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Uncommon Convergences: A Hemispheric and Comparative Approach to The Great Gatsby and Pedro Páramo

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UNCOMMON CONVERGENCES: A HEMISPHERIC AND COMPARATIVE
APPROACH TO *THE GREAT GATSBY* AND *PEDRO PÁRAMO*

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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We recommend the thesis prepared under our supervision by

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to *The Great Gatsby* and *Pedro Páramo***

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ABSTRACT

Over the past thirty years, American literary scholarship has shifted focus away from a national approach centered on the United States to a hemispheric methodology that includes all of the countries within this hemisphere. As scholars begin to break down the once iron-clad borders that stood between the American canon and the authors of our hemispheric neighbors, new opportunities have arisen for literary exploration. As an original contribution to this field of scholarship, my thesis project uses a hemispheric and comparative methodology to identify and examine the manifestations of reification and patriarchy in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955). While representing United States and Mexican culture, respectively, there is an abundance of intriguing similarities between the two formative novels. Specifically, my project explores the two main female characters, Daisy Buchanan in *Gatsby* and Susana San Juan in *Pedro Páramo*. As the wives of powerful men, Daisy and Susana experience both reification and patriarchy in markedly similar ways despite the cultural differences that separate them. As the ultimate implication of this commodification and objectification, I explore to what extent these women experience "madness" and whether or not that "madness" leads to triumph or defeat.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER ONE Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER TWO Uncommon Convergences: Reification in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s <i>The Great Gatsby</i> and Juan Rulfo’s <i>Pedro Páramo</i>	5
CHAPTER THREE Behind Every Powerful Man: The Status of the Wife in <i>The Great Gatsby</i> and <i>Pedro Páramo</i>	25
CHAPTER FOUR Deconstructing “Madness” in <i>Pedro Páramo</i> and <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	49
CHAPTER FIVE Conclusion.....	65
NOTES.....	68
WORKS CITED.....	78
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	81

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The opening lines of Juan Rulfo's 1955 novel *Pedro Páramo* suggest the major themes that are prevalent in many canonical works of United States modernism, including F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby*.¹ Likewise, identity, origin, memory, and history are themes that recur most prominently in William Faulkner's novels. While Rulfo is often likened to Faulkner, the striking convergences between Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* have been overlooked. While a comparative approach to *Pedro Páramo* and *Gatsby* may seem unlikely, these two famous novels, though different in many important ways, have a great deal in common.

The following chapters identify and analyze these similarities using a hemispheric comparative methodology. Ralph Bauer argues that:

[...] the hemispheric approach has generally emphasized the relations among and similarities between the literatures and cultures of the New World, focusing on what distinguishes the cultures and literatures of the New World at large from that of the Old—the colonial past and neocolonial present, for example, racial and cultural diversity, processes of transculturation and creolization, and so on.

(“Early American Literature” 218)

My project participates in this hemispheric comparative discussion. But rather than attempt to examine all aspects of these two major novels, I wish to focus on their respective depictions of women characters. I use Susana San Juan in *Pedro Páramo* and Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby* as my conduits into the worlds created by Rulfo and Fitzgerald. Using the theoretical lenses of Hemispheric literary studies, Cultural

Materialism and Feminism, I interrogate questions of female agency and socioeconomic class within the two novels. Despite the differences between the political and economic systems in *Gatsby* and *Pedro Páramo*, why do they both come to illustrate Georg Lukacs' concept of reification and especially the objectification of the female characters? Further, why are Daisy and Susana constrained in reified relationships when they both appear to have other options available to them? And why does Daisy's apparent "madness" cripple her agency while Susana's is recovered through her "madness"?

Chapter One, "Uncommon Convergences: Reification in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*" addresses how Fitzgerald and Rulfo represent capitalism and *caciquismo*, respectively. This section is concerned with how reification, as defined by Lukacs, manifests itself within these seemingly disparate societies. Reification can be defined as the commodification of every part of life, including human relationships. While a modern capitalist society is the prime example that Lukacs provides for his discussion of reification, *caciquismo* in Mexico also results in a similar commodification of relationships. *Caciquismo* can be likened to a semi-feudal system of economics. Within this structure, there is a localized power, a *cacique* or *patrón*, who controls the economic and political lives of the people within his realm of influence. Questioning the notion that capitalism is somehow more progressive than *caciquismo*, this section discusses why both systems result in complete reification and disillusionment of the characters. What is particularly sinister about Pedro Páramo's control over Susana San Juan's life? Then, turning to Daisy Buchanan, I ask why this seemingly affluent woman is unable to maintain any significant level of autonomy or

agency. To answer these questions in a comprehensive way, I discuss both in the context with the socioeconomic and local power structures that define these novels.

Chapter two, “Behind Every Powerful Man: The Status of the Wife in *The Great Gatsby* and *Pedro Páramo*,” explores the intersection of reification and patriarchy in the institution of marriage. This chapter is anchored in the notion that the main female characters in both Fitzgerald and Rulfo’s novels are entirely reified characters because once they enter the marriage contract they are seen entirely as possessions or objects. For my discussion, I define a “subject” as a character who speaks, acts, and therefore creates meaning. Conversely, an “object” is a character who is silent, passive, and has meaning placed onto her. This section looks at the relationships between Daisy Buchanan and her husband, Tom Buchanan, and her love-interest, Jay Gatsby. I examine these relationships with that of Susana San Juan and Pedro Páramo, showing how patriarchal marriage functions in both novels in a markedly similar way. After stripping these female characters of agency, placing them on the pedestal as the ultimate commodity is a particularly striking example of objectification. Despite Daisy and Susana San Juan’s agency during their earlier lives, they are reduced to being objects to be “bought” and then contained within marriage for the pleasure of their husbands. As Nick Carraway, the narrator of *Gatsby*, says, “There are only the pursued, and the pursuing” (79). In these novels, the wife is often the “pursued” and the husband is almost always the “pursuing.”

Chapter three, “Deconstructing ‘Madness’ in *Pedro Páramo* and *The Great Gatsby*,” explores why the result of Daisy and Susana’s objectifications is different based on the way that they experience “madness.” Beginning with the more obvious case of Susana, I interrogate the extent to which she is actually insane. Then, reading Daisy’s

experience through Susana, I examine how the people surrounding them misrepresent moments of agency for both women as “madness.” While Daisy’s “mad” attempts at escape are ultimately what lead to her demise, Susana is able to triumph over her position within patriarchy, mentally escape her captor, and regain some sense of agency because she uses “madness” as a disguise. Why would the label of madness completely undermine one character while supplying a respite for the other? The answer may lie in the different socioeconomic contexts of the novels, and the degree of choice that is available to Susana and Daisy in the works.

Telling the stories of the tumultuous relationships between the self-made magnates and their wives, Rulfo and Fitzgerald’s novels allow for an illuminating comparison. While Rulfo’s novel, in particular, draws from a regional Mexican identity, both *Pedro Páramo* and *Gatsby* lend credence to the idea that there are specific transnational “American” preoccupations in the literary art produced by Rulfo and Fitzgerald. Most importantly, it is first imperative to disassociate “America” exclusively with the United States. As Bauer points out, “the name *America* has rightfully belonged to the entire hemisphere [...] and that its equation with the United States is a relatively recent act of ‘rhetorical malpractice’” (“Hemispheric Studies” 239). Just as the term “America” is more accurately applied to the hemisphere, my intention in this project is to dismantle the long-standing boundaries between Rulfo and Fitzgerald and uncover what makes their celebrated novels exemplary instances of why scholars must embrace transnational and comparative models over narrowly nationalistic ones.

CHAPTER TWO

Uncommon Convergences:

Reification in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*

Over the past thirty years, the theoretical shift in American literary studies to a hemispheric approach has begun to dismantle national borders, canonical writers, and recover those who have been historically marginalized. Taking a transnational approach, hemispheric studies scholars examine the direct and indirect connections between literature of the United States, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. This “crossing” of borders is more than simply an examination of how authors of a particular region influence one another. American hemispheric studies respects and celebrates what makes each country in the hemisphere unique while exploring their shared “Americanness.” As canonical modernist works, Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) present a seemingly unlikely opportunity for hemispheric scholarship. While depicting different cultures and eras, both authors are said to have captured the “spirit” or “essence” of their respective countries, Mexico and the United States, while at the same time displaying a sometimes-intangible “hemispheric” American voice that creates a fascinating connection between the two. Even though the texts were published thirty years apart, it is likely that Rulfo was as familiar with Fitzgerald's work as he so clearly was with the modernist works of William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway. Both *Pedro Páramo* and *Gatsby* paint vivid portraits of powerful and self-made men, Pedro Páramo in Rulfo's work and Jay Gatsby, and Tom Buchanan in Fitzgerald's. Their quest for wealth and power is the driving force in the novels, a force which corrupts their relationships, most markedly with their love

interests—particularly, Susana San Juan in *Pedro Páramo* and Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*.

