrowed or bought from her store. This list “reveals a distinct preference for Russian literature, particularly for the fiction of Ivan Turgenev, whose works account for a fifth of the books Hemingway borrowed” (Fitch 157). In particular, Fitch proves that *A Sportsman’s Sketches* was not only the first book Hemingway borrowed from the store, but that he checked it out four times within a span of eight years (165). To explain this preference for Turgenev, Fitch argues that Hemingway admired Turgenev’s “realistic portrayal of the peasants and the figure of the observant hunter” as well as Turgenev’s “creation of country sketches and his power to confer on the reader a sense of participation” (166).
Hemingway himself has been full of praise for Turgenev’s collection of sketches. In a letter to Archibald MacLeish, written from his winter retreat in Schruns, Austria, he clarified his appreciation:

I’ve been reading all the time down here. Turgeneff to me is the greatest writer there ever was. Didn’t write the greatest books, but was the greatest writer. That’s only for me of course. Did you ever read a short story of his called The Rattle of Wheels? It’s in the 2nd vol. of A Sportsman’s Sketches. War and Peace is the best book I know but imagine what a book it would have been if Turgeneff had written it. Chekhov wrote about 6 good stories. But he was an amateur writer. Tolstoi was a prophet. Maupassant was a professional writer, Balzac was a professional writer, Turgeneff was an artist. (Baker 176)

The significance of A Sportsman’s Sketches for Hemingway and his literary creation is also suggested by the frequent references to the sketches in several of his works. Thus, in A Moveable Feast, Hemingway recalls immersing himself in Turgenev’s Russia while waiting for Fitzgerald: “There was no word from Scott at the hotel and I went to bed in the unaccustomed luxury of the hotel and read a copy of the first volume of A Sportsman’s Sketches by Turgenev that I had borrowed from Sylvia Beach’s library. I . . . was happy being with Turgenev in Russia until I was asleep while still reading” (159). And in The Sun Also Rises, Jake likewise ends a night out drinking by returning to his hotel room to read a book by Turgeneff. Probably I read the same two pages over several times. It was one of the stories in “A Sportsman’s Sketches.” I had read it before, but it seemed quite new. The country became very clear and the feeling of pressure in my head began to loosen. I was very drunk and I did not want to shut my eyes because the room would go round and round. If I kept on reading that feeling would pass. Later, Jake hints at the significance the Russian writer has for him. More than a mere escape from the painful reality of his impossible love for Brett Ashley, reading about the country allows Jake to vicariously experience living there, for, as he says, “All I wanted
to know was how to live” ($AR$ 152): “I turned on the light again and read. I read the
Turgenieff. I knew that now, reading it in the oversensitized state of my mind after much
too much brandy, I would remember it somewhere, and afterward it would seem as
though it had really happened to me. I would always have it. That was another good thing
you paid for and then had” ($AR$ 153). This ability to capture landscape and nature in
such a way as to “transplant” the reader to this world is one of the main reasons
Hemingway found in Turgenev such an admirable writer.9

Similarly, the transcription of rural life and scenery, as well as the mutual interest
in hunting, initially attracted Gaines to Turgenev. In an interview, Gaines acknowledges
the “sense of the soil, of being close to the earth, [and] to the people” that he enjoyed in
Russian literature:

I think the thing I recognize in Russian writers, especially when they’re
writing about the peasant, is some of the same sort of thing that I’ve
experienced in the southern part of the United States. I’ve gotten this from
Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Turgenev much more than I’ve gotten it out of the
white American writers who deal with the same sort of thing. When the
white writers are writing about the blacks of the fields, they seem to make
them caricatures rather than real people, but the Russian writers made their
peasants real. I felt that they did. I suppose this is why I’ve studied them
and loved them so much. (Fitzgerald and Marchant 6-7)

Gaines’s comment about the portrayal of the peasants in Russian writing is crucial, as it
explains why $A$ Sportsman’s Sketches held such a fascination for him. While he shares
with Hemingway an admiration for Turgenev’s depiction of landscape, Gaines’s interest
in the peasants and in Turgenev’s implied criticism of serfdom marks a major difference
to Hemingway’s attraction to Turgenev.10

However, both writers have in common that they found in Turgenev a kindred
spirit who, in his treatment of generational conflicts, gave voice to their own feelings of
being lost and alienated. As the following discussion will clarify, Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* is a key text both Hemingway and Gaines used as a point of departure to tell their own stories of generational dissonances.

**Chapter Six**  
**Generational Conflicts in Turgenev, Hemingway, and Gaines**

When Turgenev published his generational novel *Fathers and Sons* in 1862, he was addressing the conflicts in Russia that emerged as a consequence of Russia’s transition from the ruthless disciplinarian Nicholas I (1825-55) to the more liberal and tolerant Alexander II (1855-81). After Russian serfdom was abolished on March 3, 1861, far-reaching social and economic reforms took place that turned Russia from a feudal country into a modern state, after the example set by other progressive European countries. As a result of the country’s reorientation, a split occurred among the Russian intelligentsia. On the one hand, there were the Slavophiles, who, as the Russian historian E. Foxcroft explains,

> held that Russia’s strength lay in her indigenous cultural roots and in her adherence to tradition. They defended her autocratic form of government, Orthodox religion and the patriarchal organization of peasant society. They attacked Western Europe for its rationalism, materialism, and for its form of parliamentary democracy which they criticized as dominated by capitalist interests. They believed that the Russian Orthodox Church and Russia’s culture were infused with true spirituality, rather than the materialism, which in their view, dominated all phases of life in the West. (12)

On the other hand, there were the Westerners, who proposed that Russia was an integral part of European civilization, though her cultural process had been delayed by the Tartar yoke. Her present task was to catch up with the West. She must not only assimilate European technological advances, but also the fruits of Western culture and the progressive forms of government and social organization developed by Western political thought. (Foxcroft 12)
In addition, many of the reforms initiated by the Tsar, especially the emancipation of the Russian serfs, led to a split among the population between reactionaries and radicals. The former thought that freedom and allotment of land to the peasants went too far, whereas the latter complained that the reforms were not going far enough.

This division between reactionaries and radicals was accompanied by a larger generational conflict, the conflict between the so-called “superfluous men” and the “nihilists,” which has become a major subject in Russian literature. Previously, in the 1830s and 1840s, many Russian students espoused liberal ideas that they encountered while studying in France and Germany. Upon their return, however, they were “[u]nable to put their idealist theories to practice at home [and] many of them became what is known in Russian literature as ‘superfluous men’” (12). As Foxcroft continues to explain, “This term denotes a character who is sensitive to social and ethical problems, but who fails to act, partly out of inherent weakness, partly because of political and social restraints on his freedom of action.”

After Alexander II’s ascension to the throne, however, actions finally could and did take place, and Russia was progressing. However, many of the radicals were not patient enough for reforms to take effect and wanted immediate change instead:

The Tsar and some of his progressive advisers saw the changes as a slow process leading eventually to a more constitutional form of government, but many hot-heads were not prepared to wait and wanted to change everything at once. They saw themselves as the apostles of a new destructive order: a clean sweep had to be made of all the values their fathers had lived by. This included courtesy, considerateness, respectability, family ties, appreciation of beauty and belief in God. Because they negated everything respected in the past, they were nicknamed nihilists. (Foxcroft 12)
Fathers and Sons reflects this generational split between the superfluous men and the nihilists in its juxtaposition of the young nihilist Evgeny Vasilev Bazarov, on the one hand, and the superfluous men Nikolai Petrovich Kirsanov and his brother Pavel Petrovich Kirsanov, on the other hand, with Nikolai’s son Arkady shifting allegiances from Bazarov to his father during the course of the novel. Bazarov is a strong representative of the nihilist attitude; he rejects the romantic ideals and values of the previous generation, as well as its cultural institutions and art. As Bazarov himself explains, “‘Aristocratism, liberalism, progress, principles, . . . just think, how many foreign . . . and useless words! A Russian has no need of them whatsoever.’”¹² As a materialist, he believes in nothing but the laws of nature and natural science. Nature to him, however, is “‘not a temple, but a workshop where man’s the laborer’” (FS 33). Jeering at societal conventions, such as marriages and respect for the older generation, Bazarov looks cynically and disparagingly at the old order. However, even though he anticipates social change, he has no ideals or program to offer. He is, as Irving Howe, describes him, “a revolutionary personality, but without revolutionary ideas or commitments. He is all potentiality and no possibility” (242).

Bazarov is opposed by his friend’s father and uncle, who are both well-meaning but largely ineffective idealists. Nikolai Kirsanov wishes to be seen as a progressive landowner, who treats his serfs well, but he is mostly distinguished by his passivity and discomfort with the younger generation. Bazarov mocks Nikolai’s “antiquity” and ridicules his romanticism, which is illustrated by his reading Pushkin, whom Bazarov calls “rubbish” (FS 35). Instead, Bazarov proposes Nikolai read Ludwig Büchner’s Stoff und Kraft, which offers a materialist interpretation of the universe.
Bazarov’s nihilism has infected his friend Arkady, whose feelings are divided between a rejection of his father’s morally “antiquated” ideas and his genuine love for him. Thus, upon his return from the university, Arkady reacts with resentment toward his father’s sentimentality and repeated apologies about his proposed marriage to the peasant Fenechka: “‘What’s there to apologize for?’ he thought; a feeling of indulgent tenderness toward his gentle father, combined with a sensation of secret superiority, filled his soul. ‘Stop it, please,’ he repeated, involuntarily enjoying an awareness of his own maturity and freedom” (FS 9). Nikolai senses the growing estrangement from his son after he overhears a conversation between Bazarov and Arkady: “‘[O]ne thing hurts: this was precisely when I’d hope to become closer to Arkady. Now it turns out I’ve been left behind while he’s moved ahead, and we can’t understand each other’” (FS 35).13

Nikolai’s brother Pavel, an eccentric aristocrat, has never recovered from the death of Princess R., his only love. Since her death, his life has been full of suffering and increasingly empty. Pavel personifies the “superfluous man’s” lack of practical value, as he lives a life of jaded boredom, obsessively preoccupied with a strict adherence to principles and elegance in clothing.

The generational distance between Pavel and Bazarov is indicated from the beginning of the novel when Bazarov and Pavel meet for the first time: “Nikolai Petrovich introduced [Pavel] to Bazarov: Pavel Petrovich bowed his elegant figure slightly and smiled slightly, but didn’t extend his hand and even put it back into his pocket” (FS 12). Bazarov tells Arkady that he thinks Pavel is an “eccentric” and mocks his “dandyism” (FS 13), whereas Pavel calls Bazarov a “hairy creature” and objects to his “free-and-easy manner” (FS 20).
Their repeated, heated exchanges foreshadow the later violent conflict and exemplify the differences in attitude between the two generations. For example, after Bazarov explains his nihilistic stance and rejection of all authorities, Pavel asks him “on what basis” he would act:

“We act on the basis of what we recognize as useful,” Bazarov replied. “Nowadays the most useful thing of all is rejection—we reject.” “Everything?” “Everything.” “What? Not only art and poetry . . . but even . . . it’s too awful to say . . .” “Everything,” Bazarov repeated with indescribable composure. (FS 38)

When Nikolai and Pavel object that one cannot only destroy but “one must also build,” Bazarov simply responds:

“That’s not for us to do . . . First, the ground must be cleared.”

[. . .]
He was suddenly annoyed with himself for having been so expansive with this gentleman [Pavel].

“And merely curse everything?”

“And curse everything.”

“And this is called nihilism?”

“And this is called nihilism,” Bazarov repeated again, this time with particular rudeness. (FS 38-40)

Bazarov’s words and composure must have sounded familiar when Gaines read *Fathers and Sons* while struggling with his own first novel, *Catherine Carmier*. Gaines considered Bazarov’s position in Russia comparable to the situation he found himself in when he visited his native Louisiana from California, where he had enjoyed an education and been exposed to a multicultural and more egalitarian milieu. Although he denies he was a nihilist then himself, Gaines admits to having flirted with similar ideas: “I could almost see myself in Bazarov’s position, you know? When you go back, what? Not that I’d become a nihilist, but I could understand the nihilistic attitude after someone had been away awhile” (Laney 60).
Even before Gaines created his own nihilistic protagonist in *Catherine Carmier’s* Jackson Bradley, Bazarov’s nihilistic attitude found an earlier, direct reflection in one of Gaines’s short stories. In “The Sky Is Gray,” the radical student’s excessive logic and strict questioning recall Bazarov’s rejection of traditions and conventions. As the discussion of the story in chapter two has shown, the student questions the meaning of words themselves, which “‘mean nothing. Action is the only thing. Doing. That’s the only thing’” (*BL* 101). Like Bazarov, the student rejects all inherited beliefs. And like his literary predecessor, he acknowledges the importance of actions without becoming himself actively involved. A true nihilist with no values to sustain him, he admits that he is lost: “‘I haven’t anything. For me, the wind is pink, the grass is black’” (*BL* 102).

In the young student’s attitude, Gaines demonstrates the influence Bazarov had on his own writing. He explores the same attitude of rejecting inherited beliefs without being able to propose an alternative in more detail in the character of Jackson Bradley in *Catherine Carmier*. Importantly, Jackson suffers from the fact that his family was forced to leave home in search of jobs. With the whereabouts of his father unknown, Jackson lived with his mother and step-father in a slum in California, disadvantaged by the poorly paid jobs his uneducated stepfather must accept. The community at home sets high expectations for Jackson, as he is the first one of them to receive a better education. He is regarded as “the one” who is supposed to better the situation at home upon his return.¹⁴

However, Jackson quickly becomes disillusioned when he comes back to the Louisiana plantation where he grew up. While he has enjoyed more freedom in the West, he has come to realize that the *de facto* segregation there is only slightly less destructive than the *de jure* segregation in the South: “[H]e had found out that [the West] had its
faults as well as the South. Only the faults there did not strike you as directly and as quickly, so by the time you discovered them, you were so much against the other place that it was impossible ever to return to it."15

Back at home he feels imprisoned by the Jim Crow laws as well as by the passive attitude and silent acquiescence to the racist status quo that are manifested by Aunt Charlotte, his friend Brother, and the rest of the community. He feels physically displaced and caught in a spiritual vacuum, as a result of his lack of belief in definite values. His restlessness is reflected in the way he perceives his surroundings: “Everything—his aunt, the house, the trees, the fence—seemed strange, and yet very familiar” (CC 26). To his former teacher, Madame Bayonne, he confides: “‘I’m like a leaf, Madame Bayonne, that’s broken away from the tree. Drifting’” (CC 79). Furthermore, the way he observes nature renders the isolation he feels when his love for Catherine Carmier remains unrequited: “He looked at the old cypress tree down the riverbank. Gray-black Spanish moss hung from every limb like long, ugly curtains. Jackson felt as though these curtains hung over his heart” (CC 173).

Much of his problem stems from the fact that, like Bazarov, he negates the old order but is not involved in trying to effect change. Just as the older generation in Fathers and Sons not only resents Bazarov but is also afraid of him because of his absolute difference from them, the Cajuns on the Louisiana plantation are wary that Jackson might be one of “[t]hem demonstrate people” (CC 7). Contrary to their fears, however, Jackson has no interest in the civil rights movement. Although he is able to discern how the racist and segregated status quo confines him, he is too lethargic and too much occupied with
himself to be able to work for the greater good. Ironically sent off to become a teacher, he returns disillusioned, without any ideas or creative energy.

The generational differences in the novel are revealed most clearly by the conflicts between Jackson and his great-aunt Charlotte. Aunt Charlotte, a firm believer in God, has been shocked by Jackson’s indulgence in drinking and playing cards. When he informs her that he doesn’t belong to the church anymore, a world collapses for her. She pleads with him:

“I wanted you to study. I wanted you to get a good learning, the kind o’ learning you couldn’t get here. But I didn’t want you to forget God, Jackson. I didn’t send you up there to do that.”
“I haven’t forgotten God. But Christ, the church, I don’t believe in that bourgeois farce—.” (CC 100)

As in “The Sky Is Gray,” the cruel sincerity and directness of the non-believer is met with violence by the believer. Regretting striking him, however, Aunt Charlotte asks Jackson to “[k]neel down” with her and pray (CC 100). Three times she asks, and three times Jackson refuses, before he falls silent to all her further entreaties and questions.

This scene highlighting the religious dissonances between the generations is a common denominator in the works of Gaines, Turgenev, and Hemingway, for the conflict between Jackson and Aunt Charlotte, as well as the one between the young student and the preacher in “The Sky Is Gray,” finds its literary precedent in two passages Gaines was familiar with. Jackson’s attitude recalls Bazarov’s negative response to his father’s request to agree to receiving religious sacraments on his deathbed. Even though Bazarov agrees in principle to his father’s wish to “‘provide [him] some consolation,’” he insists on waiting until the last moment:
“No, I want to wait a bit,” Bazarov said, interrupting him. “I agree that the crisis has come. And if we’re wrong, so what? They administer the sacrament to people who’ve lost consciousness, don’t they?”
“Evgeny, for heaven’s sake . . .”
“I’ll wait. Now I want to sleep. Don’t bother me.” (FS 150)

Later, when Father Aleksei performs the religious rites over Bazarov’s unconscious body,
“just as the holy oil touched his breast, one of his eyes opened and, at the sight of the priest in his vestments, the smoking censer, the candle in front of the icon, something resembling a shudder of horror seemed to pass momentarily across his deathly countenance” (FS 153).

The second passage Gaines revises is found in Hemingway’s famous story “Soldier’s Home,” which in its oppressive mood is close to Catherine Carmier. When Harold Krebs returns shell-shocked from World War I to the stifling atmosphere of his Oklahoma hometown, he spends his days drifting aimlessly. Similar to the way Aunt Charlotte puts pressure on Jackson, Harold’s mother also wants her son to assume responsibility for his life and find a job:

“God has some work for every one to do,” his mother said. “There can be no idle hands in His Kingdom.”
“I’m not in His Kingdom,” Krebs said.
“We’re all of us in His Kingdom.”
Krebs felt embarrassed and resentful as always.16

The mother continues to put pressure on Harold, forcing him into a cruel defensive reaction, in which he shocks her the way Jackson Bradley and Bazarov upset their great-aunt and father respectively:

“Don’t you love your mother, dear boy?”
“No,” Krebs said.
His mother looked at him across the table. Her eyes were shiny. She started crying.
“I don’t love anybody,” Krebs said. (IOT 75-76)
The mother’s response, like Aunt Charlotte’s, is to resort to prayer:

“Now you pray, Harold,” she said.
“I can’t,” Krebs said.
“Try, Harold.”
“I can’t.”
“Do you want me to pray for you?”
“Yes.” (*IOT* 76)

Afterwards, Harold admits to having “felt sorry for his mother” and concedes that his consent to her praying for him was a “lie,” similar to Bazarov’s attempt to console his father (*IOT* 77). Like Jackson, Harold understands that he must leave this stifling atmosphere.

These scenes, in which the son refuses to commit to the religious values of the father, mother, or great-aunt, exemplify the generational dissonances the three authors explore. In each of the works, the male protagonist is alienated from the older generation and struggles to create a space for himself in his attempts to find a meaningful existence. Religion, which symbolically represents the older generation’s set of values, is perceived as oppressive and constraining. Harold Krebs foreshadows Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*; both are existentialists, members of Hemingway’s own “lost generation.” Krebs’s decision to leave his hometown anticipates Jake’s pattern of endless wandering. Different from Bazarov, the Hemingway protagonists are searchers, true existentialists, who roam the world in their quest for a replacement of the values that have been lost as a consequence of their rejection of the old order.

