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The Myth of a Nation: Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Corruption of the American Ideal

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Abstract of the Thesis

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America's national image has long been personified by images of its so-called "founding fathers." Figures such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin drafted the classic representations of American social and individual ideals, those characterized by an abundance of access to prosperity, opportunity and possibility. Following the First World War, the viability of the prosperous and self-sufficient American life was called into question by the writers of the Lost Generation. Writing in postwar America, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald recognized a shift in the nation's values and self-image, and used their work to call attention to this social and cultural redefining. This project looks at Hemingway's *In Our Time* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in correlation with the writings of Jefferson and Franklin to make the argument that the two representative twentieth century authors utilize historical texts and dispositions to illustrate the corruption of past ideals in postwar America.

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The Myth of a Nation: Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Corruption of the American Ideal

When the first Dutch sailors arrived on the shore of what would become New York harbor, they met a land ripe with promise, with possibility. As F. Scott Fitzgerald imagines in the final page of *The Great Gatsby,* what these sailors saw from their boats as they approached the sand was an unknown territory, a country that heretofore had not existed. From this moment forward, settlers from Europe came to evolve ideals concerning this "new world." To these early dreamers, it was a land of limitless opportunity, a place where any individual could create their own destiny. Nearly two centuries later, the perception remained the same. Thomas Jefferson, easily recognizable as a quintessential shaper of American identity, wrote at length about America's abundance of resources, and promoted a self-sufficient way of life free of reliance on outside influences. In drafting the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson created a model American document, one that took the image that had been cultivated of the nation and put it to words, and in doing so established America as sovereign state, free from the social and political reach of Europe.

Seven years after the Declaration was drafted, the American Revolutionary War came to an end, signifying the birth of the American individual alongside the formation of the nation. This figure, characterized as hard working, upward moving and self-created, was a reflection of the national image itself. In his *Autobiography,* Benjamin Franklin wrote the definitive rendering of the American individual: the Franklinian self-

made man. Much in the same way Jefferson had scripted the creation story of America as a nation, Franklin wrote the origins of the ideal American individual, using his own life as a reference but not necessarily as a model. Both men represent the qualities America as a nation strives to be known for: courage, strong work ethic, confidence and virtuousness. Both promote the nation as a land of abundance, in terms of both natural resources and opportunity. The national image these two men constructed went largely unchallenged and unchanged for over a century.

When Franklin was writing his *Autobiography,* he intended it to be a guide for his son, mixed with life advice and personal narrative. Franklin situated himself as a representative of the self-made man, relying heavily on the details of his rise from poverty to affluence to reinforce his position. But Franklin was still in the process of living up to the model he created. The *Autobiography* presented Franklin's view of the ideal American individual, portrayed as being both wealthy and virtuous, as concerned with the betterment of the lives of those around him as his own. The image of Franklin himself in the *Autobiography* is meant only as a starting point, an example of the possibility for success in America, but is not intended to be a completed vision of the ideal American.

No longer viable in the twentieth century, the works of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald challenged the attainability of this model. Informed by the social and individual ideals created by Jefferson and Franklin, these authors of the "Lost Generation" took stock of the social climate and began to question the place of the old establishment in the modern world. By interacting with historical images of the American, Hemingway and Fitzgerald aimed to illustrate the corruption of the American

ideal, and intimate that the models established by the likes of Jefferson and Franklin lacked a foundation in postwar society.

Like the "founding fathers," much of what the authors of the early twentieth century wrote was a reaction to war. But while Jefferson and Franklin were optimistic about the future of the nation, Lost Generation writers were much less confident in the stability of the American ideal. Following the First World War, figures of American history could no longer be called upon to justify or even rationalize the contemporary situation. What Franklin and Jefferson represented-- the America of old-- was not viable in the postwar climate. In being forced to cast aside older images of the American hero, writers of the era attempted to recreate this type, to bring about a new kind of heroic figure, one whose characteristics and experiences were more in line with America's faltering self-image. The new hero was informed by the old, but was no longer a flawless, confident, and fearless individual. Writers of the Lost Generation developed a type of hero that was damaged, that had been beaten in one sense or another and had to now reconcile this defeat within themselves. Like the "founding fathers," this new hero was larger than himself, representing through action and disposition the larger social climate and transitioning image of America that followed the end of World War One. The new heroic figure was more aligned with the anti-hero than the classical hero, further illustrating the way in which these authors doubted the validity of a Jeffersonian or Franklinian American hero as a representative of the nation.

With the character of Nick Adams, Ernest Hemingway scripted a twentieth century American creation story. Adams character arc represents the development not only of the new heroic figure, but the creation of a new American consciousness. In writing the creation story of postwar America, the narrative of Nick Adams channels the

work of Jefferson but does so in a way that presents the Jeffersonian ideal as unattainable in the modern setting. In *The Great Gatsby,* F. Scott Fitzgerald brought the self-made man, a type penned by Franklin and so often used to define the identity of America as a nation, into the context of the twentieth century. In the novel's famous final page, Fitzgerald recalls the story of the first Dutch sailors arriving in the new land, enraptured and apprehensive, their minds clouded with idyllic conceptions of the new life this land represented. But the narrative concludes with the dream going unrealized, nothing more than an invention, an ideal to be sought but never truly attained. Both Nick Adams and Jay Gatsby are highly informed by heroic figures of the past but serve to show that the ideals that so characterized America as a younger nation have been exposed as unattainable in the interwar period. What these characters come to reflect is the fact that the American ideal is still as much of a myth as it was to the first European settlers, as much of an unattainable concept as it was when Jefferson and Franklin were putting it to words. Nick Adams and Jay Gatsby show that the ideals of the founding fathers are still sought after in vain, and the only real change is the way in which one approaches the task of trying to realize an impossible dream.

