

Masculinity Under Assault: Homosociality in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Great Gatsby*  
Undergraduate Disciplinary Honors Thesis

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

When using the lens of queer theory to examine literature, the defined lines of “acceptable” identities are blurred by exposing the complexities of human nature and sexual desire. Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses how the binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality are inevitably cast against one another in society and, consequently, in literature in her novel *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. The binary, in combination with homosexual panic, manifests in what Sedgwick calls a “homosocial bond” between males. “Homosocial” is a term that is used to describe the social bonds that form between two individuals of the same sex; it is parallel with “homosexual” but is defined against “homosexual” at the same time, due to the need of heterosexuality to establish itself as superior to homosexuality. Sedgwick explains that “homosocial” is “applied to such activities as ‘male bonding,’ which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality” (Sedgwick 1). However, this term is redefined by Sedgwick so that the male homosocial bond is viewed, not by an emotion such as “love,” but rather through the less emotive structure of erotic desire (Sedgwick 2). Ultimately, this homosocial bond occurs when two males are connected in such a way that an erotic charge or desire develops.

To analyze homosocial bonds and desire in literature, Sedgwick offers a useful method for studying relationships within literary texts: the erotic triangle. This idea of Sedgwick’s comes from theorist René Girard’s “triangular desire,” in which he “[traces] a calculus of power that was structured by the relation of rivalry between two active members of an erotic triangle” (Sedgwick 21). Girard most often focuses on triangles that involve two males who are “rivals for a female” and it is the rival bond between males that is most intense rather than their relationship

with the female. Girard's triangles offer a symmetry that Sedgwick argues against, due to the "radically disrupted continuum, in our society, between sexual and nonsexual male bonds, as against the relatively smooth and palpable continuum of female homosocial desire" (Sedgwick 23). However, these male-male-female erotic triangles are outwardly based on heterosexual relationships between the males and the female. In this way, Sedgwick suggests that the structure of erotic triangles is circumstantial to gender and must be asymmetrical (Sedgwick 24). It is through the heterosexual relationships and normativity that the male homosocial bonds are developed; this is what makes analyzing heterosexual relationships interesting, as homosocial bonds inherently include aspects of homosexuality, but still work to support heterosexuality and heteronormativity.

As sexuality is directly connected to gender, which is often a "profound determinant of power," it is important to consider its relation to femininity or masculinity (Sedgwick 26). The dominance of heteronormativity in society constructs masculinity as it conforms to heterosexuality, and thus, the level of an individual's conformity to societal standards of gender and sexuality determines the individual's masculine identity; consequently, any threat to heteronormativity leads to anxious masculinity. Evidently, the nature of gender and sexuality norms are complex, so Sedgwick's erotic triangle works as a useful tool for "delineating relationships of power and meaning, and for making graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment" (Sedgwick 27). Therefore, to structure my own literary analysis, I use Sedgwick's method of the erotic triangle to examine the homosocial bonds and heterosexual relationships in two early

twentieth century<sup>1</sup> novels: D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

The two novels allow for interesting points of analysis because of their comparative publication dates, as well as their differing narrative point of views, in addition to their common elements of heteronormative relationships and masculine anxieties. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was first published in 1928 and *The Great Gatsby* was published just three years earlier in 1925. Although the authors' nationalities and the novels' settings differ, the early twentieth century was characterized by anxieties in both England and the United States due to post-World War I societal changes.<sup>2</sup> However, the more distinguishing feature of the two texts are their narrative point of views, as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is told through a third person omniscient narrator, while *The Great Gatsby* is narrated by Nick Carraway in first-person, who is a minor participant within the plot; Nick's role as both a narrator and a character complicates the erotic triangles and the entailing masculine identities.

Despite their differences, the novels exhibit a theme of class divide, as portrayed in the contrast between the aristocratic Clifford and the working-class Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and Tom's old money versus Gatsby's (fake) new money in *The Great Gatsby*, which establishes masculine identities and anxieties in both narratives. Additionally, the literary texts also feature unhappy marriages and extramarital affairs that reveal and cause masculine anxieties

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1. As Sedgwick's work involves pre-twentieth century literature, my work is an extension of Sedgwick's by continuing the analysis into the twentieth century.

2. D.H. Lawrence is an English writer, while F. Scott Fitzgerald is American. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is set in early twentieth century England, which is the Technological (or Second Industrial) Revolution era. *The Great Gatsby* is set in the United States during the early twentieth century, which is known as the Jazz Age or Roaring Twenties. The eras of both England and the US featured breaks in traditions and newly developing societal conventions.

for the characters. As Sedgwick warns against “historical blindness” when analyzing texts (24), I consult marital advice manuals to historically contextualize the novels’ representations of the institution of marriage, which seem to be dramatizations of anxious masculinity due to the threatened heteronormative marriages. As literature tends to reflect the society in which it is written, applying Sedgwick’s erotic triangle to the relationships in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and *The Great Gatsby* reveals the complicated nature of homosociality and heteronormativity by illustrating how masculinity acts while under assault.



## CHAPTER II

### FRAGILE MASCULINITY AND HOMOSOCIALITY IN *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER*

In D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*,<sup>3</sup> Constance (Connie) Reid grows up in a cultured, upper-middle class family and marries aristocrat Clifford Chatterley in 1917. Clifford is sent to war shortly after marrying Connie and returns paralyzed from the waist down, leaving him impotent. Clifford becomes a seemingly successful writer as he begins to entertain intellectuals at Wragby, the Chatterley estate. Connie becomes increasingly detached and isolated, as she is unable to relate to the values and discussions of Clifford's cohorts. However, Connie does have an intimate connection with a playwright friend of Clifford's, Michaelis. After her relationship with Michaelis ends, Connie physically weakens due to her declining mental and physical state, leaving her unable to care for Clifford and his disability, causing them to hire Mrs. Bolton as Clifford's caretaker. Recognizing that he cannot fulfill Connie's sexual or reproductive needs, Clifford suggests that she take a lover in order to procreate, as long as Connie will still love Clifford and raise the child with him. It is Wragby's gamekeeper, Oliver Mellors, who Connie takes as a lover, and they engage in an emotional and physical affair. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is comprised of many complex intimate relationships and homosocial bonds, which allows for a deep analysis of compromised masculinity through literal, metaphorical, core erotic triangles.

#### **Literal Triangles**

The "literal" erotic triangles are extending secondary triangles that take place in the beginning of the novel, before the core erotic triangle. These literal triangles are characterized by

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3. I am using the 2006 Penguin Classics edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* for the purposes of this essay.

themes of homosocial bonds and fragile masculinity. As the literal triangles are fairly simplified, they work as a precedent for the other erotic triangles to come.

*Connie, Clifford, and Michaelis*

Michaelis is a “young Irishman who had already made a large fortune in America by his plays” and for a period of time, he socialized with a “smart society” in London, but was rejected when his anti-Englishness was discovered by the group (20). To compensate for his decline in social status, Michaelis befriends Clifford in hopes of entering a higher social circle. Clifford benefits from befriending Michaelis, as he “had the ear of a few million people” in America and Clifford is “determined to build himself a monument of a reputation quickly, [using] any handy rubble for the making” (21). Clifford’s determination in creating a world-wide reputation for himself stems from his fragile state of ego due to injury and impotence. Thus, the relationship between Clifford and Michaelis is of mutual benefit, as the two use each other’s diminished statuses to stabilize their own depleted sense of masculinity; this is an illustration of their homosocial bond. As Connie is “in love” with Michaelis (28), this establishes the first erotic triangle of the novel.

Connie connects Clifford and Michaelis in a different homosocial bond, as she creates a sense of competition between the two men through her erotic desire. Clifford’s impotence leaves him unable to fulfill Connie’s sexual and reproductive needs, yet Connie is contractually obligated to remain with him by marriage. While Clifford’s explicit intention in connecting with Michaelis is to use his success to form his own global reputation, he directly connects Michaelis with Connie through his own desire to compensate for his feebleness. Though Michaelis’ relationship with Clifford is an attempt to join a high-class society, his dispossession of Englishness causes him to be considered an “outsider” (24), regardless of his contact in the social

circle. While this class-standing is emasculating to Michaelis, Connie's interest in Michaelis is sparked by his "queer extraordinary success" and his transcendence of class. Clifford reaps the benefits of Michaelis and Connie's relationship, as Connie's erotic desires are being fulfilled and she becomes "cheerful" (30). Connie's sexual relationship with Michaelis (which is unknown by Clifford) and her contractual link to Clifford forms a competitive, but reciprocally beneficial, homosocial bond between Clifford and Michaelis; Connie also acts as a compensation for each man's delicate masculine state.

Connie's physical and emotional need for childbearing is related to her sexual desire for Michaelis. He is described as seeming "so old—endlessly old...and at the same time he was forlorn like a child" (23). It is Michaelis' likeness of a child in combination with his "outsider" condition that causes Connie to feel sympathy "mingled with compassion and tinged with repulsion" for him (24). While Connie feels a "terrible appeal" for Michaelis (25), his childlike qualities are intertwined with her erotic desires and reproductive needs. This is evident through the depiction of Michaelis' internal emotions in relation to Connie's childbearing desire: "[T]he infant crying in the night was crying out of his breast to her, in a way that affected her very womb" (25). The looks that Connie and Michaelis exchange appeal to Connie's longing for a child, which leads to their first sexual encounter. To Connie, their intimacy "meant nothing except that she gave herself to him" (26); however, for Michaelis, his "child's soul was sobbing with gratitude to the woman, and burning to come to her again" (28). The consistent portrayal of Michaelis as a helpless child during his encounters with both Clifford and with Connie signify a frailty of his masculinity, which is both amended and accentuated by his relations with the Chatterleys.