Gaines’s Jackson Bradley is Evgeny Bazarov’s and Jake Barnes’s black cousin, as the similarity of their names also suggests. Gaines further revises both Turgenev’s and Hemingway’s protagonists by allowing his character neither the privilege to die nor the option to wander. Jackson has to live through the confinement to one place. As illustrated
by his silence to Aunt Charlotte’s entreaties, he must try to reclaim his voice so that he can be integrated in the community.

The characters’ struggle for space is paralleled by the writers themselves, as both Gaines and Hemingway perform different acts of misreading on Turgenev’s text. Gaines explores Bazarov’s nihilism first in the student in “The Sky Is Gray” and then complicates it further in Catherine Carmier’s Jackson Bradley, whereas Hemingway develops Harold Krebs’s stance to a greater extent in Jake Barnes’s attitude in The Sun Also Rises. As the scenes discussed above illustrate, however, both Hemingway and Gaines did more than merely imitate Turgenev’s ideas. They performed acts of “misprision” on their literary predecessor’s text to rewrite his story and thereby create their own narrative space.

The first of his six “revisionary ratios” Harold Bloom calls “clinamen,” which is “poetic misreading or misprision”: “A poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor’s poem as to execute a clinamen in relation to it. This appears as a corrective movement in his own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves” (14). Clinamen is the principal corrective maneuver a writer performs, “an instance of creative revisionism” (Bloom 42). In order to perform such misprision, the latecomer needs to feel or imagine that he agrees with much in the precursor’s story, but that the latter did not follow through with his ideas. As we will see, both Hemingway and Gaines shared many of Turgenev’s concerns, but they eventually “swerved” from him to create their own voice.
Chapter Seven
Evgeny Bazarov and Jake Barnes: Existentialists or Romantics?—Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons and Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises

In many ways Bazarov and Jake Barnes can be seen as literary cousins, as they are both part of a wounded generation. If Bazarov is a 19th century “romantic hero-cum-nihilist,” Jake is the post-World War I alienated man: “Jake Barnes stands on the other side of a revolution and a World War which the Bazarovs of the world helped to create. [. . .] The engaged nihilist of Turgenev’s fiction gives way to the wounded artist of personal survival in Hemingway” (Wilkinson 49).17 If Bazarov is in opposition to the romantic generations before him, Jake Barnes represents the “lost generation” after World War I. Both Bazarov and Jake Barnes are disillusioned rebels who search for self-definition, faced with the emptiness of their own respective culture. In both cases, the protagonist’s alienation from and opposition to society is not dramatized in a positive verbalization of their political beliefs or ideology, but through their social relations, which illustrate, ex negativo, the values the protagonists reject.

Maintaining that “a decent chemist is twenty times more useful than any poet,” Bazarov belittles the older generation’s romantic dreams, especially Pavel’s eccentricities: “Yes, and am I supposed to pander to them, these provincial aristocrats? Why, it’s all vanity, society habits, foppishness. Well, he should’ve carried on his career in Petersburg, . . . But, to hell with him! I’ve found a rather rare example of a water bug. Dytiscus marginatus, do you know it?” (FS 20-21). Furthermore, Bazarov’s resoluteness and fierce individualism are betrayed when he states, “I don’t share anyone’s opinion. I have my own” (FS 53).
However, as the plot development demonstrates, Bazarov’s rejection of art and his retreat into empiricism and materialism are just thin disguises for his inherent romanticism. In fact, the novel affirms the primacy of the very principles he denies: life’s unpredictability and the importance of the heart. In the end, it is fate that exposes Bazarov’s true character, both in the disguise of a beautiful woman he falls in love with and in form of the lethal disease he contracts.

Early in the novel, Bazarov still repudiates the notion of love as just another form of romanticism, which he calls “nonsense” compared to natural science: “‘And what about those mysterious relations between a man and a woman? We physiologists understand all that. You just study the anatomy of the eye: where does that enigmatic gaze come from that you talk about? It’s all romanticism, nonsense, rubbish, artifice. Let’s go have a look at that beetle’” (FS 26). However, when he meets Anna Sergeevna Odintsova, he immediately feels attracted to her even though he represses his feelings with his typical cynicism. Arkady, who is likewise enthralled by Odintsova, is able to discern Bazarov’s changing behavior:

Contrary to his normal behavior, he spoke a great deal and made an obvious effort to interest his interlocutor, which also surprised Arkady. . . . Arkady continued to be surprised all that day. He expected Bazarov would talk to an intelligent woman like Odintsova about his convictions and views: she’d declared her desire to meet a man “bold enough not to believe in anything.” But instead, Bazarov talked about medicine, homeopathy, and botany. (FS 60)

His fascination with materialism and science proves less powerful than the “newness” of his feelings that Odintsova inspires. At this point, however, he still denies his romantic side: “Bazarov was a great lover of women and feminine beauty, but love in the ideal sense, or, as he expressed it, in the romantic sense, he called rubbish or
unforgivable stupidity” (*FS* 71). Bazarov thus finds himself in a position in which he is actually experiencing what he denies to exist: “In conversations with Anna Sergeevna he expressed even more strongly than before his careless contempt of everything romantic; but when left alone he acknowledged with indignation the romantic in himself” (*FS* 71).

Ultimately, he confesses with chagrin his feelings to Odintsova: “‘Then you should know that I love you, stupidly, madly . . . Now see what you’ve extracted’” (*FS* 80). The “trembling” and “passion” that accompany this moment of revelation reflect his inner struggle, the conflict between acknowledging romantic feelings and thereby admitting the wrongness of his previous belief, on the one hand, and denying what he knows to be true for the sake of being consistent with his views, on the other hand: “He was breathing hard; his whole body was trembling visibly. But it was not the trembling of youthful timidity or the sweet fretting over a first declaration of love that overcame him: it was passion struggling within him—powerful and painful—passion that resembled malice and was perhaps even related to it” (*FS* 80).

Yet, Odintsova, who, to an even greater extent than Bazarov, is ruled by intellect and self-control, maintains her distance and forces Bazarov into a realization of the impossibility of their love. Bazarov then seeks solace in his Hemingwayesque “men-without-women” theory and labels as “nonsense” once again the word romanticism. As he tells Arkady, “‘You won’t believe me now, but let me say this: you and I fell into the society of women and found it very pleasant; forsaking society of that sort is just like splashing yourself with cold water on a hot day. Men have no time to waste on such trifles. A man must be fierce, says a splendid Spanish proverb’” (*FS* 85).
That the repression of his feelings is partly motivated by fear of being hurt becomes obvious when he informs his friend of his pride in not having been “destroyed” yet, and when he vows that “no woman’s going to destroy me” (FS 98). Having made up his mind once more, he can belittle as “sugary” Arkady’s love for Katya, Odintsova’s younger sister.

When Bazarov infects himself with typhus while performing an autopsy, ironically contracting death while working in his chosen profession as a doctor, it seems as if he is almost unconsciously wishing for death to release him from his emotional agony. While he remains stoic in the face of death, he wishes to see Odintsova one more time to tell her his true feelings: “I did love you! It didn’t mean anything then and it means even less now. Love’s just a form, and my own form’s going to pieces already. I’d rather say how lovely you are! And now you stand here looking so beautiful . . .” (FS 152). In spite of himself, then, Bazarov admits his genuine side by expressing his love at this final moment of truth.

Bazarov’s love for Odintsova, as well as his brief romantic interlude with Fenechka, Nikolai’s bride-to-be, exposes Bazarov as the idealist that he really is. He becomes aware that his resort to stoicism and the study of natural science are his only defenses against his emotions. As an unwavering nihilist, he cannot allow himself feelings that he denies exist, which leads to his inner struggle between emotions and principles. Only on his deathbed can he admit that theorists like himself are not “needed by Russia”; instead he affirms the value of his simple but good-hearted parents (FS 152).

The fact that Bazarov eventually has to concede the reality of love indicates Turgenev’s own repudiation of the harsh nihilistic stance. The romantic sub-plot of the
novel is, of course, most vividly emphasized by the novel’s concluding epilogue. Whereas Bazarov, the nihilist, dies the way a romantic hero dies, out of unrequited love, Arkady and his father celebrate a double wedding. Ironically, Bazarov, who initially infects Arkady with his nihilist ideas, gets infected by a lethal disease himself, which ultimately frees Arkady of his influence. In fact, “affairs have begun to improve” at Marino, Kirsanov’s estate, and everybody seems to be doing rather well after Bazarov’s death (FS 155). As the narrator summarizes the fate of the characters six months after Bazarov’s death: “Our friends had changed of late; they all seemed to have grown stronger and better looking” (FS 154). In the happy ending, then, Turgenev expresses his optimistic belief in the reconciliation between the generations, as exemplified in the simultaneous marriages of father and son. The final passage, depicting Bazarov’s grieving parents on their son’s gravesite, likewise suggests a picture of harmony and reconciliation between the generations: “However passionate, sinful, rebellious the heart buried in this grave, the flowers growing on it look out at us serenely with their innocent eyes: they tell us not only of that eternal peace, that great peace of ‘indifferent’ nature; they tell us also of eternal reconciliation and life everlasting . . . (FS 157).

Turgenev’s concluding paragraph is crucial for an understanding of how Hemingway “misread” Fathers and Sons. I would like to argue that The Sun Also Rises is framed by three passages that directly respond to and revise the literary precursor’s last paragraph. Both the two opposing epigraphs to the novel and Jake Barnes’s last words at the novel’s conclusion directly relate to the ideas of romanticism as well as harmony and reconciliation between the generations as proposed by Turgenev. Framed by these
passages, *The Sun Also Rises* becomes a metaparodic play on the theme of generational (dis)harmony and the possibility of romantic love.

Hemingway picks up where Turgenev left off, as the picture of harmony and timelessness at the end of *Fathers and Sons* finds an ambiguous echo in the two epigraphs to *The Sun Also Rises*. Turgenev’s optimistic ideas are immediately parodied in the first epigraph with Gertrude Stein’s famous phrase “You are all a lost generation.” In *Everybody’s Autobiography*, Stein reports the origin of the phrase:

> It was this hotel keeper who said what it is said I said that the war generation was a lost generation. And he said it in this way. He said that every man becomes civilized between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. If he does not go through a civilizing experience at that time in his life he will not be a civilized man. And the men who went to the war at eighteen missed the period of civilizing, and they could never be civilized. They were a lost generation. Naturally if they are at war they do not have the influences of women of parents and of preparation. (53)

By comparison, a Hemingway manuscript from 1925 contains the projected foreword to “The Lost Generation. A Novel.” Here, Hemingway tells his own account of how Stein came upon the term “lost generation”:

> One day last summer Gertrude Stein stepped in a garage in a small town in the Department of Ain to have a valve fixed in her Ford Car. The young mechanic who fixed it was very good and quick and skillful. . . . “Where do you get boys to work like that?” Miss Stein asked the owner of the garage. “I thought you couldn’t get boys to work any more.” “Oh yes,” the garage owner said. “You can get very good boys now. I’ve taken all these and trained them myself. It is the ones between twenty-two and thirty that are no good. C’est un generation perdu. No one wants them. They are no good. They were spoiled. The young ones, the new ones are all right again.” (qtd. in Svoboda 107)

In both accounts, the emphasis is on the war as the cause of the “lostness.” War has a destructive influence on love and family relationships, as war makes it impossible for those who have witnessed it to return to their previous life. The pessimistic idea of the
“lost generation” thus clearly revises Turgenev’s optimistic ending of “eternal reconciliation and life everlasting.”

However, at the same time, Hemingway parodies the idea of a “lost generation” by including a second epigraph, taken from Ecclesiastes:

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

The optimistic Biblical passage, which in its affirmative spirit is similar to the ending of Turgenev’s novel, emphasizes the idea of life as progress, as a cycle, in which man plays a subservient role. The individual and even a single generation are just a minor component in the overall picture of life and abiding time. By juxtaposing these two epigraphs, Hemingway thus intends to play them off against each other, thereby parodying and simultaneously complicating Turgenev’s ending.

A similarly affirmative message as in the second epigraph is implied in one of the novel’s projected titles, *Fiesta*, which was actually used as the title for the British edition. Discussing the role the fiesta in Pamplona plays in *The Sun Also Rises*, Allen Josephs argues that a “fiesta is time out of time, sacred time, original time, primal time” (93). The fiesta thus fulfills a function similar to other rituals Hemingway uses, such as fishing, hunting, war, and especially the art of *toreo*, which all “stop profane time, clock time, historical time” (93). This concept of fiesta and *toreo*, according to Josephs, is the “moral axis of *The Sun Also Rises*” and “the *axis mundi* of Hemingway’s artistic vision” (93).
The centrality of the fiesta and its sacred nature are also illustrated by the fact that much of the novel revolves around the characters’ attitude toward and reaction to the bullfight, which functions as an emblem of moral behavior. Here one is reminded of Hemingway’s description of the faena, which he defines as “the sum of the work done by the matador with the muleta” (*Death in the Afternoon* 407). Hemingway explains that the faena “takes a man out of himself and makes him feel immortal while it is proceeding” (*Death in the Afternoon* 206). Pedro Romero’s great faena stands at the center of the novel and constitutes the link to the epigraph. The idea of fiesta as sacred time is thus reflected in the Biblical epilogue, which “denies the importance of the individual or the individual generation and affirms the essence of sacred time in which . . . man emerges from his solitude and becomes one with creation” (Josephs 99).

According to Svoboda’s discussion of the rejected epigraphs and trial titles for the novel, Hemingway “did not want to use a foreign title like *Fiesta*” nor a negative one like “The Lost Generation,” “Lost,” or “Perdu.” Instead, he “chose to emphasize the optimistic idea of progress within life’s cycle” by selecting “The Sun Also Rises” as the title (106). As Svoboda argues, “[T]he second epigraph . . . seems to suggest that the ‘lost generation’ is not really lost, that it is only a part of the cycle of life and that if the sun has set upon the members of Jake’s generation, it has set only for a while and, in the cycle of nature, will rise again” (108). However, the juxtaposition of the two chosen epigraphs can also be seen as a Bakhtinian metaparody on the generational issue, with neither one of the two epigraphs necessarily gaining prominence over the other. In this respect, it is important that, while upholding a sense of life’s permanence and progress, the second epigraph also implies the vanity of man and thus derides man’s sense of self-
importance, especially if one considers the passage immediately preceding it in
Ecclesiastes: “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” The
“vanity” passage was originally included in the epigraph; Hemingway later instructed
Maxwell Perkins to cut it, thus providing an example of his “iceberg theory,” according
to which things that are known can be left out without losing their meaning.

Considering this metaparodic play between the two epigraphs, one could
conjecture that Hemingway’s intention is neither to project an absolutely gloomy picture
of the war generation nor to emphasize its eventual survival and thus belittle the postwar
disillusionment. If Turgenev’s concept of timelessness is intended in an idealistic sense,
as an affirmation of life’s possibilities, and to reinforce the overall romantic tone of the
ending, Hemingway’s use of the Stein and Ecclesiastes epigraphs is slightly different.
Hemingway also affirms life; however, he does so not out of a romantic conviction but
based on a more sober and pragmatic view of life. In a letter to Maxwell Perkins he
describes his intention in writing *The Sun Also Rises*: “The point of the book to me was
that the earth abideth forever—having a great deal of fondness and admiration for the
earth and not a hell of a lot for my generation and caring little about Vanities. . . . I didn’t
mean the book to be a hollow or bitter satire but a damn tragedy with the earth abiding
for ever as the hero” (Baker, *Selected Letters* 229). Hemingway is thus aware that life is
a “tragedy,” but he does not grow melancholy about it. His novel is about his characters’
periences in such a world. They have to make the best of it, exhibiting a philosophy
that recalls Friedrich Nietzsche’s “joyful affirmation of nihilism.”

Jake Barnes is the Nietzschean character who affirms life and goes on living in
spite of his physical and psychological wounds. The metaparodic juxtaposition between
being a member of the “lost generation” and taking solace in the “sun rising again” finds its artistic highlight in the novel’s conclusion, which certainly ranks as one of Hemingway’s greatest literary achievements:

“Oh, Jake,” Brett said, “we could have had such a damned good time together.”
Ahead was a mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic. He raised his baton. The car slowed suddenly pressing Brett against me.
“Yes,” I said. “Isn’t it pretty to think so?” (SAR 251)

Jake’s closing words are Hemingway’s final answer to Turgenev’s romantic ending and reconciliation between the generations in Fathers and Sons: “Isn’t it pretty to think so?” Jake’s words express his affirmative position on life and its possibilities, but at the same time, they acknowledge life’s ambiguities and the power of fate, which often thwarts human intentions and plans. The military and phallic imagery implied in the “mounted policeman in khaki” with “his baton” raised recalls Jake’s war experience, which has made it impossible for him to consummate his relationship to Brett. The conclusion, then, is both Jake’s embracing of romantic ideals and, at the same time, his awareness of the impossibility of romantic happiness for himself.

Turgenev’s use of the nihilistic theme and romantic subplot thus meets with a complicated response in Hemingway’s novel. Following a strong poet’s route of initial admiration and subsequent distancing from the precursor, Hemingway initially felt attracted to Bazarov’s sense of alienation as well as his dignified attitude toward his death. In his sincerity and aversion to all pretensions, Bazarov foreshadows the stoic Hemingway protagonists who remain strong and committed to their principles until the end. However, Hemingway must have also felt that the all-too-open romantic subplot of the novel undercut its thematic examination of the individual’s estrangement from the
world. In what constitutes the most important “corrective swerve” performed by Hemingway, Bazarov is not allowed to die a romantic death but has to live on in the form of Jake Barnes with his perpetually disillusionsing experiences. Neither does Hemingway allow space for a romantic happy ending or an implied reconciliation between the generations.

In Hemingway’s novel, Russia’s transition from an aristocratic to a progressive state and the concomitant development from romanticism to modernism have given way to the existential world of post-World War I in Europe. With no firm political beliefs or philosophies, the characters have only a personal code to guide them. Importantly, the relationship to the past is completely broken, as manifested by the conspicuous absence of any figures from the past in the novel, as well as the absence of any father figures and of other familial ties between the characters, who are all truly expatriate men and women, cut off from home.

Alluding to his epigraphs, Hemingway himself expresses this feeling of disconnection: “[W]hatever is going to happen to the generation of which I am a part has already happened” (qtd. in Svoboda 106). As Svoboda continues to paraphrase Hemingway’s manuscript comments,

In spite of all that will happen to the generation, in spite of all the movements it will seek salvation in, and in spite of the possibility of “another and better” war, nothing will really matter to this generation; it has been permanently shaped by its experience in the World War, an event already past. To this generation, Hemingway concludes, “the things that are given to people to happen to them have already happened.” (108)

The absence of an open conflict between the generations was thus an important act of misprision that Hemingway performed on Turgenev’s text. Hemingway’s world is a post-romantic world in which, as Wilkinson describes it, “the sensibilities of the
politically engaged nineteenth-century man were to be transformed in the inward-looking character of Jake Barnes” (52). If Bazarov is still politically-minded and optimistic in terms of progress and societal change, Jake “lapses into political silence,” as he has realized the insignificance of the individual: “The bill always came. That was one of the swell things you could count on. . . . I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it. Maybe if you found out how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about” (SAR 152). Finding out “how to live in it” is Jake’s only “philosophy.”