Part I: Manifest Destiny and the Origins of a New America

Ernest Hemingway's national creation story begins with Nick Adams as a young boy, his youth reflected symbolically in the early morning during which the opening story takes place. "Indian Camp" is the story of Nick accompanying his father across a

lake to the Indian reservation. Native American characters play a prominent role in the early stories of the collection while at the same time being cast as existing on the fringes of society. In the case of this story, the Indian characters are separated from Nick and his family by a body of water, reflecting a separation of cultures. Nick's father, a doctor, is called to deliver a baby for one of the women on the reservation. When they set sail in the morning, it is still dark outside, and "Nick lay back with his father's arm around him" (15). Here, Nick is a young boy, yet to attempt reaching for the level of self-awareness and understanding he seeks in the later stories. At this time in his boyhood, he is with a sense of security and safety symbolized here, and often in the early stories, by the presence of his father. Nick's father reflects past ideals represented by the "founding fathers," a past whose influence is nearing its end. "Indian Camp" takes place before the outbreak of World War One. The story beginning in the early morning before it becomes light outside suggests that the sun has figuratively set on their time, that while the ideals of the founding fathers ruled the previous day, the coming morning will bring with it a new creation story, an origin moment for the new American hero. In using Nick to personify the consciousness of the nation, Hemingway indicates that America at this point is still holding to a sense of safety in older ideals and images. The wisdom of older modes of thinking at this juncture goes unquestioned, and provides comfort. But, this is the beginning of a new day. While it is still dark at this moment, the sun is creeping up beyond the horizon.

The story proceeds to discredit Nick's feeling of unquestioning security provided by the presence of his father. Dr. Adams explains to Nick exactly what is going on. About the screams coming from the sick pregnant woman, Dr. Adams tells Nick "What she is going through is called labor. All her muscles are trying to get the baby born," and

soon after says "her screams are not important. I don't hear them because they are not important" (16). Immediately upon entering the room in which the woman is laid up, Nick and his father encounter a chaotic situation. Dr. Adams, by explaining step by step what is happening, attempts to instill order onto this chaos. Upon completion of the delivery, Dr. Adams says to his brother, George, "That's one for the medical journal, George. Doing a Caesarian with a jack-knife and sewing it up with nine-foot, tapered gut leaders" (18). Here, the mention of the medical journal and Dr. Adams' knowledge of how to perform a Caesarian section substantiate his position of authority and medical ability. But what undermines his position are the tools which he uses to perform the delivery. Using a "jack-knife" and "tapered gut leaders" in any sort of medical procedure could be characterized as primitive, entirely out of line with the image Dr. Adams has created for himself as a provider of Western medicine. But contrary to this reading, Dr. Adams' explicit highlighting of the tools he uses to deliver the baby suggests he is reinforcing his belief in his own technical mastery of both the medical arts and the situation into which he is called.

While in this moment, Dr. Adams feels proud of himself for being able to bring order to such a chaotic situation, the satisfaction does not last long. He finds immediately afterwards that during the delivery, the "proud father" has killed himself in the bunk above his wife (18). Nick is a firsthand witness to this immense violence, both the birth and the death. Through the trip to the camp and the delivery of the baby, Dr. Adams had been in control. But that control was only an illusion, as the reality of the situation proves him to be fallible. The idea of Dr. Adams as a source of security and stability is shown here to be nothing more than a creation of young Nick's mind. In showing the fallibility of Dr. Adams, Hemingway indicates that the very concepts of civil

and rational control are fallible. The simultaneous birth and death also symbolize the ushering in of a new era; the birth of the new coincides with the death of the old.

A particular image of the past with which Hemingway works in this story is that of the white European settler asserting control over the “savage” natives on their own land. In his reading of “Indian Camp,” Thomas Strychacz addresses this dynamic between Dr. Adams and the Indians in the camp. He says “Appropriately, the story concerns origins: not only birth, but the origins of a bitter racial conflict between native and white Americans” (Strychacz 61). Indeed, the story is highly informed by the concept of Manifest Destiny. Dr. Adams is on what could be referred to as a humanitarian mission, to bring civility to an uncivilized people. His knowledge of Western medicine is the source of his power over the natives. Strychacz asserts that Dr. Adams and George “play the role of the Great White Father, bringing to birth a child/nation supposedly deficient in civilized attributes” (Strychacz 61). The Indian father, laid up in bed with an axe wound to his foot, is forced to bear witness to history repeating itself. In having Dr. Adams come into his home and assert control over the birth of his child, the Indian father has been stripped of his manhood. The suicide, then, takes on various meanings. In my reading, the Indian father takes his own life as a way to reestablish control over his own destiny. Dr. Adams tells Nick later in the story that the man killed himself because “He couldn’t stand things” (19). What he could not stand were not the screams of his wife, but the fact that he had no control over the situation. In his own home where his wife is giving birth to his son, the Indian father is helpless and powerless, pushed aside in the face of superior knowledge. He regains the control that Dr. Adams has taken from him in the only way he can: by taking his own life.

When the three men leave, “it was just beginning to be daylight when they walked along the logging road to the lake” (18). Continuing with the progression of the day, Hemingway points towards the dawn of a new understanding, and the coming end of America’s sense of faith in past ideals. As Strychacz writes, “Indian Camp” is an origin story, and in more ways than one. The narration at the end of the story indicates that the day is still very young, as it reads “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” (19).

Hemingway uses the serene natural setting to counter the unnatural way in which the birth and death occur. Both the suicide and the Caesarian section are not natural occurrences, as they both are accompanied by human intervention. The natural setting also works to reflect a kind of symbolic comfort within Nick. He writes “The sun was coming up over the hills. A bass jumped, making a circle in the water. Nick trailed his hand in the water. It felt warm in the sharp chill of the morning” (19). This description comes immediately before Nick’s assertion that he will never die. Nick feels safe in the natural setting, and is able to distance himself from what he has just witnessed by the inorganic way in which the events occurred. The birth was uncommonly painful and violent, and even the fact that it was a Caesarian as opposed to a vaginal birth lends itself to being, in some sense, unnatural. The death taking the form of a suicide also concurs with this reading. Nick latches onto what he believes to be stable and true: being in the natural landscape and being with his father. In doing this, he is able to distance himself from the harsh realities he has just encountered.

In taking his own life, the Indian father does, in fact, undermine the control and superiority of Dr. Adams. In the story immediately following this one, “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” the Indian characters serve again to deconstruct the intellectual and

moral eminence Dr. Adams feels he possesses over the natives. Instead of Dr. Adams going to the Indian land to perform a service, this story opens with Dick Boulton and a few younger Indian men coming to Dr. Adams' land to do work for him. Nick's father has enlisted the men to chop logs he has found by the bank of the lake. As in "Indian Camp," Dr. Adams' position of power and authority is short lived. Boulton accuses Dr. Adams of having stolen the logs. The two get into an argument when Dr. Adams refuses to admit that the logs were, in fact, stolen, and the confrontation ends with Boulton and the other two Indians leaving the property without doing the job. Here again, Dr. Adams' authority and control is undermined by the Indian characters' refusal to submit. Instead of pushing the issue and physically confronting Boulton, Dr. Adams gives empty threats like "I'll knock your eye teeth down your throat," only to ultimately back down from the larger man and walk back to the cottage, having been defeated (25).