While the socioeconomic and cultural differences within the narrative worlds of *Pedro Páramo* and *Gatsby* stand out, many of the implications and realities faced by the characters in both works are strikingly similar in that the characters are mostly, if not entirely, reified figures. Rooted in Marxist socioeconomic theory, Lukacs' work, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (1923), sets forth the author's Marxist approach to Western economics, politics, and society as a whole. Lukacs discusses how the concept of reification manifests itself in modern capitalist society. Essentially, reification is a form of alienation whereby human life is reduced to its "exchange value." This extends to include the relationships between people. Lukacs argues that, "The commodity can only be understood in its undistorted essence when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole" (86). Therefore, human relationships become a "commodity" because economic value is the "universal category" through which everything must pass. Lukacs goes on to argue that only within this context, "does the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance both for the objective evolution of society and for the stance adopted by men towards it" (86). While Lukacs asserts that reification applies to modern capitalist society, he also suggests that this type of commodity-driven process can be seen throughout history (84). For example, as I will argue, the concept of reification applies to a non-capitalist context like Comala in *Pedro Páramo*. Even though Rulfo's novel is set in a "semi-feudal" world, the characters therein suffer in much the same way as those in *Gatsby* and for many of the same reasons. Using Lukacs' definition as a framework for

my interpretation, I will argue that reification dominates both the capitalist world of *The Great Gatsby* and the semi-feudal world of *Pedro Páramo*.

For much of its history, Mexico was dominated by the hacienda system and a form of political “bossism” known as *caciquismo*. Functioning as a semi-feudalistic economic and political structure, *caciquismo* essentially means that each town is run under the direct economic and political power of the local hacienda owner, or *cacique*, whose land and wealth allow him to maintain his control over the workers, or *campesinos*, as well as the local community in general. As defined by José Carlos González Boixo:

In a general sense, the “cacique” is a wealthy landowner, a person who is powerful because of his economic resources, one who uses his social position to his own advantage and maintains his hegemony on the strength of the many individuals who depend upon him. (109)

Reflecting a similar paternalism that defined relations between southern plantation owners and their slaves, González’s definition provides the broad context from which Rulfo creates his archetypal hacienda boss. His *cacique* is Pedro Páramo, the wealthy and powerful hacienda owner in Comala who quite literally controls every aspect of the community’s life. His power is exercised through intimidation and violence that is often exacted on every citizen no matter their station, but most harshly upon the women of Comala. The Media Luna, the crescent-shaped hacienda owned by the Páramo family, is the epicenter of Pedro Páramo’s power and the axis of his control. As Rulfo graphically depicts, land and workers are equated with economic, political, and social power (within the confines of *caciquismo*). Pedro Páramo is the primary beneficiary of this system.

Rulfo weaves a remarkably complex and abstract portrait of life in Comala that does not follow a linear timeline, in much the same way as celebrated modernist works like Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*. Essentially, the narrative begins with Juan Preciado's quest to discover his father, Pedro Páramo, in order to fulfill a promise he made to his mother, Dolores, on her deathbed. With her last breath she instructs him, "Don't ask him for anything that isn't ours. Just for what he should have given me and didn't. Make him pay for the way he forgot us" (1). From the first page of the novel, Rulfo establishes that *Pedro Páramo* is going to tell the story of a son's quest for identity and retribution against his absent father. Both of these central themes are interwoven with the themes of money and land.

Evidence that Pedro Páramo will become the local *cacique* appears early in the novel during Páramo's recollections of his childhood and early adulthood. Rulfo describes a conversation between Pedro Páramo and his grandmother when the young *patrón* was a boy. During his childhood, he works as an apprentice for a local man named Rogelio. However, he quickly becomes dissatisfied with his unpaid role and decides to leave. His grandmother asks him, "What are you doing here? Aren't you working?" (18). When Pedro Páramo explains that he quit the apprenticeship because it holds no monetary value for him, the novel reveals that Páramo already understands the power that comes from money. With the intention of imparting to him more traditional values of hard work and apprenticeship, Pedro Páramo's grandmother replies:

You aren't there to get paid, you're there to learn. When you know a little something, then you can start asking for pay. Right now you're just an apprentice. Maybe tomorrow or the day after you'll be the boss. But you've got to have

patience, and learn how to take orders. If he tells you to take the baby for a walk, then do it, for the love of God. You've got to resign yourself. (18)

Pedro Páramo's grandmother tries to advise him to take his time and not be overly ambitious too soon. He retorts to his grandmother, "That's all right for other people, Grandmother. Not for me" (18). He refuses to move forward slowly or patiently, and instead displays a level of ambition that will propel him into his future position of *cacique* of Comala. In a rather prophetic manner, his grandmother laments her grandson's overt ambition and predicts that, "You and your ideas! I'm afraid you're going to turn out bad, Pedro Páramo" (18). This early exchange between grandmother and grandson shows that even from an early age, Pedro Páramo displays a unique level of ambition and hunger for money and power, and that he will be restless until he achieves it. This scene does more than simply establish some of Pedro Páramo's traits as a future *cacique*. While reification is most often associated with capitalism, this early characterization of Pedro Páramo shows that he sees his world solely through the lens of money.

Reification dominates every facet of the Mexican hacienda community. This reality is established early as Rulfo creates additional layers to his protagonist's character. Pedro Páramo's amorality is reinforced in another anecdote from his childhood. While on his way to purchase items for his grandmother on credit, he shows just how far he is willing to go to get ahead in his world. Rulfo writes that, "He went past the doorway of the Sacred Heart and found twenty-four centavos. He left four centavos and kept the twenty" (12). Later on, "He found a peso. He left his twenty centavos and took the peso. 'Now,' he thought, 'I've got more than enough money, no matter what happens'"(12). A symbol of Catholic compassion and charity, the Sacred Heart

commands no respect from Pedro Páramo's. Here, Rulfo juxtaposes the presumed characteristics of the Sacred Heart and the callousness and avarice of his protagonist.² This scene foreshadows how Pedro Páramo will eventually rise to the stature of *cacique*: he will steal and avoid immediate detection until his power is so complete that no one can challenge him.³

Pedro Páramo's amorality displayed as a child serves as an introduction to his role as the new *patrón*, or boss, of the Media Luna. Fulgor Sedano is the first to be introduced to Pedro Páramo, the young *cacique*. The narrator explains that, "It was the second occasion he had seen him. On that first occasion Pedro was only a baby. [...] You could almost say this was the first occasion. The result was that he began talking with him like an equal" (33). Pedro Páramo quickly corrects this indiscretion and instructs Sedano to address him as "Don" Pedro (33). It is at this moment that Pedro Páramo embraces his power and claims his name and identity as *cacique*. Alberto Vital notes the significance of this moment in his book entitled *Lenguaje Y Poder en Pedro Páramo*. He argues that:

In this moment, the future cacique is only concerned with his own security, it manifests in the imperative verb that appears as a formula of courtesy. Pedro Páramo can practice absolute pragmatism while he cannot touch the only love that is important to him. (73)⁴

Vital describes Pedro Páramo as a "pragmatismo absoluto" or an "absolute pragmatist." This indicates that this passing of power to Páramo would have been entirely logical in the new *cacique's* mind especially when the focus of his desire, Susana San Juan, would not be a deciding factor since she was not in Comala at the time. It is significant that he claims this title for himself because, unlike the land which was passed down to him from

his father, the complete control was something that he creates for himself starting with his self-identifying as the locus of power on his hacienda.

Once the hierarchy on the Media Luna is established, Sedano becomes Pedro Páramo's right hand as he carries out his boss' every whim with the Media Luna's neighbors. As his first act as the new *patrón*, Pedro Páramo sets out to settle all previous debt that was procured by his father. In doing this, he chooses to elevate himself as judge and jury in the matter of the boundaries of the Media Luna. He instructs Sedano in how to deal with the Aldrete ranch, a neighboring hacienda whose fences, according to Pedro Páramo, cross over into Media Luna territory. Pedro Páramo says that, "'Tell him he went beyond the boundaries. He's invaded lands that belong to the Media Luna.' [...] 'Tell him he made a mistake, he didn't measure correctly. Knock the fences down if you have to'" (38). He is completely willing to use intimidation and force when necessary to strengthen his grip on the surrounding community. Sedano questions the legality of Pedro Páramo's actions, to which he replies, "'What law, Fulgor? From now on we're going to make the laws ourselves. [...] He's got to make new arrangements with me'" (38). This is a moment that Deborah Cohn identifies as paramount to Pedro Páramo's character. Cohn argues that:

His act of original accumulation destroys established meanings of terms of exchange, as well as the agreements that they entail, and introduces the rules that become the paradigm for social and spiritual relations in Comala. [...] The abrogation of territorial rights that takes place when he annexes his neighbor's land also brings down the laws which have protected them. [...] In the new order, the only value recognized is quantifiable, "measured" in monetary terms rather

than according to any abstract concept of intrinsic worth; “non-quantifiables” such as familial obligations are not honored. (149-150)

Cohn takes this concept of land control a step further and notes that not only does Pedro Páramo maintain his power through his relations with his neighbors, but he also rewrites the rules of commerce within Comala. This is the true beginning of the *cacique*'s rise to power. In Rulfo's narrative world of *caciquismo*, power runs through land that generates wealth. Therefore, Pedro Páramo, and Rulfo's depiction of *caciquismo* by extension, is a completely reified character in that he judges his power based on tangible and “quantifiable” value.⁵

Along with reification, by this point in the novel it is abundantly clear that Pedro Páramo as a *cacique* is an archetypal figure that Rulfo uses to reflect the aggrieved condition of Comala and often such regions throughout Latin America. Echoing González's definition, Kevin J. Middlebrook provides an important facet to the interpretation of Pedro Páramo's actions. Middlebrook writes that:

A cacique is a local or regional boss whose eminently personalist domination typically rests on the combination of family-and kinship-based (including ritual kinship, *compadrazgo*) alliances and patron—client networks, control over patronage resources and coercive sanctions—including the threat or actual use of physical violence against rivals. (412).