*Connie, Clifford, and Mrs. Bolton*

When the relationship between Connie and Michaelis ends due to his critiquing of her sexual habits, another erotic triangle emerges, as Mrs. Bolton, a caretaker for Clifford, is introduced into the narrative. Because of Connie's lack of sexual and reproductive satisfaction, her body was physically thinning and weakening, while her mental state also declined. Without purpose, "[Connie's] body was going meaningless, going dull and opaque, so much insignificant substance. It made her feel immensely depressed, and hopeless" (70). The drastic change in Connie's state of well-being exhibits a frailty of her femininity, which sparks a "sense of rebellion" in her (72). Growing tired of taking care of Clifford's physical needs (i.e., those related to his disability) and rapidly declining in health, Connie requests (through her sister) that a servant be hired to take care of Clifford. Clifford refuses to have a *manservant*, as it would further accentuate his impotence and assault his already impaired masculinity. At the threat of Connie being taken away by her sister, Clifford accepts Mrs. Bolton as his caretaker since he knew her when he was young. With this acceptance of Mrs. Bolton into the Chatterley household, the second erotic triangle of the novel is produced.

Most immediately and positively affected by Mrs. Bolton's presence is Connie, who describes her arrival as "a new voice in Wragby...it roused a new ear in her" (82). Mrs. Bolton takes to Connie more quickly than Clifford, "feeling she must extend to her her female and professional protection" (85). The mutuality of appreciation between Connie and Mrs. Bolton forms a homosocial bond between the two women at Wragby. Additionally, Mrs. Bolton serves as a replacement for Connie in her intimate duties of caring for Clifford's needs. Connie welcomes the displacement that Mrs. Bolton creates since Connie no longer has to spend the

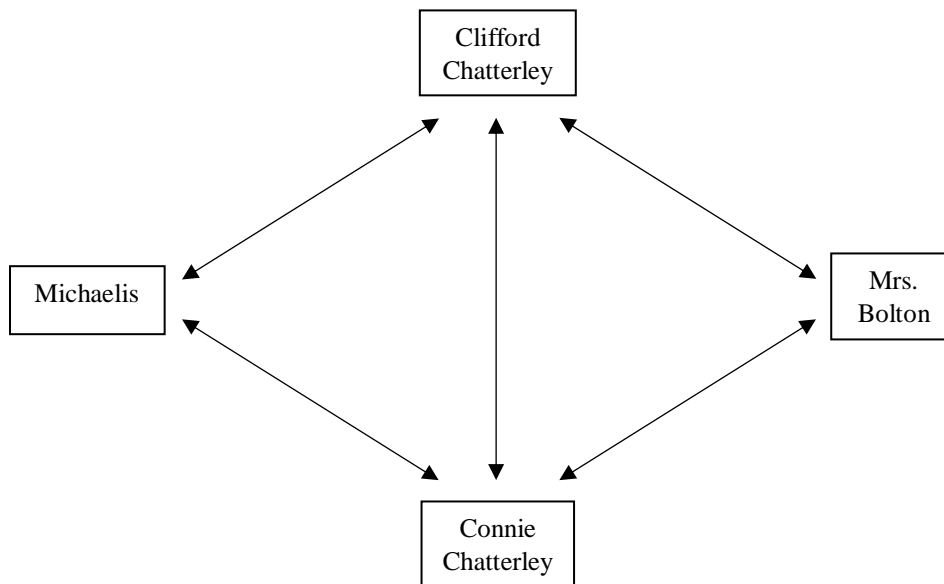
majority of her time with Clifford; she is able to be alone and she is “thankful” for this (83). Ultimately, Connie is freed by Mrs. Bolton, which emphasizes their homosocial bond.

Clifford resents Connie “giving up her personal care of him to a strange hired woman” because to Clifford, the intimacy between them is especially enacted when Connie takes care of him (83). When Connie is replaced by Mrs. Bolton, it is Mrs. Bolton who takes part in the intimate acts with Clifford, which is the ultimate stimulus of their relationship. Because Mrs. Bolton is reserved and nervous around Clifford at first (due to her inexperience with upper-classes), Clifford “recovered his self-possession, letting her do things for him without ever noticing her” (82). In this way, Clifford is able to retain more of his masculinity through his intimacy with Mrs. Bolton than with Connie, because she is lower in station than him, which allows him to dominate while still being in the vulnerable position created by his disability. While he feels powerful, dominant, and masculine with Mrs. Bolton, he paradoxically is described as “if he were a child, really as if he were a child” when Mrs. Bolton shaves and bathes him (109). Thus, not only does the intimate relationship between Clifford and Mrs. Bolton compensate for Clifford’s broken masculinity, but it also strips him of his masculinity when he is compared to a child.

### *Comparing the Literal Triangles*

The literal erotic triangles have several things in common: (1) both triangles are established through Clifford’s need to supplement his masculinity (Michaelis and Mrs. Bolton); (2) both triangles are characterized by a homosocial bond, the first being with Clifford and Michaelis, and the second being with Connie and Mrs. Bolton; (3) both triangles have direct effects on Clifford and Connie’s relationship; (4) both triangles exhibit men who are characterized as childlike in relation to women, the first occurring with Michaelis and Connie,

and the second occurring with Clifford and Mrs. Bolton. Although there are differences between the first and second erotic triangles, the summation of their commonalities prove that the triangles work in a reflective manner (see figure 1). Ultimately, the two literal erotic triangles demonstrate that the relationships in each work to compensate for fragile masculinity, but paradoxically accentuate an assault on the masculinity of men who have a form of weakness (i.e., Clifford's disability, Michaelis' social class).



The Literal Erotic Triangles in *LCL*. Figure 1.

### Metaphorical Triangles

The “metaphorical” triangles involve the relationship between characters and thematic ideas, rather than between only characters. These triangles exemplify anxious masculinity and the way in which women are used by men to reenter a “masculine” world.

#### *Clifford, Mrs. Bolton, and Industry*

Mrs. Bolton seems to further emphasize Clifford's fragile masculinity because of the act of her taking care of him. However, as Clifford becomes closer with Mrs. Bolton, she begins to have a great new influence over him. She “put a new fight into Clifford” by discussing the

intellectual world versus the working world with him (106). Clifford decides to visit the mines, during which, he remembers things “he had learned before the war” about mining that he had forgotten (107). During this visit to the mines, Clifford “sat there, crippled, in a tub” while he spoke with the underground manager (107). This is a seemingly emasculating moment since his disability is clearly on display, yet he overcomes any sense of masculine anxiety as “his mind began to work” (107).

After this experience and researching modern coal-mining techniques, Clifford chooses to enter the industrial world of coal-mining, causing him to feel “a new sense of power flowing through him” (108). Though Clifford is unaware of the impact that Mrs. Bolton has on him, he recognizes that it is “[only] when he [is] alone with Mrs. Bolton [that] he really [feels] a lord and a master” (109). Thus, it is through Mrs. Bolton’s conversation and advice that Clifford reenters the “masculine” world of industry. It is also through Mrs. Bolton that Clifford regains a sense of masculinity by having “power over all these men,” which insinuates that his overcoming of anxious masculinity occurs by dominating over other men who are considered to be “masculine” by their hard manual-labor. Therefore, Clifford’s work in a masculine industry rather than an intellectual society, as prompted by Mrs. Bolton, seems to be the solution to his impotence and lacking masculinity.

### *Mellors, Connie, and Nature*

Mellors’ role at Wragby as a gamekeeper constitutes his relations with the natural world of the outdoors, including the life forms that exist in nature (i.e., animals, plants, trees). For Mellors, his working-class occupation as gamekeeper defines his sense of masculinity, similar to how Clifford redefines his masculinity with industrial work. Because of Mellors’ hatred of industry, he views the industrial world as “mechanized greed,” as “it would destroy the wood,

and the bluebells would spring no more. All vulnerable things must perish under the rolling and running of iron” (119). From this description, we can determine that Mellors’ vulnerability is created by his hatred and fear of an industrially changing world. As he distinguishes his identity of masculinity against industry, he is defining his anxious masculinity. In order to fight against the industrial world, Mellors becomes a recluse in the natural world, detaching himself from people who could drag him into industry and assault his masculinity.

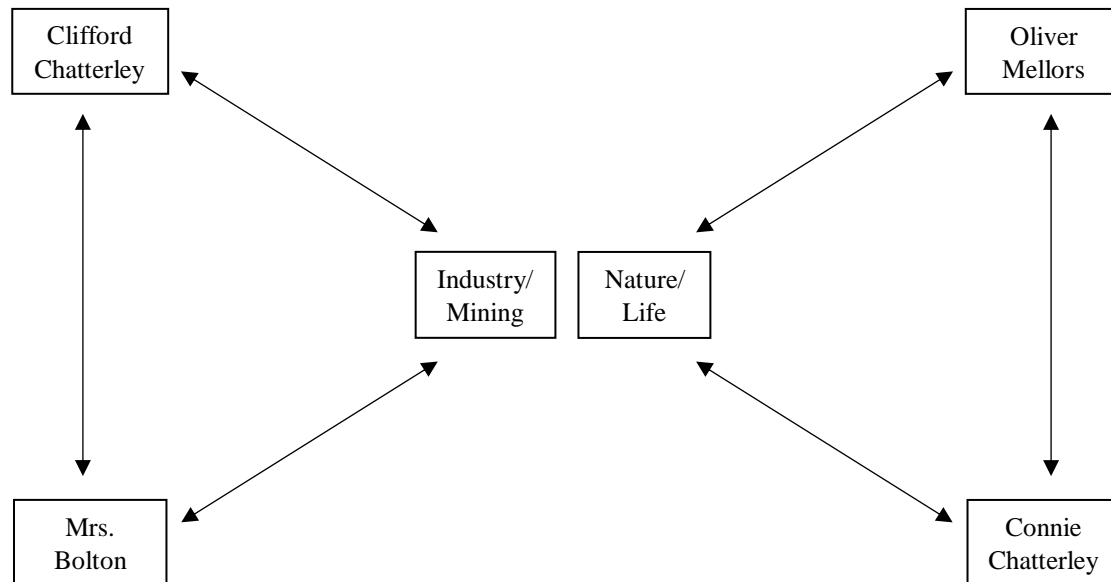
After Mellors and Connie engage in their first act of sex, he immediately dreads the connection that he has made with her, as he believes she will bring him back into the “evil” world of industry (119). Yet, he chooses to continue their intimate relationship because of his ardor for Connie’s “infinite tenderness” (119). While Connie seems to be a source of Mellors’ anxious masculinity, she actually reinforces his bond with nature and “life.” The anteceding moment of their first sexual act involved Connie holding a small chick, which evoked an emotional reaction in her, causing her to cry. Mellors notices her crying and is sexually aroused by Connie’s vulnerability and emotions towards nature, as “compassion flamed in his bowels for her” (115). Thus, it is Connie’s relation to Mellors through nature that influences his return to “life” (i.e., an intimate bond with another human being) in the natural world. Throughout the rest of the narrative, Connie and Mellors’ relationship continues to form through experiences in nature, eventually creating another life together, which seemingly resolves Mellors’ anxious masculinity.