The second part of the story continues the theme of Dr. Adams being defeated, his authority and manhood challenged and beaten. When he first gets back inside, he sits on the bed and cleans his shotgun, "pushing the magazine full of the heavy, yellow shells and pumping them out again" (26). Hemingway here sets up an almost masturbatory image of Dr. Adams attempting to regain his manhood, his feeling of masculine authority. Strychacz notes that aside from this action helping Dr. Adams to "feel like a man, it serves to demonstrate his access to the cultural and technological prowess that 'won the West' for white settlers" (Strychacz 65). But his reassurance is short lived. The interactions with his wife that follow prove to further discredit Dr. Adams as a figure of masculine authority. First, there is the reference to her being a Christian Scientist, which directly undercuts and devalues his profession as a medical doctor. Then, as he is leaving the house, his wife asks "If you see Nick, dear, tell him his

mother wants to see him," making Dr. Adams' walk no longer an attempt to clear his mind, but instead an errand for his wife. Dr. Adams slams the door on his way out, but quickly turns and apologizes to his wife for the noise.

When Dr. Adams finds Nick, he relays the message his wife gave him, but Nick insists on accompanying his father through the woods instead. This reinforces the idea that Dr. Adams is only an authority figure in the eyes of his young son. But in the end of "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife," even this fact begins to change. While Nick certainly still looks up to and feels secure and safe with his father, he is now the leader. The story concludes not with Nick following his father through the woods, but conversely with Dr. Adams following Nick to find the black squirrels Nick says he has seen. This indicates a transition, one that was beginning to take shape in the form of Nick's questions at the end of "Indian Camp," and here further develops. Dr. Adams fades as an effective figure of influence in his community. He represents a dying generation, a declining vision of American society. Nick, on the other hand, is beginning to question things and to take control. His development reflects that of a new day in American society, a move away from ideas like Manifest Destiny and towards a different sort of understanding. These two stories are informed by a past that is no longer relatable in the twentieth century.

The stories of Nick's childhood also work by relating history to the modern moment. In an article titled "A Usable American Literature," Joel Pfister explores the concept of the usable past, a term coined in 1918 by Van Wyck Brooks. Pfister discusses this role of literature as helping to shape a modern cultural identity through interacting with the past. He criticizes historicisms that render history as only a thing of the past. He says that the foremost reason for the historical study of art and literature is the fact

that "it might lead to a better comprehension of one's own moment" (6), and says that "literature can expand conventional history's scope, persuade historians to pay attention to different kinds of human subjects and agency, and in effect rehistoricize history" (5). Despite the fact that Hemingway is discrediting the presence of Manifest Destiny in twentieth century America, he is nonetheless interacting with history to illustrate the modern moment.

The subsequent stories in which Nick is the main character are without the figure of Dr. Adams. These stories are all highly informed by Nick's time in the war. Hemingway gives only one small vignette of Nick actually *in* the war, but this experience proves to be the most significant in the redevelopment of the Nick Adams character. In the start of the vignette, Nick has already been wounded. He sits with his back against the wall of the church after having been hit in the spine by an enemy bullet. The childish naivete of the earlier stories has all but disappeared, replaced instead by a jaded disillusionment. Nick looks over to his fellow soldier, who has also been wounded, and asserts that they are "Not patriots," and they have made "a separate peace" (63). The language of the vignette describes the attack going on around Nick and his wounded comrade by saying it is "brilliant" and noting "other dead" up the street, it is said to be "going well" (63). This points to the way in which war makes the soldier impervious to violence. Nick sits "smiling" with a bullet in his back amidst the chaotic events of the battle (63).

The wounding of Nick reflects Hemingway's larger attempt to rewrite the myth of the American hero, perhaps writing instead a new literary myth of the American antihero. Nick does not exemplify the traditional qualities often recognized in the heroic figure, such as control, courage and perseverance. In this scene, Nick has

abandoned hope, he has given up trying to fight and sits laughing against the wall with the knowledge that his death could be imminent. By having Nick react in this way to being shot in battle, Hemingway suggests that the new heroic American shares more in common with the antihero than the traditional hero. The new heroic figure, like America's national identity, is damaged, both literally and symbolically. His redevelopment as an individual and as a symbol of the nation begins when he returns from the war.

In "The War and the Postwar Temper," Frederick J. Hoffman discusses the "soldier home" type that emerged in post World War One American literature. He says upon returning from war, "what was left was the isolated person, who had, in almost every case, to start anew. He retreated into embarrassed silence and suspicious disapproval when he encountered any public display of formal emotion" (Hoffman 75). This characteristic detachment from emotional relationships is evident in the third story of *In Our Time,* "The End of Something." The story focuses on Nick, having returned from the war, interacting with his girlfriend, Marjorie. The presence of death and destruction is immediately evident in the description of the setting, an old lumbering town called Hortons Bay. The town has been reduced to rubble, "there was nothing left of the mill except the broken white limestone and its foundations showing through the swampy second growth as Nick and Marjorie rowed along the shore" (31). The reduction of a once thriving town to nothing more than abandoned buildings and ruin reflects two things. First, it mirrors the destruction of European towns as a result of World War One, such as the one in which Nick was injured. Secondly, it reverts back to the theme discussed in the analyses of "Indian Camp" and "The Doctor and the Doctor's

Wife": the weakening influence of the American past. Hortons Bay was once a thriving town but could not survive the harsh nature of modernity.

But what is of particular interest in this story is not the ruins of a formerly thriving lumber town, but the disconnect between Nick and Marjorie, and perhaps more so the disconnect between Nick and his own emotions. In *Exile's Return,* Malcolm Cowley chronicles the lives of the American and British writers publishing during the first half of the twentieth century. In "Mansions in the Air," he discusses from an eyewitness perspective the writers who served in the ambulance corps during the War, Cowley himself having served in the corps as well. Hemingway and his contemporary John Dos Passos are the main focus of this chapter. Cowley says of these young writers that the war "taught them courage, extravagance and fatalism, these being the virtues of men at war" (Cowley 38). Like the American founding fathers, Cowley is documenting the origins of a new type of American as the type is being formed. He is a firsthand witness to the events of the War which come to shape the writing of the postwar period.