While Middlebrook's *cacique* maintains his power through the familial or kinship relationships that he has established, Rulfo's *cacique* seems to be much more all-powerful and autonomous. As demonstrated through his usurpation of the law, Pedro Páramo uses others as tools for his own ends. Confident in his own authority, he does not

need family or partners to bolster his efforts. This sets Rulfo's *cacique* on a different level than others in the novel in that he embodies not only the tenets of the hacienda system, but also the system's effects on human relationships. He only needs human interaction insofar as it serves his purpose, which is a near perfect illustration of Lucaks' definition of reification. Páramo claims his place as the new head of the Media Luna and proclaims that he now has total control over the land and the law that allows him to take that land; he becomes the personification of the hacienda and *caciquismo*.

Even Sedano, who reluctantly serves Pedro Páramo his whole life, is grouped with these unnecessary relationships once Sedano no longer provides tangible value in the eyes of his *patrón*. While Sedano had been his loyal foreman and right-hand throughout most of the narrative, Páramo's apathy towards him becomes apparent after Sedano is killed by the revolutionaries. Upon hearing the news of Sedano's death Pedro Páramo, "shut himself into his office again. He felt old and worn out. He didn't care about Fulgor, who had already served his purpose. Though he was very useful at times" (93). Once Sedano had "served his purpose" his death is of no consequence to Pedro Páramo since he knows that someone else can complete the same tasks; nothing was lost and nothing was gained, so he can continue his business as usual. Here, Pedro Páramo's only real relationship is also shown to be based purely on exchange value.

As the locus of Pedro Páramo's power, the Media Luna becomes the focal point of Rulfo's novel. As the center of violence and suffering, Comala is plagued by an inescapable force that draws people into the *cacique*'s sphere of influence and then traps everyone within it.⁶⁷ Rulfo structures the entire novel to bolster this idea that everything surrounding Comala gets drawn into the evil vortex of the *cacique*'s power. From the

onset of the novel, Juan Preciado builds a mental obsession around his mysterious father. He remembers why he left on his journey, “I didn’t intend to keep my promise. But then I began to think about what she told me, until I couldn’t stop thinking and even dreaming about it, and building a whole world around that Pedro Páramo. That’s why I came to Comala” (1). To Juan Preciado, Pedro Páramo takes on a phantom-like quality that haunts his thoughts and his dreams and coaxes him onward as he gets nearer to Comala. Further, the very landscape seems to serve the *cacique* in the same way. Juan Preciado observes that, “They say a road goes up or down depending on whether you’re coming or going. If you’re going away it’s uphill, but it’s downhill if you’re coming back” (1-2). The image is one that attracts travelers to Comala while simultaneously using the geography to literally funnel them into Pedro Páramo’s sphere of influence. González bolsters this point, arguing that:

[...] one must keep in mind that the figure of the *cacique* conditions the entire story, and that his presence is a constant throughout the novel. In fact, he is the center toward which all the stories of individuals converge, and all the characters “exist” only through their dependence on the nuclear personage of Pedro Páramo. (111)

As the epicenter of all the violent destruction in the novel, Rulfo uses this vision to establish that once a character is on the road to Comala, chances are that he or she will end up in the death trap and never be free from the subsequent solitude.

For the habitants of Comala, the realities of *caciquismo* and the cruelty of Pedro Páramo are inescapable truths. If he is successful, then they will survive. But he has the power to crush them at any given moment because his control is so complete. Following

the death of his last wife Susana San Juan, Pedro Páramo punishes Comala for not mourning along with him. It is at this moment that he exercises his full power over them. Rulfo writes that, “The Media Luna was silent. All the servants walked barefoot and talked in whispers. Susana San Juan was buried in the graveyard, but hardly anybody in Comala even knew about it” (115). Instead of mourning with him, the town instead celebrates with a “fiesta” that is filled with “cockfights, “music,” and “drunkards” (115). Rulfo establishes a stark contrast here in that, “The village was all lights and noise, and the Media Luna was all shadows and silence” (115). The vibrancy of the fiesta is offensive to Pedro Páramo, who vows to have his vengeance against Comala. Rulfo writes that, “Pedro Páramo wouldn’t speak, wouldn’t leave his room. He swore he’d get revenge on Comala: ‘I’ll fold my arms and Comala will starve to death.’ And that was what he did” (115). He exacts his retribution on the town and subsequently plunges it into the state of death and solitude, which is what greets Juan Preciado when he arrives many years later. Cohn also addresses this all-encompassing aspect of Páramo’s persona. She argues:

Through the accumulation of property and money, Pedro Páramo expands his authority from the material to the immaterial, gaining control over Comala’s judicial and religious institutions and, by extension, over its inhabitants’ morals, lives, and spiritual beliefs. (148)

As Cohn asserts, Pedro Páramo has by this point gained control over every facet of every person’s life in Comala. Rulfo takes the more definition of a *cacique* given by Middlebrook and heightens the violence and the control factors. His vendetta-fueled destruction of the town exemplifies his utter cruelty. This is the best example of what

caciquismo means to a small town like Comala, and exemplifies Rulfo's critique of the system; all the power in the hands of one man results in the utter destruction of any semblance of community.

It is abundantly clear from the onset of *Pedro Páramo* that Rulfo is questioning the socioeconomic power structure that he is depicting. From the characterization of his *cacique* as "just pure hate" to the display of violence and suffering that burdens the citizens of Comala, Rulfo paints a bleak yet realistic picture of a regional reality for his people during the early twentieth century (4). In contrast to this portrait, Fitzgerald does not seem to question the direction of power that he portrays in *The Great Gatsby* but simply displays it and, at times, even celebrates it. While this is a noteworthy distinction between the intentions of the two authors, Fitzgerald does exhibit in *The Great Gatsby* many noteworthy similarities with Rulfo, particularly in terms of how reification manifests in everyday life.

Capitalism as a social, economic, and even political system is an institution that has become synonymous with the United States. Moreover, the idea of the "American Dream" has been deeply entrenched in the cultural mythos of the country for as long as most people can remember. New York City in the roaring twenties is the epicenter of this mythos as the height of material wealth, extravagance, and upper class fashion. Because of this historical reality, capitalism may be seen as synonymous with reification. Donaldson punctuates this definition, as Lukacs would assert, arguing that, "under capitalism not only the worker but everything—and everybody—was 'transformed into a commercial commodity.' People became objects to be bought and sold, with their attractiveness as purchases depending largely on their presentation of themselves" (200).

Donaldson argues that within a reified society, every aspect of that society is judged based solely on its economic value. He goes on to explain how the rise of a “culture of consumption” allowed reification to flourish in a society like the United States. As Donaldson explains:

The culture of consumption on exhibit in *The Great Gatsby* was made possible by the growth of a leisure class in early-twentieth-century America. As the novel demonstrates, this development subverted the foundations of the Protestant ethic, replacing the values of hard work and thrifty abstinence with a show of luxury and idleness. (201)

The rise of the leisure class allowed the culture of the United States to shift from a focus on work to a worshipping of material things. This new cultural ethos dominates personal relationships. Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* is at once a glimpse into the harsh realities of this reified society yet it also celebrates and reinforces the ideology that fuels its existence.

Fitzgerald establishes the commodity-driven world of *Gatsby* very early on as one of wealth, privilege, and commodity fetishism. According to Karl Marx in *Capital*, commodity fetishism arises out of the relationship that the worker, or people, have with the item that they produce or procure. He argues that:

[...]the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relations both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. This I call the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor, so soon as they are

produced as commodities, and which therefore is inseparable from the production of commodities. (78)

Marx's idea of commodity fetishism influences Lukacs' definition of reification. Both of these phenomena recur throughout Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*. Early on, Fitzgerald introduces Nick's cousin Daisy Buchanan and her husband Tom; the ultimate representatives of "old wealth" within the novel. The portrait of their house in East Egg, punctuated by descriptions of their wealth, symbolizes their status but also their alienation.

Fitzgerald describes the vast scope of Daisy and Tom's East Egg estate. Nick muses that, "Their house was even more elaborate than I expected, a cheerful red-and-white Georgian Colonial mansion, overlooking the bay" (6). Tom and Daisy's mansion is the pinnacle of old wealth that is dripping with "elaborate" extravagance and every detail reinforces the idea that this house is the symbol of their economic power.⁸ As Donaldson describes it, "Whatever the color, it is a magical place where nature is harnessed for the pleasure of its inhabitants. To begin with, the lawn has supernatural qualities" (205). From the lawn that stretches for "a quarter of a mile, jumping over sun-dials" to Tom standing "in riding clothes" positioned with "his legs apart" literally straddling his wealth, Fitzgerald presents the ultimate figure of wealth and masculinity with his "running" lawn that has "momentum" and vigor all its own (6). This first impression of Tom as the primary personification of capitalism, with his "riding clothes" connoting upper class leisure, is accentuated by the "American" imagery embedded within the description. The fact that the "red-and-white" house is positioned in such a picturesque way against the bay with its blue water points to the house itself reflecting the American flag; the American Dream personified in architecture. Tom's expansive estate connotes

monetary power. In Fitzgerald's reified society, power runs through money and class. Tom is the master of both.