In this passage Hemingway’s revises Bazarov’s nihilistic lecture on the significance of the individual to Arkady:

“The tiny space I occupy is so small compared to the rest of space, where I am not and where things have nothing to do with me; and the amount of time in which I get to live my life is so insignificant compared to eternity, where I’ve never been and won’t ever be . . . Yet in this atom, this mathematical point blood circulates, a brain functions and desires something as well . . . How absurd! What nonsense!” (FS 97)

Whereas Bazarov here expresses his romantic angst, Jake is an existentialist, who has no other belief except that one must go on living. Like Bazarov, Jake is aware of the vanity of all philosophies and does not ask any more questions; he lives by his personal standard of conduct. If Bazarov is an empiricist who tries to explain away feelings as a mere mechanism of the nervous system, Jake Barnes has resolved to make the best of things and live life sensually to the fullest by indulging in eating, drinking, and adventures, such as fishing and bullfighting. Jake is Bazarov transplanted into 20th century Europe, forced to live in a world where reconciliation between the generations is not possible and the realization of love remains an illusion. Added to Bazarov’s psychic struggle is Jake’s
physical wound, which makes it impossible for him to consume his relationship with Brett Ashley.

To fully understand Hemingway’s revision of Bazarov in Jake, it is necessary to compare both characters in their relationship to their respective foils, Pavel Petrovich and Robert Cohn. It is important to realize that in spite of their professed differences and open animosity, Bazarov and Pavel are more alike than different. Both are strong characters and full of by pride. They may be worlds apart in their manners of speech, social conduct, and lifestyle, with Pavel’s outdated dandyism opposed by Bazarov’s plebeian manners, but both are similar in the way they believe in the absolute validity of their exaggerated principles. Dmitry Pisarev likewise emphasizes the similarities between the two characters: “In the depths of his soul, Pavel Petrovich is just as much of a skeptic and empiricist as Bazarov himself. . . . [T]he first mistakenly ascribes to himself a belief in principes and the second just as mistakenly imagines himself to be an extreme skeptic and a daring rationalist” (193). In a further parallel, both men’s lives changed forever as a consequence of lost love. Pavel’s life “turned . . . into a peaceful vegetation” after Princess R.’s death, just as Bazarov never recovers from Odintsova’s rejection and dies shortly thereafter (Pisarev 192). In spite of their elegant decorum (Pavel) or nihilistic coolness (Bazarov), both men are passionate and engage in frequent, heated debates. Pavel clearly resents the fact that he cannot dominate Bazarov, “the only man whom he respects, despite his hatred of him” (Pisarev 194).

Pavel’s and Bazarov’s sameness is finally illustrated in their duel, a contest that is commonly reserved to set a dispute between equals. The sheer occurrence of the duel is surprising enough, considering that the code of the duel is the epitome of romanticism.
Therefore, Bazarov’s participation contradicts his repeated beliefs, his rejection of all things romantic. If Bazarov’s participation thus implies a weakening of his principles, Pavel’s challenge itself is also strange, as it implicitly recognizes Bazarov as Pavel’s equal and thus invalidates Pavel’s previous insistence on his aristocratic superiority over the low-born Bazarov. Based on these developments, Gary R. Jahn concludes that “the dissimilarities between [Bazarov and Pavel] have to be regarded as accidental and the similarity between them as essential,” a point which is also reinforced by the departure of both characters at the end of the novel (86). The outcome of the duel, then, is less an indication of the younger generation’s triumph over the older but has to be seen “in the pattern of disintegrating solidarity within generations and increasing solidarity between generations which is being developed in the novel” (Jahn 86).

To support such a reading, Jahn convincingly demonstrates that the novel’s initial intra-generational harmonies are gradually upset in the course of the action, while the inter-generational disharmonies are ultimately overcome. For example, the initial solidarity between Bazarov and Arkady, as well as the one between Pavel and Nikolai, is proven to be tenuous, as their bond becomes strained and is ultimately severed. Likewise, the dissonances between Arkady and his father Nikolai, as well as the conflict between Pavel and Bazarov, give way to a renewed understanding and unifying bond that goes beyond their superficial differences.²² Importantly, then, “the relations existing among Bazarov, Arkady, Pavel Petrovich, and Nikolay [sic] Petrovich are developed from a position of solidarity within generations to a position of solidarity, for Arkady and Nikolay Petrovich, and of similarity, for Pavel Petrovich and Bazarov, between generations” (Jahn 82).
Concomitant to the reversal in the four relationships in the novel, Jahn concludes that the title likewise undergoes a change in meaning:

The reader is first offered what he may, in fact, quite probably be expecting, “fathers and sons” in the sense of “fathers against sons.” This initial impression is rendered ambiguous as the novel develops and the work concludes having guided the reader to the opposite, probably unexpected, perception of the meaning of the title: “fathers and sons” in the sense of “fathers united with sons.” The novel begins with the assumption that generations are essentially in conflict and ends with the conclusion that generations are essentially the same. (88)

The idea that generations are the same is not only illustrated by Bazarov’s and Pavel’s relationship, which, as we have seen, is characterized by an underlying similarity between the two characters. Nikolai and Arkady are also revealed to be similar in their preference for love over intellectual matters. Both have repressed their sentimental side and thus their affection for each other in their blind obedience to a member of their own generation. Therefore, once their unnatural bonds to Pavel and Bazarov are severed, their father-son relationship is no longer impaired. The initial disharmony and later reconciliation in the father-son relationship illustrates the artificial strain that can be put on a relationship as a result of prioritizing solidarity within a generation over solidarity between generations.

The disintegrating solidarity within generations and increasing similarity between generations is thus a crucial idea in Fathers and Sons. A detailed comparison of Nikolai and Arkady shows that father and son are strikingly similar in their character traits and interests. Both are raised at home in the provinces and then enroll in the university. They “pay lip-service to the fashionable intellectual trends of the day,” but their “real commitments are to music, art, poetry, nature, and the life of the emotions” (D. Lowe, Fathers and Sons 47). In addition, Nikolai and Arkady are “both easily moved to tears”
and “charmingly inarticulate at moments when they are being sincere” (48-49). And, most importantly, their married lives parallel each other in that Arkady’s marriage to Katya bears striking resemblances to Nikolai’s first marriage, and in that the novel ends happily with their simultaneous marriages (49-50). Arkady’s development, his growing disillusionment with Bazarov’s ideas and his becoming like his father, underscores the theme of the novel: that fathers and sons are alike, that it is the sons’ fate to become like their fathers.

It is also useful to remember that the novel’s Russian title, *Ottsy i deti*, is more accurately translated as “fathers and children” rather than as “fathers and sons.” The Russian title therefore invites a generational rather than a mere father-son comparison and thus emphasizes a more “generic sense of relationships within and between generations” (Jahn 91 n.1). The wider generational implications are all the more important if we consider that Turgenev’s troubled relationship with his daughter Pauline was on his mind when he wrote the novel. She lived with him for a brief period during the time when he was writing the novel, and Turgenev was “confronted [with] the obligations of fatherhood day in and day out” (D. Lowe, “Father and Daughter” 441). The author’s growing estrangement from Pauline is reflected in the novel by Bazarov’s negative character traits: “If we compare Bazarov’s traits with those that Turgenev ascribed to his daughter, it becomes clear that . . . he is Pauline Tourguéneff metamorphosed into a male” (Lowe 444). We can therefore conclude that the conspicuous absence of any father-daughter relationships in *Fathers and Sons* and Nikolai’s ultimate reconciliation with Arkady reflect Turgenev’s problematic relationship
to his own daughter and a projection of the reconciliation that never took place in his own life.24

In his honest portrayal of both the older and the younger generation, Turgenev lays bare the strengths and weaknesses of both. Most importantly, he emphasizes the importance of the romantic side in the revolutionary Bazarov. Without his contradictions Bazarov would certainly lose much of his vitality and attraction to the reader. It is Bazarov’s inner conflicts that make him such a great and strong character, and his very contradictions make him not only more life-like but also similar to Hemingway’s Jake Barnes.

Just as Bazarov personifies the best traits of a nihilist in his resoluteness, honesty, courage, and self-confidence, so Jake embodies the best traits of an existentialist in his personal standard of conduct. In spite of his physical incapacities and psychic wounds, and even though he possesses no controlling social or political beliefs, Jake goes on living in an incomprehensible world. Sexually impotent, he copes with the impossibility of romantic love by his adherence to a personal code, which places a high value on living in a world of sensations, but which also makes him restless and forces him into a continual search for place. As an expatriate, he does not have the option, as does Bazarov, of returning to his parents, even though the latter only belittles his parents’ simplicity and good-naturedness. Bazarov’s parents’ complete emotional attachment to their son is a quality clearly absent in the moral wasteland of The Sun Also Rises.

The disembodied presence of both the previous generations and the war shapes the novel’s and Jake’s development. An awareness of the generational conflict beneath
the tip of the iceberg is thus necessary to understand Jake’s yearnings. As Wilkinson summarizes the nature of the generational conflict in *The Sun Also Rises,*

> The older generation, the prewar mentality, is no more than an unexpressed presence in the novel. But that presence explains why the current generation is lost, what beliefs it has seen shattered, what hopes it has given up, and what it is trying to escape both historically and personally. The argument between the cultural fathers who created the conditions which led to World War I, and the sons who inherited the world which resulted from this catastrophe is both constant and unexpressed in *The Sun Also Rises.* And because this conflict is unexpressed and unadmitted, it cannot be reconciled. There is an essential discontinuity between generations in *The Sun Also Rises,* and that discontinuity is so complete that the question of fathers and sons is never voiced. (50)

In the absence of pre-war generations, the novel’s focus is directed at the issue of love and its survival in the post-war world. As Mark Spilka argues, “One of the most persistent themes of the twenties was the death of love in World War I” (238). Spilka reads the novel as an “extensive parable” in which Hemingway’s “protagonists are shaped as allegorical figures: Jake Barnes and Brett Ashley are two lovers desexed by the war; Robert Cohn is the false knight who challenges their despair; while Romero, the stalwart bullfighter, personifies the good life which will survive their failure” (239).

Of particular interest is the relationship between Jake Barnes and Robert Cohn, who, like their literary predecessors Bazarov and Pavel, are obvious foils to each other before they are revealed as essentially the same. Initially, Jake’s private grief and public self-control stand in clear contrast to Robert’s public suffering and self-pity. Cohn’s interest in boxing exemplifies his concern with postures of manhood, which he confuses with actual manliness. In contrast to Jake’s existentialism and journalistic matter-of-factness, Cohn subscribes to a romantic view of life. Like Nikolai Petrovich, he reads romantic literature and seeks escape and adventures in exotic places. Similarly, his
romanticism is illustrated because he likes “the authority of editing” and “discover[s] writing even though he does not possess much talent for either” (SAR 13).

In matters of love, we are told that “he was married by the first girl who was nice to him,” divorced after five years, and “taken in hand” by the exploitative Frances (SAR 12-13). As the narrator evaluates Cohn’s love life, “He had married on the rebound from the rotten time he had in college, and Frances took him on the rebound from his discovery that he had not been everything to his first wife” (SAR 16). Robert enjoys having mistresses and refuses to marry Frances because that “would be the end of all the romance” (SAR 58). When he meets Brett Ashley, he does not believe Jake’s “facts” about her nymphomania and imagines her as “absolutely fine and straight” (SAR 46). Later, after her affair with the bullfighter Romero, Cohn “nearly killed the poor, bloody bull-fighter. Then Cohn wanted to take Brett away. Wanted to make an honest woman of her, I imagine” (SAR 205). As the narrator concludes, “Damned touching scene.”

Cohn’s romanticism and proclivity to ignore reality stand in clear contrast to the other characters’ inner emptiness and disillusioned acceptance of life’s realities. Emotionally immature, out of touch with reality, and falling for romantic illusions, Robert Cohn is an outsider among the expatriate crowd, a status which is also illustrated by his “incapacity to enjoy Paris” (SAR 49). Importantly, Cohn is the only character who has not seen the war. His attitude and behavior thus tie him to the pre-war generation, and make him, vicariously, a representative of it and the values left behind by the other expatriate men. Significantly, Cohn is also “enthusiastic about America” after a trip there (SAR 16). In spite of Cohn’s tendency to ignore reality, his “stubbornness” (SAR 20), his “air of superior knowledge” (SAR 101), and repeated public crying, Jake feels both
repelled and drawn toward him. Bill Gorton might express best Jake’s mixed feelings toward Cohn: “‘The funny thing is he’s nice, too. I like him. But he’s just so awful’” (SAR 107).

If it is true that Cohn is, as Spilka argues, “the last chivalric hero, the last defender of an outworn faith, [whose] function is to illustrate its present folly—to show us, through the absurdity of his behavior, that romantic love is dead,” then it is also true that, ultimately, “Barnes and his friends have no alternative to Cohn’s beliefs” (241-42). Jake’s life may be guided by his attempt to indulge in life’s pleasures, but even his escape from civilization into picturesque Burguete, where he spends a few idyllic days fishing with Bill Gorton, cannot make him forget his defining need—romantic love. Unlike Nick Adams in “Big Two-Hearted River,” Jake needs to face the swamp by returning to society and going to Pamplona, where he will get involved once more with Brett Ashley and betray his most cherished principles.

For in spite of his rough exterior, Jake has always been an idealist like Cohn, and a restrained romantic at best. When Jake picks up the prostitute Georgette, he does so because of “a vague sentimental idea that it would be nice to eat with some one” (SAR 24). Brett later teases him about “‘getting damned romantic,’” which he denies by saying he was just “‘bored’” (SAR 31). Interestingly, he chooses the word “funny”—with its connotations of absurd but also truthful—whenever he refers to his war wound, which has made him sexually impotent (SAR 38). Jake uses words like “bored” and “funny” to downplay his real emotions, as he is no different from Cohn in his deepest feelings and weakness for Brett. Only privately can he admit to himself his attachment to Brett: “I was thinking about Brett and my mind stopped jumping around and started to go in sort of
smooth waves. Then all of a sudden I started to cry” (*SAR* 39). Deep in himself, he is like Cohn and not only wants to be with Brett but keep her for himself. During the day, when spending time with her, he can restrain his yearnings and accept the impossibility of their love; he behaves stoically and with dignity. As he admits, “It is awfully easy to be hard-boiled about everything in the daytime, but at night it is another thing” (*SAR* 42).

Significantly, it is when Jake moves more and more toward Cohn’s romantic position that the two, like Bazarov and Pavel, ultimately engage in a physical confrontation, which further illustrates their similarity. Jake admits that he would “be as big an ass as Cohn” if given the proper chance” (*SAR* 185). That “chance” comes when he tacitly agrees to act as pimp for Brett in the cafè, thus setting in motion Brett’s affair with the matador Pedro Romero. In addition to violating the code of *aficion*, which forbids any disturbance of the bullfighter’s preparation for the bullfight, Jake also sacrifices his self-respect and degrades himself, all for the sake of keeping Brett’s friendship.

After Brett runs off with Romero, Jake realizes that he has indeed been a “damned pimp,” as Cohn accuses him (*SAR* 194). Jake and Cohn are finally rendered equal in that they have both been left behind, without any self-respect, by the woman they have served. After their brief fight during which Cohn knocks out Jake, both men are reduced to the state of “emotional adolescents,” as Spilka argues (251). Cohn lies on his bed crying, while Jake regresses to his youthful days, remembering when he had returned home after having been kicked in the head during a football game:

> Walking across the square to the hotel everything looked new and changed. I had never seen the trees before. I had never seen the flagpoles before, nor the front of the theatre. It was all different. I felt as I felt once coming home from an out-of-town football game. I was carrying a suitcase with
The violence of the football experience is tied to Jake’s war wound, both of which have robbed Jake of his manhood and made him vulnerable to being hurt by women. Having been physically defeated by Cohn, as well as having lost his emotional equilibrium after Brett’s departure, the fiesta becomes, as Daiker argues, “another war for Jake, wounding him emotionally, as World War I had injured him physically” and as the football game had before the war (40).

The fact that “everything looked new and changed” after the fight with Cohn signals the beginning of Jake’s transformation. Before that transformation can take place, however, Jake has to shake Cohn’s hand as an acknowledgement of their equal status. As Donald Daiker assesses this scene, “In agreeing to shake hands with Cohn, as Romero would not, Jake tacitly acknowledges that he and Cohn are linked by their falsely romantic attitude toward Brett and by their lack of self-control” (45). The handshake effectively plays on the two scenes in Fathers and Sons in which first Bazarov refuses to shake hands with Nikolai and later Pavel refuses to shake hands with Bazarov. Unlike Bazarov and Pavel, Jake now understands his similarity to Cohn and accepts the fact that he, too, has harbored romantic illusions.

Jake’s dilemma is to work through his inability to deal effectively with two conflicting emotions. On the one hand, there is his profound love for Brett and her frequent, albeit at times selfish, need for him.25 Jake understands Brett, who in many ways is just as much a victim of the war as he is. As Spilka explains,

[S]he completes the distortion of sexual roles which seems to characterize the period. For the war, which has unmanned Barnes and his contemporaries, has turned Brett into the freewheeling equal of any man.
It has taken her first sweetheart’s life through dysentery and has sent her present husband home in a dangerous state of shock. For Brett these blows are the equivalent of Jake’s emasculation. (243)

Calling her “an early but more honest version of Catherine Barkley,” Spilka sees in Brett a survivor who is able to “confront a moral and emotional vacuum among her postwar lovers” (243–44). Their comparable post-war suffering makes understandable why neither Jake nor Brett can relinquish the mutually destructive nature of their relationship and explains Jake’s continuing attraction to Brett in spite of the never-ending cycle of frustrating meetings.

On the other hand, Jake realizes that there can be no serious or permanent love relationships in this post-war environment. The more involved he gets with Brett, the more hurt he will get. David Crowe describes Jake as “a maddeningly divided protagonist between dignified stoicism and abject self-pity” (69). Jake’s conflict is thus between the heart and the mind, not unlike Bazarov’s mixed feelings for Odintsova. Both men realize the power of their lovers to destroy them, but most of the time Jake is unable to put a stop to it. Jake’s struggle, then, is also about the power and limits of his personal code, a code that emphasizes self-control and discipline: “Certainly a code involving self-determination and dignity,” Crowe argues, “would not allow Jake to enter another cycle of Brett’s abuse” (69). Crowe considers Jake as a truly “dialogical hero” because in Jake’s character Hemingway questions the validity of codes in general, such as the familiar “grace under pressure” or other fixed approaches toward life. The situation between Jake and Brett, Crowe argues, “implies a world in which ethics of courage, dignity and even common kindness fall short of the profound imperatives life can call unto action” (78).
This ambiguity becomes especially obvious at the end of the novel, when Jake, still vacationing in San Sebastian, receives a telegram from Brett asking for his assistance in Madrid after her breakup with Romero. Once again, Jake runs the risk of sacrificing his self-respect, as Cohn did in his subservient behavior to Brett. However, this time he is aware of his actions, as he ironically comments: “That was it. Send a girl off with one man. Introduce her to another to go off with him. Now go and bring her back. And sign the wire with love. That was it all right” (SAR 243). It is important, then, that Jake does go to Madrid to help Brett even though he clearly sees the slavish role he plays in her life. To refuse her call would be to act cold-heartedly; to continue rushing to her in blind infatuation would prolong his suffering and undercut his self-respect.