### *Comparing the Metaphorical Triangles*

While Clifford’s relationship with Mrs. Bolton directly influences him to return to industry, Mellors has a previous relationship with nature due to his position as gamekeeper. However, because Mellors’ masculinity is formed by his work in nature in combination with his



fear and hatred for industry, his masculinity is compromised by anxiety. It is through his connection with Connie that he is able to resolve his anxious masculinity in nature; this is what allows the metaphorical erotic triangles to work in a parallel manner (see figure 2). The relationships in the metaphorical triangles promise to support the masculinities of Clifford and Mellors, until the two men form a homosocial bond through Connie in the core erotic triangle.



The Metaphorical Erotic Triangles in *LCL*. Figure 2.

### Core Erotic Triangle

The “core” erotic triangle represents the bonds between the three central characters of the novel: Clifford, Connie, and Mellors. While Clifford and Mellors’ masculine identities seemed to have been supported by their metaphorical bonds in the previous section, there is an accelerated unraveling of their masculinities as their relationship becomes more direct in the core erotic triangle. Clifford and Mellors are positioned as opposing characters through their connections with Connie and their class differences.

*Clifford, Connie, and Mellors*

Firstly, Clifford's inability to provide a child for Connie, or an heir for the estate, strains their relationship and hinders his masculine identity. Clifford does not ostensibly consider the idea that Connie's mental and physical condition declines because she is not able to engage in sex; Clifford believes that Connie's "maternal" needs should be attended to by allowing her to have an affair for the sole purpose of bearing a child. Clifford suggests this idea by saying:

"It would almost be a good thing if you had a child by another man," he said. "If we brought it up at Wragby, it would belong to us and to the place. I don't believe very intensely in fatherhood. If we had the child to rear, it would be our own. And it would carry on. Don't you think it's worth considering?" (43-44)

It is obvious that Clifford cares little to none about the physical act of sex between he and Connie or even Connie and another man. To Clifford, sex is only essential in terms of reproduction, and childrearing is necessary to "carry on" the Chatterley line. Connie's reaction to this is to ask, "But what about the other man?" (44) to which Clifford essentially explains that sex is meaningless. Marriage, to Clifford, is not about "the simple function of sex," but is rather about the emotional connection between a man and a woman. While Clifford compares arranging this "sex thing" as one would a dentist appointment, Connie views sex as an excursion that "must not be denied" (44). It is this fundamental difference in erotic desire that leads Connie to have a physical and emotional affair with Mellors. While Connie might seem to be the sole benefiter of an affair, Clifford would benefit as well, as a child would not only be an heir of Wragby, but would also partially restore Clifford's masculinity by feigning fertility and upholding the image of a proper heteronormative marriage. Therefore, Clifford needs this relationship with another man in order to preserve his masculine image.

Clifford's upper-class and industrial standing directly counters Mellors' working class and natural preferences. Both men view the opposing class as the "wrong" type of man in terms of masculinity, but their differences are emphasized by Clifford's physical disabilities compared to those of Mellors'. While Clifford explains to Connie that he does not "rule with his legs," thus, he is able to rule "the masses," these capabilities are placed in direct contrast with his motorized wheel-chair's dysfunction in climbing up a hill (183). Mellors comes to assist Clifford and Connie with the chair, but Clifford angrily insists that no one push him (in the chair) up the hill. Only until Clifford's stubbornness causes him to almost roll backwards down the hill does he request "in a superior tone" that Mellors push him up the hill (190). From this part of the scene, it is evident that although Clifford believes in his masculinity through his mental ability, it is stripped away from him by both his inability to climb a hill in his wheel-chair and his need for a working-class man to push him. In order to retain a fragment of his masculine identity, Clifford clings to his status as dominant by class.

In the same scene, Mellors is portrayed as physically strong, and therefore, masculine, in comparison to Clifford. However, Mellors is immensely weakened by the physical exertion that Clifford's body is placing upon him, as he "was paler than Connie had ever seen him: and more absent" (191). Connie, feeling concerned for Mellors' health, helps him push Clifford up the hill and an erotic moment takes place:

Shoving [the chair] with his left hand, he laid his right on her round white wrist, softly enfolding her wrist, with caress. And the flamy sort of strength went down his back and his loins, reviving him. And she, panting, bent suddenly and kissed his hand. Meanwhile the back of Clifford's head was held sleek and motionless, just in front of them. (192)

This moment places Clifford in a position of inferiority and Mellors in superiority, as Clifford is characterized as unwitting, while Mellors is dominant. Mellors' arousal by Connie while pushing an impotent Clifford situates Mellors as more masculine by asserting the idea that eroticism is a desirable trait, per Connie. Although Mellors was physically weakened by Clifford, the temporality of the weakness causes Mellors' masculine identity to remain unaffected, especially as Connie expressed concern (as opposed to antipathy). Had Connie been revolted by Mellors' momentary weakness rather than concerned, his masculine identity would have been negatively impacted. In this way, Mellors' transient weakness reinforces Clifford's deficit of masculinity in his permanent weakness; this reflects the ultimate aspect of Clifford and Mellors' homosocial bond, as the two men need the relationship to define their own sense of masculinity by revoking the other's masculine identity.

#### *Challenging Heterosexuality and Masculinity: Mellors and Clifford*

While Mellors and Clifford mostly define their masculine identities through their homosocial bond, there are several instances throughout the novel in which the masculinity and heterosexuality of the men are challenged. Rather than being challenged by contrasting images of each other, these instances of questionability are created outside of their homosocial relationship. Essentially, this further complicates the heteronormative masculinity of Mellors and Clifford.

For instance, when Mellors reflects upon his former occupation as a soldier in India, he fondly remembers his deceased colonel "who had loved him and whom he had loved" (141). Other than that phrase, there is no further detail surrounding the relationship that Mellors had with his colonel. Considering the distinctiveness of the statement in relation to the rest of the novel, it is evident that this "loving" relationship between two men has substantial significance, perhaps signifying homosexuality. Mellors is characterized as particularly isolated from others,

aside from his relationship with Connie and his occasional interactions with Clifford. Yet, Mellors would seem to be the most masculinized character; thus, the subtle hint towards a non-heteronormative erotic relationship works to challenge Mellors' masculine identity. Additionally, Mellors' isolation further questions his masculinity as he is unable to relate to or identify with the other men in Connie's life (i.e., her father, and her friend, Duncan). He is challenged by Sir Malcom, Connie's father, when he laughs about Mellors being a gamekeeper, but justifies Mellors' relationship with Connie by saying, "she has her own income" (284). As Sir Malcom only approves of Mellors being with Connie because she can support herself financially, he emasculates Mellors by insinuating that he could not support Connie.

Unlike those few instances of Mellors', Clifford's heterosexuality, and entailing masculinity, are challenged more considerably. The main moment of questionable heterosexuality for Clifford occurs when he has returned to the mines: "He really felt, when he had his periods of energy and worked so hard at the question of the mines, as if his sexual potency were returning" (147). It is Clifford's power and rule over miners, or other men, that regenerates his sexual potency, which is a direct challenge of heterosexuality and normativity. Although becoming potent would seem to reinstate Clifford's lacking masculinity, the cause of potency being his domination of men and a masculine industry contests his sexuality; this works similarly, but less directly, to the challenging of Mellors' sexuality.

However, Clifford's emasculation is much more extensive than that of Mellors'. Recalling Clifford's positioning when Mrs. Bolton first arrives at Wragby, it is evident that he regains masculine power by ordering her around, but this is juxtaposed when he is continuously described as child-like. Clifford being equated to a child is a common recurrence throughout the novel, but it reaches a greater level when he discovers Connie will not return to Wragby due to

her love for another man. Clifford's "hysteria" in the moment is followed by the statement, "Any attempt to rouse his manhood and his pride would only make him worse: for his manhood was dead, temporarily if not finally" (290). Not only is Clifford's masculinity nearly entirely revoked, but he reverts to a child-like state with Mrs. Bolton:

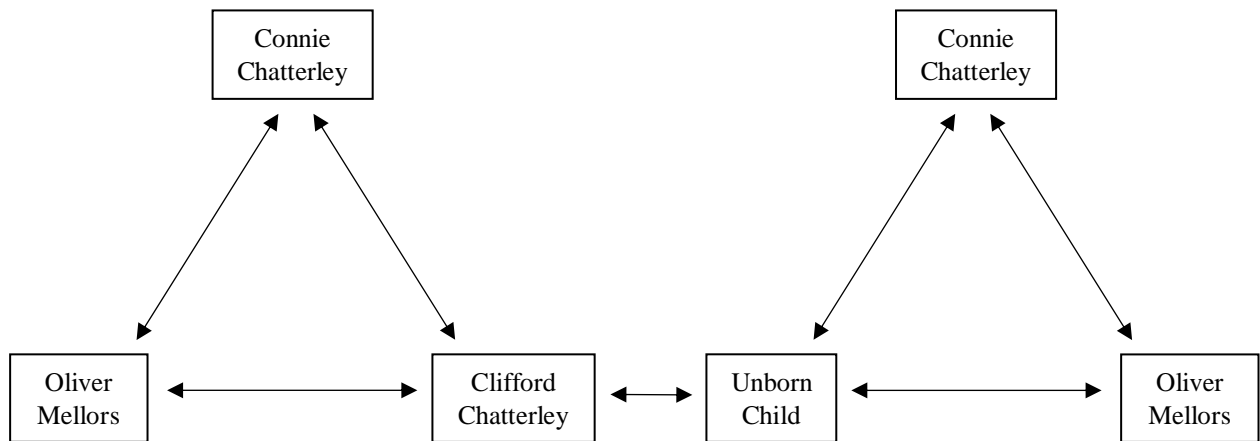
He would hold her hand, and rest his head on her breast, and when she once lightly kissed him, he said: "Yes! Do kiss me! Do kiss me!" And when she sponged his great blond body, he would say the same...And he lay with a queer, blank face like a child, with a bit of the wonderment of a child...It was sheer relaxation on his part, letting go all his manhood, and sinking back to a childish position that was really perverse. And then he would put his hand into her bosom and feel her breasts, and kiss them in exaltation, the exaltation of perversity, of being a child when he was a man. (291)

This depiction of Clifford as a child is essentially, the ultimate emasculation of his character. Although much of the scene could be viewed in a sexualized manner, the perverseness of Clifford "sinking back to a childish position" establishes his and Mrs. Bolton's relationship as maternal, rather than sexual; this is especially true regarding his interactions with her breasts, as it is the "exaltation of perversity." Thus, Clifford's degeneration into a child assaults his masculine identity to the point of near nonexistence.