While there are many characters within *Gatsby* that participate in conspicuous consumerism, no one can quite match the Buchanans in their near-perfect display.⁹ Jay Gatsby, despite his outsider status, is the only figure that is able to approach the Buchanans' degree of opulence; Gatsby is almost able to pass in Tom and Daisy's world of old-wealth. While he is a stranger to the old wealth of East Egg, he has built his home in West Egg where new money reigns. As the prime example of the self-made man, Gatsby is a dynamic and yet elusive persona from his very first introduction. Nick describes one of his first impressions of Gatsby:

He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American—that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of manner in the shape of restlessness. He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand.

(64)

If Tom's house symbolizes the American Dream, then Gatsby symbolizes the American Dream contained within one man. The car, perhaps the ultimate symbol of American capitalism, supports the weight of his "formless grace" and "punctilious manner" that paints him as "peculiarly American." Just as Rulfo characterizes Pedro Páramo as being impatient, Fitzgerald describes Tom's eyes looking around "restlessly," and also creates Gatsby as a character that embodies "restlessness." This indicates that both Tom and Gatsby, but especially Gatsby, are constantly in flux and attempting to move themselves

forward economically and socially much in the same way that Pedro Páramo does from an early age. Just as Tom and Daisy's estate creates a reified image of a commodity driven system of valuation, so too does the initial vision of Gatsby depict him as a character that is inseparable from the things he possesses.

Fitzgerald's initial characterization of his protagonist as a reified figure is echoed many times throughout the novel. For Gatsby, specifically, reification leads to isolation, alienation, and ultimately death. The disparity between his private identity and public identity is a battle that he struggles with throughout the novel. One of the key facets of this false identity is his background and education. Gatsby explains that, "I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford, because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years. It is a family tradition" (65). The prestige of Oxford University makes it a status symbol much like his elaborate cars and opulent mansion. Already, Gatsby's identity is indicative of reification because his entire back-story is centered on characteristics that make him more economically and socially viable. Nick observes the way that Gatsby delivers this information and through Nick's observation comes the association of reification with isolation and death. Nick notes that, "He hurried the phrase 'educated at Oxford,' or swallowed it, or choked on it, as though it had bothered him before. [...] His voice was solemn, as if the memory of that sudden extinction of a clan still haunted him" (65). The fact that his reified identity would "strangle him" is indicative of the grave implications that can result from a society that is entirely defined by money. As Fitzgerald foreshadows here, there is an inescapable mental oppression that is tied to reification, and which characters in *Gatsby* cannot outrun.

While Tom and Gatsby both represent how men operate within a reified society, Daisy as a character reveals some of the socially-prescribed roles of women within this system. She becomes the best example of objectification based on gender because, unlike Myrtle who has to grapple with her lower class status, Daisy is already economically privileged. Because of her upper class standing, Daisy is used to reinforce the commodification of her world. Upon bringing Daisy to his house for the first time, Gatsby's reaction almost appears as if he were watching an appraiser assess the value of his estate. Nick observes that, "He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes" (91). This quotation could be interpreted in such a way that would suggest that Daisy holds some type of power that influences the value of Gatsby's items, indicating that she is occupying the position of subject at this moment. However, when looked at through the lens of reification and the cycle of consumerism, Daisy serves as an object, an object of economic commodification in which she finds herself enmeshed. As the "appraiser" of Gatsby's house and possessions, the "response it drew from her well-loved eyes" is merely Daisy acting out her role within her society.

As the scene continues, Gatsby is waiting with bated breath to learn her response. Sayre and Löwy address this phenomenon in their article. They argue that:

One can consider conspicuous consumption as, in some measure, a form taken by reification in a hierarchical society. We are confronted, once more, with the domination of "things" over the individual's social being and the degradation/reification of social relations. (137)

Gatsby views his shirts as currency for “purchasing” the love of Daisy; both the shirts and the relationship represent what Sayre and Löwy describe above as conspicuous consumption and reification. The value of these items and his purchasing of them in the first place is fueled by this ultimate goal to win Daisy’s love. As a member of the upper class, she is the arbiter of taste and the authority on how much everything, including relationships, will be valued. Therefore, while on the surface Daisy may appear as the subject of the exchange, the deeper workings of the economic system that drives this display objectifies everyone involved but especially her because she is both being pursued on an individual level while simultaneously, and subconsciously, acting out her prescribed role within the capitalist society.

While I will argue in chapters two and three that Daisy is a victim of culturally sanctioned patriarchal oppression, she herself is also a “blind” participant in Fitzgerald’s reified society. Daisy, like Gatsby who equates commodities with desire, judges people’s love for her based on trivial, material gestures. Upon arriving at Tom and Daisy’s estate for the first time, Daisy asks Nick if she is missed back home in Chicago. He replies that, ““The whole town is desolate. All the cars have their left rear wheel painted black as a mourning wreath, and there’s a persistent wail all night along the north shore”” (9). While Nick’s response may be meant to be light-hearted and playful, it connotes a more serious reality about how Daisy values her relationships. To this inconsequential description she replies, “How gorgeous!” (9). The “wheel painted black” as the “mourning wreath” for her absence is another instance of the worship of consumerism and thus, the reification of human relations.

What is even more sinister than singular Daisy's reified nature is the fact that this facet of her character appears to be a family heirloom that is passed down to the next generation without any diluting. Daisy's daughter with Tom, a figure that is only mentioned twice throughout the novel and only appears once, represents the offspring of their reified existence, and from the moment of her birth has been objectified. Nick looks on during this awkward exchange between mother and daughter that reveals so much about the depth of commodification within Tom and Daisy's world because of their economic privilege. Nick observes:

“The bles-sed pre-cious! Did mother get powder on your old yellowy hair? Stand up now, and say—How-de-do.” [...] “I got dressed before luncheon,” said the child, turning eagerly to Daisy. “That’s because your mother wanted to show you off.” [...] “You dream, you. You absolute little dream.” “Yes,” admitted the child calmly. “Aunt Jordan’s got on a white dress too. How do you like mother’s friends?” Daisy turned her around so that she faced Gatsby. “Do you think they’re pretty?” (117)

This scene alone is enough to call this familial façade into question. However, further explication reveals that this nameless daughter is being conditioned to follow in her mother's footsteps and become an object rather than a subject. Her “yellowy hair,” “small white neck,” and “white dress” all carry with them elements of both classical notions of ethereal beauty as well as modern upper class status. Therefore, the daughter is an old stereotype of beauty transposed to the roaring twenties. Daisy's daughter is then asked to appraise the value of the people in front of her based on their appearance. When Daisy asks her daughter, “Do you think they're pretty?” this echoes the earlier scene with her

“well-loved eyes” assessing the value of Gatsby’s possessions. Daisy’s only visible interaction with her daughter is essentially a training session to condition her to play her role like a proper objectified female. It is important to emphasize at this point that contrary to her daughter, Daisy is a fully rounded out character even though she is objectified. In contrast, Daisy’s daughter shows all the markers of objectification but she has essentially no identity beyond her physical attributes and her lineage as a Buchanan. She is the nameless, faceless warning against the alienated world of 1920s capitalist society.

Both *Pedro Páramo* and *Gatsby* depict the realities to be found within societies ruled by wealth and a “restless” desire for power. While there are great cultural differences between *caciquismo* and capitalism, they do share at least one common denominator. Reification, as defined by Lukacs, plagues both novels. Defining relationships in terms of monetary worth can be seen in both novels even though they depict different socioeconomic systems. This is because while capitalism may breed the worst form of reification, this is a phenomenon that can be seen elsewhere too.

Despite their cultural and historical differences, *Pedro Páramo* and *The Great Gatsby* both present portraits of reified societies. Without disregarding the differences that exist between the two authors, the two novels, and the two countries that produced them, the similarities between the two narratives call into question any notion that the United States was especially progressive in comparison to Mexico in the early twentieth century.

CHAPTER THREE

Behind Every Powerful Man:

The Status of the Wife in *The Great Gatsby* and *Pedro Páramo*

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* create similar yet disparate tableaux of societies ruled by power and money. Both capitalism and *caciquismo* create reified societies that value human relationships solely based on their economic worth. While every individual, regardless of class or level of agency, experiences the crippling effects of reification, it is clear that these effects are not distributed evenly. While working-class characters in both *The Great Gatsby* and *Pedro Páramo* clearly suffer under the yoke of the capitalist tycoons or the hacienda *caciques*, no group endures the same level of objectification as do female characters like Daisy Buchanan and Susana San Juan. This is because they also bear the burden of a culturally entrenched patriarchal system.