As his ironic self-evaluation shows, Jake has found a way to combine responsibility and compassion with realism. Consequently, he no longer indulges in self-pity or romantic illusions about their relationship. His final answer to Brett’s continuing self-pity and illusions, “Isn’t it pretty to think so?,” is thus a testament to Jake’s ability to live with contradictions. He is aware of the impossibility of love, but can both cherish the beauty of the illusion and tolerate the pain of its impossibility.

Of pivotal importance in illustrating Jake’s transformation is the metaphor of the bullfight. Donald Daiker demonstrates how Jake Barnes and Robert Cohn play “the role of steer to Brett’s bull” for most of the novel (49). Listing several passages in which Brett is likened to a domineering bull, Daiker explains how Jake eventually undergoes a “transformation from a steer to a bullfighter in relation to Brett the bull” (48). Jake watches Pedro Romero subdue the bull in the ring, which teaches him “how to come to
grips with Brett”—a spectacle that is crucial for Jake’s transformation (50). In addition, Pedro’s failed elopement with Brett opens Jake’s eyes. As Daiker explains,

> It is Romero’s experience with Brett in Madrid that has rightly convinced Jake that under no circumstances could he and Brett have lived happily together. Brett’s unwillingness to let her hair grow out for Romero—he wants to make her “more womanly” (246)—is significant of her more general incapacity to become a complete woman even for the man whose masculinity is beyond doubt. (53)

Jake is thus able to put an end to “the illusion which is behind Jake’s suffering throughout the novel; namely, that if he hadn’t been wounded, if he had somehow survived the war with his manhood intact, then he and Brett would have become true lovers” (Spilka 254-55). In the taxi, faced with the policeman and the war memory associated with him and with Brett’s body pressed against him, Jake understands that love is dead for their generation.

Just as Jake’s departure from Pamplona to San Sebastian constitutes a more successful period of cleansing and re-creation of his self than his previous flight from Paris to Burguete, so Jake’s return to Madrid successfully reverses the previous roles between Jake and Brett in Paris. In contrast to their taxi ride at the beginning of the novel, the final scene in the taxi sees Jake in command of the destination of both the ride and their relationship.26 With his final remark, Jake refuses to indulge Brett in her self-pity and is no longer willing to blame circumstances—the war—for the impossibility of love. It is in this sense that Jake “has mastered his life by gaining the strength and self-control to end once and for all his destructive relationship with Brett” (Daiker 55).

Jake is thus Hemingway’s successful revision of both Bazarov and Arkady. Whereas Turgenev’s characters are too much guided by their intellect or emotion
respectively, Jake is able to juggle the two extremes in a meaningful tension at the end. It is Jake’s “dialogical status” that allows him to survive.

Jahn argues that Turgenev’s characters are arranged “along a linear continuum extending between antinomical extremes,” with Odintsova and Bazarov’s parents forming the two extreme poles of intellect or strong will, on the one hand, and emotion or sentimental attachment, on the other hand (89). According to Jahn, “true happiness, represented by a union of all of the positive human characteristics in full degree, is shown to be logically impossible” (89). For example, Bazarov, who is primarily intellectual, cannot be happy because he does not engage his emotional side, which thwarts his intellectual efforts. Arkady, by contrast, who, like his father, is primarily emotional, fails to achieve his intellectual goals because he is not capable of “sacrific[ing] the emotional sufficiently” (90). According to Jahn, it is thus “typical of Turgenev’s pessimism with regard to the achievement of human felicity that the extremes are incompatible with one another” (89).

Hemingway, by contrast, is able to revise Turgenev’s position. Jake’s behavior at the end demonstrates that true happiness might be impossible, but it also proves that one can strive for a positive tension between the head and the heart. Rather than aiming for an extreme position, as is implied in Turgenev’s novel, or in the justification of codes, happiness or peace of mind is the result of a flexible set of standards, or variable ethical standards, which allow room for decisions in a highly ambiguous world. With his “Isn’t it pretty to think so?” Jake is better prepared to confront “the chaos that lies beneath Brett’s seductive exterior” than is, for example, Pedro Romero with his rigid code of aficion, which leaves him vulnerable to Brett (Crowe 81).
Based on this comparison of *The Sun Also Rises* and *Fathers and Sons*, Hemingway proves to be the strong poet Bloom theorizes about. Hemingway “swerved” from Turgenev in having Jake live on past the romantic denouement of the precursor’s novel. In step two of Bloom’s revisionary ratios, which is called “*tessera,*” the “poet antithetically ‘completes’ his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough” (14). Implementing this step, Hemingway corrects Turgenev’s idealistic concepts of love and generational harmony by replacing them with his dialogical hero Jake Barnes, who eventually embraces the fluidity and flexibility of metaparody over the inadequacies of rigid, dichotomized responses to life.

Myler Wilkinson sees “a form of completion or *tessera*” in the fact that “romance becomes an anguished relationship between an impotent Jake Barnes and a nymphomaniac Brett Ashley” (48). While this explanation might seem somewhat general, I would like to suggest that the real instance of *tessera* lies in the way Hemingway pushes to the extreme the interplay between the mind and the emotion in Jake, thus making him a truly dialogical hero and expanding Turgenev’s idealism to the unresolvability of metaparody.

In addition, one could argue that Jake, unlike Bazarov, does reconnect with the past and the previous generations. During his brief stay in San Sebastian Jake begins a process of self-renewal. Importantly, he is alone and thus in a position to return to order and to reevaluate his self after the tumultuous events and the nightmarish ending of the carnivalesque time in Pamplona. During his two days in San Sebastian, Jake undergoes what could be called a religious conversion experience, as he indulges in the ritual
cleansing and purification acts of swimming and diving to probe the depth of his soul:

“Then I tried several dives. I dove deep once, swimming down to the bottom. I swam
with my eyes open and it was green and dark” (SAR 239). As Daiker explains, “Jake’s
diving deep suggests that his new self will have depth and a sound basis; his holding the
second dive “for length” signifies that his new self will last and survive” (45).

On the following day, out swimming again, Jake describes the water as “buoyant
and cold. It felt as though you could never sink” (SAR 41). In addition to expressing his
renewed self-confidence, this passage recalls Nick Adams’s feeling of immortality in
“Indian Camp” and thus implies Jake’s accomplished “rebirth.” Significantly, it is then
that Brett’s telegram arrives, and, as the ensuing actions make clear, Jake has indeed
become a new person. The time in San Sebastian, especially the religious overtones of his
baptism in the water, can thus be seen as signifying a rapprochement with the religious
values of the previous generations, if not a continuation of their creed. Viewed in this
way, Hemingway has successfully performed the step of *tessera* by allowing the
nihilist/existentialist Jake to reconnect to the religious values of his forefathers.

In his final step of revisionary ratios, called “*apophrades,***” or “the return of the
dead,” Bloom explains that the

later poet . . . already burdened by an imaginative solitude that is almost a
solipsism, hold his own poem so open again to the precursor’s work that at
first we might believe the wheel has come full circle, and that we are back
in the later poet’s flooded apprenticeship, before his strength began to
assert himself in the revisionary ratios. But the poem is now *held* open to
the precursor, where once it *was* open. . . . [T]he new poem’s achievement
makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as
though the later poet himself had written the precursor’s characteristic
work. (15-16)
Just as Turgenev set out to write a novel that realistically rendered the atmosphere of Russia in the 1860s, so Hemingway attempted to depict the post-World War I era of his time. However, Turgenev, who sympathized with Westerners and harbored nihilistic ideas, creates, almost unintentionally, a novel that affirms romanticism and the values of the older generation. Correspondingly, Hemingway, the existentialist and anti-romantic, affirms the importance of love and the heart at the center of the novel. This is how Hemingway’s and Turgenev’s novels parallel each other and how “the wheel has come full circle.” Both Bazarov’s and Jake’s stories are ultimately stories about the importance of love and previous generations, with the earth as the abiding hero. Just as Bazarov realizes his kinship with Pavel, so Jake comes to understand his relationship to Robert Cohn, who connects him to the time of his youth and pre-war experience, which allows him to see through the present.

In contrast to his story “Fathers and Sons,” whose title was certainly taken from Turgenev’s novel, Hemingway creates in *The Sun Also Rises* a protagonist with a more balanced vision concerning the generational conflict. Whereas neither Nick Adams nor Jake Barnes are able to commit themselves to the values of the past, the latter’s exile and existentialist perspective at least allow him to live satisfactorily without them and thus avoid the pattern of mistakes that is awaiting the former. His quasi-religious experience and his effective way of handling his relationship with Brett make the conclusion in the novel much more affirmative than the highly ambiguous ending of the short story.
Chapter Eight  
Jackson Bradley and Grant Wiggins—
Nihilism in Catherine Carmier and A Lesson Before Dying

When Gaines was struggling with his first novel, Catherine Carmier, he had both Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons and Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises as models. As I will demonstrate, in writing Catherine Carmier Gaines turns out to be the “weak poet” who idealizes his literary predecessor rather than usurps space for himself (Bloom 5). It wasn’t until Gaines revisited Catherine Carmier thirty years later and rewrote it as A Lesson Before Dying that Gaines was able to successfully deal with the issues of nihilism, love, and generational conflicts.

To his credit, Gaines has always been forthright in admitting the enormous influence of Fathers and Sons: “I think the major thing I liked about him [Turgenev] was the structure of his small novels. My Catherine Carmier is almost written on the structure of Fathers and Sons. As a matter of fact, that was my Bible. I used it on my desk every day” (Laney 60). In an interview, Gaines frankly admits that his first novel was closely modeled after Fathers and Sons:

The style of [Catherine Carmier] is based around Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons. Someone coming from the North, coming back to the South, and meeting a beautiful lady, coming back to the old place, to the old people and just as Bazarov does, the doctoral student coming back home for a while to be with his mother and father. Jackson comes back to be with his Aunt Charlotte. Basically I based it around that structure of Turgenev’s novel as I was at that point in my life still influenced by his style. (Sartisky 265)

Certainly Gaines intended to use his own novel, as Turgenev had used Fathers and Sons, as a critique of society without lapsing to the level of political tract. In addition, at that point in his career, Gaines did not have the close bonds to the older generation on the Louisiana plantation that he formed later. Even though he admits that he could
“understand the nihilistic attitude after someone had been away awhile” (Laney 60),

Gaines was unfamiliar with

how an older person could meet a young person. I didn’t know what a young person would do during the time he was thinking about leaving, what he would do during that time he was not with a girl. But then I read how Bazarov went through the fields with a switch knocking the leaves off the weeds and popping tassels off flowers. So I made Jackson walk down to my favorite river and take these rocks and skim them across the water. This was the kind of thing I learned. When I mention Turgenev, I’ve been told that Turgenev was an aristocrat and wrote about the aristocracy, but I’m talking about form. James and Flaubert thought a hell of a lot of Turgenev, and form is what I’m interested in. (Parrill 192)

A brief overview of the many parallels between *Fathers and Sons* and *Catherine Carmier* shall illustrate how closely Gaines modeled his work after his predecessor’s. In addition to the overall theme of the hero’s homecoming and subsequent alienation and aloofness from the older generation, other parallels include comparable pairings of characters, recurring plot elements, and strikingly similar metaphors. For example, Bazarov’s mother Arina Vlasevna finds a more powerful counterpart in Aunt Charlotte Moses, the sisters Odintsova and Katya correspond to Catherine and Lillian Carmier, the antiquated Pavel is a less harmful version of Raoul Carmier, and of course Bazarov is Jackson Bradley’s literary cousin. Among the most prominent plot elements occurring in both works are the failed love relationships (Bazarov-Odintsova and Jackson-Catherine), the generational dissonances (Bazarov’s parents vs. Bazarov and Aunt Charlotte vs. Jackson), and the duel (Bazarov-Pavel and Jackson-Raoul).

Finally, both writers use identical metaphors to express the thematic conflicts. Odintsova’s increasing power over and danger for Bazarov is metaphorically rendered through the description of her hair: “Her braid became undone and curled around her shoulder like a dark snake” (*FS* 77). Correspondingly, Catherine Carmier’s temptation
for Jackson is expressed in the following way: “Catherine had a red coat then and a long braid of black hair that hung down her back like a twisted rope” (CC 113). Fittingly, the “snake” alludes to Bazarov’s interest in science, and the “rope” threateningly refers to the lynchings that were rampant in the South during that time.

Gaines uses another parallel metaphor: After a heated exchange with Bazarov which reveals his growing separation from his mentor’s ideas, Arkady reveals his increasing awareness that man is a social animal by comparing himself to a leaf: “‘Look, . . . a dry maple leaf’s broken off and is falling to earth; its movements are like those of a butterfly in flight. Isn’t it strange? What’s saddest and dead resembles what’s most joyous and alive’” (FS 100). In a similar fashion, when talking to his former teacher, Madame Bayonne, Jackson is comparing himself to a leaf as well: “‘I’m like a leaf, Madame Bayonne, that’s broken away from the tree. Drifting’” (CC 79).

In addition to these obvious parallels between the two novels, it can certainly be argued that 19th century Russian society bore some similarities to the South Gaines knew in the 1930s and 1940s. When the Russian serfs were freed in 1863, they were given small allotments of land. However, as Foxcroft explains, “[T]his land . . . did not become their private property but was vested in the ‘Mir’ or village commune. Such a collective form of ownership proved unsatisfactory to the peasants from the start” (12). Even before Emancipation, many farms operated under the quitrent system or system of métayage. According to the former, the serfs farmed the landowner’s estate and paid him an annual sum, whereas under the latter the serfs farmed the land in return for a share of the crop. These systems recall, of course, the sharecropping policy in the post-Emancipation South, which likewise ensured the freed slaves’ economic dependency on the landowners.
Moreover, Turgenev’s “superfluous men” find their equivalent in those white landowners who suffer under the burden of history but are too weak and passive to effect change. One is reminded of characters like Frank Laurent in “Bloodline” and Jack Marshall in *A Gathering of Old Men*, who cling to tradition and embody conservative if not reactionary values, while the society around them is progressing. In general, Gaines seems to subscribe to Turgenev’s optimistic view of change. In most of his works, Gaines demonstrates that the old and the new can exist and survive together, as his novels often reflect a movement from alienation and misunderstanding toward reconciliation. In *Catherine Carmier*, however, Gaines is still struggling with bringing together the generations and with bridging the generational gap. In a significant “corrective swerve” from Turgenev, and similar to Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises*, Gaines leaves out the fathers; as a result, his novel markedly lacks any instructive male voices.

*Catherine Carmier* features a young man who returns home to his rural Louisiana after his years of education in California and can no longer get reintegrated into the society where he grew up. From the start it becomes clear that Jackson Bradley’s years of absence, like Bazarov’s in *Fathers and Sons*, have resulted in a thorough estrangement from everything once so familiar and dear to him.

When Jackson arrives back home in the quarters, he is welcomed by Brother, the friend of his youth. In the absence of the father figure that could welcome him, as Nikolai welcomes Arkady, Brother represents the extended community that is willing to bring into their fold “the one” they have been waiting for. However, the chasm that has grown between Jackson and the community in the course of years passed becomes evident when Brother watches Jackson getting off the bus: “What could he say? Anyhow, this might
not be Jackson at all. There was something too different about him— something Brother
could not put his finger on at the moment” (CC 17). The ensuing dialogue between the
two former friends is indicative of the different experience the two men have made:

    “Damnit, man, you done growed some there,” Brother said. “I wouldn’t
    ‘a’ knowed you.”
    “You look the same.”
    “Yeah, me, I never grow,” Brother said, laughing. But the laugh ended
    almost as quickly as it had begun. There was something about Jackson’s
    face that made him feel that his laughing was out of place. (CC 18)

While Brother is the archetype of a likeable though static character who remains
essentially unchanged throughout the novel, Jackson’s education in California and his
experience of a world apart from the rural South, have not only broadened his experience
but have also distanced him from his old friends.

    Jackson’s dilemma is a familiar one in an African American context, as increasing
education often leads to increasing disillusionment. Fredrick Douglass’s Narrative
provides the best-known example of the problem associated with literacy and education.
When Frederick secretly learns how to read and write, his enthusiasm knows no
boundaries. He is determined to become free: “From that moment, I understood the
pathway from slavery to freedom” (49). However, the more he reads the newspapers, the
more he learns about the devastating effects of slavery: “I would at times feel that
learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing . . . I envied my fellow-slaves for
their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. . . . Any thing, no matter what, to get
rid of thinking” (55). In Douglass’s attitude we see the reason for Jackson’s bitterness
and inability to feel at “home” again after his stay in a more liberal environment.

    By contrast, Brother is representative of the stasis reigning in Gaines’s fictional St.
Raphael Parish, where life is still strictly regulated according to the old codes of racial
behavior, codes Jackson can now no longer conform to: “There have been some changes, Jackson thought, and there haven’t been any. The Cajuns have taken over the land and some of the people have gone away, but the ones who are left are the same as they ever were” (CC 30-31).

Whereas in Turgenev’s novel the young students Bazarov and Arkady adopt the revolutionary Western ideas of freedom and modernism, Jackson becomes familiar with a more progressive society in the West. In both cases, the experience puts them at odds with the rest of the community at home. However, Gaines makes it clear that not all is better outside the South.

Living in a slum neighborhood in California, Jackson, at first, senses only the advantages that living outside the South entails: attending integrated schools, eating in non-segregated restaurants, and participating in sports side by side with whites. But soon Jackson realizes that the West has its own version of discrimination against blacks and other minorities, only more disguised than in the South: “He was not told that he could not come into the restaurant to eat. But when he did come inside, he was not served as promptly and with the same courtesy as were the others” (CC 92). He has similar experiences when he is trying to shop in stores or when his family is looking for an apartment, but finds itself forced to search in segregated areas only:

These incidents were not big. They were extremely small when you thought of them individually. But there were so many of them that they soon began to mount into something big, something black, something awful. . . [T]hey continued to mount until they had formed a wall. Not a wall of slivers that could be blown down with the least wind. But a wall of bricks, of stones. A wall that had gotten so high by now that he had to stand on tiptoe to look over it. (CC 94)
Once he realizes that it only appears that society outside the South is more egalitarian, Jackson’s search for a satisfying way of life and a place where he can feel at home begins. He decides to return to Louisiana because he feels that a return to his roots will give him the time necessary to reflect upon his future career now that he has finished college.

But Jackson returns to a world that has grown completely alien to him. Having been sent to California in the hope that he would return as a teacher for the children at home, he now perceives the expectations the others have of him as unbearable pressure. This is particularly true as far as his relationship with Aunt Charlotte is concerned. Jackson is actually her grand-nephew, and she is the closest relative to him in the quarters. All her life she has placed her hopes on Jackson becoming the community’s leader. She has spent most of her life working in order to pay for her grand-nephew’s education. But her love for Jackson is distorted by possessiveness, as becomes evident in her first thoughts on his arrival when she sees him talking to another woman (cf. CC 23-24). Aunt Charlotte won’t tolerate sharing Jackson with other women, because “she had sacrificed too much of her life to educate him to let any one take him from her. Now that he was back, there would be no one but the two of them” (CC 35). Similarly, it never occurs to Aunt Charlotte that Jackson might not want to stay forever:

She did not think for a moment that he had the right to go back. She had sacrificed too much of herself for him. She had hoped, prayed, waited too long for him to come back just to see him turn around and leave her like this. What was she going to do after he was gone? What would her life be like after he was gone? All of her dreams, her hopes, were wrapped up in the day that he would come back to her. (CC 169)

Jackson does not dare tell her that his stay in the quarters will only be a temporary one and that he does not intend to become, as she hopes, a teacher in this rural
community. Knowing how high her hopes for him are (“[Y]ou all they is left Jackson. You all us can count on. If you fail, that’s all for us,’” [CC 98]) and sensing that she would not understand his motives, Jackson cannot explain to her his resolve to leave again very soon. Torn between the homelessness he has experienced in California and his feeling of dislocation in the South, Jackson does not know where to go. He is adrift between two worlds and desperately tries to search for a place of rest, or for an anchor that would let him to settle down.