Hemingway articulates the characteristic fatalism through Nick, and it comes to define Nick's disposition in the postwar stories. As a young boy, Nick feels as if he were immortal, that death may happen to others, but not to him. His time in the war reeducates him, and in "The End of Something," he wrestles with the idea that everything, including his life, has a definite end. The very title of the story, "The End of Something," points to Nick's newfound fatalism. Knowing that everything has a definite end, he cannot seem to comprehend a reason to be in a relationship with someone. This is something he feels, but cannot express. He says to Marjorie about their relationship that "It isn't fun anymore. Not any of it. I feel as though everything has gone to hell inside of me," to which she replies "Isn't love any fun?" His stark, one word response of

“No” highlights his inability to reconcile these feelings, and that even the basic emotion of love makes no sense to him anymore (34-35). His attempt to restore some of the virtues and beliefs he possessed in the earlier stories comes in the book’s final selection, the two part story “Big Two- Hearted River.”

Part II: Hemingway, Jefferson, and the Dangers of Subservience

Joseph DeFalco discusses in detail Nick's struggle and subsequent attempts to reconcile his emotions in his book *The Hero in Hemingway's Short Stories*. In the chapter titled "Initiation Experiences," DeFalco writes "As the hero divests himself of all former ideals, the creation of a new self must follow" (DeFalco 39). Nick's escape to isolation in the wilderness depicted in "Big Two- Hearted River" is his attempt to find some self-awareness and to regain control over his emotional state. This is a story of renewal, and of Nick as the heroic figure in development. Though, in contrast to DeFalco's claim, Nick in this story does not entirely divest himself of former ideals. Rather, this story depicts his attempt at reaching back to one of the origins of the American identity, one characterized in American history by the writings of Thomas Jefferson.

In becoming the iconic American figure that he has been regarded as for centuries, Jefferson had to divest himself of all former ideals in order to facilitate the creation of a new self, and more importantly, to facilitate the creation of a national identity. The Declaration of Independence, penned by Jefferson, is the cornerstone document in ascribing to America a strong national identity, one separate from England and its colonies and entirely self-created. This was the origin of America as an independent nation. Once the Declaration had been written, Jefferson was asked to give insight into the life of the American individual, and these responses were collected as his *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

Jeffersonian idealism is never far from the surface in the stories of *In Our Time,* from the earliest narratives of Nick as a boy to this final culminating tale of Nick in self

imposed isolation. Written in 1787, Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* respond to a set of twenty three "queries" submitted to him by the secretary of the French Legation in Philadelphia. In "Query XIX," Jefferson is asked about the state of manufacturing in Virginia. He discusses how the people of Virginia have "manufactured within our families the most necessary articles of clothing," and stresses the importance of communities being able to manufacture for themselves (Jefferson 164). He proceeds to spend much of the remaining response discussing the type of the "husbandman," the farmer who works and tends his own land. He states bluntly that "Those who labour the earth are the chosen people of God," and that they "possess substantial and genuine virtue" (165). He asserts that "dependence begets subservience and venality, and suffocates the germ of virtue," stressing again the importance of self-sufficiency (165). In my reading of *In Our Time*, the Indian characters from the early narratives represent the presence of this mode of being in a twentieth century setting. But if this is true, it indicates the difficulty in maintaining agrarianism within the modern world. The Indian characters have fallen into subservience, needing Dr. Adams for medical as well as vocational assistance. In "Indian Camp," they are no longer self-sufficient, as is evident by the fact that Nick's father has to come out to help them with the delivery. And again in "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife," the Indian characters are employed not by their own resources, but by Dr. Adams. The Indians are not characterized as a people of the land. They are now forced into dependence on outsiders for survival.

Not even Dr. Adams represents the virtuousness and self-sufficiency embodied in Jefferson's husbandman type. The dramatic irony of his character lies in the fact that while he makes great efforts to distance himself from the Indian characters, he too is dependent on them. This is apparent in "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife," where Dr.

Adams needs the assistance of the three Indian men to move the logs. Try as he may to differentiate his station in life from that of the Indian characters, Dr. Adams is a reflection of them. He is also subservient to his wife, whose criticisms he meets without rebuttal. The Indians characters, along with Nick's father, represent not a dying way of life, but one that is already lost.

But the violence and disorder of "Indian Camp" is not what Nick remembers about that experience. What he recalls when looking back to the events of the simultaneous birth and death is the sense of security and safety he felt in the presence of his father. Along with Dr. Adams, Nick is comforted by the natural setting. At no time in the stories is Nick more comfortable and sure of himself than as a young boy on the lake with his father, and his venture into the wilderness depicted in "Big Two-Hearted River" is his endeavor to recapture that sense of order and stability that has eluded him since returning from the War. But right from the start, there is a fundamental difference in Hemingway's placement of Nick in the woods and Jefferson's ideal agrarian lifestyle: For Nick, fishing the river and camping in the woods is an escape from reality, as opposed to Jefferson's agrarian ideals that are meant to be a reality in themselves. In "Big Two-Hearted River," the reality of the present national state is illustrated though Seney, the burnt-over town through which Nick has to travel to get into the woods.

With his draft of the Declaration of Independence and *Notes on the State of Virginia,* Jefferson aimed to establish the origins of America's national identity, casting a nation that is capable of supplanting chaos with order and one ripe with the promise of stability and opportunity. These are the aspects of America's origins that Nick Adams is attempting to recapture. The story begins with a description of the town, or more

precisely the area where the town used to be. It is narrated that "There was no town, nothing but the rails and the burnt over country. The foundations of the Mansion House hotel stuck up above the ground. That was all that was left of the town of Seney. Even the surface had been burned off the ground" (Hemingway 133). The images of ruin where the town used to stand recall the description of Hortons Bay. Seney was once a thriving town, but now is nothing more than the blackened remnants of a forgotten past. Images of ruin are abound in the stories, and always serve to reflect a dying or dead past. In beginning the story with Nick in a burnt over town, Hemingway suggests that Nick's attempt to recapture something of his past is in vain, that the woods are an insulated illusion and Seney is the reality.