Both *Gatsby* and *Pedro Páramo* depict females who are characterized as models of femininity and also as wives to powerful men. While Tom Buchanan and Pedro Páramo exercise their power over nearly everyone in their spheres of influence, it is in their role as husband that they exact the greatest level of power. For women in both capitalist and *caciquista* society, the institution of marriage is designed to celebrate feminine beauty while simultaneously containing the wife within socially prescribed gender roles that reduce her to a product to be bartered for and "won." Therefore, it is not only the spousal relationships that lead to objectification but also the male familial ties as well. Since the father will raise his daughter to meet social norms, he also wields influence over whom she marries, which effectively transfers the daughter's agency from

her father into the hands of her husband. Both Daisy and Susana are victims of this type of process. However, Susana's victimization is much less nuanced and her objectification is therefore much more obvious.

As the most prominent female characters in their novels, these two women offer an ideal example of the narratives in terms of the effects of patriarchy and the institution of marriage. These social effects are exacerbated by the alienation brought about by reification. In both Fitzgerald and Rulfo's societies, marriage is a construct designed to operate within an economic system that places the wife on a pedestal as the ultimate commodity to be "won" and thus contained by the husband. Daisy is socially conditioned to relinquish her agency and Susana is stripped of hers, leaving both characters as striking representatives of the status of women within capitalism and *caciquismo*.

Feminist critics, such as María Elena de Valdés, point to the potential problems of employing a first-world feminist model to examine the status of women in the developing world.¹⁰ But Valdés also argues that, "Women in the third world suffer from the same gender bias as their counterparts in the first world, but their response, in a large part owing to the fact that their sociopolitical situation is different, differs markedly" (20). The overarching implication here is that feminist theory, coupled with a sensitive handling of cultural context, can be a powerful tool for social, and in my case literary, analysis. Overall, it is my intention to argue that the source of these women's objectification is strikingly similar even though geographical context may change how that objectification manifests itself. I am especially interested in the degree to which these women are able to exercise agency within their individual cultures both of which are patriarchal.

Fitzgerald and Rulfo depict the status of women through the use of stereotypical masculine and feminine qualities. For example, Tom Buchanan and Pedro Páramo are portrayed as overtly masculine while their female counterparts, Daisy and Susana, exhibit stereotypically feminine qualities. From the onset, Tom is introduced with conventionally masculine language both in terms of his character and his physical presence. Nick observes that Tom, “among various physical accomplishments had been one of the most powerful ends that ever played football at New Haven” (6). Here, Tom is described as having “physical accomplishments” and being exceptionally “powerful.” Coupled with the fact that he is “enormously wealthy,” the narrator draws at least an indirect relationship between Tom’s physicality and his wealth. Here, masculinity connotes wealth and power. Nick is amazed that Tom, at a relatively young age, has been able to accumulate so much wealth and power. Nick remarks that, “It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that” (6). Nick also notes that, “Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over [Tom’s] face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward” (7). Tom’s “arrogant eyes” and stance are additional Tom’s character. At this stage of the novel Tom clearly is the dominant figure, described as having “a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body” (7).

Daisy is established as the opposite to Tom’s aggressive and masculine figure. In stark contrast to Tom’s “cruel body,” Daisy is identified with terms like “lovely,” and “bright,” and “passionate.”¹¹ Nick goes as far as to claim that her voice carries musical qualities, with its highs and lows as unforgettable “notes.” Elsewhere, she is associated with conventional female beauty in descriptions of her physical presence. Nick describes

her face, eyes, and mouth as having ethereal qualities. This “cataloguing” not only recalls other similar depictions of the female body throughout history, but it also suggests the theme of reification in relation to Daisy’s character. Here, Daisy’s body is viewed as a jeweler might view his or her inventory. Daisy’s physical qualities are established as her most marketable possessions. Nick’s observation reveals a more sinister contrast between Daisy and Tom. Her physical characteristics effectively mute her voice; her physical beauty essentially drowns out her words. This foreshadows events to come, as Daisy spirals into the abyss of her life with Tom.

Pedro Páramo is also described as an aggressive and dominating figure. However, unlike Tom, Pedro Páramo establishes his dominance through his political and economic power. This power manifests itself in many ways, but especially noteworthy are Páramo’s sexual conquests that come to symbolize his patriarchal authority. Father Rentería’s memories provide a view into this side of the *cacique* life. Rentería remembers the conversations that he had with the women of Comala during their confessions. They tell him, for example, that “I want to confess that I slept with Pedro Páramo last night,” “Father, I’m going to have a child by Pedro Páramo,” or “I loaned my daughter to Pedro Páramo, Father” (67). Father Rentería is unable to stop the women in his town from falling victim to Páramo’s sexual desire. Pedro Páramo establishes his dominance not only over the women in Comala, but also over every other aspect of the community. Unlike Tom, Páramo seeks to create his own dynasty through his complete control over Comala, including and especially through his subjugation of the female inhabitants. Páramo is the personification of *machismo*.¹² Valdés defines this concept as, “a social relationship that promotes male superiority over the female in all aspects of life” (15).

In much the same way that Daisy's femininity is portrayed as the antithesis to Tom's masculinity, Susana is characterized as the antithesis of Pedro Páramo's masculine identity. She is described as having an inseparable connection to nature that is consistently juxtaposed with her expressions of sexual desire. Susana, for example, remembers her adolescent years, and particularly her love for her boyfriend Florencio, saying that, "I like to bathe in the sea naked," I told him. That's why he followed me that first day. He was naked too, and he glowed when he came out of the water. [...] I went back to the sea" (94). The interplay between nature and sexuality continues as Susana remembers that, "the sea washed my ankles, my knees and thighs. It clasped its gentle arms around my waist. It stroked my forehead, and kissed my throat, and hugged my shoulders. I hid myself in it, in its strength and gentleness..." (94). Unlike Nick's view of Daisy, Susana's memories in this passage suggest that she has some control over her own body and a degree of freedom in the realm of sexuality. Susana is clearly established as a feminine contrast to Pedro Páramo's masculine identity. There is nothing conventional here about Susana's sexual desire. While Nick's description of Daisy is anchored in traditional definitions of femininity, this aspect of Susana's character emerges from a more organic space that operates outside of these traditional models.

The masculine and feminine qualities that Fitzgerald and Rulfo showcase within their novels are indicative of a larger social system of power at work. While reification controls the economic aspect of social interactions, patriarchy organizes gender relations within both of the narratives. As exemplified by both Daisy and Susana, women find themselves being passed from their fathers to their husbands with very little space to

discover their own autonomy. This “transaction” can be seen in the courtship and marriage of Daisy and Tom as well as between Susana and Páramo.

Tom and Daisy’s marriage embodies the reified status of love and courtship in the novel’s world of “old-wealth.” Daisy is the ultimate “commodity” due to her wealth, beauty, and lineage. To satisfy her parents’ expectations, Daisy must marry a wealthy man and maintain the social status quo. Nick’s description of the young Daisy is framed by markers of reification. Her family is defined by its large house which has the “largest of the lawns,” and her suitors would like the “privilege of monopolizing” Daisy’s time (74).¹³ She is in short, a commodity to be “monopolized” as one would a company or industry. Scott Donaldson points out that, “Daisy represents the most desirable object of all. She is invariably associated with the things that surround her” (200). The line between the human Daisy and the inanimate things around her is blurred, as they become one “thing” for young men to compete for and “win.”

After Daisy’s “début,” she is expected to marry well and continue in her upper class life with her new husband and in his new mansion.¹⁴ Nick recalls the entourage that Tom brought in from Chicago, saying that, “[Tom] came down with a hundred people in four private cars, and hired a whole floor of Muhlbach Hotel” (75). The excess that surrounds their wedding is not only a marker of upper class identity but also of commodity fetishism as Karl Marx describes it. Tom and Daisy’s wedding with all its “pomp and circumstance,” “private cars,” and entire floors of fancy hotels creates a tableau of conspicuous consumerism. This union is symbolized by an extravagant string of pearls that Tom gives Daisy as a wedding present (76). These pearls can be interpreted as yet another marker of wealth. However, the image of Daisy receiving the necklace

from Tom could also be seen as an image of containment; a pearl necklace is, after all, a collar of sorts. Daisy is being contained not only by what society expects of her as a woman, but also by what Tom now expects of her as his wife.