As exemplified by Jackson’s fate, Gaines shows how community can at times be overpowering in its suppression of individuality. Gaines explores the older generation’s perspective that is only vaguely sketched in Turgenev’s novel and absent in The Sun Also Rises. We can see here an instance of clinamen, in which Gaines revises his predecessors by having his protagonist stay in the quarters and work through his feeling of lostness. Jackson is not allowed to wander to new places, like Jake Barnes, nor can he take the easy way out and die, like Bazarov.

After the verbal and physical confrontation about religion discussed earlier, the tension between Jackson and Aunt Charlotte worsens. Since God and Jackson have always been the most important pillars in her life, Aunt Charlotte cannot bear one turning against the other. Jackson’s remarks devastate her, and, as a consequence, Aunt Charlotte falls severely ill.

Not able to talk openly to his great-aunt, Jackson cannot relate to the rest of the community either. At a party given to celebrate his return, he behaves condescendingly and indifferently toward the others, whom he perceives as ignorant; they, however, are intimidated by his education:
The men shook Jackson’s hand and spoke to him, but they did this just as the others had done. They waited for him to make the first move. He had been educated, not they. They did not know how to meet and talk to educated people. They did not know what to talk about. . . . But once Jackson had spoken to them and had shaken their hands, Jackson was as lost for words as they were. (CC 67)

As we have seen in Philip Martin’s case in *In My Father’s House*, the loss of voice is a crucial factor in a character’s sense of alienation. It reinforces the feeling of being an outsider and stranger, while, at the same time, cutting the individual off of the nourishing source of the community and the revitalizing power of the word.

The only person Jackson can talk to is his former schoolteacher, the now retired black Creole, Madame Bayonne. Her interpretative abilities as well as her knowledge of the wider world outside this community allow her to understand Jackson’s inner turmoil. She is the only one who comprehends that Jackson has changed and why he cannot stay: “She continued looking at him—not only at him, but through him. Those eyes know everything, he thought” (CC 71). Her name, Bayonne, which is the fictional name of the parish capital, “linking all Gaines’s works,” suggests that she functions as “a cohesive element” between the outsider Jackson Bradley and the rest of the community: “Her knowledge of past and present and her analytical abilities allow her to create a perspective for Jackson, one that links many disparate elements of race, ethnicity, class, and communal history” (Babb, *Gaines* 144 n.9). However, the fact that she herself is described as an eccentric, and is not integrated into life in the quarters, undercuts her possible role as a mediator between the two worlds.

Thus isolated, Jackson seeks refuge in nature, only to discover that his physical alienation is reinforced by the changes in nature that have taken place as a consequence of the Cajun encroachment: “Houses don’t sit between houses any more, now they sit
between fields. It’s all right at night. It’s quiet at night. But in the day you might have a tractor running up to your fence any time” (CC 77). Most houses have been torn down to make room for new fields of corn and cane, and the Cajun machinery has replaced the mules and men that had traditionally worked the fields. As a consequence, most black farmers have given up, and many families have moved to the cities, leaving behind only the elderly. This displacement of the pastoral ideal by economic agrarianism complements Jackson’s feeling of forlornness and restlessness: “[H]e hardly recognized the old place anymore. The old houses that had once stood back there had been torn down. . . . He would stand on one of the headlands, trying to remember whether or not a house once stood in a certain place, but there was nothing there to assure him that it did, . . . ” (CC 106). No wonder, then, that Jackson feels “like a leaf . . . that’s broken away from the tree. Drifting” (CC 79).

The pastoral in decline is a fitting setting for Jackson’s dilemma. Having gone to California with the intention of becoming a teacher and a leader for his home community, his idealism soon evaporates in the face of the disillusionment he experiences there. It made way for an attitude of desperation, combined with a nihilistic repudiation of all the values he had been brought up with. Consequently, Jackson is left rootless:

He was feeling empty. He did not like being empty—unable to recognize things, unable to associate himself with things. He did not like being unable to recognize the graves. He did not like being unable to associate with the people. He did not like being unable to go to church with his aunt, or to drink in the sideroom with Brother. What then? Was it to be there [i.e., in the West]? No, that was not it either. If neither there nor here, neither the living nor the dead, then what? (CC 191)

In his nihilistic tendencies, Jackson is both similar to and different from Bazarov. They both are disconnected from their previous generations, but Jackson, more than
Bazarov, senses the pain of the void. Whereas Bazarov escapes into the study of science, Jackson has no interests to assuage his pain. Jackson’s only hope is Catherine Carmier, the love of his youth. When they renew their affair, it becomes clear, however, that they do not so much complement each other as represent opposite poles in a society that emphasizes skin-color and family. Whereas the black Jackson has no ties to his past, the land, or family, the rather light-skinned Catherine has a secure sense of place and is virtually imprisoned by her father.

Raoul Carmier, being the only black sharecropper left, spends all his energy cultivating his land and fighting the encroachment of the Cajun machines. Not tolerating any people except Creoles of color, he has already chased away Catherine’s former lover and father of her only child, simply because he was too black. Everyone in the quarters knows that Raoul would not accept the black Jackson as husband of his daughter. While certainly no actual incest is implied, the relationship between father and daughter does have Electra overtones. Catherine has to fill the roles of both daughter and wife because Raoul’s actual wife, Della, is “no more than a servant around the house” since she had an affair with another man (CC 114). Importantly, however, Della is the only one who supports Jackson’s and Catherine’s relationship, because she knows that she can’t win back her husband as long as Catherine stays at home and Raoul considers his daughter the main pillar in his life.

Catherine herself is in love with Jackson, but she is torn between the two men in her life, “loving him [i.e., Raoul] as much as she had ever loved Jackson” (CC 153). Raoul’s uncompromising disdain for all non-Creoles makes an arrangement impractical: “It was impossible to belong to both at the same time, and it was just as impossible to
belong to one and not to the other” (CC 131). The heavy burden her father puts on her, in the absence of a son, makes Catherine a “victim” and a “cross-carrier,” and Catherine knows that she “cannot leave that house” as long as her father is alive (CC 118-9).

In view of the pressures that Raoul exerts on his daughter, love alone does not suffice to free Catherine from her father’s grip. Yet Jackson has nothing else to offer her. He’s a rebel who does not know where to go. He has no money, no friends, no job, no ideals, and no place he could call “home.” Consequently, even though she feels strongly for him, Catherine is unwilling to sacrifice the constricting yet secure place she has at home for the illusive freedom that Jackson offers: “Us? us? us? and nobody else but us? Is that what you want? Oh, Jackson, that is not life. Oh, Jackson, darling, can’t you see? Us? How long can it be like that? How long? Can’t you see that’s what happened between them [i.e., her parents]? Can’t you see there must be others—something else in our lives, can’t you see?” (CC 232-33). Catherine realizes that the life her parents lead, isolated from the rest of the community, is the fate in store for them if she and Jackson put their love above everything else and neglect the interests and hopes of those surrounding them: “‘We must think about the others. We must think about them, we owe them our lives’” (CC 221).

While it could be argued that Catherine is too dependent on her parents and too unselfish in pursuing her own dreams, it is also true that Jackson is too egoistic, too disrespectful toward the elderly, and cares too little for the feelings of his great-aunt. He obviously does not feel any ties to the past nor obligation to anyone, whereas Catherine has no ties to the future and hardly has a life separate from her father’s interests. Whereas Jackson’s rebellious stance may be justified in other matters, as for example when he
refuses to humble himself by drinking in the side room of segregated bars, his intention to straighten out his life is bound to fail unless he is willing to make compromises. His successful search for meaning in life will eventually depend on his ability to give up part of his independence and cease to neglect the interests of others. In this sense, even the heretofore seemingly obstinate Aunt Charlotte provides a positive example, because she undergoes a change in that she is able to forgive Jackson and at least tries to understand his motives.

Jackson’s final fight with Raoul therefore cannot change Catherine’s resolve to stay. Jackson defeats her father, and Raoul, for the first time, falls in front of her eyes, thereby losing his mystique of invincibility. Yet, her love towards her father, in addition to the insecure future offered by Jackson, keeps her from leaving her family. In Gaines’s world, dislocation and rootlessness, alienation from family and community, and lack of purpose and ideals are more powerful factors than romantic love. Love alone does not provide sufficient strength to overcome the anachronistic caste codes that impede the intermingling of blacks and Creoles of color.

While Jackson therefore has to be seen as an unsuccessful rebel, he is nevertheless a very important catalyst for change in general. His arrival back home heralds the impending alteration that the static community will have to undergo sooner or later. His estrangement from the community, paralleled by Catherine’s sister, Lillian, who arrives on the same bus as Jackson, stands in sharp contrast to the rootedness of the older generation. Their rootedness, however, cannot be seen as an exclusively positive factor either. Whereas it provides stability and strength to persevere through daily routine, it must also be seen as having a paralyzing effect by preventing people in the quarters from
adapting to change or even recognizing the change that is going on in other parts of the country. Their rootedness has already been challenged by the ongoing mechanization of agriculture, which endangers the former pastoral ideal. Viewed in this light, the community’s stability and peace constitute only the illusion of a contented place, and the fight between Jackson and Raoul challenges more than just the isolationist tendencies of the Creoles of color: it also announces the advent of a new age, where one man alone can no longer defy the ongoing mechanization, and, by extension, the globalization of the world.

Jackson’s return and the advance of Cajun machinery are harbingers of a more complex future and of the inevitable change that will befall this community. This change is summed up by Valerie Babb:

Nature silently guards the community from the exigencies of change. Ever watchful, it conceals the passage of time and allows all to live in the shadows of a simpler but decaying past. But as the trees are felled and the land cultivated, the dense protection nature provides disappears, and the community must face the onset of new values. (Gaines 58)

Jackson Bradley himself is one of the catalysts for change, but does not bring with him the “new values” Babb is alluding to. However, his refusal to continue to live by the old dehumanizing codes, combined with his search for dignity and pride, is a laudable start. Jackson at least has understood that life cannot go on as it used to: “Why couldn’t he be like the rest and go along with the game? Why worry about selling one’s soul—what is a soul? Why worry about it when everyone else was doing it?” (CC 188). Yet, his inability to believe in anything prevents him from finding peace: “If she said yes, I’ll go with you, then what? What then? That would mean he would settle down, quit searching.
But how could he settle down—and what to? Teaching? Teaching what? How could he teach when he did not believe in what he was teaching?” (CC 186).

Before he can settle down, Jackson still has to learn the value of tradition and the spiritual strength an extended community can provide, so evident by the care the people in the quarters take of Aunt Charlotte when she is ill. The broken key chain he finds and picks up while wandering aimlessly is at least a symbol of hope for his future: “He started to throw it away, but changed his mind and put it in his pocket” (CC 193). Maybe this chain will at some time connect him to others and to his past.

Jackson’s disorientation at the end is bewildering for the reader, as it also demonstrates the author’s hesitation about what to do with his protagonist. When Della encourages him to wait for Catherine, even “[i]f it takes twenty years,” Jackson is confronted with the nada: “He watched her go into the house. He stood there, hoping that Catherine would come back outside. But she never did” (CC 248).

Rejecting Turgenev’s all-too-optimistic ending of generational harmony and triumphant love, Gaines may have had Jake Barnes in mind at the conclusion of his novel. However, as I have tried to demonstrate, Jake is far more affirmative and thus successful in handling the challenges of his life. Gaines seems to have “misread” Jake’s transformation at the end since Jake’s recognition of the impossibility of love is an affirmative act, not a negative one.31 Jake has become a strong character, who is able to live with his challenges and contradictions. By contrast, Jackson has not matured much during the course of the novel. He is more lost than ever. Furthermore, whereas Jake’s change has brought him closer to previous generations, Jackson is still rootless, as the generational gap in Gaines’s novel is not bridged.
If Gaines is not yet able to move from *clinamen* to *tessera* and successfully “correct” the precursors’ texts in *Catherine Carmier*, the novel does “set the stage for what is to come in the Gaines canon” (Beavers 144). Later novels, such as *Of Love and Dust* and *In My Father’s House*, return to characters whose search for identity forces them to reevaluate their roots. And thirty years after *Catherine Carmier*, Gaines actually picked up Jackson’s broken key chain and wrote his first novel’s sequel, *A Lesson Before Dying*.

Asked whether the later work can be read as a sequel to the first, Gaines agreed that the relationship between Grant Wiggins and Vivian Baptiste in *A Lesson Before Dying* parallels Jackson’s and Catherine’s, just as the character of Tante Lou is reminiscent of Aunt Charlotte, with the characters in the later novel being “one step ahead of those in *Catherine Carmier*** (Lepschy 199). *A Lesson Before Dying*, set in 1948, at about the same time as Gaines’s first novel, is structured around the nihilist/existentialist Grant Wiggins. Like Jackson, Grant has also enjoyed the privilege of a good education, but his homecoming to the rural community where he grew up leaves him disillusioned and cynical towards the people there. He is unwilling to return to his former lifestyle and accept the discriminating social codes that he knows should be changed. Grant Wiggins also reflects on whether he should stay or leave for another state, and although he displays a similar indifference and cynicism to the community in the quarters as Jackson Bradley did, these considerations do not receive primary focus in the novel; instead, they constitute only the starting-point for the ensuing action.
Unlike Jackson Bradley, Grant has in fact decided to become the local teacher, even if he performs his job without any enthusiasm or idealism. In fact, he continually questions the very usefulness of teaching, given the economic and social degradation of blacks in the South that he fears will continue through endless cycles of poverty and criminality. Without any prospects of good jobs, most blacks would sooner or later be either poor sharecroppers or unemployed. Even worse, Grant’s school has to set its timetable according to the seasons, because the children must help their parents till the land, which leaves only the winter months for regular education: “And I thought to myself, what am I doing? Am I reaching them at all? They [i.e., his students] are acting exactly as the old men did earlier. They are fifty years younger, maybe more, but doing the same thing those old men did who never attended school a day in their lives? Is it just a vicious cycle? Am I doing anything?”

Grant remembers the time when he himself was a student. His teacher, the black Creole Matthew Antoine, displayed intense self-hatred for being caught in a racial limbo and shared contempt for everyone blacker than he. Matthew taught his students a philosophy that parallels Munford Bazille’s insights in “Three Men.” Grant recalls the negative picture painted by his former teacher: “He had told us then that most of us would die violently, and those who did not would be brought down to the level of beasts. Told us that there was no other choice but to run and run” (LBD 62). However, having spent some years in supposedly egalitarian surroundings have made it clear to Grant that there is no place to run to. Therefore, he reluctantly decides to assume his responsibility and become a teacher.
Unlike Jackson, Grant Wiggins is more rooted in the community’s life and more respectful towards the older people, even though he does not approve of their conformity and passivity. His respect and affection for the older generation, especially toward his aunt Tante Lou, are the crucial factors that impel him in the end to visit Jefferson in his cell after the latter has been sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit. Both Grant’s aunt and Jefferson’s grandmother, Miss Emma Glenn, want Jefferson to meet his fate like a man and die with dignity, and they instruct Grant to teach him the lessons of manhood. The emphasis on manhood becomes particularly significant, considering the fact that Jefferson’s white lawyer bases his defense on the argument that Jefferson is not to be held responsible for the charges because his intelligence parallels that of a “hog.” Miss Emma expresses the hurt this remark has caused in her: “‘I don’t want them to kill no hog, . . . I want a man to go to that chair, on his own two feet’” \((LBD\ 13)\).

In the creation of Grant and Jefferson, Gaines has performed a major corrective swerve on both \textit{Fathers and Sons} and \textit{The Sun Also Rises}. If the nihilist tendency is represented by a single character in the two earlier novels, Grant and Jefferson can be seen as split counterparts of their literary predecessors. They represent different aspects of nihilism. The one, educated and cynical, lives in a prison constructed by himself; the other, uneducated and disillusioned, is a virtual prisoner of injustice and racism. Neither one has any hope, and it is Gaines’s brilliant corrective move that allows them to form a symbiotic partnership and teach each other the respect and values they both need to redefine their identity.

At the beginning, Grant is unwilling to truly commit himself to his mission, as he puts his individual interests and wounds ahead of the community’s needs. For example,
he complains about the fact that visiting Jefferson in jail entails being humiliated by having to ask the white racist policemen for permission to see him, and Grant is aware of the pleasure they take in making blacks feel degraded. In addition, Grant does not have any idea how to influence and change a man who has been sentenced to death. Besides, like Jackson Bradley, Grant is also too much preoccupied with his own life: “‘I’m still trying to find out how a man should live. Am I supposed to tell someone how to die who has never lived?’” (LBD 31). However, Grant is perfectly aware of the scorn that would fall on him if he dared not to comply with the wishes of either Tante Lou or Miss Emma. Thus, it is both fear and respect that prevent him from resisting their demands.

Equally important, Grant’s fiancée, Vivian Baptiste, herself a teacher, exerts considerable pressure on him, too. In the past, she has continually dissuaded Grant from leaving Bayonne by reminding him of the responsibility they have as teachers: “‘Some people can [run away], but we can’t, . . . We’re teachers, and we have a commitment’” (LBD 29).

The character of Vivian Baptiste is an interesting revision of Catherine Carmier, as they are both rather light-skinned and identified as Creoles of color. However, just as Grant Wiggins is more involved in community matters than Jackson Bradley, so Vivian Baptiste is more vigorously attempting to overcome the isolation that still exists between her and the rest of the black community. She knows that she must win the acceptance of Tante Lou and the other people in the quarters in order for her and Grant’s relationship to become a lasting affair, and she actively attempts to bridge the gap by visiting the house of Tante Lou.
Moreover, Vivian is also a development of the strong Beverly Ricord in *In My Father's House*. A teacher like Beverly, Vivian’s relationship to Grant is complicated by her children from a previous marriage. Awaiting her divorce and anxious to keep custody of her children, Vivian imparts important lessons to Grant about the necessity of assuming responsibility and fulfilling one’s duties to prepare him for his eventual role as a father to her children.

Giving in to the pressures of both the old people and his fiancée, Grant, with hesitation, sets about his task and regularly visits Jefferson in jail. It is important to remember in this context that Jefferson is one of Gaines’s fatherless and motherless men whose life was negatively impacted as a result. As he asks Grant, “‘Who ever car’d my cross, Mr. Wiggins? My mama? My daddy? They dropped me when I wasn’t nothing. Still don’t know where they at this minute’” (*LBD* 224). The emotional deprivation he has suffered from as a consequence of his parents’ absence has made him lose all self-respect. As he later writes in his diary, “[N]obody aint never been that good to me an make me think im sombody” (*LBD* 232).