### *Analyzing the Core Erotic Triangle*

The cause of Clifford's reversion into a child seems to be that Connie is impregnated by Mellors, which, in addition to their erotic connection, causes Connie to decide to leave Clifford in order to raise the child with Mellors. However, it is Clifford's impotence (and suggestion) that influenced Connie to take a lover in the first place, which established the core erotic triangle of

the novel (see figure 3). It is ironic, then, when Clifford becomes the child that he could never have, and thus, the triangle shifts when Connie decides to leave Clifford, and Clifford's position is replaced by the child (see figure 3). Clifford is ultimately emasculated by both Connie's child and his own perverse regression to childhood, and Mellors is masculinized by achieving a heteronormative relationship and family unit; evidently, the child symbolizes new life and rejuvenation in the sense of heteronormative masculinity.



The Core Erotic Triangle and Clifford's Replacement by the Child in *LCL*. Figure 3.

## Conclusion

In analyzing the relationships in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* through erotic triangles, it is clear that masculine identities are established, reinforced, and discredited in a complex manner. The literal erotic triangles, which represent character relationships prior to those in the core triangle, are defined by homosocial bonds and fragile masculinity. While the relationships in the literal triangles work to support fragile masculine identities, the result is an accentuation of weakened masculinity in men who are already affected by a form of weakness (i.e., Clifford's disability, Michaelis' social class). Fragile masculinity tends to become anxious masculinity, which is exhibited in the metaphorical erotic triangles, and these represent the relationships

between characters and thematic ideas. Particularly, the metaphorical triangles demonstrate how relationships with women are used to return men to a masculine world; these triangles ensure a support of masculine identities. However, the core erotic triangle unravels the seemingly determined masculinities of the metaphorical triangles by positioning the males both opposingly and homosocially, while emphasizing questionable heteronormativity and emasculation. In examining how masculinity functions when under assault through the erotic triangles in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, there is a central theme of regeneration and rejuvenation; this is especially the case as masculinities are established by procreation and heteronormativity in the novel.



## CHAPTER III

COMPROMISED MASCULINITY AND ACCELERATED UNRAVELINGS IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*<sup>4</sup> is narrated by a young man, Nick Carraway, who has moved to West Egg in New York in the 1920s. Across the bay in the elite East Egg is Nick's second cousin once removed, Daisy Buchanan, and her wealthy aristocratic husband, Tom Buchanan. Nick's rental house in West Egg is next door to the rich and mysterious Jay Gatsby, who is the plot's focus. Nick learns from Daisy's friend, Jordan Baker, that Daisy had been romantically involved with Gatsby prior to marrying Tom until Gatsby was sent to fight in the war. Currently, in the narrative, Tom and Daisy's marriage is strained due to Tom's affair with a woman (Myrtle Wilson) in the city, which allows Gatsby to enact his plan to reunite with Daisy through Nick. While the marital affairs establish literal erotic triangles similarly to those in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Nick's narration of and presence within the plot complicates the triangles and the ensuing masculine identities in a way that is unique to *The Great Gatsby*.

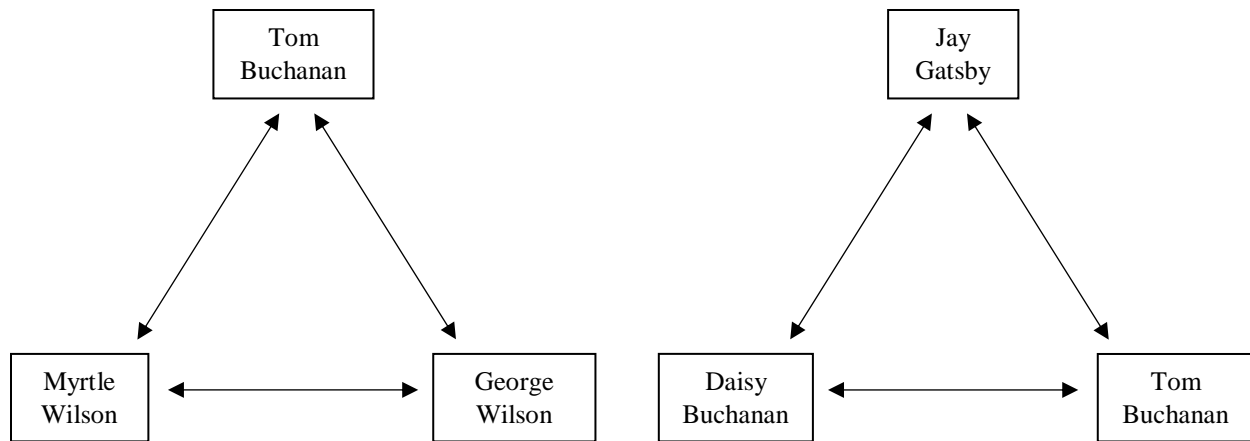
**Literal Triangles**

The "literal" erotic triangles involve the main characters within marital affairs without considering Nick Carraway's position as a narrator or character (see figure 4). These triangles differ from those in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, as they represent the core relationships of the marital affairs, rather than representing the secondary relationships that exist outside of the core triangle. Additionally, the plot of *The Great Gatsby* is driven by the relationships within these literal triangles. Like the literal triangles of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, these are characterized by

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4. I am using the 2004 Scribner edition, copyright 1925 by Charles Scribner's Sons, of *The Great Gatsby* for the purposes of this essay.

compromised and anxious masculinity through heterosexual competition, and thus, homosocial bonds.



The Literal Erotic Triangles in *The Great Gatsby*. Figure 4.

### *Tom, Myrtle, and George*

Tom Buchanan is the epitome of heteronormative masculinity in a 1920s' America, as he is materialistically successful based on his physicality and upper-class wealth; while he attended Yale University, Tom was “one of the most powerful ends that ever played football at New Haven—a national figure in a way” and “his family were enormously wealthy” (6). Although Tom is presently around thirty-years-old, he is described as physically powerful:

Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward. Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body—he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing, and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body. (7)

From this description, it is evident that Tom's masculine qualities are defined particularly by his stature, as his arrogance, dominance, and aggressiveness are established by the appearance of his body. While he could have been emasculated by the "effeminate swank of his riding clothes," the masculinity of his muscularity overshadows any potential femininity. However, this is soon contrasted with Tom's insecurity about the "white race" being "utterly submerged" by minorities, as he says, "It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or those other races will have control of things" (13). Tom's concern with becoming submissive to other races establishes both his heteronormative *white* masculinity and his anxious masculinity, as it is apparent that his societal position of dominance is being threatened.<sup>5</sup> Considering this as an aspect of Tom's anxious masculinity, perhaps his extramarital affair works to settle that anxiety.

The woman who Tom has an affair with, Myrtle Wilson, lives with her husband, George Wilson, in "a valley of ashes" between West Egg and New York City (24). George Wilson is a mechanic in a car garage that is described as "unprosperous and bare" (25). The Wilsons, being a part of the working-class, are used by Tom to reinforce his masculinity by class dominance; this is clear when Tom takes Nick to meet Myrtle and they visit George in the car garage. Tom asserts his masculinity over George as Tom threatens to end a business deal they had made, which causes George to scramble (25). Additionally, Tom and Myrtle move (physically) close to one another while George has turned his back, and Tom tells her to "get on the next train" (26). This interaction between Tom and Myrtle that takes place in George's shop, essentially under his nose, positions Tom as dominant over George by asserting his ability to "take" George's wife. Tom further emasculates George by telling Nick that when Myrtle is out with Tom, "[George]

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5. While these overtly racist views (pp. 12-13) are obviously problematic and could be further analyzed, I am only discussing the statements in relation to queer theory for the purposes of my argument.

thinks [Myrtle] goes to see her sister in New York. He's so dumb he doesn't know he's alive" (26). Ultimately, by positioning himself as superior to George in his social class and relationship with Myrtle, Tom is substantiating his dominant masculinity and resolving his anxious masculinity, which establishes a homosocial bond between the two men.

*Gatsby, Daisy, and Tom*

Another homosocial bond is formed between Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby due to their competition for Daisy's affection. Unlike Tom's direct and immediate masculinization, Gatsby is characterized by mysteriousness for much of the narrative, and before he appears in the plot, he is masculinized by his wealth and fame for throwing extravagant parties. At the first of Gatsby's parties that Nick attends, he describes Gatsby:

His tanned skin was drawn attractively tight on his face and his short hair looked as though it were trimmed every day. I could see nothing sinister about him...When the Jazz History of the World was over, girls were putting their heads on men's shoulders...girls were swooning backward playfully into men's arms...but no one swooned backward on Gatsby. (50)

Gatsby's masculinity is defined by his attractiveness, fame, and fortune, but his lack of a heteronormative connection, as seen by "no one [swooning] backward on Gatsby," causes part of his anxious masculinity.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Gatsby uses his quest for reuniting with Daisy as compensation for his lacking heteronormativity.

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6. I say "part of" here because I will later address another aspect of Gatsby's anxious masculinity.