Unlike Daisy, who seems to have a degree of freedom to choose her husband, Susana in *Pedro Páramo* has no such freedom. For Susana in *Pedro Páramo* the institution of marriage not only contains women, but also becomes a vehicle for coercion and abuse. Susana's marriage is rooted in Pedro Páramo's childhood obsession, which becomes an unyielding desire to "acquire" her as his wife. Hints of this distorted view of matrimony are evident from the onset of the novel. Páramo's first marriage to Dolores Preciado, Juan Preciado's mother, becomes the first indication that something is amiss in Páramo's perception of marriage. As the owners of a neighboring hacienda, the Preciados fall under the power of Páramo once he assumes control over the Media Luna. In an attempt to settle his debt with the family, Páramo sends his foreman Sedaño to propose marriage to Dolores in hopes of joining the two properties and effectively erasing his debt. Sedaño explains that, "Doña Dolores...is the owner of everything. You know, the Enmedio farm. And she's the one we have to pay" (34). Instead of paying his debt to her, Páramo decides to strike a marital bargain. He instructs Sedano:

"Tomorrow you're going to propose to Lola." [...] "Propose for me. Tell her I'm very much in love with her. And while you're at it, tell Father Rentería to arrange the wedding." [...] "Tell Lola this and that and the other thing, but tell her I love her. That's important. And it's true, Sedano, I do love her. For her eyes, you know." (34-35)

Even though Pedro Páramo claims that he is marrying Dolores for love, or at least that is how he means to convince her of the union, it is clear from the outset that the “love” is based in practicality rather than romance. Deborah Cohn comments on this point. She argues that, “[Páramo] mercantilizes human relationships, reduces women to the status of commercial goods, and overturns an economy that requires repayment of debts incurred”(149). As Cohn contends, Pedro Páramo’s first marriage represents his ultimate power as a *cacique* and establishes the role that marriage will play in the economy of Comala; he marries Dolores for her property and for what her position can gain him, more land and less debt to address. There is very little that is sacred about matrimony in *Pedro Páramo*. It represents yet another economic tool within Comala.

The disintegration of marriage within Comala is also exemplified by two of the only living people left when Juan Preciado arrives in the ghost town. Donis and his sister/wife represent the ultimate example of how women in Comala are treated within their familial and spousal relationships. Without even a name, Donis’ sister’s identity is derived entirely from her relationship with her brother/husband. She laments that, ““He isn’t my husband, he’s my brother...although he doesn’t want anybody to know it”” (49). With the line between sibling and spouse blurred, she is unable to embrace any semblance of an identity. She further explains that, ““I never go out. I’ve been here forever, right here where you see me...No, that’s not true. Just since he made me his woman. Since then I’ve stayed inside, so they won’t see me”” (49). Because she is unable, or unwilling, to leave her brother/husband, she is condemned to a life of solitude and despair that is exacerbated by a sense of complete disillusion, since she cannot derive an identity from her relationship with her brother. At one point, she cries out, ““Can’t you

see my sins? Can't you see those purple stains, like impetigo? And that's only on the outside. Inside I'm a sea of mud'" (49). She sees her relationship with her brother as sinful. Like elsewhere in the novel, marriage in Comala is an affront to nature. Donis' sister describes her ailment as being like "impetigo" or a bacterial skin disease, which left untreated, will spread and infect other parts of the body.

Susana's marriage to Pedro Páramo is equally wrought with issues stemming from her objectified status. Pedro Páramo can essentially have any woman he wants. In the novel, it is common for fathers to offer their daughters to Páramo. Later, when Susana's first husband dies, Susana returns to live with her father Bartolomé San Juan. However, once word reaches Páramo that Susana has returned, Páramo jumps at the chance to marry her. He tells Bartolomé that, "The only thing I want from you is your daughter. She's the best work you've ever done'" (82). Páramo strikes a marriage deal with Bartolomé.

Struggling with mixed feelings of a fear of Pedro Páramo and custodianship over his daughter, Bartolomé must now inform Susana. He tells her, "He loves you, Susana. He says that you played with him when you were both little. That he knows you. That when you were little you went swimming together in the river. I didn't know that. If I had, I would have beaten you to death" (82). In an attempt to try to shield his daughter from her own sexuality, and from Pedro Páramo, Bartolomé then tries to stop the union from taking place. However, he is shocked when Susana says that she wants to enter into a relationship with Pedro Páramo. Astonished, he asks, "You mean you want to sleep with him?" to which she replies, "Yes, Bartolomé'" (82). By not calling him father, she seems to be rejecting her identity as his daughter.

Bartolomé frantically tries to dissuade Susana by reminding her that her husband just recently passed away. He pleads, ““You’re a widow, but I told him that you’re still living with your husband, or that at least you act that way. I’ve tried to talk him out of his idea, but he just squints at me when I talk to him, and when I mention your name he shuts his eyes. I know what that means” (82). Bartolomé and Susana are both cognizant of the inevitable fate that Susana faces now that Páramo wants her. Bartolomé laments, ““That’s sheer evil. That’s Pedro Páramo” (82). By this point, Susana and Bartolomé know that Pedro Páramo will not desist until he gets what he wants. Susana asks her father, ““who am I?”” and he replies, still begging, ““You’re my daughter. Mine. The daughter of Bartolomé San Juan”” (82). To complete the marriage “transaction,” Susana’s identity shifts from being the widow of her husband, to “my daughter,” and then to the wife of Pedro Páramo. Susana becomes the non-incestuous example of what Donis and his sister exemplify; she is identified almost entirely through her relationships with her father and then her husband.

Fulfilling Bartolomé’s prediction that he will ““have to go [to the mines] to die,”” it becomes apparent that Pedro Páramo means to replace all the men in Susana’s life in order to possess her completely (82). Fueled by his obsession with Susana and his own abounding power, Páramo schemes to have her father killed. He says to Sedaño, ““Tell her father to keep on working the mines. And out there...I imagine it would be very easy for the old man to vanish out there. Nobody ever goes there. Isn’t that right?”” (83). The manner in which he plans to kill Bartolomé is not made entirely clear but it is obvious that he intends to remove him as an obstacle. Sedaño affirms that the plan is feasible and Pedro Páramo replies that, ““It has to be. She has to be left an orphan. And it’s our

obligation to take care of orphans and such” (83). Sharon Magnarelli discusses this connection between violence and marriage in *Pedro Páramo*. She writes that, “the ritual of marriage forestalls a more overt, more dangerous form of violence” (94). Magnarelli identifies the connection between marriage and violence that is created by a patriarchal society like the one in Comala. She points out that the main implication of this violence is the female’s experiences of a victim’s “patent impotence, lack of power, and lack of authority” (94). According to Magnarelli, the culminating effect of marriage is that women, “have no say in their own destinies; all is decided for them by familial males” (94). Rulfo depicts this transfer of agency from father to husband in his novel. To complete the cycle, Páramo wishes to act as Susana’s father and husband and, effectively, gain complete control over her. Therefore, she is no longer the “daughter of Barolomé San Juan” but rather the wife, and metaphorical daughter, of Pedro Páramo.

The wives within Fitzgerald and Rulfo’s narrative worlds are almost entirely reified characters whose patriarchal society contains these women within traditional gender roles. However, this analysis becomes even more intriguing when the two signifiers come together to create an alienating version of patriarchal marriage. Ultimately, their relationship with their husbands objectifies them in a two-fold manner. They are at once worshipped for their beauty but at the same time “bought” as a “commodity” and placed on display as another marker of conspicuous consumption.

Tom Buchanan’s courtship of Daisy is already established as being surrounded by “pomp and circumstance.” However, once the honeymoon is over, it becomes clear what role Tom expects his new wife to fulfill. As the ethereal beauty that she is, Daisy already fits the mold of the stereotypically glorified woman dressed in white. In their East Egg

mansion, Daisy becomes literally a part of Tom's estate. Like the impressive façade of his house, expansive lawn, or his stately polo horses, Daisy morphs into yet another material object for Tom to display as a show of his immense wealth.

Upon first entering the sitting room of the mansion, Nick describes the sight of Daisy and her friend Jordan Baker reclining on sofas. Fitzgerald writes:

The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon.

They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house. (8)

Lounging on the settees dressed in white, Daisy and Jordan represent the height of upper class leisure. However, this image also suggests that these women are positioned and clothed intentionally, as if on display, for Nick and Tom as they enter the room. More statue than woman, this exhibit is punctuated by Daisy's first words in the novel. She exclaims that she is "p-paralyzed with happiness" when she sees her cousin Nick for the first time in years (8). The word "paralyzed" that Fitzgerald uses here accentuates the interpretation of Daisy and Jordan as living statues in this initial scene because she cannot move despite feeling joy. Jordan's words also support this interpretation when she protests, "I'm stiff, [...] I've been lying on that sofa for as long as I can remember" (10). Jordan's choice of words, like Daisy's, reinforce the statue imagery. Daisy and Jordan are painted as inanimate "commodities" that are elevated and placed on display on their couches where they are "stiff" and "paralyzed" while they are observed and admired by the male characters.

While Gatsby's vision of Daisy is not as static as Tom's, what she represents for him is also contaminated by reification. Gatsby's rise to power and accumulation of wealth can be traced back to his view of Daisy as an arbiter of taste and a member of the upper class. Donaldson remarks that, "The magic for Gatsby, in this commodified universe, is inevitably linked to expensive objects" (205). Therefore, over the years between when he left for the war and when the two are reunited, he develops a hyperbolic illusion of who Daisy is and what being with her means for him based on an assumption of love. However, Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy is truthfully rooted in his desire for material wealth.