Therefore, Grant has to help rebuild Jefferson’s self-esteem on two fronts. On the one hand, he has to convince him that the white construction of black manhood—for example his status as a “hog”—is a “myth” that must be deconstructed: “‘White people believe that they’re better than anyone else on earth—and that’s a myth. The last thing they ever want is to see a black man stand, and think, and show the common humanity that is in us all. It would destroy their myth’” (*LBD* 192). Grant thus tries to impart to Jefferson the knowledge of the social construction of black manhood and encourages Jefferson to “‘chip away at that myth by standing’” (*LBD* 192).
On the other hand, Grant has to work against Jefferson’s marginalization within
his own community, the lifelong neglect and lack of respect he has suffered from as a
result of his parents’ absence. In a way, Grant can also be seen as complicit in Jefferson’s
dilemma. In his selfishness and rejection of communal needs and belief systems, such as
religion, as well as in his cynicism about his job as a teacher, Grant has compromised his
social responsibility as a role model and has thereby severed the bond that ties together
the members in a community. As Jeffrey Folks explains,

> It is a refusal to take seriously the belief system of the time and place in
which he lives, and inevitably his skepticism becomes a corrupting model
for others. In a sense, Grant is responsible for Jefferson’s presence during
the murder of a liquor store owner, and for the other youths who murder.
Once the binding of shared values is severed, discrete acts of
irresponsibility and violence occur with increasing frequency. (266)

In this regard, Grant needs to become aware of his own fatherly responsibility to
Jefferson, for, as Folks remarks, “Grant Wiggins’s relationship to Jefferson repeats a
familiar cultural pattern in which an older male abnegates his responsibility for a younger
male” (262). By accepting his role as a teacher, however, Grant proves to Jefferson the
community’s interest in him, thus making Jefferson see that he is a vital part of the
community. More importantly, as a consequence of the communal affirmation Jefferson
receives when the community visits him in jail, he comprehends the significance of his
role and of preserving his dignity for the community’s good. Grant explains to Jefferson
that he needs to become a “hero,” whom he defines as someone who “‘does for others.
He would do anything for people he loves, because he knows it would make their lives
better’” (LBD 191).

As a consequence of their regular meetings in jail, the roles between the two men
are gradually reversed, and Grant becomes Jefferson’s student. By trying to make a man
out of him and by subsequently observing the growth and change in Jefferson, Grant is able to see the parallel to the history of his people, and how they have endured constant denigration but still retained their dignity. In this sense, Jefferson, who is not guilty of the crimes he’s been convicted for, stands representative of all black people, whose lives were stolen by enslavement, but who have not given up in despair but rather have consistently struggled to keep their dignity. Witnessing the transformation of Jefferson leads Grant to a thorough self-examination and ultimately causes a profound change in himself: “‘You’re more a man than I am, Jefferson. . . . My eyes were closed before this moment, Jefferson. My eyes have been closed all my life. Yes, we all need you. Every last one of us’” (*LBD* 225). From this moment on, his former exasperation with his people, what he had previously interpreted as subservience and conformity, is now seen for what it really is: a survival mechanism that is based on strength and endurance.

Grant Wiggins comes to a more profound understanding not only of the community’s history of survival but also of himself, which includes the reawakening of the dormant pride in his people that had heretofore only slumbered beneath his preoccupation with himself. Since Jefferson ultimately maintains his dignity and refuses to succumb to despair, Grant finally becomes aware of his own weakness, which prevented him from standing by Jefferson in his final hours: “I am not with you at this moment because—because I would not have been able to stand. I would not have been able to walk with you those last few steps. I would have embarrassed you” (*LBD* 249).

When Deputy Paul Bonin later brings Grant the news of Jefferson’s heroic behavior—his facing the chair upright like a man—he also carries with him the diary Jefferson has kept. Taking the diary Grant is reminded of the future and the responsibility
he has as a teacher. The novel thus ends with Grant facing his students while crying and holding in his hands Jefferson’s diary, the words of strength and resilience.

Grant’s maturation is also complemented by a modification of his attitude concerning religious matters. Grant initially echoes Jackson Bradley’s disbelief and resents Reverend Mose Ambrose’s presence in Jefferson’s cell. Whereas Miss Emma insists on the religious component of Jefferson’s teaching, Grant first regards the minister as an impotent representative of an outdated mode of belief, one who can only quote Bible verses when faced with problems but who cannot influence the present in any way. Yet, Reverend Ambrose differs from other preachers in Gaines’s earlier works. Reverend Ambrose is not blind to the concerns of his parishioners and he has not lost his rhetorical abilities. Unlike the preachers in “The Sky Is Gray,” “A Long Day in November,” or A Gathering of Old Men, Reverend Ambrose understands how to apply the care of the soul to the community’s physical aches. When Grant accuses him of telling only “lies” from the Bible in order to soothe the people’s hearts and to comfort them with promises about a better future in Heaven, the minister replies:

“Yes, you know. You know, all right. That’s why you look down on me, because you know I lie. At wakes, at funerals, at weddings—yes, I lie. I lie at wakes and funerals to relieve pain. ’Cause reading, writing, and ’rithmetic is not enough. . . . She’s been lying every day of her life, your aunt is there. That’s how you got through that university, cheating herself here, cheating herself there, but always telling you she’s all right. I’ve seen her hands bleed from picking cotton. I’ve seen blisters from the hoe and the cane knife. At that church, crying on her knees. You ever looked at the scabs on her knees, boy? Course you never. ’Cause she never wanted you to see it. And that’s the difference between me and you, boy; that make me the educated one, and you the gump. I know my people. I know what they gone through. I know they done cheated themself, lied to themselves—hoping that one they all love and trust can come back and help relieve the pain.” (LBD 218)
This lengthy passage illustrates Gaines’s revision of the religious conflicts in his precursors’ and his own works. Neither the religious beliefs of Harold Krebs’s mother in “Soldier’s Home” nor those of Bazarov’s father are portrayed in a positive light, as their unquestioning religious faith smothers their children. Reverend Ambrose is the orally skilled and community-anchored minister that Phillip Martin in In My Father’s House needs to become. By calling the supposedly educated Grant “boy,” Mose Ambrose indicates that knowledge of facts alone does not suffice to make one a man, which is a clear rejection on Gaines’s part of the young student’s ideas in “The Sky Is Gray.” Rather, matters of the heart must not be neglected in favor of things concerning the head. It is only the knowledge of one’s people, of their daily toil and their secret hopes and wishes, that gives one the power to influence others. Grant may be educated, but he won’t reach his people by tending to the minds alone. Like other Gainesian characters, he still has to learn how to take care of the hearts. As Valerie Babb remarks: “[T]o be effective, all beliefs, whether they are secular or religious, must stem from an understanding of the human experience they address” (“Old-Fashioned” 258).

Unlike other, more orthodox preachers in Gaines’s canon, Reverend Mose Ambrose is firmly rooted in his community and therefore has the ability to be effective. Grant himself also seems to understand the significance of religion for the wellspring of the community, as his following remark attests: “They must believe, if only to free the mind, if not the body. Only when the mind is free has the body a chance to be free. Yes, they must believe, they must believe. Because I know what it means to be a slave. I am a slave” (LBD 251). Grant may never become a believer himself, but he comes to accept
“the value of belief” and “the role of religion as a collective narrative of hope within a traditional community” (Folks 265-66).

What then initially started out as an endeavor to teach the convicted Jefferson the lessons of manhood has in the end turned into Grant’s own bildungsroman, as he gives up his disapproving and condescending attitude towards the community in favor of a more understanding and also more affectionate position. As a consequence, he is not only more respected by the older people and his fiancée, he also finds himself more thoroughly integrated into the community’s life and discovers for himself an inner peace that allows him to become a potentially positive influence on future generations. In the end, he resolves to tell his students about how one man stood in the face of death, thereby attempting to convey to them the values of dignity and pride that have always been characteristic of his people. Rather than displaying a pessimistic or indifferent attitude, as he did in the beginning, Grant now comes to grip with his responsibility. In the end, he feels no longer any need to leave the community and has thus made the transition from an indifferent and cynic rebel to a potential leader.

Grant is ready to become a father himself—by marrying Vivian and becoming her children’s stepfather as well as by possibly fathering children himself. Grant therefore personifies the values displayed by the old men in A Gathering of Old Men, as his newfound knowledge of the past and his assuming responsibility in the present make him fit to be a role model in a way that Jackson Bradley clearly is not. By finding his place in the community and by being able to commit himself to the roles of teacher, husband, and father, Grant is successful in bringing together the generations.
As the discussion of Jackson Bradley and Grant Wiggins has demonstrated, Ernest Gaines shows a pervasive concern for the nihilistic or cynical tendency of young, educated black men, who are no longer willing to live according to what they consider anachronistic social codes and who, in one way or another, defy the status quo. It seems fair to say that the author himself must have experienced similar feelings when he returned to his native Pointe Coupée Parish, which he had left for California at the age of fifteen. But just as Gaines himself has been successful in reintegrating into rural life, so he also gives his characters the same possibility.

Whereas he is sympathetic to their problems, Gaines is quite unequivocal when he approves and when he disapproves of their behavior. To begin an investigation of the status quo by asking unpleasant questions is the right starting-point. After all, this is one of the main reasons why Jackson and Grant were sent away and given the privilege of a good education. But this questioning of the status quo must not lead to total relativism, as in the nameless student’s case in “The Sky Is Gray” or to an outright rejection of all values, as exemplified by Jackson Bradley. Although such a nihilistic stance may sometimes be understandable, Gaines tends to view this attitude as essentially antisocial. Rather, so he seems to suggest, it is indispensable for one to get integrated into the life of a given community and try to initiate change from within. By accepting one’s responsibilities and duties in a community, meaning is created and the “nihilistic threat,” warned against by Cornel West, can be overcome (23). Likewise, the energy set free by an antagonistic and rebellious stance might in this way get transformed into a catalyst for constructive change, for which Grant Wiggins stands as a hopeful representative.
The contrasting examples of Jackson Bradley and Grant Wiggins also demonstrate one of Ernest Gaines’s key tenets: Freedom is not a place to be found by running away and leaving behind one’s responsibilities. Unlike Nick Adams and Jake Barnes (except for his final realization), Grant realizes that liberty is not a spatial or geographic entity, but a psychological concept. As other works, particularly *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, make clear, it is only by giving up one’s preoccupation with oneself, by getting rooted in a community, and by building up a network of relationships that lasting peace can be found. Sticking to intellectual concepts alone does not lead to a satisfying life. Rather, a largely passive criticism of the status quo must be converted into an active involvement and participation in community affairs, which often necessitates making sacrifices and includes making compromises.

In Grant Wiggins, Gaines has thus completed the step of *tessera* and corrected the precursors’ texts where they “had failed to go far enough” (Bloom 5). Most obviously, Grant Wiggins is a rounder and more developed character than Jackson Bradley, as he is dynamic and matures during the course of the novel. In addition, Gaines revises Hemingway’s Jake Barnes and Turgenev’s Bazarov in that he places the community and previous generations before his individual protagonists. In Gaines’s world, the cultural authority of ancestors needs to be affirmed, and characters are not allowed to run away or die without having achieved significant maturity. As we have also seen in the discussion of *A Gathering of Old Men*, generational gaps need to be bridged, and Grant Wiggins is more likely to achieve that than any of Gaines’s other young men.

On a different level, *A Lesson Before Dying* also revises the ideas on romanticism held by Gaines’s precursors. If the relationship between Jackson Bradley and Catherine
Carmier resembles Bazarov’s and Odintsova’s in their ultimate failure, Grant Wiggins’s and Vivien Baptiste’s union recalls Arkady’s and Katya’s marriage at the end of Fathers and Sons. In spite of his sympathy for his angry young men and their nihilism, Gaines ultimately reveals himself as a romantic, and it is no coincidence that he wrote about a successful love relationship at the time when he himself had first gotten married.

Gaines is indeed a more optimistic writer than either Turgenev or Hemingway, which may derive from the fact that his personal involvement in the experiences he writes about makes him also more affected by his writings than either Turgenev, who was, after all, a serf-owning landowner and aristocrat, or Hemingway, who, in spite of his personal rootlessness, did have the privilege and luxury to wander and search for places. Most of Gaines’s works conclude with at least hope for social change (Of Love and Dust, A Lesson Before Dying) if not actual, achieved transformation (The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, A Gathering of Old Men). This faith in social change depends in large part on the individual’s personality, as Gaines subscribes to the belief that personal conduct can and will change society, a philosophy which hinges on the interconnectedness of the individual and the community. In order to illustrate the interdependence of the two, which is certainly Gaines’s most significant “corrective swerve” on his precursors’ texts, I would like to return to his latest novel and discuss the transformation that Jefferson undergoes.

All of Gaines’s works demonstrate the author’s pervasive concern with the fight for personal honor and dignity, which are prerequisites for influencing others. In his world, a character can either look away and accept the status of victim or he/she can make an active decision and thus alter history. In either case, the choice the character
makes reveals his or her personality. For example, in *Of Love and Dust*, Marcus Payne’s unaltering attempts to preserve his self-esteem make the narrator Jim Kelly aware of the loss of his own integrity, a result of his conformity. In this sense, Marcus Payne’s achievement parallels Jefferson’s in *A Lesson Before Dying*. Like Marcus, Jefferson’s emerging dignity and manhood have a profound impact on another human being, Grant Wiggins. In contrast to Marcus, however, Jefferson is less assertive and outspoken.

In many respects, Jefferson could even be seen as the very opposite of Marcus. Whereas Marcus Payne is a strong-willed character, who betrays a blatant arrogance and confrontational stance towards his environment, Jefferson seems to have no will of his own and appears to have completely submitted to society’s relegation of him to second-class citizen. When he is sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit, he answers his verdict with silence. In the course of the novel, however, he learns to find his voice and thus has an important impact not only on his teacher, Grant Wiggins, but on the whole community.

The initial visits to jail by Grant and his godmother Miss Emma show how much Jefferson has internalized society’s definition of him as a “hog.” When Miss Emma brings him some of his favorite food that she cooked, Jefferson demands corn instead, because, as he says, “[t]hat’s what hogs eat” (*LBD* 82). The power of language to define identity is not only revealed by Jefferson’s acceptance of the animal-like status implied in the term “hog,” used by his attorney as a strategic device for Jefferson’s *non compos mentis*, but also by his perceived difference from both his teacher and his godmother: “‘Y’all youmans, . . . I’m a hog’” (*LBD* 83). His statement “‘I ain’t no youman’” signals both the repudiation of his own humanity as well as the chasm that he feels exists
between him and “you,” that is, Grant and the others who visit him (*LBD* 139, [emphasis added]). His behavior corresponds to his self-image: “I’m go’n show you how a old hog eat,” he said. He knelt down on the floor and put his head inside the bag [of food] and started eating, without using his hands. He even sounded like a hog” (*LBD* 83).

Thus, Grant’s task is, as Philip Augur expresses it, the “problem of redefining Jefferson, from his identity given to him by the white dominant culture, hog, to a new identity, man” (75). During the first months Grant fails to initiate any improvement because he is still too cynical and too much preoccupied with himself. Jefferson senses that Grant has not voluntarily assumed the role of a teacher to him. As Suzanne Jones remarks:

Grant’s first sessions with Jefferson have no effect. Grant’s pedagogical techniques include modeling polite behavior for Jefferson, trying to make Jefferson feel guilty for hurting his godmother’s feelings, and exploiting the bad relations with whites by telling Jefferson that they are betting against Grant’s project with him. At first Grant fails with Jefferson for the same reason he is failing with his elementary school students. He does not want to teach, he is cynical about the prospect of making a difference, and thus he is angry about being forced into such a position. (57)

However, when Grant “shifts the focus of their meetings from himself to Jefferson,” signs of change in Jefferson’s behavior become observable (Jones 57). As Munford Bazille did to Procter in “Three Men,” so Grant explains to Jefferson the social mechanism that has shaped him. Grant attempts to convince Jefferson that he has the potential to influence others, even to make others happy and proud, especially Miss Emma, simply by properly eating the food that she brings him: “A hero does for others. . . . You could give something to her, to me, to those children in the quarter” (*LBD* 191). By behaving like a man and mounting enough courage to face his death nobly, Jefferson could, as Grant argues, debunk the white myth of black inhumanity: “The
white people out there are saying that you don’t have it—that you’re a hog, not a man. But I know they are wrong. You have the potentials. We all have, no matter who we are’’ (LBD 191). By standing like a man Jefferson would thus refute the basis for black subjugation: “It would destroy their myth. They would no longer have justification for having made us slaves and keeping us in the condition we are in. As long as none of us stand, they’re safe’’ (LBD 192).

Importantly, Jefferson’s process of maturation from a mere “brute” to a “man” is accelerated by the overwhelming communal affirmation he receives. Abandoned by his parents when young, disadvantaged by a discriminatory educational system, and rendered invisible by the racist social order, Jefferson is moved to tears when Grant’s students visit him in jail. The pecans they have gathered for him constitute his tie to the community and parallel Dirty Red’s eating pecans on the graveyard in A Gathering of Old Men, an act that similarly reestablishes his and the other old men’s link to the past.

The role of food in this scene is an important communal marker. As in A Gathering of Old Men where Mathu’s porch and yard, the site of a possible violent encounter, is transformed into a picnic area, the prison dayroom is made into a kitchen where the characters celebrate their communal ties. Courtney Ramsay explains the repeated references to the serving and partaking of food: “Food is often the only material asset available to the individual to express love or a giving of oneself to others” (50). For example, Miss Emma spends great energy in preparing Jefferson his favorite food of fried chicken, yams, and tea cakes. When Jefferson rudely rejects the food, she is hurt because the renunciation of food is tantamount to the rejection of his ties with her. As Ramsey clarifies, “By rejecting food, one also rejects the person offering it” (51). Similarly, John
Lowe argues that the prison “must be transformed into a nurturing, communal space if Jefferson is to die with dignity and thereby unify, inspire, and instruct the children in particular and the people in general” (148).

Forging ties with others provides Jefferson with the strength necessary to change his attitude and to confront his future, a strength that receives a decisive boost when the rest of the community visits him. Each one of them offers something to him and thus makes him aware of the influence his behavior will have on the people’s perception of themselves. Hence, Jefferson finally arrives at a redefinition of his identity: “If I ain’t nothing but a hog, how come they just don’t knock me in the head like a hog? Stab me like a hog? . . . Man walk on two foots; hogs on four hoofs” (*LBD* 220). Jefferson thus successfully abdicates the label imposed on him, as he can now express his common status with the rest of the community: “‘Yes, I’m youman, Mr. Wiggins. But nobody didn’t know that ’fore now’” (*LBD* 224).

In the end, Jefferson eats Miss Emma’s gumbo, thus signaling the forging of generational ties. As Grant happily remembers, “How he and I had gone back to the table, and how he had eaten the gumbo though it was cold, and how his nannan was so proud” (*LBD* 195). To further solidify his accomplished transformation, Jefferson changes his initial request for last supper from a gallon of vanilla ice cream to a mere cup of ice cream to be consumed after a meal cooked by Miss Emma. Ramsey summarizes the importance of food and the proper atmosphere of a kitchen in the novel:

The rituals are necessary to provide an appropriate environment for the deep communication of love and emotions that transpires over what seems otherwise to be only the mundane activity of the ingestion of food. . . . In a culture where the voices of the people have traditionally been silenced, food becomes an even more essential currency of exchange, and at times the only comprehensible means of communication. (56-57)
Food thus provides not only the nourishment, but the rituals associated with it—proper attitude and etiquette, the manner of setting the table, the use of tablecloth, napkins, silverware, and eating together—are “connected with the idea of shared humanity” (Folks 269).