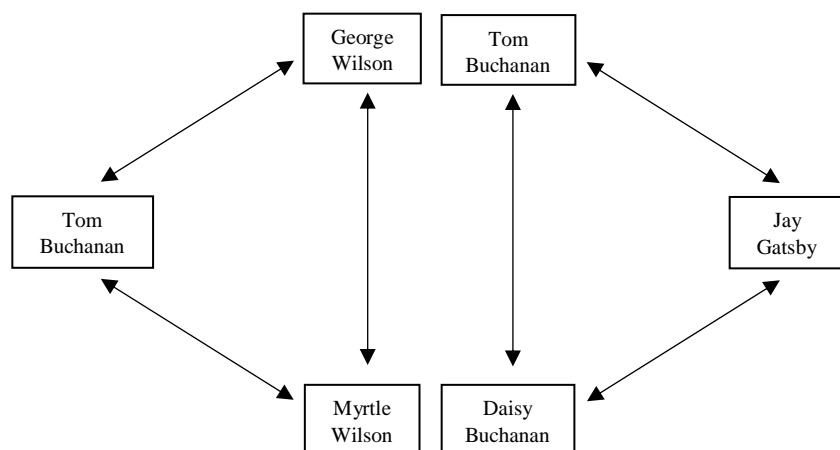
Nick (and thus, the reader) is unaware of Gatsby's intention to reconnect with Daisy until Jordan Baker explains the circumstances of their past relationship. From the backstory, it turns out that when Daisy was eighteen-years-old, her family was extremely wealthy and prevented her from seeing Gatsby before his deployment overseas; this led to Daisy eventually becoming engaged to Tom Buchanan, although, she did not want to marry him. After marrying Tom, Daisy was "mad about her husband" and refused to leave his side, until later, Tom was in a car accident with "one of the chambermaids in the Santa Barbara Hotel" (76-77). The insinuation that Tom had an affair prior to Myrtle, in addition to Daisy's hesitation in marrying him, discredits Tom's masculinity in a heteronormative marriage. Juxtaposing Tom and Gatsby's characters in the backstory allows Gatsby's masculine identity to dominate Tom's, as his affection and respect for Daisy is portrayed positively and heroically.

#### *Comparing Anxious Masculinities*

While a part of Gatsby's anxious masculinity is caused by his lack of a heteronormative relationship, later in the narrative, it is revealed that he has fabricated his success, wealth, and therefore, his social class. Jay Gatsby was born James Gatz in North Dakota on a farm and later ended up being the personal assistant for Dan Cody, who was a wealthy man. Cody gave Gatsby his new name and treated him to a life of wealth and luxury, but when he passed away, the money that Cody left for Gatsby in his will was taken by Cody's mistress. However, Gatsby did not lose sight of a life of wealth and success; he became involved with Meyer Wolfsheim, who helped him make his fortune through illegal business. Gatsby's anxious masculinity surrounding his fraudulence manifests itself in his interactions with Tom Buchanan, as Tom comes from established familial money and is married to Daisy, with whom Gatsby desperately wants to be.

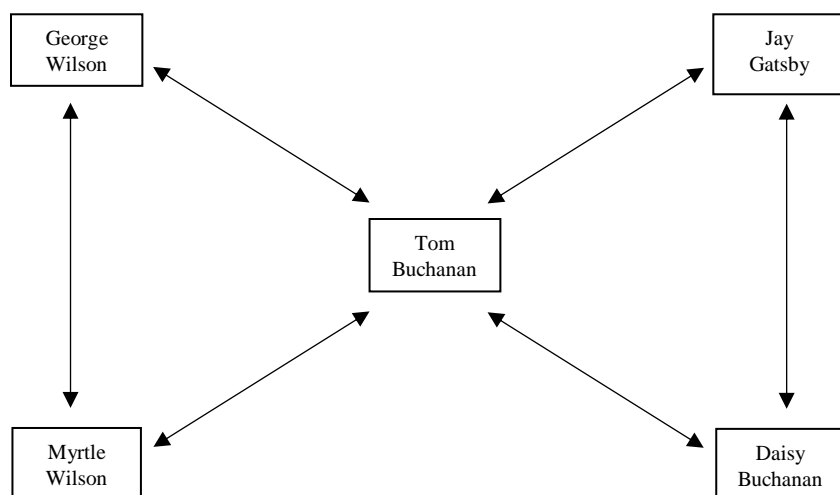
While Tom is in Gatsby's house after riding with some friends, Gatsby tells Tom that he knows Daisy in an "almost aggressive" manner (102); at this point in the narrative, Gatsby and Daisy have been spending time together, and thus, Gatsby presents his confidence superiorly toward Tom, as Gatsby has succeeded in reconnecting with Tom's wife. Although Tom is unaware of the extent of Daisy's relationship with Gatsby, he is still "evidently perturbed at Daisy's running around alone," which exhibits another aspect of Tom's anxious masculinity. Tom's masculine identity heavily relies on his heteronormative marriage with Daisy to remain intact, just as Gatsby's masculinity relies on reuniting with Daisy. Therefore, a homosocial bond between Tom and Gatsby is established and continuously reinforced through their heteronormative competition over Daisy.

Both Tom and Gatsby's affairs with married women demonstrate social class differences in relation to masculinity. Tom's affair and involvement with the Wilsons, who are lower in class than Tom, are representative of his need to assert his dominance through superiority in wealth and social status. Tom supports his masculine identity through his relationship with the Wilsons, which he uses to rectify his anxieties of losing his (white) power to other races, as well as his anxieties of losing his wife to an inferior man. Similarly, Gatsby's relationship with the Buchanans, who are "old money" upper-class, proves Gatsby's need to be successful and wealthy enough to be accepted by the upper-class. By connecting with Daisy and competing with Tom, Gatsby is able to assert his masculinity through (fraudulent) wealth, which he uses to amend his anxieties of isolation and lack. Thus, Tom and Gatsby's positions within a marriage that is outside of their social classes reveals an inversion of the literal erotic triangles (see figure 5).



Inversion of Literal Erotic Triangles in *The Great Gatsby*. Figure 5.

While both Gatsby and Tom have anxious masculinities, Tom's hypermasculinity is extremized in attempt to compensate for his numerous anxieties; this causes Tom to dominate over men and women, unlike Gatsby, whose competition lies solely with Tom. Tom's affair with Myrtle acts as one solution for his anxious masculinity, as he uses her marriage with George to position himself as domineeringly masculine. Yet, this aspect of his hypermasculinity negatively affects his relationship with Daisy, which influences her to pursue an affair of her own with Gatsby. Tom's marriage with Daisy, along with his masculine identity, is threatened by Gatsby's relationship with Daisy, and this creates another aspect of his anxious masculinity. Thus, the literal erotic triangles become intertwined by Tom's anxious masculinity (see figure 6).



Intertwined Literal Erotic Triangles in *The Great Gatsby*. Figure 6.

*Complicating Masculinities*

While Tom's anxious masculinity connects the two literal triangles, his relationships with each character establish connections between characters that do not have constant relationships, especially Gatsby and George (see figure 7). In considering these outlying connections through particular sections of the narrative, the masculinities of the men are complicated. Tom's direct interactions with George and Gatsby, as well as his homosocial bond with both men, allow Tom to serve as the connector between George and Gatsby; yet, without the presence of the women in the triangle, the three men would not be linked at all, which proves their necessity in forming homosocial relationships. It is through the relationship between Tom, Gatsby, and George that the men's masculine identities are complicated and solidified in the climax and denouement of the plot.

The climax of the narrative occurs as Tom, Daisy, Gatsby, Nick, and Jordan go into town for the afternoon where they attempt to escape the summer heat in a suite at the Plaza Hotel. Tom has noticed Daisy's feelings for Gatsby, as she blatantly says to Gatsby that he "always [looks] so cool" (119). Tom, in order to prove his dominance, questions Gatsby's reputation as an "Oxford man," which leads to Tom exclaiming, "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out..." (130). Tom and Gatsby's competition culminates as they argue about which man Daisy loves, and after Daisy reveals that she is leaving Tom, he exposes Gatsby's illegal wealth. At that moment, Gatsby's face looked "as if he had 'killed a man'" and Daisy began to lose her confidence in their relationship. At Daisy's request to leave the hotel, Tom insists that she leave with Gatsby in his car—the two following his orders works to support Tom's authority and masculinity.

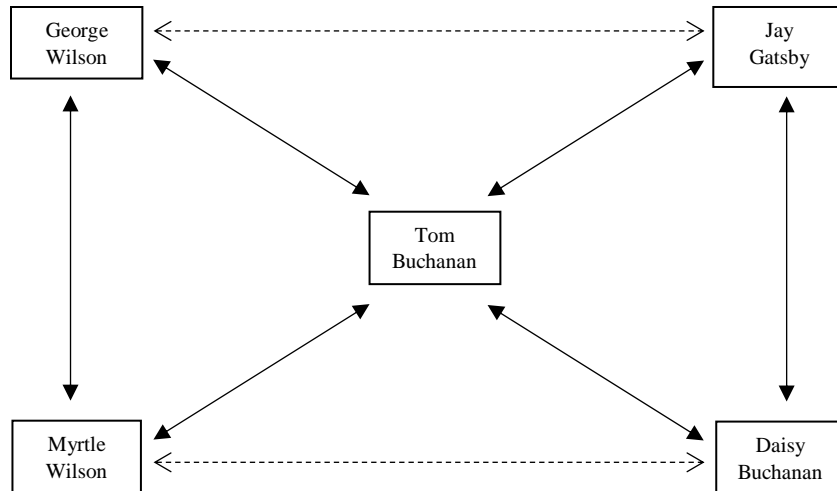


The next incident depicts Myrtle Wilson being hit and killed by someone driving a yellow car and Tom happens to come across the scene, adamantly telling George, “I just got here a minute ago, from New York. I was bringing you that coupé we’ve been talking about. That yellow car I was driving this afternoon wasn’t mine—do you hear? I haven’t seen it all afternoon” (140). Tom’s insistence that he wasn’t driving the yellow car that killed Myrtle clears his name in the hit-and-run, but also causes George to later determine that Myrtle’s killer (and owner of the car) was her lover. George’s conclusion that Myrtle was having an affair is triggered by his discovery of a dog leash that Myrtle had hidden, and he remembers her previously coming home from the city with a broken nose, both of which are related to her affair with Tom.