Represented by the green light at the end of her dock, Daisy had been the object that Gatsby had been running toward his entire life. On the night of his last party, he mused to Daisy that, "You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock" (92). An object that would be of little significance to anyone else takes on this immense metaphorical meaning for Gatsby. Once they are reunited, the problematic nature of this illusion becomes clear. Fitzgerald writes that, "Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever" (93). Within this single gesture, Gatsby is snapped from his dreamlike state and drawn back into reality at the feeling of her touch. Fitzgerald continues writing that, "Compared to that great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. [...] Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one" (93). In comparison to his inflated illusion of Daisy, the joy of actually having her next to him is greatly reduced and unsatisfying. For Gatsby,

Daisy represents success and a horizon that he had been chasing for years. However, this vision of Daisy, and worship of what she symbolizes, becomes the reason that she is objectified even in her relationship with Gatsby. Robert Woods Sayre and Michael Löwy discuss this phenomenon in their article. They argue:

Gatsby's original project also becomes mixed up with love—a love which is consequently as corrupt as the dream itself. For we discover progressively that Daisy is inseparable from wealth in Gatsby's mind. [...] Daisy's power of seduction is indissociable from that of her house. (136)

As Sayre and Löwy assert, Daisy is part and parcel to the economic power that she represents in Gatsby's mind and this taints their relationship. They conclude that, "Gatsby's dream of possibility, which from the start was a dream of money, in transforming itself into love for Daisy has reified this love as entirely as the original dream" (137). While this union is not as overtly violent or obviously commodified as her marriage with Tom, Daisy is still placed on a pedestal and her value to Gatsby has little to do with her character but rather what she embodies economically.

Like Tom and Gatsby's vision of Daisy, Páramo has a similar image of Susana cemented in his mind. As another example of female objectification through idealization, his idea of Susana as otherworldly fuels his desire to have her as his wife. Rooted in his memory of her, Páramo often harkens back to his obsession with Susana when they were young. He recalls that, "*I was thinking of you, Susana. In the green hills. [...] 'Help me, Susana.' And gentle hands grasped my hands. 'Let out more string.'*" (9-10). In a playful and innocent way, he reminisces about spending time with Susana when they were children. The Susana's virtue comes through here with her "gentle hands" in the "green

hills.” Further, she encourages him to “Let out more string” which suggests that she wanted him to soften his controlling grip and surrender to the circumstance. When juxtaposed with Páramo’s acts of violence and power later in his life, this moment seems filled with possibility for what could have been.

This hopeful scene soon gives way to envious desire as Pedro Páramo grows up and becomes the *cacique* of Comala. He laments that, “*Susana, you are miles and miles away, above all the clouds, far away above everything, hidden. [...] where I can never find you or see you. Where my words can never reach you*” (11). Unlike Tom’s display of Daisy, Páramo’s view of Susana is much more in keeping with how Gatsby views Daisy; an untouchable horizon always just beyond their reach. Also like Gatsby, Pedro Páramo glorifies Susana saying that she is “*far away above everything.*” On one hand, this image connotes his worship of her. On another level, however, this reinforces the idea that she is the ultimate prize and all his wealth is for naught unless he can also possess her. In spite of the innocence that his memories are born in, adulthood and power morph that childhood longing into a desire that cannot be satisfied until he marries Susana.

The toxicity of Pedro Páramo’s desire for Susana is most apparent after she dies and he is left alone to mourn her passing. Dorotea explains the relationship to Juan Preciado. She says that, “I can tell you he never loved any other woman the way he loved her. He loved her so much that he spent the rest of his life hunched over in a chair, looking at the road where they took her out to bury her. He lost interest in everything” (78). Susana’s death is the ultimate consequence for Páramo’s actions and he is faced with living out the rest of his life bearing the burden of what he had done to her. Dorotea postulates that this display of solitude was, “because of Don Pedro’s ideas. Because of his

grief. Just because his wife died, that Susanita. So you can imagine whether he loved her” (79). In Dorotea’s eyes, Pedro Páramo did love Susana but the consequences of this love for Susana, and the town, are catastrophic. Painted in a categorically different way than the two children flying kites together, this image of Páramo, while possibly driven by his genuine love for Susana, is poisoned because this love is rooted in violence and control instead of equality and mutual respect. Therefore, not only does his love drive Susana to her untimely death, but it also plunges Comala into an early grave from which it will never recover. Because the importance of containing Susana becomes more important than Susana as a woman, his love becomes the poison that perpetuates the diseased state of marriage and relationships within his community.

Fitzgerald and Rulfo both present patriarchs that rule over their spheres of influence with iron fists. The greatest victims of their tyranny are the women in their lives. Socially constructed gender roles and the economical implications of the institution of marriage create an environment where the wife is “hunted” and, once caught, placed on a pedestal as the ultimate commodity for all to see. While the community implications of these systems are staggering, the most brutal fallout is felt by the wife because of the complete loss of agency that comes with this type of relationship. While Fitzgerald and Rulfo both represent this reality differently, the end result is the same and that creates an immense common ground between the two novels.

Tom Buchanan, up until the last quarter of the novel, has skillfully maintained control over his wife and his working-class mistress, effectively running the gamut between his world and the world that capitalism regurgitates. Once he begins to lose his

grip over the two, he flies into state of aggressive determination to regain rule. Fitzgerald writes:

There is no confusion like the confusion of a simple mind, and as we drove away Tom was feeling the hot whips of panic. His wife and his mistress, until an hour ago secure and inviolate, were slipping precipitately from his control. Instinct made him step on the accelerator with the double purpose of overtaking Daisy and leaving Wilson behind, [...] (125)

The “hot whips of panic” drive Tom forward and feed his frenzied state of mind. The notion that the women in his life would cease to be “secure and inviolate” is such an affront to his sense of power that he must “double purpose” to fix the situation. Tom’s reaction to this turn of events is most telling about how he views his relationship with Daisy, and even Myrtle Wilson to a lesser extent. Instead of being outraged at the fact that his wife might love another man or that Myrtle has been locked up by her husband, his anger is directed toward Daisy’s choice to act outside of his wishes; he is furious because she is no longer “secure and inviolate” on her couch in their mansion.

Daisy’s act of rebellion, however, is short lived since once she is overtaken and cornered by Tom and Gatsby, she has no choice but give up the small amount of agency that she had won for herself. Her first words of the novel where she describes herself as “p-paralyzed” seem to echo as the climax of the novel approaches. In the Plaza Hotel, the infamous fight ensues between Tom and Gatsby, with Daisy wedged in the middle.

Despite the fact that the argument is centered on how Daisy does or does not feel, she is almost entirely silent throughout the scene. Instead, both Gatsby and Tom speak for her, assuming that they know what her mind is thinking. Gatsby protests that, ““She never

loved you, do you hear? [...] She only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me. It was a terrible mistake, but in her heart she never loved anyone except me!” (130). Gatsby claims to know the innermost workings of Daisy’s heart as well as her motivation throughout all these years. However, even though Gatsby may have the best of intentions, his actions still effectively silence Daisy and strip her of agency. As the fight continues to smolder, Tom claims lordship over Daisy’s thoughts and feelings for the entirety of their relationship.¹⁵ He argues, “I can’t speak about what happened five years ago because I didn’t know Daisy then” (131). As Tom explains, he cannot “speak about what happened five years ago” meaning that he cannot put words in Daisy’s mouth until they meet because she is not yet within his sphere of influence.

Daisy’s words during the confrontation are few but they are immensely insightful and, therefore, dangerous to the established patriarchy. Daisy exclaims, “You’re revolting” in response to the fight (131). She is reacting to the entire conversation but is most directly criticizing her husband. She continues her attack on Tom’s character saying to Nick, “Do you know why we left Chicago? I’m surprised that they didn’t treat you to the story of that little spree” (131). Daisy is referring to Tom’s multiple acts of infidelity. Her words are pointed and filled with awareness of her situation. She finds her husband’s words and acts “revolting” especially when coupled with his moral impropriety. This brief yet telling moment within the argument does display glimmerings of Daisy’s agency that has been anesthetized ever since she married Tom. While it has been Tom who has been in control over her voice and her actions up to this point, now Gatsby is the one who participates in Daisy’s loss of agency. He speaks for her saying, “You never loved him” (132). After much hesitation and anxiety, Daisy gives in and hands over her voice. She

says, “I never loved him,” with “perceptible reluctance” (132). Here, Daisy is relieved of her agency because the weight of the circumstance is too much for her to bear any longer. She submits to the wills of her husband and then her supposed love.

Just as Daisy loses her agency by the end of Fitzgerald’s novel, Susana is also stripped of her power to choose within Rulfo’s. In comparison to other characters within *Pedro Páramo*, Susana does begin with a notable level of freedom over her life. In particular, her first marriage is described as being a more equal relationship and less rooted in power like her relationship with Páramo. In a flashback, Pedro Páramo is the one who remembers Susana leaving Comala to be with her new husband. He recalls, “*The day you went away, I knew I would never see you again. Your face was dark in the blood-red light of the setting sun. You were smiling. You left the village behind you*” (18). While the emphasis in this passage is clearly focused on how Susana’s exit effected Pedro Páramo, embedded within is evidence of Susana’s original agency at the onset of the novel. She is able to choose to leave Comala despite Pedro Páramo’s romantic feelings toward her; he does not yet have any real control over her actions. Susana starts off with the power to choose her own husband, her geographical location, and she is allowed to articulate these desires without being in any significant danger.