The sharing of food is, however, not the only ritual used in the novel to convey communal support. Folks also lists the “practice of ‘visiting’ to express support for the sick and dying” and the way the “members of the community employ clothing to express their sense of deference for an important occasion.” As Folks summarizes, “Through the use of such shared signals, a system of communal support and faith is maintained” (270).

The community’s and Jefferson’s interdependence is successfully realized by Jefferson’s redefinition of himself: “lowly as I am, I am still part of the whole” (LBD 194).

Conversely, the people in the quarters, and especially Miss Emma, profoundly profit from a single man’s assumption of manhood and dignity. As Augur summarizes, “Jefferson shows with abundance the power to be gained in the spirit of mutual giving. Jefferson and the members of his community all gain in their actualizations of self-worth as they give to each other” (82).

The community’s benefit becomes even more obvious if one considers the legacy Jefferson will leave after his death. In one of his last visits to jail, Grant brings Jefferson first a radio, then a pencil and a notebook. In his lonely days and hours before death, Jefferson gradually transfers the voices he hears on the radio to his own mind, thereby producing his own voice. Writing down his thoughts and feelings in what will turn out to be his diary constitutes the decisive transformative effect on Jefferson. As Babb notes, “[W]riting fulfills two fundamental needs for Jefferson: it helps him to crystallize fleeting
ideas, and, more important, it assists him in coming to terms with . . . his death” (“Old-Fashioned” 262).

Finding the voice he had been denied all his life, Jefferson is finally able not only to deconstruct the identity and reality imposed on him by both white and black society but also to reconstruct and redefine a new identity, impregnated with his personal thoughts and emotions. The following excerpt from Jefferson’s Diary, frequently praised as Gaines’s single most brilliant piece of writing, illustrates Jefferson’s completed transformation into a proud man. Written without punctuation, it not only conveys Jefferson’s authentic voice but also proves the power of language and self-expression and the humanity and dignity that he has reclaimed prior to his death:

mr wigin i just feel like tellin you i like you but i dont kno how to say this cause i ain never say it to nobody before an nobody aint never say it to me . . . i ain’t done this much thinkin and this much writin in all my life before . . . when they brot me in the room an i seen nanan [his godmother] at the table i seen how ole she look an how tied she look an i tol her i love her an i tol her i was strong . . . an i let her hol me long is she want cause you say it was good for her an i tol her i was strong an she didn need to come back no more cause i was strong an she just set ther wit her eyes mos shet like she want to go to sleep . . . i been shakin an shakin but im gon stay strong . . . good by mr wigin tell them im a man good by wr wigin im gon ax paul if he can bring you this [the diary]. (passim, 228-34)

At the end, the diary is passed into the hands of Grant, who will not only preserve Jefferson’s memory but also transmit the story of his heroism to his students. By having faced death standing like a man, Jefferson ultimately proves his humanity and will additionally, like Marcus Payne, serve as an inspiration and moral boost to the others in the community. Jefferson thus impressively complies with the demand made in Claude McKay’s famous poem “If We Must Die”: 
If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead! (36)

Not only has Jefferson’s death been “noble,” but it will also be acknowledged by his oppressors, “the monsters we defy,” who will ultimately be constrained to “honor us though dead.” The latter is exemplified by the Deputy Paul Bonin, who witnesses the execution: “‘He was the strongest man in that crowded room. . . . When Vincent [the executioner] asked him if he had any last words, he looked at the preacher and said, ‘Tell Nannan I walked.’ And straight he walked, Grant Wiggins. Straight he walked. I’m a witness. Straight he walked’” (LBD 254).

Though Paul has always been sympathetic to the black prisoners, he is clearly impressed by Jefferson’s stance, thus recalling his namesake in the New Testament: “Paul is the converted soldier struck by a ‘bolt of lightning’ to ultimately preach ‘the word’ of Christ,” as Philip Auger remarks (83). This is confirmed at the end, when Paul confides to Grant: “‘I heard the two jolts, but I wouldn’t look up. I’ll never forget the sound of that generator as long as I live on this earth’” (LBD 254). Paul’s offering Grant his friendship as well as his “eagerness to read the [diary] after Grant is finished and to help Grant spread ‘the word’ to Grant’s students that Jefferson was the ‘bravest man’ at the execution adds to his parallels with the biblical St. Paul” (Auger 84-85).

The diary indeed becomes the new script for the community, as it reverses white society’s definition of African Americans as victimized, while simultaneously underlining the rich positive resources of African American culture. John Lowe reminds
us that the diary has “a powerful counterpart historically in the magnificent blues songs that grew out of the African American prison population” (158). In addition, Jefferson’s Diary recalls both Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the works they wrote in jail. Like Malcolm X, Jefferson fashions a positive identity and creates a new self out of confinement, and like Dr. King in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” he spreads the word of love and the common humanity of all.

Therefore, Jefferson’s “blood [has not been] shed in vain,” as demanded by McKay, but bequeathed a legacy that is pivotal for Grant’s own process of maturation, as well as for the rest of the community, both black and white. Jefferson’s diary may thus well be interpreted as a new “Bible,” as some critics have observed (cf. Auger 83-84 and Stelzmann 207-09). This “Bible” will teach the words of love, humanity, and integrity, and confirm the common humanity of all. Like Marcus Payne’s death in Of Love and Dust and Charlie’s death in A Gathering of Old Men, Jefferson’s death serves as a revelation for the community in that it inspires others and contributes to a heretofore nonexistent feeling of pride. Since Jefferson refuses to succumb to the definition imposed on him by an oppressive society, he may well be regarded as a “rebel,” who subverts the racist rationale that denies him his humanity, and who replaces it with a proud, but quiet, assertiveness. He exemplifies Gaines’s tenet that “standing,” or reclaiming one’s dignity, will not go unnoticed but will initiate gradual and decisive change in the parish.

Jefferson thus illustrates Gaines’s belief that personal conduct can effect change in society. The goal of ameliorating society for the better is certainly a concern not shared to the same extent in the writings of Turgenev and Hemingway. While all three authors
voice their critique of society’s status quo, Gaines’s position of writing as a member of a disadvantaged population makes the concern with social reforms a higher priority.

In his optimistic ending in *A Lesson Before Dying*, Gaines clearly revises both the negative ending of his *Catherine Carmier* and the ambiguous conclusion of *The Sun Also Rises*. The novel is thus closer in spirit to *Fathers and Sons*, whose reconciliation between the generations at the end finds its counterpart in Grant’s reintegration into the community as well as in the closing of the generational gap between Miss Emma and Jefferson. Similarly, the double wedding in Turgenev’s novel finds its analogy in Grant’s and Vivian’s impending marriage and, if one is allowed to move beyond the text, in Gaines’s own marriage to Dianne Saulney in the very year *A Lesson Before Dying* was published.

Gaines’s overall optimism and belief in social change is a curious feature to explain. On the positive side, one could argue that it bespeaks of his inherent belief in humanity and anticipates a better future. Certainly, this vision stems from his time in California when he found himself integrated among people of many different nationalities. Jeffrey Folks likewise attributes Gaines’s “progressive vision of cooperation” to his “California perspective” (262). From a more critical perspective, however, one could also qualify Gaines’s vision as idealistic, especially when we consider that race relations in the South, and in the United States in general, have not progressed as much as his works would allow us to hope for. At least from that perspective, Hemingway’s playful hero Jake Barnes and his dialogical vision seems to be a more true-to-life literary model.
Gaines’s optimism is especially obvious in his later works. Here we may see an obvious indication of his rejection of Hemingway as a literary ancestor. Certainly, one can look at the nihilist Jackson Bradley and the ineffective father Phillip Martin as Gaines’s most Hemingwayesque characters. And until his gradual transformation into a more responsible character, Grant Wiggins, in his existentialism and cynicism, bears some resemblance to Jake Barnes. Clearly, however, Gaines’s *A Lesson Before Dying* is distinctly his own and very different from both *Fathers and Sons* and *The Sun Also Rises*, as well as from *Catherine Carmier*. As the discussion has sought to emphasize, novels like *A Gathering of Old Men* and *A Lesson Before Dying*, but also *Of Love and Dust* and *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, work against the (white) American literary grain of individualism. Neither Jefferson nor Grant is a Jake Barnes, as they eventually abdicate their egotistical concerns for a recognition of communal interests. All of Gaines’s characters realize that they find themselves within a network of relationships and that the discovery of the self is inextricably bound up with social and communal accountability.

At the same time, they have to find and assert their voice in order for them to join the community. The issue of voice, then, is a key issue stylistically as well as thematically. As Herman Beavers remarks with regard to point of view in Gaines, “[I]n those novels where he uses the third person omniscient narrator, the protagonists’ quest is to improve their aural skills rather than their oral skills” (244 n.36). This is true for characters like Phillip Martin and Jackson Bradley, whose silence has a dampening effect on their surroundings. The same is true for Jefferson, who asserts himself and thus recreates a new identity by giving voice to his thoughts in his diary. The power of voices,
both spoken and written, is the link to the rest of the community, as well as to previous
generations. Unless the characters’ inner conflicts are voiced, they cannot be reconciled.
Here we see another key difference in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, which does not
allow for a genuine reconciliation between the generations, as the pre-war generation
remains a disembodied entity throughout the novel.

The lack of orality in Hemingway’s works, which can certainly be traced to
modernism’s emphasis on fragmented experience and subjectivity, becomes especially
obvious in works like *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea*. As seen,
both works emphasize storytelling and language as socially constructive, but never to the
extent that the emphasis shifts away from Hemingway’s concern with an individual
character. Interest in the interrelatedness of individual and community and the
concomitant emphasis on orality are thus the major reasons why Gaines eventually had to
reject Hemingway as a literary father.

In this context, I would like to return here to the comparison of scenes of religious
oppression I have discussed earlier. Bazarov’s deathly body releases “something
resembling a shudder of horror” when the holy oil touches his chest (*FS* 153), while
Harold Krebs calls his mother’s prayer a “lie” (*IOT* 77). The student in “The Sky is
Gray” negates the existence of God, and Jackson Bradley cruelly calls religion a “farce”
(*CC* 100). These comparable attitudes find their revisions in both Jake Barnes’s religious
conversion in San Sebastian and in Grant Wiggins’s ability to live with the religious
“lie.” The differences may be attributed to the authors’ increasing understanding of the
value of belief. However, there is a difference between Jake’s and Grant’s attitudes that is
indicative of the two authors’ concerns. Jake’s conversion and spiritual rebirth are
personal; they allow him a return to order after the fiesta’s nightmare and chaos. Grant’s “lie,” however, is communal; his views have not changed, but he acknowledges that religion serves as a sustaining force or collective narrative of hope for the community.

To conclude this section, it seems necessary to at least mention Hemingway’s and Gaines’s personal background to arrive at a better understanding of their fictional treatment of the father-son relationship. Although both authors share a problematical relationship with their father, which, as we have seen, informs their fiction in different ways, the big difference is, of course, the fact that Hemingway had three sons, whereas Gaines has no children. Consequently, we see a continued fascination with the father-son theme in Hemingway’s posthumous works, notably in *Islands in the Stream* and *The Garden of Eden*. By contrast, Gaines’s focus on the extended community has led to a redefinition of the father role from his early short stories via Phillip Martin to the old men in *A Gathering of Old Men*. This redefinition finds its climax in *A Lesson Before Dying*.

In the absence of a biological father-figure, Grant Wiggins has to negotiate the lessons of three different teachers that could be likened to father figures. His former teacher Matthew Antoine instilled in Grant a bitterness and cynicism that has vexed him for much of his life. Antoine’s lesson emphasizes the endless cycle of dehumanization that awaits the black male. His only advice is to run. The second father figure is Reverend Ambrose who teaches Grant about humility and the role of religion in sustaining a community. Finally, Jefferson becomes Grant’s third teacher, as his courage and dignity allow Grant to redefine heroism and his own role and responsibility as a teacher.

These three teachers are supplemented by Grant’s fiancée Vivian, who teaches Grant that “running away” is no solution. To make this relationship work, Grants needs to
place individual needs after familial concerns and give up selfish ways. Grant most obviously revises the ineffective father-figure of Phillip Martin when he kneels before his fiancée and asks for forgiveness for his selfish barroom-fight. If Reverend Ambrose teaches Grant an obligation to the older and present generations, then Jefferson and Vivian impart to Grant that he has a duty to future generations as well. Once he has internalized the lessons of these teachers and renounced Matthew Antoine’s embittered advice, he is ready to be a father himself.

_A Lesson Before Dying_ thus illustrates what I would like to characterize as an increasing tendency in Gaines’s works to construct a family or patriarchy out of whatever material is available. In the absence of father and mother figures, Gaines redefines the roles of the extended family and community according to particular needs. His earliest short stories still focus on the mother or father as guide. However, there are no effective parents of note in any of the novels, so the aunts and great-aunts or the nannans and parrains take over. In _A Gathering of Old Men_, the whole community and with it an entire generation become fathers and mothers to the grandchildren. In _A Lesson Before Dying_, Grant synthesizes various models (teacher, preacher, pupil, fiancée) to define a father-role for himself. In this sense, Jefferson’s diary becomes the script for a father, as it illustrates the interconnectedness of human beings and the universal responsibility for one another, white and black.

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1 Cf. Gaines’s flat response to the question which black writers influenced him: “No black writer had influence on me” (Gaudet and Wooton 33). On a different occasion, Gaines explains his preference for Faulkner, Joyce, Hemingway, and the Russians: “They showed me how to get it much better than the black writers had done because so many of them really dealt with style, whereas I think the black writers are much more interested in content—you know, putting it down like it is—and the style is sort of secondary” (Fitzgerald and Marchant 13-14). In addition, Gaines laments that “[m]ost of your black
writers who have left the South have ignored the black peasantry, the people who work
the land, as though they want to forget that completely. I think too many of our black
intellectuals who have left the South put down those experiences, do not think those
experiences are worth writing about” (Tarshis 74). The portrayal of the peasantry in
Turgenev is central to understanding Gaines’s fascination for the Russian writer.

2 See my introduction (page 3) for a discussion of Gaines’s criticism of Ellison. For an
eexample of Gaines’s comments on other black writers, see Gaudet and Wooton 33-36.

3 Male African American writers often differ from female African American writers in
that the former seek to distance themselves from other African American writers,
whereas the latter often embrace black tradition and literary kinship. These two camps,
which may have originated with the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet
Jacobs, find their corresponding thematic emphases on the struggle of the male individual
in the works of writers such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and John Edgar
Wideman, on the one hand, and the celebration of community and tradition by African
American female writers, such as Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison,
on the other hand. Ernest Gaines may be one of the few male writers who transcends this
gap in his later works by bringing together both the individual and the community.

4 Bloom’s theory, in particular his explanations about the mechanisms of denial, would
have further strengthened Beavers’s argument, as Gaines has always insisted on his
writing being very different from Ralph Ellison’s. Cf. Gaudet and Wooton 30 and Lowe
311-12. In fact, it is quite interesting that Gaines not only repeatedly but also vehemently
dissociates himself from Ellison.

5 Later in the same letter, Hemingway repeats his boxing metaphor and advises Faulkner:
“You should always write your best against dead writers that we know what stature (not
stature: evocative power) that they have and beat them one by one. Why do you want to
fight Dostoevsky in your first fight? Beat Turgenieff—which we both did soundly and for
time which I hear tick too with a pressure of 205 over 115 . . . Then nail yourself
DeMaupassant (tough boy until he got the old rale. Still dangerous for three rounds).
Then try and take Stendhal. . . . You and I can both beat Flaubert who is our most
respected, honored master” (Baker, Selected Letters 624).

6 Noel Fitch also contends that Hemingway “inherited his classical style of clear, lean
prose detail as much from Turgenev as from any other writer.” In addition, according to
Fitch, Hemingway “admired Turgenev’s precise observation and his effort to call
attention not to his language but to his material” (166). However, it seems too simplistic
an approach to attribute Hemingway’s style to a single or even major source. In fact, it is
more likely that Hemingway’s distinctive style evolved from his experience as a reporter
on the Kansas City Star, the influence of the Imagist movement, and a slate of other
writers, among whom the most important ones may be Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein. In
a lot of ways, Hemingway’s style is very different from Turgenev’s, as it is much more
economic and less ornamental.
Carlos Baker illustrates Turgenev’s significance for Hemingway by emphasizing the latter’s “love of those books which can be read, above all, with a sense of personal participation.” Baker then refers to a “million-dollar list” of 16 predominantly continental titles published in Esquire, which Hemingway “would rather read again for the first time’ than be assured of a million-dollar annual income.” The list includes Turgenev’s A Sportsman’s Sketches (The Writer as Artist 175).

Ernest Hemingway, The Sun also Rises (New York: Scribner’s, 1926) 151. Subsequent references to the novel are to this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text, preceded by the abbreviation SAR.

In A Moveable Feast, Hemingway recalls how he wrote “Up in Michigan” in a Paris café: “I was writing about up in Michigan and since it was a wild, cold, blowing day it was that sort of day in the story. I had already seen the end of fall come through boyhood, youth and young manhood, and in one place you could write about it better than in another. That was called transplanting yourself . . .” (5). Besides the influence of paintings, such as Cézanne’s, Turgenev in his description of nature was the major instructor for Hemingway in achieving this technique of “transplanting” oneself.

The influence on Gaines of those stories in A Sportsman’s Sketches that portray serfs and peasants is worth a separate study. There is a clear link between the narrator’s understated tone of social criticism in Turgenev’s stories and the way Gaines often depicts scenes of injustice and cruelty. Furthermore, Turgenev’s indirect way of portraying the far-reaching psychological consequences of serfdom is comparable to what Gaines does in his works. A further investigation of these particular subjects is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study, which focuses on the father-son relationship and larger generational conflicts.

In addition to Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons, this generational conflict is also the subject of Chernyshevsky’s What Is To Be Done? (1863) and Dostoevsky’s The Possessed (1871).

Ivan Turgenev, Fathers and Sons, ed. Michael R. Katz (1862; New York: Norton, 1996) 38. All further citations are based on this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text, preceded by the abbreviation FS.

Of course, it is generally acknowledged that Nikolai is a thinly-disguised portrait of the author himself. As Turgenev writes in a letter to Konstantin Sluchevski: “Nikolai Petrovich and Pavel Petrovich are our grandfathers; Nikolai Petrovich is myself, Ogarev, and thousands of others” (Lehrmann 136). Earlier in the same letter, Turgenev states that “[m]y entire story is directed against the gentry as the leading class” and that a “feeling of aesthetics has compelled me to take the best representatives of the gentry so as to show my theme more faithfully” (135-36).

The Messianic theme of “the one” plays a crucial part in Gaines’s fiction. Jackson Bradley is the first representative in a line of protagonists, which includes Ned Douglass.
and Jimmy Aaron in The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman as well as Grant Wiggins
and Jefferson in A Lesson Before Dying. As Gaines explains the role of “the one,” “[I]n
any family, any family of five or six, the mother and father or the older people pick out a
person in that family to do—to carry on the work, in case something happens. In a place
like the Quarter where I lived, those old people, without you knowing, will concentrate
on you, and they will choose you” (Lowe, “Interview” 304). Even though Gaines denies
having been picked as “the one,” his early task of letter writing for the elderly folks, as
well as his fame now, has established him as a sort of savior of the heritage of the Quarter.
This is especially true in terms of the active restoration and maintenance work he does on
the Cherie Quarters cemetery, as noted above.