Just before her death, George confronted Myrtle about her affair and during their argument, Myrtle saw the yellow car that she had seen Tom driving earlier in the afternoon, which prompted her to run into the street toward the car. George decides that the driver and owner of the car must be Myrtle’s lover and determines that “he killed her” and “his mouth dropped open suddenly” (158). Since Tom had cleared his name as Myrtle’s killer and lover just hours before George’s conclusion, George goes on a hunt for the man who killed Myrtle and who owns the yellow car. Of course, the owner of the yellow car is Gatsby, which George discovers rather quickly by forcing Tom to reveal the owner. However, George never finds out that it was Daisy who was driving the car that night when Myrtle was killed. Because of Gatsby’s widely known reputation, George is able to locate his residence easily, which enables him to shoot and kill Gatsby in his home; although it is a fleeting moment, this action creates the direct connection between George and Gatsby.

Essentially, Tom's anxious masculinity that exists prior to the novel's climax is resolved by his domination of Gatsby during their argument; Tom emasculates Gatsby by exposing his fraudulent identity and causing him to lose credibility (through sanity) in Daisy's perspective. Then, Tom further stabilizes his own masculinity by establishing his faultlessness in Myrtle's death and consequently allows the blame of his own affair with Myrtle to be placed upon Gatsby. While Gatsby's masculinity could have been somewhat stabilized by his heroic act of protecting Daisy from being blamed for Myrtle's death, his masculine identity is compromised by George killing him. For George, his anxious masculinity could have potentially been solved by the confrontation with Myrtle's lover, but because he is led to a false conclusion by Tom, George's anxious masculinity is left unresolved. Additionally, George is wholly emasculated in his death (by suicide), as Myrtle's sister denies any possibility of Myrtle being unfaithful in her marriage, which causes George to be "reduced to a man 'deranged by grief'" (164).

By the end of the plot, Tom has disappeared with Daisy after having indirectly caused the deaths of Myrtle, Gatsby, and George due to his hypermasculinity and attempts to support his anxious masculine identity. It is evident that Tom was using his relationship with Myrtle and her status as a married woman to settle his anxieties, yet, this causes Daisy to partake in an affair of her own, which further compromises Tom's masculinity. Daisy's affair does not solve her own marital anxieties but rather exacerbates them, leading her to kill Myrtle. Thus, Tom's need to support his compromised masculinity through his connections with each character creates a link between Daisy and Myrtle, and George and Gatsby, that would not exist without Tom's anxious masculinity. Since Tom ultimately saves his marriage with Daisy by eliminating his competition, and thus, his anxious masculinity, Tom's masculinity is left intact in the narrative's denouement.



Additional Connections in Intertwined Literal Triangle: *The Great Gatsby*. Figure 7.

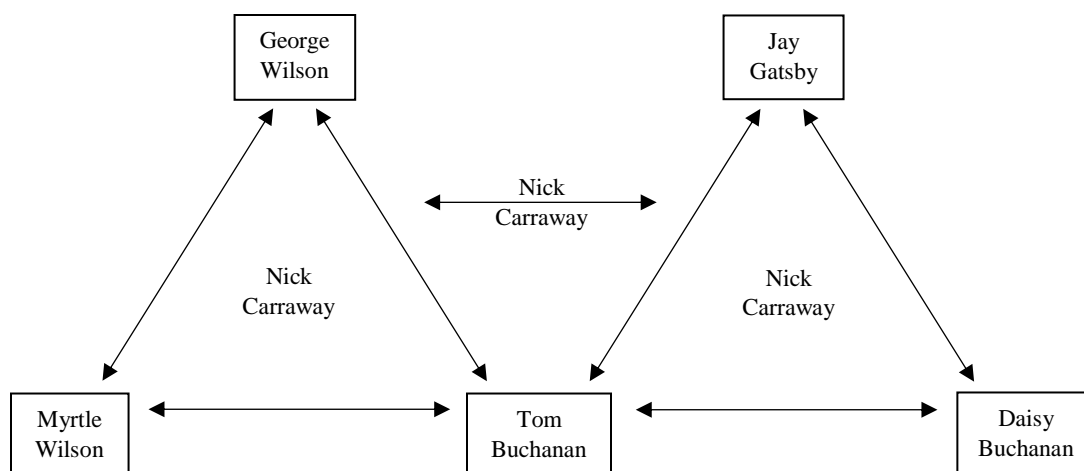
### Nick Within the Triangles

While Tom's masculinity influences each variation of the literal erotic triangle, Nick's position as the narrator of the novel, as well as a participating character, complicates the relationships within the erotic triangles. Although there are certain moments when Nick seems to be acting more explicitly as the narrator, it is oftentimes difficult to differentiate between the moments when Nick is simply narrating and when he is acting as a character within the plot. This ambiguous nature of Nick's involvement allows him to sometimes support masculine identities, while at other times, his presence causes an accelerated unraveling of masculinities.

#### *Nick as the Narrator*

Not only is Nick the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, but he also positions himself as the author of the novel, addressing Gatsby as "the man who gives his name to this book" (2). In writing "his" novel, Nick seems to be reflecting upon human intimacies through his experiences with Gatsby. Before introducing the beginning of the narrative, Nick provides some information about himself, as he says, "I'm inclined to reserve all judgements," but then quickly contradicts himself by saying "Reserving judgements is a matter of infinite hope. I am still a little afraid of

missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth” (1-2). This contradictory remark is representative of Nick’s narration style as a subjective first-person narrator; his views and descriptions of the story are presented as objective, but usually involve comments or analysis of characters or events that are based on his restricted access to information. Although his subjective first-person narration is somewhat limited, we, as readers, understand the characters and events as Nick constructs them through his commentative narration, which makes his presence essential *in* and *between* both literal triangles (see figure 8). As Nick’s explicit role as a narrator allows him to define the characterizations in the novel, he supports the masculine identities that are established in the literal erotic triangles.



Nick as the Narrator in the Literal Erotic Triangles in *The Great Gatsby*. Figure 8.

### *The Ambiguity of Nick's Role*

However, there are moments in the narrative when it is impossible to distinguish between Nick’s position as either a narrator or a character, as he is acting in both positions, which allows

him to both support and destabilize masculine identities. For instance, after Nick describes Tom's masculinity in relation to his physique,<sup>7</sup> Nick continues and says:

His speaking voice, a gruff husky tenor, added to the impression of factiousness he conveyed. There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward people he liked—and there were men at New Haven who had hated his guts.

“Now, don't think my opinion on these matters is final,” he seemed to say, “just because I'm stronger and more of a man than you are.” We were in the same senior society, and while we were never intimate I always had the impression that he approved of me and wanted me to like him with some harsh, defiant wistfulness of his own. (7)

In this section, Nick is providing both factual narration (i.e., “there were men at New Haven who hated his guts”) and subjective commentary (i.e., “he seemed to say”), which work to characterize Tom as masculine. At the same time, Nick's statement that Tom “wanted [Nick] to like him with some harsh, defiant wistfulness” insinuates that Tom's severe need for approval from another man, especially in a nostalgic sense,<sup>8</sup> creates a homosocial bond between Tom and Nick; yet, this homosocial bond does not support Tom's masculinity, but rather destabilizes it by suggesting that Tom cannot assert his masculinity without the presence of a seemingly less-masculine man.

Additionally, this scene contributes to Nick's masculine identity through his narrative interpretation of what Tom's voice “seemed to say,” which is seen particularly in the comment of

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7. I am referring to the block quote that I previously referenced in the “Tom, Myrtle, and George” section, which comes from page 7 of the novel.

8. The phrase “nostalgic sense” refers to the nature of Nick and Tom's relationship during their time together at Yale University where Tom was an immensely popular football player, and thus, at the peak of his masculinity.

“I’m stronger and more of a man than you are.” Although Nick is supposedly describing Tom by the remark, he is actually establishing his own anxious masculinity, as his intimidation is reflected by his commentary. He continues to shape his masculine identity as he says, “while we were never intimate I always had the impression that he approved of me,” which is his attempt to stabilize his own masculinity by suggesting that Tom, a popularly masculine character, “approved” of Nick as a “man,” despite their remote friendship. However, Nick’s reliance of approval from another man does not resolve his anxious masculinity and perhaps even accelerates it. Thus, Nick resorts to assaulting Tom’s masculinity by implying that Tom also needs approval from another man, further solidifying their homosocial bond. While the purpose of this scene seems to be to destabilize both men’s masculine identities, it ultimately works to establish Nick’s masculine identity as a *character* through his own *narration*; therefore, it exemplifies the complex and ambiguous nature of Nick’s involvement in the narrative.

### *Nick as a Character*

Furthermore, Nick’s narration deliberately constructs the triangulation of the novel’s relationships, which allows Nick to insert himself into the erotic triangles by replacing an existing character; this particularly occurs in the literal erotic triangle of Tom, Gatsby, and Daisy, in which Nick replaces Tom’s position in the triangle (see figure 9). In considering Nick’s involvement as a character in the novel, it is evident that Gatsby’s relationship with Daisy relies on Nick’s existence as a character and not an explicit narrator. As previously discussed, part of Gatsby’s anxious masculinity is created by his lack of a heteronormative relationship, and it is only through his connection with Nick (as a character) that he is able to attain that relationship.