In an essay titled "Naming of Parts; or, The Comforts of Classification," Susan Manning contends that "The conflict of patriotism, and pain of war are never far from the surface of Jefferson's catalogue of information on the state of Virginia" (Manning 351). Certainly war is also never far from the surface of "Big Two-Hearted River." In fact, war is the backdrop both literally (with the presence of Seney's ruins just outside of the woods) and figuratively in the story. Jefferson, like Nick, was not someone fond of war. In his book *American Heroes and Hero-Worship,* Gerald W. Johnson characterizes Jefferson's averse attitude towards war in saying "Jefferson's disability as a warrior was not a lack of courage, but of comprehension of the warlike impulse. His common sense told him that war is horrible and destructive of all values, material and moral" (Johnson 84). In my reading of *In Our Time,* I find that Nick shares the same sentiments regarding war as those attributed here to Jefferson. His time in the war has taken away from him his basic understanding of life, it has forced him to question

everything from the nature of relationships to his own morality. The fatalism he was forced to adopt in the war now defines his emotional disposition.

I find that stylistically the prose in "Big Two-Hearted River" implicitly channels Jefferson's technique of listing and procedural detailing. In taking everything slowly and step by step, Nick is able to instill a certain level of control over his environment. In reference to Jefferson's *Notes,* Manning contends that "naming of things becomes a possible activity against the random or the meaningless, at once a celebration of profusion and the shoring of fragments of order against the ruins of war" (Manning 346), and goes on later to reaffirm "listing and classifying the features of the landscape subdues it to human ordering power" (Manning 359). These claims are particularly relevant to "Big Two-Hearted River," as Nick does exactly this in the Michigan wilderness. For example, the first instance of Nick trying to maintain order and control over his environment comes in his making of camp:

> With the ax he slit off a bright slab of pine from one of the stumps and split it into pegs for the tent. He wanted them long and solid to hold the ground. [...] Nick tied the rope that served the tent for a ridge pole to the trunk of one of the pine trees and pulled the tent up off the ground with the other end of the rope and tied it to the other pine. [...] He crawled inside under the mosquito bar with various things from the pack to put at the head of the bed under the slant of canvas. Already there was something mysterious and homelike. Nick was happy as he crawled inside the tent (Hemingway 138-139)

The presence of this procedural detailing affords Nick the comfort he feels by the end of setting up camp. He tames the landscape by creating a space of his own using what the land has given him. Hemingway pays close attention to each step of the process in writing Nick's activities in this story, and by doing so, he creates the same effect as Jefferson intended when writing about the Virginia wilderness. While discussing a natural bridge that is on his property, for instance, Jefferson writes "It is on the ascent of a hill, which seems to have been cloven through its length by some great convulsion. The fissure is by some measurements 270 feet deep, by others only 205. It is about 45 feet wide at the bottom, 90 feet at the top" (Jefferson 24). It is evident that with Jefferson, the technique of listing is more prevalent than that of procedural detailing, but the effect remains the same.

As it is mentioned in the beginning of my analysis, Hemingway uses the burnt over town of Seney to reflect the constant presence of war. But, the presence of war is also evident in the language used to narrate Nick's time in the woods. This comes through especially in the descriptions of Nick fishing the river. When he first gets into the water, "It was a shock. His trousers clung tight to his legs. The water was a rising cold shock. Rushing, the current sucked against his legs. Where he stepped in, the water was now over his knees" (Hemingway 148). The repetition of the word "shock" and the image here of Nick fighting against the current present a man fighting to stay steady within a chaotic situation. The landscape around him is described with violent, warlike imagery, such as the description of the uprooted elm tree: "Gone over in a storm, it lay back into the woods, its roots clotted with dirt [...] The river cut to the edge of the uprooted tree" (Hemingway 152). Phrases like "clotted with dirt" and describing

the river at cutting through the tree lend themselves to be compared to the violence of war.

In responding to a query about the mountains in Virginia, I find that Jefferson's description of the landscape also reflects the presence of war, and even some commentary on the progress of the conflict. He describes, in detail, the point along the Blue Ridge Mountains where the Patowmac and Shenandoah rivers intersect. He writes of the erosion caused by the Shenandoah, saying the force of the water has "torn the mountain down from its summit to its base," and noting the "piles of rock" along the banks, fallen as a result of this water cutting through the landscape (Jefferson 19). The meeting of these two large bodies of water has created a chaotic landscape, one defined by the destruction of mountains and fallen boulders along the base. But what is of particular interest in this passage is his description of where the two rivers, after the initial violent clash, become one:

> But the distant finishing which nature has given to the picture is of a very different character. It is a true contrast to the fore-ground. It is as placid and delightful, as that is wild and tremendous. For the mountain being cloven asunder, she presents to your eye, through the cleft, a small catch of blue horizon, at an infinite distance in the plain country, inviting you, as it were, from the riot and tumult roaring around, to pass through the breach and participate of the calm below (Jefferson 19)

This passage becomes more than a description of two rivers clashing head on before melding together and continuing their flow as one distinct body. It reflects the clash between the British and Americans during the Revolutionary War, which is raging at the

time Jefferson is writing this. The initial clash is violent and destructive, but Jefferson is able to see the clear and pleasant future that will come as the ultimate result of the fighting. The area in the distance where the two rivers move beyond the destruction they initially caused the mountain and become at peace as they move into the blue horizon indicates Jefferson's confidence in a clear future, a future free of the current destruction and violence of conflict. Manning contends that with Jefferson's *Notes,* "order is imposed on chaos, writing American greatness into prospective existence" (358).

Yet this presence of a clear and ordered future becomes a point of departure between Hemingway and Jefferson. In "Big Two-Hearted River," the river itself leads into the darkness of the swamp. The presence of the swamp throughout the story plays a similar role to the presence of burnt-over Seney: it represents the constant threat of uncertainty, the ever present memory of war and the chaos by which it is defined, particularly in Nick's mind. Hemingway writes "in the swamp, the banks were bare the big cedars came together overhead, the sun did not come through, except in patches. [...] In the swamp, fishing was a tragic adventure. Nick did not want it" (Hemingway 155). As opposed to Jefferson's clear, peaceful future represented by the flow of the two rivers together, Nick's view of the future is less comforting. His fatalistic attitudes have led him to believe that everything ends in death, that the only certainty is that of destruction. The river leading into the darkness of the swamp reflects this feeling, and Nick's unwillingness to confront these fears reverts back to his mindset in "Indian Camp." He does not want to fish the swamp because he does not want to face his fears. His intention in making the trip into the woods is to reclaim some of that childhood security that so defined him as a young boy in the early stories. By trying to ignore the

presence of the swamp, he is recapturing that part of him that refused to accept his own mortality as a young boy.