All further quotations refer to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text,
preceded by the abbreviation CC.

16 Ernest Hemingway, In Our Time (1925; New York: Scribner’s, 1987) 75. All further
quotations refer to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text, preceded by the
abbreviation In Our Time.

17 Many of the ideas in this chapter, which revolve around the similarities between
Bazarov and Jake Barnes, are also explained in Myler Wilkinson’s study Hemingway and
Turgenev: The Nature of Literary Influence, especially in chapter 4, “Fathers and Sons
and The Sun Also Rises.

18 See also the following passage: “Now the essence of the greatest emotional appeal of
bullfighting is the feeling of immortality that the bullfighter feels in the middle of a great
faena and that he gives to the spectators. He is performing a work of art and he is playing
with death, bringing it closer, closer, closer, to himself, . . . He gives the feeling of his
immortality, and, as you watch it, it becomes yours” (Death in the Afternoon 213).

19 Instead of viewing the fiesta as “sacred time,” one could also see in it an example of
Bakhtin’s concept of the carnival during which “life is turned inside out” (Problems 122).
Bakhtin’s categories of “the carnival sense” can all be applied to The Sun Also Rises (cf.
123-24). In this sense, the atmosphere of joyful relativity and the life-creating and
transforming power of the fiesta express disorder, which must be followed by a return to
order, which is illustrated both by Jake’s rehabilitation in San Sebastian and by the
sequence of the epigraphs.

20 The sense of earth’s ultimate resilience, strength, and survival is also expressed in
Hemingway’s famous passage about the Gulf Stream in Green Hills of Africa: “[K]now
that this Gulf Stream you are living with, knowing, learning about, and loving, has moved,
as it moves, since before man, and that it has gone by the shoreline of that long, beautiful,
unhappy island since before Columbus sighted it and that the things you find out about it,
and those that have always lived in it are permanent and of value because that stream will
flow, as it has flowed, after the Indians, after the Spaniards, after the British, after the
Americans and after all the Cubans and all the systems of governments, the richness, the
poverty, the martyrdom, the sacrifice and the venality and the cruelty are all gone . . . and
the palm fronds of our victories, the worn light bulbs of our discoveries and the empty
condoms of our great loves float with no significance against one single, lasting thing—
the stream” (149-50).

21 Fathers and Sons can be regarded as Turgenev’s misprision of Pushkin’s Eugene
Onegin. There are a number of parallel plot elements, including the paired sisters, the
country estates, the friendship between a cynic and a romantic, the duel, and Tatiana’s
rejection of Onegin, which parallels Odintsova’s rejection of Bazarov. However, there are
no fathers of note in Pushkin’s work. In this respect, Turgenev’s addition of the fathers
would be his act of misprision of Pushkin’s text.

22 Jahn convincingly shows that the nature of the four relationships reverses itself by the
end of the novel from what it was in the beginning. In each case, the pattern is similar, as
the relationship begins in clarity before elements of ambiguity are introduced. When the
ambiguities are resolved, a new clarification emerges (82). For a detailed explanation of
the changes in the four relationships, see Gary R. Jahn, “Character and Theme in Fathers
and Sons,” esp. pp. 82-88.

23 In his “preface” to the Norton Critical Edition of Fathers and Sons, Michael R. Katz
quotes the editor of the first Norton Critical Edition, who defended the incorrect
translation of “sons” by arguing that “in English [sons] better implies the notion of
spiritual and intellectual generations conveyed by the Russian deti” (vii). Katz himself
emphasizes that he decided against changing the title to “Fathers and Children” out of a
sense of “tradition and euphony,” but that he is aware of the implied sexism of the title
“Fathers and Sons” (vii). Consequently, the newest Norton edition of the novel includes
several articles on the role of women in the novel.

24 Turgenev never married, and Pauline, named after singer Pauline Viardot, with whom
Turgenev had a lifelong love relationship, is the offspring of an affair Turgenev had with
a peasant seamstress on his mother’s estate.

25 Cf. Brett’s comment to Jake: “‘You’re the only person I’ve got, and I feel rather awful
to-night’” (SAR 185).

26 Donald Daiker considers the final taxi ride the “equivalent to Romero’s performance in
the bull ring”: “When Brett’s body presses against Jake, it parallels the moment in the
bull ring when ‘for just an instant he [Romero] and the bull were one’ (227). The raised
baton of the policeman suggests the drawn sword of the bullfighter. What directly follows
in both the bull ring and the taxi is the death blow. Jake’s laconic ‘Isn’t it pretty to think
so?’ is the equivalent of Romero’s driving the sword between the shoulders of the bull.
Jake administers the metaphorical sword to Brett for the same reason that Romero kills
the bulls: ‘So they don’t kill me’ (193)” (54).
I agree here with Myler Wilkinson, who likewise refers only to steps one, two, and six of Bloom’s theory. Steps three to five in Bloom’s model, called “kenosis,” “daemonization,” and “askesis,” are less important and too systematic to devote space to them in this paper. Wilkinson, however, does not elaborate on step six.

As William Adair argues, *The Sun Also Rises* constantly evokes the war and thus the “pre-story past” in its subtle allusions, which are “found in café scenes, café names, and food” (128).

In a different interview Gaines states that he had Fathers and Sons in mind when writing *In My Father’s House* (cf. Rickels 131). Presumably, Gaines is referring to the title and actual father-son relationship here, and less to the structure of the novel.

Of course, the name Bayonne also alludes to the French town Hemingway used in *The Sun Also Rises*. It is in Bayonne that Bill Gorton and Jake meet with Robert Cohn on their way to Pamplona: “Bayonne is a nice town. It is like a very clean Spanish town and it is on a big river” (*SAR* 96). Later, after the fiesta is over, Jake separates from his friends in Bayonne before heading to San Sebastian to begin his cleansing process. Bayonne thus links the pre- and post-Pamplona parts of the novel in a way that Gaines’s parish seat links his novels and Madame Bayonne links the generations.

Similarly, Herman Beavers argues that “Jackson’s solitude at the end of the novel is of a piece with Jake’s realization at the end of *The Sun Also Rises* that he, too, will be alone, that his relationship with Brett is illusory” (144). However, Jake’s relationship with Brett need not be over if Jake recognizes and accepts it for what it is. Jake is clearly more affirmative and less desperate than Jackson.

One could argue that Copper in “Bloodline” is a link between Jackson Bradley’s disillusionment and Grant Wiggins’s cynicism. Copper’s madness is Jackson’s nihilism pushed to the extreme, as he threatens to wage a war against his uncle’s plantation to get back what is rightfully his. In his advocacy of militancy, Copper also foreshadows Billy in *In My Father’s House*.

Ernest Gaines, *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993; New York: Vintage, 1994) 62. All further quotations refer to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text, preceded by the abbreviation LBD.

Another rather nihilistic-minded character and surrogate father-figure in Gaines’s canon is the cynic Munford Bazille in “Three Men.” Munford differs from the young student in “The Sky Is Gray” and from Matthew Antoine in that he—having fully realized the larger context of the social forces that contrive against the black man—actively tries to prevent another human being from falling into the same trap as he did.

As Cornel West states in *Race Matters*, “[T]he major enemy of black survival in America has been and is neither oppression nor exploitation but rather the nihilistic threat—that is, loss of hope and absence of meaning. For as long as hope remains and
meaning is preserved, the possibility of overcoming oppression stays alive. The self-fulfilling prophecy of the nihilistic threat is that without hope there can be no future, that without meaning there can be no struggle” (23).
CONCLUSION
INSTANCES OF LIFE-WRITING: HEMINGWAY AND GAINES

This study brings together two writers who are usually not thought of in the same context. Hemingway is typically discussed under the mantle of modernism and ranks as one of the great American short story writers and novelists, whereas Ernest Gaines is usually discussed under the category of African American and/or Southern literature. It is my purpose to demonstrate how the two writers can be read and taught together, as they are linked by many common themes and stylistic elements. However, their differences are even more instructive in that they allow the reader to compare and contrast the two traditions they represent.

The father-son theme both exemplifies the connection and difference between the two authors. Many of Hemingway’s protagonists reject the father and the family as a starting point to form their own identity. Grounding one’s identity often means leaving home behind and searching elsewhere. Severance from all ties and the ensuing independence, however, lead to a precarious freedom that frequently amounts to living in a void and brings with it the danger of sons repeating their fathers’ mistakes. The suicide motif illustrates both the generational rift and the dilemma of life as a cycle that repeats itself. Both Nick Adams and Robert Jordan struggle with their fathers’ suicides and with the attendant ruptures of the generational links. Whereas Nick Adams is unable to understand his father’s suicide and bring together the past and the present, Robert Jordan subordinates his private concerns for the sake of the community’s good and is thereby able to end his struggle with the past.

In Gaines’s works, by contrast, the characters’ identity needs to be grounded in the family and in the community, which often functions as a surrogate family.
Hemingway’s notion of “independence” is not a positive goal to aspire to, as the individual in Gaines’s world is inextricably intertwined with the community and any effort to break out of the communal bond is bound to effect the community and the individual in a negative way. The generational link must therefore always be preserved.

The suicide motif, then, is handled differently by Gaines. When Philip Martin in *In My Father's House* learns about his son’s suicide, he must apply the lessons he learns regarding his own past to the future. He has another son, whose fate will depend on his ability to change his selfish attitude and irresponsible behavior. What’s more, he has a community of friends who support him. The death of Robert X, then, is not a matter of shame but a lesson for the future. Similarly, the suicide of Tee Bob Samson in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* is not only an incrimination of his father’s and forefathers’ racist codes but also serves as one of the catalysts for Miss Jane’s activism when she defies segregationist laws by walking to the water fountain at the end of the novel.

The other deaths in Gaines’s fiction have a similar function as Robert Jordan’s self-sacrificing act. Charlie’s sacrifice in *A Gathering of Old Men* changes the entire community, white and black, as does Jefferson’s heroic “standing” for the execution in *A Lesson Before Dying*. Jefferson’s diary assumes a central place in Gaines’s works, as it sums up his belief in the interdependence of the individual and the community and speaks the words of love and support that will serve as a powerful script for the community’s future. Thus, unlike Hemingway’s works, which emphasize an allegiance to the self, Gaines’s stories and novels illustrate the self’s responsibility to others.
Another way to illustrate the differences between Hemingway and Gaines may be to regard their works as instances of life-writing. If it is indeed the case that all writers create out of their experiences, then it is even more valid to claim such for Hemingway and Gaines. As my remarks on Hemingway’s and Gaines’s backgrounds have indicated, both writers’ works have been shaped by the authors’ childhood experiences, especially with regard to the father-son theme. Reading any Hemingway or Gaines book certainly makes one aware that the two writers have somehow transformed their own experiences and those of other people they knew into their fiction.

At first reading, however, neither Hemingway nor Gaines would be classified as strictly autobiographical writers in the conventional sense, as neither writer has written an autobiography of himself. Hemingway’s earliest short stories, which feature Nick in the author’s Michigan summer home; the stories and novels reflecting his own involvement in and fascination with wars; and his non-fiction writings about hunting safaris and fishing trips, as well as about the bullfights he has seen—all are imbued with an autobiographical aura. The closest Hemingway comes to autobiography is in his Nick Adams stories; Nick can certainly be regarded as Hemingway’s alter ego. In addition, *A Moveable Feast* could be called an autobiographical account of his time in Paris even though it is highly fictional, as are the depictions of his safaris in Africa in *Green Hills of Africa* and *True at First Light*.

The same influence of the childhood home on the author can be seen in the works of Ernest Gaines, who continues to be driven by “this Louisiana thing.” In Gaines’s case, “The Sky Is Gray” may be his most autobiographical piece of work, as it is loosely based on his own harsh experiences as a boy—Gaines’s middle name, like the protagonist’s, is
James—and on his own mother’s strength. However, I would like to argue that Gaines is less interested in foregrounding himself in his work than in writing a composite “folk autobiography,” which is how he characterized *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (Rowell 47).

If one considers the pervasive father-son relationship and other recurring themes in both Hemingway’s and Gaines’s œuvre, it furthermore seems as if their narratives are never finished within the cover of a single book, but that the writers have to continually go back where they have left off and wrestle with the same issues again, under a different light, with changing scenarios. Both writers thus appear to be compelled to write in order to find answers to personal questions. The impact of the father-son relationship on other themes in Hemingway’s and Gaines’s stories and novels allow their works to be read as renewed attempts to come to terms with their respective familial concerns and to find answers for them. The two writers’ radically different concepts of the self eventually lead to radically different notions of how themes are developed, and they also have important effects on the writers’ styles.

James Olney’s discussion of two distinct forms of autobiography is useful in order to distinguish between Hemingway’s and Gaines’s writings. On the one hand, Olney describes a particularly Western tendency “to take the life of the self to be the true self, the real self, the life about which an autobiography should be written” (“Value” 53). This form of autobiography Olney calls “autoautography.” Hemingway seems to be an especially strong representative of this form of life-writing. Even though not strictly autobiographical, his works, even *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in spite of Robert Jordan’s transformation, remain focused on the individual. Hemingway can therefore be said to
represent the Western tradition that takes the self to be at the center of life. Stressing the singularity of each character’s life, Hemingway’s works reflect renewed attempts to portray his own struggle, to give expression to his own inner confusion. Certainly, Olney’s definition of the autobiographical act applies to Hemingway: “[T]he autobiographical act . . . [is] a perpetually renewed attempt to find language adequate to rendering the self and its experience, an attempt that includes within itself all earlier attempts” (Memory 9). Read as such, Hemingway’s miscellaneous works, his short stories, novels, autobiographical writings, and travel accounts provide us with intriguing insights into the man behind the pen, as they “bring forth ever different memorial configurations and an ever newly shaped self” (Memory 20). If we read Hemingway’s works as instances of life-writing, we thus arrive at a composite picture of one man, starting with the fear of night and mortality as a boy in “Three Shots,” continuing with his attempts as a man to create an identity in various countries, while always attempting to come to terms with the father, and ending with the old fisherman’s proven heroism even as he loses the prize (marlin). Always the focus is on one individual’s struggle—the man himself behind the pen.

In this context, Michel de Montaigne, who writes of the “consubstantial” process of self creation and book creation, comes to mind: “I have no more made my book than my book has made me—a book consubstantial with its author, concerned with my own self, an integral part of my life” (504).¹ We can therefore ask whether Hemingway’s writing about his own experiences and the concomitant public myths he created also “made” him in the same way. Did not Hemingway in writing about his various exploits—as a wounded war hero, as a skilled hunter, as an expert fisherman—“fashion and
compose” himself so often that “the model itself has to some extent grown firm and taken shape,” as it has in Montaigne’s case (504)? Was he not afterwards trying to live up to the myths that he created with the thinly-disguised self-portrayals in his works? Are not the agonizing and sorrowful thoughts of Nick Adams in “Fathers and Sons” the writer’s own with regard to his alienation from his father and his sons? These questions seem to be bound up with the pervasive emphasis on the self and the cyclical view of life that we see manifested in Hemingway’s work and life. Hemingway’s writings are an “involuted and reflexive exercise,” as the writer constantly looks inward, toward his own self (Olney, “Value” 53).

Whereas Hemingway’s writings are firmly situated in the Western tradition of autoautography, Ernest Gaines’s works can be seen as representing a more African notion of autobiography. Referring to the Sonjo people in Tanzania, John Mbiti explains that “[t]he individual is united with the rest of his community, both the living and the dead, and humanly speaking nothing can separate him from this corporate society” (117). Reminiscent of Jefferson’s “‘lowly as I am, I am still part of the whole’” in A Lesson Before Dying (LBD 194), the Sonjo exclaim, “‘I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am’” (Mbiti 117).

This bond between the individual and the community is what Gaines strives to achieve with all of his characters. Jackson Bradley in Catherine Carmier is too much concerned with himself, and Phillip Martin in In My Father's House has only made a first step to reach out to the community. By contrast, the old men and women in A Gathering of Old Men as well as Grant and Jefferson at the end of A Lesson Before Dying have realized that “‘I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.’” Most obviously,
*The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, Gaines’s “folk autobiography” celebrates this emphasis on “we” as opposed to “I.” We must remember that it is the neighbors and friends who help Miss Jane remember her life, which is not only her life, but the life of a whole people who have survived from the Civil War to the civil rights movement. Memory, then, is primarily seen as a collective faculty rather than a mere individual one.

Following Olney’s distinction, I would therefore claim that Gaines’s writings can be seen as representing an African notion of autobiography, which de-emphasizes the individual. Gaines is writing in the tradition of “autophylography,” a term which is based on the Greek word *phyle*, which suggests “a union among the citizens of a state, a class or tribe formed according to blood” and “a union according to local habitation, a tribe” (“Value” 57-58). Is not Jefferson’s forming a “union” with his community the first step to his transformation? Does not Grant’s simultaneous change indicate the interdependence of individuals? And does not the change of the Deputy Paul Bonin anticipate a wider “union among the citizens of the state”? Are not the old men and women in *A Gathering of Old Men* the harbingers of a new order, a new “union,” whose first signs can be seen in the transformations of Charlie, Mathu, Candy, and Sheriff Mapes? And is not Gaines’s voice heard in not one but in all of these characters?

Gaines’s focus on the community, on writing not about himself but about the “phyle,” begins with *Bloodline*. After he had finished writing *Catherine Carmier*, Gaines felt that he “had lost touch with the world I wanted to write about” (“Bloodline in Ink” 526).² Like Jackson, he returned home, spent six months in Baton Rouge, and reconnected to the past that he had lost. With the short story collection *Bloodline*, Gaines begins his lifelong interest in writing an “autophylography.” As he explains, “*Bloodline* is
the beginning of my going back into the past. . . . After the Bloodline stories, I realized that I needed to go farther and farther back in time” (“Bloodline in Ink” 527-28). From the focus on males, Gaines would move to Miss Jane Pittman and to the gathering of old men and women in front of Mathu’s house. Jefferson’s understanding that he is “part of the whole” when the entire community pays him a visit in jail marks the temporary end of Gaines’s exploration of the “phyle,” which, without any doubt, is now being continued in The Man Who Whipped Children.3

The distinction between Hemingway and Gaines in terms of looking at their writings as a form of “autoautography” and “autophylography” respectively seems to summarize best what this study has tried to make clear. Whereas Ernest Gaines’s early works show remarkable similarities to Hemingway in his perception of such concepts as “identity” and the “self,” Gaines soon departed from the Western emphasis on the individual to embrace a concept of identity that includes others, notably the family and larger community. Gaines thus stresses interdependence and portrays the complex and difficult relationship between the individual and the community. Ironically, in order to achieve this, he had to follow the path of many Hemingway characters and reject his (literary) father, Hemingway, and immerse himself in the African American folk culture of his home state.

1 The reference to Montaigne is taken from James Olney’s article as well as his various seminars on life-writing, which have provided the main ideas for this concluding section and for which I wish to express my appreciation.

2 Interestingly, Gaines compares the time in California then, when he was writing Catherine Carmier, to Hemingway’s “moveable feast” in Paris: “I had read Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises, and I could see the same thing going on in San Francisco in the fifties that Hemingway had called ‘a moveable feast’ in Paris during the

3 As I write, only chapter three has been published in *Callaloo* 24.4 (Fall 2001): 1015-20. Quite fittingly, it is set in a barber shop, which, in addition to the porch, is integral to African American communal life and serves as a popular gathering place for male African Americans.
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