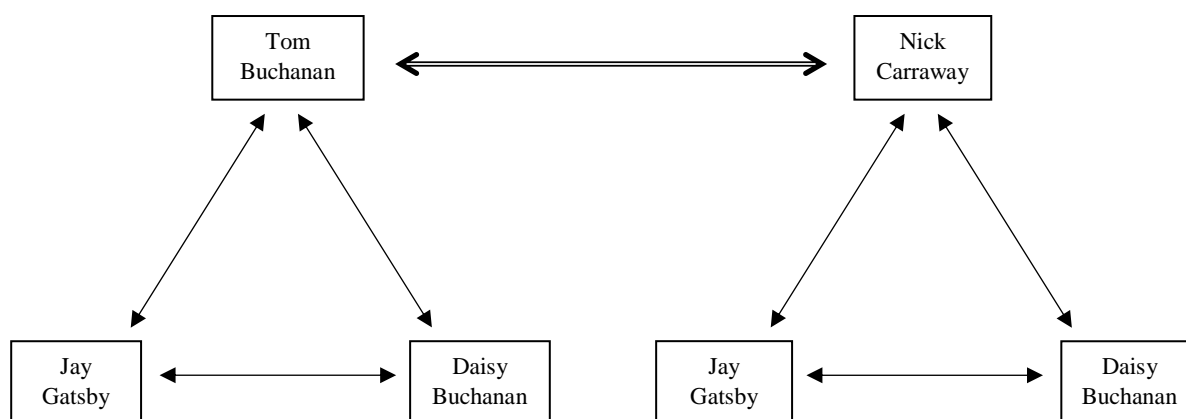
The first instance of Gatsby’s reliance on Nick is when he needs Nick to invite Daisy over for tea so that he and Daisy can become reacquainted without Tom being present. When

Gatsby and Daisy first see each other again, the awkwardness of their encounter overcomes Gatsby's confidence and it is Nick who is able to encourage Gatsby by assaulting his masculinity, as he says, "You're acting like a little boy...Not only that, but you're rude. Daisy's sitting in there all alone" (88). This comment causes Gatsby to regain his confidence, and after he and Daisy have spent an hour or so alone together, Gatsby invites not just Daisy, but also Nick, to his own house. At one point during the evening, Nick attempts to leave so that Gatsby and Daisy can be alone, but "they wouldn't hear of it," which further exhibits the necessity of Nick's presence (94).

Although it is implied that Gatsby and Daisy spend some time together without Nick being present, the next scene in which Gatsby and Daisy are seen together is at Gatsby's party, in which Nick and Tom are in attendance. During the party, Gatsby and Daisy "sauntered over to [Nick's] house and sat on the steps for half an hour, while at her request [Nick] remained watchfully in the garden" (105). Nick also notes that "except for the half-hour [Daisy had] been alone with Gatsby she wasn't having a good time (106). Thus, due to Nick being physically present during the successful alone-time of Gatsby and Daisy, it is evident that Nick's involvement in their relationship is necessary for its functionality; additionally, the erotic triangle and Gatsby's masculinity is stabilized by Nick's presence, as he substitutes himself for Tom's position.

However, there is an accelerated unraveling of Gatsby's masculine identity in the next scene with Gatsby and Daisy, as the confrontation between Gatsby and Tom takes place at the Plaza Hotel, despite Nick's physical presence. The scene mainly consists of dialogue between Tom, Daisy, Gatsby, occasionally Jordan, and most minimally, Nick. For the majority of the event, especially during the climax of confrontation between Tom and Gatsby, Nick is not

involved as a character but rather acts more explicitly as a narrator. As previously mentioned (without considering Nick’s involvement), the hotel scene causes Daisy and Gatsby’s relationship to fall apart; considering that Nick is physically present during the scene, but not acting as an essential participatory character, and Gatsby’s relationship with Daisy begins to disintegrate, it is apparent that Nick’s substitution only stabilizes the triangle when he is more explicitly involved as a character, rather than mostly existing as a narrator. Therefore, instead of Nick supporting Gatsby’s masculinity by upholding a heteronormative relationship, Nick’s presence actually accelerates the unraveling of Gatsby’s masculine identity.



Nick Replaces Tom in Erotic Triangle in *The Great Gatsby*. Figure 9.

### *Further Accelerated Unravelings*

In considering Nick as a participatory character and his relationship with Tom, Nick causes an accelerated unraveling of Tom’s masculine identity as well, particularly in the beginning of the novel. Although Nick tends to characterize Tom as overtly masculine and heteronormative, their homosocial bond is constructed by a need for approval of other men and Tom’s consistent touching of Nick’s body—for instance, Tom “[turns Nick] around by one arm” (7) and “[rests] his hand on [Nick’s] shoulder” (10); these interactions between Nick and Tom



are not necessarily strictly heteronormative. Additionally, Nick's support of Gatsby's relationship with Daisy accelerates Tom's anxious masculinity, as Nick is approving of Gatsby over Tom, which is detrimental to Tom's masculine identity.

Similarly, Nick's homosocial bonds with both Tom and Gatsby would seem to destabilize Nick's own masculinity, as his fascination and intimacy with other men throughout the narrative are not austere heteronormative. His relationship with Jordan may have temporarily resolved his anxious masculinity, but its abrupt ending causes Nick to feel "angry, and half in love with her, and tremendously sorry" at the end of the novel (177). As the novel ends with Nick lacking a heteronormative relationship or even a homosocial bond, and he is left reflecting upon his relationship with another man (Gatsby), perhaps it is Nick's heteronormative masculine identity that is the most compromised of all.

## **Conclusion**

It is evident that the complexities of masculine identities are revealed through analyzing the relationships in *The Great Gatsby*, both with and without the complications of Nick's involvement. The literal erotic triangles, which represent the main marital affairs of the plot, are characterized by anxious masculinities, heterosexual competition, and homosocial bonds, notably in Tom and Gatsby's competition over Daisy. Tom and Gatsby being involved with married women of social classes differing from their own (i.e., Gatsby is truly lower in class than Daisy, Tom is higher in class than Myrtle) creates an inverted version of the literal erotic triangles. However, it is Tom's anxious masculinity that directly causes the affairs of the literal triangles, so, Tom's anxieties intertwine the two literal erotic triangles. The masculinities of Gatsby, George, and Tom are complicated and solidified in the climax and denouement of the narrative,

as Gatsby's masculinity is compromised by his death, George is emasculated in his death, and Tom resolves his anxious masculinity by eliminating his competition.

While Tom is the clear connection between the two literal triangles, it is Nick's narration that establishes Tom's relationships and helps the readers see the link between the relationship triangles. Additionally, Nick's editorializing of the narrative shapes characterizations, especially regarding masculine identities because it is only through his narration that readers can understand the characters and their relationships. Thus, Nick's narration *in* and *between* both literal triangles supports the narrative and the masculine identities of the male characters in the novel, but not in a redefining manner. However, there are moments in the novel when Nick's position is ambiguous (i.e., it is not explicitly clear whether he is acting solely as the narrator or a character), which is seen through Nick's description of Tom; this example works to establish and destabilize Tom's masculinity, while also establishing Nick's masculine identity. The ambiguity of Nick's role allows him to sometimes act as a character and substitute himself for an existing character into an erotic triangle. In the instance of Nick replacing Tom in the Gatsby-Tom-Daisy triangle, Nick causes an accelerated unraveling of Gatsby's masculine identity through the necessity of his presence as a character. Furthermore, Nick's existence as a character compromises not only Tom's masculine identity, but also Nick's own heteronormative masculinity. In examining the functionality of masculinity in marital affairs through erotic triangles and a subjective first-person narrator in *The Great Gatsby*, there is a recurring theme of heteronormativity in marriage as a construction of masculine identities; heteronormative marriage is also a theme of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

## CHAPTER IV

## HISTORICALLY CONTEXTUALIZING HETERONORMATIVE MARRIAGE IDEALS

As the concept of marriage is central in the construction of masculine identities in both *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Great Gatsby*, specifically regarding marital affairs due to unhappiness, it is useful to examine the historical context of heteronormative marriage in the early twentieth century. In her own analysis of marital normalcies in relation to sexuality, Annamarie Jagose uses marital advice manuals from the twentieth century to explore erotic desire and sexual practices in *Orgasmology*. Jagose explains that in the early twentieth century, heterosexuality was so widely understood to be the default category that it was not even considered to be a “category” or a sexual identity; this fact is exhibited in the marriage manuals through the repetitive ideal of normalcy within the (heteronormative) institution of marriage (Jagose 45). She further states, “In order to think about the history of heterosexuality, that is, in order to think about both its coagulation as an intelligible category...concerning marriage primarily but also the family...sex and gender systems, erotic desire and practice, [and] reproduction...we need also to think about heteronormativity” (Jagose 46). Rather than the term “heteronormativity” acting as a synonym for “heterosexuality,” it represents the normalization of heterosexuality, along with its patriarchal epitomes, as the only intelligible and desirable category of identification (Jagose 47). Heteronormativity opposes any non-normative position of identification and is enacted within many institutions, but most especially in the institution of marriage, which is apparent in marital advice manuals.

The marriage manuals that were published in the 1920s and 1930s provide insight about the threatened heteronormative institution of marriage, which the manuals attempt to resolve by providing instructional solutions for couples to “save” their individual marriages, and

consequently, the overall institution of marriage. As *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Great Gatsby* were published in the 1920s, they are reflective of the “marriage crisis” of the time through their themes of anxious masculinity due to the breakdown of marriage. Thus, as a response to the anxious masculinity and heteronormativity surrounding the breakdown of marriage, the early twentieth century marriage manuals act as an idealized movement to support “proper marriages” and the entailing heteronormative culture.

### *The Marriage Crisis*

In his book *The Marriage Crisis* (1928), Ernest Groves discusses the high rates of unhappiness and divorce in marriage during the early twentieth century. The term “marriage crisis” means that “the character of people has so greatly changed that its expression in the marriage relation is necessarily taking a new form” (Groves 29); it is not marriage itself that is changing, but rather the people who sustain the marital institution. According to Groves, the development of pleasure-seeking and desire as a life-philosophy has “brought greater strain...within family life” at the time of this marriage crisis (35). This philosophy led people to believe that entering marriage would bring pleasure and happiness, and upon discovering displeasure and unhappiness within marriage, people began to seek a way out of the contract, thus threatening “the stability of marriage” which “could be maintained only by way a rapid change-about in the point of view of those who entered matrimony” (38).

Additionally, Groves believes that “the coming of birth control has removed from marriage the element of potential parenthood, which in the past was one of its fundamental features” (42-43). For Groves, birth control would allow marriage to exist without the practice of parenthood, and without parenthood in marriage, “the character of marriage itself is changed by the effort to commit it absolutely to pleasure-seeking” (45). Because many “responsibilities of

citizenship” have been directly linked to the institution of family, and consequently, marriage, Groves argues that “marriage faces a crisis and birth control is largely responsible” (46). In addition to birth control, Groves mentions other societal aspects that may have conjunctively impacted the institution of marriage, such as erotic desire.