On a larger scale, the fact of the river running into the swamp presents an image of America as a nation following the First World War. As opposed to Jefferson's take on the American Revolution, Hemingway reflects uncertainty as to where the nation is heading. The America that Hemingway pens is no longer as promising as it was in the late 1700s, when Jefferson was scripting the origins of a national identity. For Jefferson, the two rivers converge and become one powerful river that flows in a clear direction. The confidence with which Jefferson writes of America's future is something Nick is trying to regenerate. But for Nick, the river runs into the darkness of the swamp. His unwillingness to confront the dangers of the swamp point to Nick's fear of the future, and forces him to recall a nostalgic past characterized by the confidence and hope of Jefferson's national origin story. In the twentieth century, Americans have been shaken to their moral and philosophical cores by the destruction and death of the war, and the direction in which the nation is heading is no longer free of danger or uncertainty. In fact, it is defined by this darkness, this foreboding threat that all we once believed to be true has been called into question, that the image of America as fearless and confident has given way to disorder and chaos.

Part III: Franklin, *The Great Gatsby* and the Twentieth Century Self-Made Man

When thinking of the American self-made man, often the most well-known and revered of this type is Benjamin Franklin. Many of his writings stand as the epitome of this type as they work to both define and illustrate the self-made man. Franklin's was a doctrine of self creation, a possibility available to anyone capable of balancing financial success with a morally sufficient mode of being. In 1782, he publishes *Information to Those Who Would Remove to America,* a doctrine attempting to dispel any misconceptions of American life held by those in Europe. This text, much like Jefferson's writings, establishes the concrete differences between America and Europe, and in doing this, provides the origins of the American as an individual. A key point of departure from European society which Franklin discusses in this text is the fact that in America, one cannot be born into success. It is earned through prudent industry and strong work ethic. He says "Much less is it advisable for a Person to go thither who has no other Quality to recommend him but his Birth. In Europe it has indeed its value, but it is a Commodity that cannot be carried to a worse market than to that of America where People do not inquire *What is he?* But *What does he do?*" (Franklin, *Information,* 2). He continues on to say "The Husbandman is in honor there, and even the Mechanic, because their Employments are useful" (2). These assertions about the work ethic of American society help to formulate the idea of America being a land of opportunity, a place where birth means less than how hard someone is willing to work. According to Franklin here, success in America is a matter of personal desire rather than a product of birth.

The origins of Franklin's self-made man are stated more clearly in the beginning pages of his *Autobiography*. Written as a book of life advice for his son, Franklin details his family's background and his upbringing. He says he has "emerged from the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and bred to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world," providing the initial development of the rags-to-riches story so common in American history (Franklin, *Autobiography,* 1-2).

But, as is often the case with historical figures as revered as Franklin, he has his critics, both from his time and among those who have studied him. In *Illusions of a Nation,* John F. Callahan takes these sentiments of Franklin's beyond what Franklin himself lays out in *Information*. He discusses how Franklin's concept of the self-made man was not simply one who works hard and earns a living, but one who acquires great wealth along the way. He says "According to Franklinian doctrine, a man's worth is determined and demonstrated through material success," and that "Man was not a man until he had proven himself by owning the world" (Callahan 8). He agrees that Franklin's self-made man "was no longer born of a woman into a society where one found purpose and place," but adds "he symbolically gave birth to himself by becoming worth his weight in gold" (8).

In fact, Franklin himself does not shy away from his prideful and often vain nature. In the beginning of his *Autobiography,* he discusses pride as "often productive of good to the possessor," and says "it would not be altogether absurd if a man were to thank God for his vanity among the other comforts of life" (Franklin, *Autobiography,* 3). But while he admittedly possesses the greed and desire for wealth that his critics have so often condemned him for, Franklin is highly attentive to moral betterment throughout the *Autobiography*. The boundary that separates wealth and virtue is one that Franklin

maneuvers with expertise throughout his book. Steven Forde discusses this balancing act of Franklin's in his article titled "Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* and the Education of America." Forde contends that the *Autobiography* combines both wealth and virtue by saying that virtue is the pathway to obtaining wealth. He goes on further to suggest that Franklin believes one cannot exist without the other. Forde says that "it was always Franklin's notion that the four (riches, learning, power, and good character) should be combined, which is possible if virtue becomes the means as well as the end of the other ambitions" (Forde 359).

The problem many critics have with Franklin's *Autobiography* is the fact that Franklin himself did not live up to the image he created of the model American citizen. This is understandable, as when a work is presented as autobiographical, its author should be writing about their own life. But a better way to understand the *Autobiography* is to approach it less as a story of Franklin's life and more as a guide for life in the new Republic. Franklin was attempting to create the American character. Forde contests that the *Autobiography* "is the final and most comprehensive monument of that concern, undertaking, as it does, to help shape the emerging American character," and says later "Franklin gives scope to the American impulse for material advancement (which it would not be possible or fair to suppress), but he gives that impulse a push in the direction of virtue and moderation" (Forde 357-358). It is well known that Franklin was a wealthy man, and also well known that he was not always the most virtuous of men. But what he is attempting to convey with the *Autobiography* is that morality and financial success do not have to be mutually exclusive. In writing this text, Franklin creates the image of the model American, the self-made man. But what has gotten confused over the centuries is the fact that Franklin created an image for

everyone, including himself, to live up to. He was not the image itself. His ideal American is just that: an ideal. It is an image toward which to strive, but not a representation of Franklin himself. Forde contends that Franklin's text "fulfils the purpose of providing a new nation and a newly emerging culture with a model that is appropriate to them" (Forde 358).

This assertion can be applied to Fitzgerald's aim in writing *The Great Gatsby*. But the models of character being portrayed in the two texts are quite different from one another. The idea of the American success story being guided by virtue is no longer viable in the world of *The Great Gatsby*. Before he decides to reinvent himself as Jay Gatsby, James Gatz is a young man in love with a girl, Daisy, and he is sent off to war, where he does quite well for himself, making the rank of Major. His valor in war is something that, historically, would already cast him as heroic. But for Gatz, this is not enough. Success for Gatz is not determined by bravery, it is achieved through attaining the inordinate wealth represented by Dan Cody. This is true of Franklin's time as well, but what is missing from the acquisition of financial success in *Gatsby* is the presence of virtue as a tool for obtaining and utilizing wealth. While Gatsby may practice virtues of industry and cleanliness, his process of self-improvement is entirely focused on his own life and desires, while Franklin considered doing good for others as much a necessity of virtuousness as taking care of yourself.