### **Marital Advice Manuals**

In *Married Love* (1931), Marie Stopes considers the “natural desire for a sexual union,” or marriage, and explains that it is only by following the “profound laws which govern the love of man and woman” that one can achieve happiness in marriage (8), and it is unhappiness in marriage that is the main threat against the institution. *Married Love* is a differing perspective of the threatened institution of marriage than *The Marriage Crisis*, as it suggests that unhappiness in marriage is due to the suppression of and ignorance about women, especially regarding sexual desire; Stopes advocates for the education of both men and women about existing in a successful, “happy” marriage. She argues that “The only secure basis for a present-day State is the welding of its units in marriage; but there is rottenness and danger at the foundations of the State if many of the marriages are unhappy” (Stopes vii). This idea of marriage being a “secure basis for a present-day State” seems to be further rationalized in the “Society” chapter, as Stopes says:

The happiness of a perfect marriage, which enhances the vitality of the private life, renders one not only capable of adding to the stream of the life-blood of the community in children, but by marriage one is also rendered a fitter and more perfect instrument for one’s own particular work, the results of which should be shared by society as a whole, and in the tempering and finishing of which society plays a part.

Marriage should be as perfect, and hence as joyous, as possible; so that powers which should be set free for the purpose of the whole community should not be frittered away in

the useless longing and disappointment engendered by ignorance, narrow restrictions, and low ideals. (Stopes 158)

Essentially, Stopes is advocating for “perfect” marriages because they benefit society by upholding the (hetero)normative societal standards of reproduction and reassuring individualistic productivity, and thus, power for the State. By suggesting that a “perfect” marriage is beneficial to society, Stopes is reinforcing heteronormativity and providing ways to resolve anxious masculinity and heteronormativity within marriage, and within society as a whole.

Like Stopes, Frederick Harris believes in the advantages of marriage as a social institution that constructs morals and societal obligations, which he discusses in *Essays on Marriage* (1931). He points out that “Woman is demanding that her personal satisfaction shall now be duly considered in any marital arrangement,” and this is a commonly mentioned aspect of social change affecting marriage by both Stopes and Grove. Because of these individualistic changes, Harris suggests that “a marked improvement in the personal relationship would renew the dignity of the social institution and revive an interest in the sacramental conception [of marriage]” (23). Harris’ advice for married couples is comparable to that of Stopes’, as he says, “It is essential that husband and wife maintain complete understanding with each other...Each must know how the other feels about all matters, and this mutual confidence should extend to their sexual relations” (124). Yet, unlike Stopes, Harris believes in the one-sided ignorance of women, which is evident by his saying, “Some day, women will be fully instructed regarding sex; and then they may be wise and gentle counselors of men. At present, in many instances the man will have to play the role of the humble and considerate instructor. He may have to lead on the road to a perfect understanding” (124). While Stopes does argue that women of the early twentieth century are sex-ignorant, she also expresses the ignorance of men regarding both sex

and women, which Harris does not consider. Harris' comments about men "instructing" and "leading" women are representative of the suppression of women by male dominance, especially within marriage, and male dominance within (and without) marriage is a characteristic of masculinity; thus, through Harris' comments, we can see how the growing intelligence and independence of women is a threat to the traditional institution of marriage, as it is an establishment of heteronormative masculinity.

In *The Married Woman: A Practical Guide to a Happy Marriage* (1936),<sup>9</sup> Gladys Groves and Robert Ross consider the changing role of women in society, and thus, in marriage, as they are gaining power and agency through education and careers. Even though Groves and Ross do not explicitly advise against women having careers while being married, they do uphold the traditional role of women in marriage by attempting to explain how working-women can "best be true home-makers" (27). In their explanation, working-women should be "earning enough extra money to hire somebody to do the parts of housework or child care that irk them, and then coming home at the end of the day serene and able to enjoy and contribute to the well-being of the family" (Groves and Ross 27); from this quote, it is evident that even though women's power in society is shifting, there is still advocacy for women's traditional roles in marriage, particularly home-making and familial responsibility.

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9. The physical copy of this manual that I am referencing came from the Jackson Library at UNCG; as UNCG was formerly the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina from 1932 to 1963, and the manual is marked with the date "9-25-1937," it is likely that the manual has been in the University library since then. Regarding this information, I would like to further note that the manual is in excellent condition except for the third chapter, titled "Becoming a Wife," much of which details the reproductive anatomies and physicality of marital sex; the damage of this particular chapter suggests a high volume of interaction with the more "suggestive" material.

Groves and Ross further advise married women to “[fulfill] the functions of a wife” and “the first of these functions is to help her husband and herself to achieve satisfactory sex adjustment” (49); in examining their language, it is the woman’s job, in marriage, to first satisfy her husband and satisfy herself second. Additionally, a wife’s “ignorance of the sharp contrast between masculine and feminine sex needs, may hinder or prevent her own happy initiation into the marital mysteries” (50). Therefore, it is primarily the responsibility and education of the woman that determines the happiness of the marriage. In attempt to educate these women and promote happiness in marriage, Groves and Ross provide detailed information about the physicality of marital sex, as they explain the importance of satisfying “the man’s need of the physical communion with [his wife]” (51). This further exhibits the idea that women’s desires are: 1) secondary to that of men’s, 2) used to support masculine “needs,” and 3) the key to stabilizing the marriage crisis. In this manual, Groves and Ross are giving women advice to promote happiness within marriage by using the idea of female empowerment to mask the true motive of instruction: to sustain masculine dominance, and ultimately, the heteronormative institution of marriage.

Evidently, the idea of the unhappy marriage is a common theme of texts concerned with the marriage crisis of the early twentieth century. The overall consensus would seem to be that unhappy marriages are due to women’s increase in societal power, as well as ignorance regarding erotic desire and marital practices, which the marital manuals attempt to resolve. Marie Stopes’ manual offers instruction for both men and women that would further equalize power within marriage, which would not necessarily protect the traditional heteronormative institution; yet, Stopes’ “perfect” marriages consist only of normative male-female relationships, which directly supports heteronormativity. The manuals of Frederick Harris, and Gladys Groves and



Robert Ross advise mainly women in attempt to satisfy masculine desires and ensuing control in accordance with the normativity of heterosexual marriage. It is essentially the sheer existence of these marriage manuals that represent the anxiety that is induced by a breakdown of marriage norms, and thus, a dissolving of masculinity (i.e., male power in society). In applying this historical context to two early twentieth century literary texts, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Great Gatsby*, the breakdown of marriages in both narratives exemplify the “marriage crisis” of the time.

### **The Literary Texts**

In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, marriages break down with Connie and Clifford's relationship, as well as with Mellors' failed first-marriage. For Connie and Clifford, their marriage is jeopardized by their lack of sexual intimacy due to Clifford's physical condition and impotence. Connie and Clifford's declining intimacy, along with their inability to conceive a child, threatens their reputation as a “proper” married couple, and Clifford attempts to uphold an image of propriety by suggesting that Connie have an affair to become pregnant; this demonstrates the importance of maintaining the public image of an ideal marriage, even if the marriage is privately failing. Of course, as Connie's affair with Mellors becomes more emotional, rather than solely physical as Clifford intended, her marriage with Clifford rapidly breaks down.

Although Mellors was also married throughout his affair with Connie, he had already separated from his wife due to their unhappy marriage, which would seem to be the result of their ignorance regarding marital sex and intimacy.<sup>10</sup> However, despite Mellors' failings with

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10. I am basing this statement on the information from Mellors' rant about his first-marriage to Connie (pp. 201-202), but I will not provide further analysis for the sake of the argument.

marriage in addition to Connie's "married" status, Mellors and Connie's relationship still must end in marriage, as "The idea was, he should get his divorce, if possible, whether Connie got hers or not" and the two would live together on a farm (Lawrence 298). While it seems possible that Connie and Mellors may not marry because of Clifford not divorcing Connie, the novel ends with Mellors writing a letter to Connie, saying, "Never mind about Sir Clifford... Wait, he will want to get rid of you at last, to cast you out. And if he doesn't, we'll manage to keep clear of him. But he will" (Lawrence 302). The final statement being that Clifford "will" want to divorce Connie insinuates that Connie and Mellors will be married, which reinforces the cultural norm during the early twentieth century of marriage being the overall aim for a heterosexual relationship.

These same ideas of "proper" marriages and marriage as the ultimate goal are seen in *The Great Gatsby*, as well. For instance, Tom represents the idealities of a "proper marriage" as he says, "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife... Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next, they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white" (Fitzgerald 130); this comment embodies the "marriage crisis" by displaying the fears of a disintegrating institution of marriage, or "family institutions," particularly in relation to the threatened heteronormative marriage. Based on Tom's comment and the marriage manuals, a "proper" marriage is one between a man and woman of the same class and race, which shows the intersectionality of heteronormativity. Although both Tom and Daisy have extramarital affairs, Tom does not consider his own infidelity to be a threat to "family life," but he does believe Daisy's to be so. Interestingly, the marriage manuals do not overtly discuss infidelity within marriage, and where it is mentioned, it is suggested that a marriage cannot be "saved" if its

failures are due to extramarital affairs. Yet, at the end of *The Great Gatsby*, Tom and Daisy's marriage is left intact in spite of their constant failings throughout the narrative, indicating the societal importance of the survival of marriage, just as with the ending of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Therefore, from *The Great Gatsby* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, it is clear that there is a certain view of marriage as an important, yet, failing, institution that needs to be "saved" in order to preserve heteronormativity. Because the heteronormative institution of marriage is directly linked to masculine norms and identities during the time, any threat to the institution of marriage is also a threat to heteronormativity and masculinity, creating anxieties for those who stand to lose power. Based on the evident anxieties in the historically contextualized marital manuals, the marriage challenges within the novels would seem to be symptomatic of the anxieties surrounding the breakdown of marriage in early twentieth century society. Thus, despite the challenges within marriages, the novels fall back on heteronormative marriage by the end of their narratives, leaving masculine anxieties both unresolved and heightened.

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