In his book *Fitzgerald, Hemingway and the Twenties,* Ronald Berman asserts that "Fitzgerald's characters are more than just the sum of their experiences: they constitute America itself as it moves into the Jazz Age" (Berman 54). In the 1920s, America was in a transitory social state. Like Hemingway, Fitzgerald sees America as

shifting away from past conceptions of national identity, represented by early American figures like Franklin and Jefferson. His use of New York as the setting points to the change in values of American society. Fitzgerald's New York is chaotic, noisy, full of money and lacking in morality. Jay Gatsby, then, becomes a reflection of his time and place. He is a new vision of the self-made man, one who *literally* creates himself. He achieves this self invention through the appropriation of a specific image. Unlike Franklin, who promoted self improvement and encouraged people to imitate a certain mode of being, Gatsby stands as a proponent of self invention, of not simply imitating but entirely absorbing and emulating a very specific image. Gatsby does not work to better himself, he works to completely erase himself and recast his persona into a very fixed mold. He, like the nation, is in a transitory state, leaving behind his true identity as a Midwestern farm boy and reinventing himself as an East coast millionaire. Berman contends that "A new type of American novel might not only capture the moment but comprehend a new experience in American existence" (53). As much as this is a novel about the acquisition of material wealth and social status, it is also a creation story, one of the origins of a new type of hero and a corruption of the Franklinian conception of the self-made man.

Feeling that he can never have Daisy without first having material success, Gatsby reinvents himself in the image of a wealthy businessman. But in doing this, he is condemned to artificiality and forced into isolation. This isolation is a product of the way in which Gatsby chooses to reinvent himself. He does not aim to strengthen the qualities that are already part of his personality or work to better the lives of those around him, as Franklin would suggest, but rather he disowns his past, abandoning his father and his home, and utilizes an image entirely outside of himself as a model for

reinvention. The two-sided artificiality of Gatsby is evident in Nick Carraway's first encounter with him. In their initial introduction, Nick narrates "I was looking at an elegant young roughneck, a year or two over thirty, whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd. ... I got a strong impression that he was picking his words with care" (48). Carraway can tell immediately that Gatsby is putting on a facade, that the image he puts forth of a wealthy gentleman is nothing more than a farce, an imitation.

A key point of departure between the Franklinian self-made man and Jay Gatsby is their respective origins. In the *Autobiography,* Franklin spends a great deal of time detailing his past and his family heritage. He discusses his parents, his siblings, his aunts and uncles, where everyone originated from, what their occupations were, and what type of people they were, exhaustively telling the reader of where he and his family came from. In doing this, especially in talking about his poor upbringing, Franklin is better able to script his journey from childhood to adulthood, from poverty to affluence, and in turn, he creates what is perhaps the most common trope in American rhetoric. Franklin is proud of his past because it helps to validate his present situation as he writes the *Autobiography,* and his rise to wealth casts him as quintessentially American.

Gatsby, on the other hand, is never outspoken or honest about his past. Throughout the novel, it is a great source of speculation among party-goers and friends. There are a number of stories invented by party guests in regards to Gatsby's origins, but it is not until the end of the novel that we are given the truth. Gatsby's guide for reinvention comes from his relationship with Dan Cody. Described as "a grey, florid man with a hard, empty face- the pioneer debauchee," Cody is a wealthy man that Gatsby works for when he is still James Gatz (100). To him, Cody is the epitome of

American success. Gatz recognizes Cody as possessing all the attributes needed to win the love of an upper-class woman like Daisy, so he appropriates Cody's image down to the last detail. Nick narrates that "The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. [...] He invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to the conception he was faithful to the end" (98).

In an essay titled "The Allusive Past: Historical Perspective in *The Great Gatsby,*" John Rorhkemper discusses the historical significance of the name "Dan Cody," attributing the name to a combination of Daniel Boone and Wild Bill Cody: "Both Boone and Cody are Westerners, icons of the American pioneer experience, of rugged individualism, of faith in Manifest Destiny. One is the authentic hero, the other is the exploiter of the dream" (Rorhkemper 156). Dan Cody is a figure highly informed by popular tall stories of the American past, but is defined more by his material success than his virtuousness. Gatsby himself fits Rorhkemper's characterization of Dan Cody. In one sense, he is the authentic hero, being a war veteran and one who rose in rank because of his adeptness in terms of military service. He is the American war hero. But when he disowns this, and every other, aspect of his past, he becomes the exploiter of the American dream, one who establishes himself by emulating another with no regard for his true identity or his origins. This illustrates Fitzgerald's view of the twentieth century self-made man, and lays out the origins of Jay Gatsby. Fitzgerald ascribes to Gatsby only the aspects of Franklin's self-made man that receive the most criticism: the endless desire to obtain wealth and status, but without the moral attentiveness for which Franklin advocates as the means to obtaining these things.

Fitzgerald also interacts with some of the Jeffersonian ideals found in my analysis of *In Our Time*. In deciding to leave behind his life as a farm hand on his father's land, Gatsby directly turns his back on the Jeffersonian conceptions of a moral and virtuous mode of being. Jefferson asserted through his writing that the self-sufficient "husbandman" was the vision of perfect virtue and was not subject to moral corruption. Turning his back on this type of agrarian life, Gatsby in turn leaves behind his chance at a morally sufficient mode of being. The vision of the Jeffersonian lifestyle in *The Great Gatsby* comes through the characterization of Gatsby's father. Not seen until after his son's death, Mr. Gatz is described as "a solemn old man, helpless and dismayed, bundled in a long, cheap ulster," and has a "sparse, grey beard" (Fitzgerald 167). Fitzgerald casts Mr. Gatz as looking haggard, poor, and entirely out of place in the confines of his son's lavish mansion. As an image of the past in a definitively modern setting, Mr. Gatz is cast as being symbolically defeated. Much in the way that Hemingway addresses the presence of Jeffersonian ideals in a modern setting, Fitzgerald's characterization of Mr. Gatz as the representative of agrarian life furthers the claim that this ideal way of life is no longer viable in the twentieth century.

Part IV: Virtues and Resolves

Fitzgerald directly connects Gatsby's process of self invention with that of Franklin's self improvement. When Mr. Gatz comes to see his son buried, he brings along with him a book that Gatsby had written in years ago. The notes in the back of the book consist of a list of "General Resolves" and a daily schedule intended to keep Gatsby

focused on the task of self-invention. In the exact form of Gatsby's notes, Franklin's *Autobiography* contains a list titled "Virtues with Precepts" along with a chart made for his daily schedule. Gatsby's resolves can all be found in different wording on Franklin's list. For example, Gatsby writes "No more smoking or chewing" (Fitzgerald 173), which is in line with Franklin's "TEMPERANCE: Eat not to dullness, drink not to elevation" (Franklin 768). Again, there is Gatsby's "Bathe every other day" (Fitzgerald 173) to Franklin's "CLEANLINESS: Tolerate no uncleanliness in body, clothes or habitation" (Franklin 768), and Gatsby's "No wasting time at Shafters" (Fitzgerald 173) to Franklin's "INDUSTRY: Lose no time- cut off all unnecessary actions. Be always employed in something useful" (Franklin 768). The connections here are obvious, as is the intent in each man to better themselves.

But more significant than the similarities between the two men's self-invention or improvement lists are the differences. Gatsby's list contains six "resolves," none of which deal with improving himself morally, but only in helping him to aspire to the Dan Cody image of success. Conversely, Franklin's "Virtues" are heavily ingrained in making moral improvements, particularly in doing good for others and not only for one's self. Absent from Gatsby's list but present in Franklin's are notions of sincerity, justice, humility, chastity, and resolve (Franklin 768). In looking at the two men's schedules, this fact is again clearly presented. Franklin's daily schedule begins with "What good shall I do today?" and ends with "What good have I done today?" (Franklin 770). Notions of justice, sincerity, humility, and doing good each day are other-directed acts. Franklin is concerned equally with self-improvement and improving the lives of those around oneself. Gatsby's schedule is entirely focused on making him fit the image he has set for himself. For example, from 5:00-6:00, he is to "Practice elocution, poise and

how to attain it" (Fitzgerald 173). His schedule and list of virtues make no mention of doing good for others. Both are entirely focused on self- creation, not self-improvement. The absence of these types of moral goals furthers Fitzgerald's rewriting of the self-made man. It illustrates the idea that the twentieth century self-made man is no longer concerned with issues of morality or virtue, but only with attaining material wealth and social status.

Even the points of similarity between the two come into question. For instance, Gatsby's connection to Franklin's call for industry can be challenged because while Gatsby makes a success of himself, he does so through dishonest and criminal acts. Though it is never directly stated, it is strongly suggested that Gatsby made his money through criminal activity, be it gambling, bootlegging, or any other illegal acts. His closest business acquaintance, Meyer Wolfsheim, is a known figure in organized crime. Beginning with leaving the family farm, and hence the agrarian, Jeffersonian lifestyle, Gatsby is not concerned with moral betterment, only with the acquisition of wealth. In chapter four of *The Twenties,* Hoffman claims that "The only real American hero is the inspired millionaire," a claim that channels Fitzgerald's feelings in writing the character of Jay Gatsby (Hoffman 153).

Even Gatsby's conception of love becomes muddled in his desire to obtain material wealth. Several critics and academics have cited that his love for Daisy is more in line with him wishing to obtain a material possession than a companion. In *The Illusions of a Nation,* John F. Callahan discusses Daisy in this manner, saying "To Gatsby, Daisy, 'gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor' (Fitzgerald 116-117) changes from woman to treasure. As woman, she is perishable, as silver or golden girl, an immortal. Precious metal becomes the only way of preserving

the ideal, the idea of success. Thus, the dream becomes a commodity" (Callahan 13). Gatsby as a person has become so artificial, so concerned with collecting material possessions, that he has lost sight of one of the most basic human emotions. He sees Daisy as more of an object to acquire than a woman with whom he can share a life.

Part V: Retreating Into the Past

Throughout the novel, Nick Carraway serves as the moral center. He is an outsider, not predisposed to the corruption of values found in the likes of Gatsby and Daisy. Coming from the Midwest, he is the ambassador of the traditional values so associated with that region of the country, the values to which Gatsby explicitly turns his back. But this notion is challenged by Nick's ambivalence in regards to Gatsby's persona. He never takes a definite position against what Gatsby represents, the dishonesty and moral corruption inherent in his invented self. Callahan suggests that Nick's inability to judge Gatsby on moral grounds stems from Carraway's admiration of the qualities present in Gatsby and not in himself. Callahan contests that "what Nick values in Gatsby are qualities he himself lacks: spontaneity, outward sensitivity, and finally, that capacity for hope crushed in Carraway by the burden of history" (Callahan 32).

In the final page of the novel, Fitzgerald makes an interesting turn. After spending so much time recasting a quintessentially American type in a twentieth century setting, he presents a nostalgic, almost elegiac look at the American past. Nick, sprawled out on Gatsby's lawn and looking off into the Sound, imagines the vision of

America held by the first Dutch sailors who came to New York. He narrates "for a transitory, enchanted moment, man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, [...], face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder" (180). What is being narrated here is the original encounter with the pristine land soon to be settled. The land itself serves as a reflection of limitless potential and the opportunity to invent something new, to reinvent the self in whatever image one wishes. This is the image of America encapsulated by the writings of Jefferson and Franklin, the America of endless possibility, a clean slate on which to invent a new mode of being. This narration centers on an image of America before the time of Jefferson and Franklin, honing in on the simultaneous excitement and apprehension felt by the first Dutch colonizers to arrive in New York, detailing their approach to the land but stopping short of them stepping out of their boats. America here is seen from a distance, and as such is idealized. But at this point, the moment of approach just before docking, the ideal is as pristine as the land.

In bringing the reader back to the imagined origin point of America's history, Fitzgerald suggests that the dream at that moment was just as much a myth as it is during the interwar period. This recalling of the past goes beyond Franklinian origins of the self-made man and moves instead to examining the origins of America itself. The days of self-reliance and endless possibility have been replaced by social and monetary greed, trees ripped down to make way for lavish mansions, the American dream rewritten as a story of artificial superiority. Fitzgerald imagines this earliest image of New York harbor and all it represented to the Dutch sailors as a way to emphasize a shift in American values, to highlight the move away from self-improvement and towards self-invention. Nick narrates of Gatsby "his dream must have seemed so close that he

could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the light" (Fitzgerald 180). This statement brings the analysis back to Jeffersonian ideals, that the American dream is found in the rural areas, and that the cities represent a corruption of the dream. Gatsby is a vision of how this initial dream has been tarnished, how it has lost its core in the midst of selfish desires. "So we beat on," Carroway concludes, "boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (Fitzgerald 180). Like Hemingway with *In Our Time,* Fitzgerald incorporates the American past into his presentation of the twentieth century to convey a sense of loss, an irreplaceable set of ideals that have been corrupted in the face of modernity.

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