This level of choice and control extends to Susana’s expressions of sexuality. She reminisces about the freedom she experienced during her first marriage. Dorotea and Juan Preciado listen in on her musings. Dorotea reports:

“She used to sleep all nestled up in him, hiding herself within him. She says she used to feel lost in a dark nothingness when she felt her flesh being broken open

like a furrow being opened by a burning spike. Then it wasn't burning, it was warm and sweet, striking hard blows against her soft flesh." (98)

Juxtaposing images of warmth, violence, and sensuality, Susana remembers her first sexual encounters with her first husband. The aggressive images of "flesh being broken open" and a "burning spike" morphing into the "warm and sweet" expression of sexual discovery show self-awareness and agency on the part of Susana. Moreover, this description connotes intimacy in that she "put her feet between his legs" to "warm them" and that she slept "nestled up in him" (98). Coupling sexuality and intimacy, Rulfo displays that Susana did have a fair amount of freedom earlier in her life.

However, Susana's agency over her actions, words, and sexuality are stripped away once her first husband dies and she is at the mercy of Pedro Páramo. Páramo rejoices saying that, "I've waited thirty years for you to come back, Susana, [...] I hoped to have everything. Not just something: everything. Everything we could possibly want...and all of it for you" (80). While Páramo may have loving intentions, his words and actions connote power rather than love. He says, "I hoped to have everything" which suggests his desire to have total control. Even though he claims that is all for Susana, it is clear that she is included within the idea of "everything" that he so desperately wants. He is willing to do whatever it takes to get her back to Comala so that his boyhood dream could be realized. However, this cannot occur without Susana losing her freedom to choose. Instead of letting her go as he did when he was a boy, he employs his power to coax her back to Comala then trap her until her eventual death.¹⁶

Mourning the loss of her first husband, father, and her ability to control her destiny, Susana spends the rest of her days on earth battling the demons of her present

circumstances and spiraling into a state of “madness” that I will examine in chapter three. Páramo can only observe her in this state because there is nothing he can do to change it. Rulfo writes that, “He thought of Susana San Juan, always in her room, asleep, or if not sleeping, then as if she were. He had spent all last night leaning against the wall, staring at her by the faint light of the votive candle. Staring at her restive body. (93) Even though he is not able to change anything, he still looms over her ominously with his eye fixed on her writhing body. José Carlos González Boixo argues that this scene “brings the image of the heartless ‘cacique’ up against one of a human being whose suffering equals that of his victims” (114-115). While González is correct to point out the fact that we see hints of Pedro Páramo’s humanity here, he make an egregious error in claiming that his pain is equal to Susana’s. Even if I concede that Pedro Páramo is feeling genuine emotional pain in this scene, it still cannot be ignored that his experience of this pain is singular while Susana’s is multi-faceted rendering hers much more damaging. Further, despite his supposed “suffering” he continues to objectify her by remaining within her personal space, which indicates that his pain is superficial. He catalogues her “body,” “face,” and “hands” as he looks at the sorry state of his newly won prized wife (93). Pedro Páramo refers to Susana as “the creature he loved best in all the world” (93)¹⁷. Lysander Kemp translates the word “criatura” from the original Spanish into “creature” and this creates some problems with the translated text. “Criatura” is a term of endearment in Spanish meaning “a newly born baby.” However, the word “creature” in English carries a very different, and often more negative, connotation. The use of the word “creature” suggests something less than human. Despite Kemp’s misleading translation, the term “criatura” still carries with it a paternalistic tone that also objectifies Susana, albeit in a different

way. Therefore, the primary value that she carries for Páramo is that of a beauty that would make him “drunk” and “erase all other memories” before he dies (93). It is not the love of the Susana that occupies his mind as he watches her in obvious pain but rather how her sickness hinders her ability to be a good wife for him.

Through socially prescribed gender roles, relationships ruled by commodities, and the institution of marriage, Daisy and Susana find themselves lacking any semblance of freedom by the end of their respective novels. Fitzgerald’s capitalism and Rulfo’s *caciquismo* exemplify many similarities that cause this chain reaction to occur. However, Daisy and Susana experience this objectification for different reasons. As the theoretical caveat that I provided at the beginning suggested, one cannot simply apply feminist theory from the developed world onto a developing world context without proper cultural consideration. This is the niche in which the differences between Daisy and Susana can be explained.

It can be argued that Daisy’s social conditioning renders her powerless in a world where she would otherwise have the potential for choice. With the exception of her gender, she is afforded all the other privileges that come with upper class wealth. Therefore, her objectification and oppression would not be compounded by a lower economic status. She is trained from her childhood that Gatsby is not worthy of her because he is not wealthy and that she must marry for money if she wants to stay in the lifestyle to which she has grown accustomed. While there are certainly other factors involved, Daisy does make a decision to marry Tom. However, this choice is not based on love or even a necessary desire to be with Tom in particular; he is wealthy and has a high economic status and this makes him a suitable match. Therefore, while Daisy does

act with some level of agency in that she does make a conscious decision to enter into this bargain, it can also be argued that her choice is based in social pressures for her to marry within her own social class.

In stark contrast to Daisy, who opts to marry for money rather than love, Susana does initially marry her first husband because she genuinely loves him. In her early life, she is able to subvert the prescribed gender roles that Valdés identifies. Valdés argues that, “women are targets for aggression on account of an entrenched sexism which fixes their social roles as subservient objects of desire, venerated mothers, or abnegated scapegoats” (37). While Valdés certainly summates the tradition locus of power within Mexican society, Susana seems to be able to overcome these roles to a certain extent. She picks her first husband and she never fulfills her traditional role of mother because she never has children. She initially acts with agency and leaves Comala behind her. However, her marriage to Páramo is realized out of coercion and violence. Susana is given no real choice in this matter since Páramo represents total power within the region and is willing to commit acts of brutal violence in order to “win” her. Susana is not afforded the opportunity to choose her second husband because her oppression is exacerbated by her lack of economic power that renders her options extremely limited.

Daisy and Susana, while from different societies and operating under different rules, share experiences as wives of powerful men that create a bridge between *The Great Gatsby* and *Pedro Páramo*. As characters, they reflect and contrast each other in ways that reveal new similarities between their two cultures. Just as hemispheric studies in American literature attempts to uncover a more genuine “American” voice comprised of

all the tones of the region, so too do Daisy and Susana unconsciously dismantle the boundaries that have stood, ironclad, for so long between the two novels.

CHAPTER FOUR

Deconstructing “Madness” in *Pedro Páramo* and *The Great Gatsby*

Both Daisy Buchanan and Susana San Juan operate within a reified economic and patriarchal society that targets them in particular because of their familial and spousal relationships. While the reasons behind these issues may differ across geographical and cultural lines, the experience that these women share is markedly similar. Yet another parallel becomes apparent in the extent to which Daisy and Susana work to regain and retain their agency through their experience of “madness.” However, this madness is defined as such only through the words and actions of the male characters. Further, these moments of madness occur simultaneously with instances where Daisy and Susana are exhibiting agency; Daisy is vocal during the fight scene and is deemed “foolish” and “nervous,” while Susana is identified as “insane” because she refuses to be defined or contained by her father or her husband. Here, agency is misinterpreted, and misrepresented, by male characters as madness. However, both women experience a momentary freedom from objectification through this perceived madness.

The comparison between Susana and Daisy may seem unlikely at first given the fact that Daisy never displays signs of insanity in the way that Susana does. However, the link between the two characters becomes much more clear when one reads Daisy through Susana and *Pedro Páramo*. For this reason, I will begin my discussion by showing that, despite arguments to the contrary, Susana is not mad in any clinical sense. Rather, she is only characterized as such by the people around her. Rulfo and Fitzgerald create narrative worlds that reflect the worlds that they lived in: a world in which women are faced with

the realities of patriarchy and offered very few possible escape routes. Often times in the novels, as will be explored in this chapter, female agency is perceived as madness.

Susana San Juan appears to experience madness, but, with one notable exception that I will discuss later, Susana's madness is always reported by other people, which calls into question the notion that her madness is actually clinical. Dorotea explains to Juan Preciado that, "Some people say she's crazy, some say she isn't. The truth is, she talked to herself even when she was alive" (76). This is the first mention of Susana's madness in the novel and even Dorotea, in her reporting, is not concrete about whether or not Susana is actually in a state of insanity at any point of her life. From the start, Susana's madness is filtered through the eyes of her community, which becomes the basis for the interpretation.

Later in the novel, Susana's "madness" is once again unclear even when she appears to be in the throes of a psychosis-driven delusion. After awaking from a supposed nightmare, Justina, Susana's companion, threatens to leave her to the whims of Páramo. She pleads:

"You're seeing visions, Susana, that's what's the matter. When Pedro Páramo comes I'm going to tell him I can't put up with you any longer. I'm going to tell him I'm leaving. There's plenty of good people who'll give me work. They aren't maniacs like you, always making trouble. I'm leaving tomorrow and I'll take my cat with me and then you can sleep." (87)

Justina describes Susana as a "maniac" and threatens to leave her in the care of her abusive *cacique* husband. Despite Susana's seemingly irrational behavior up to this moment, her response reveals a possible reason for her "madness." She responds that,

“You’re a wicked woman, Justina, but you won’t go away. You won’t go anywhere because you know you can’t find anybody who loves you the way I do” (87). Susana appeals to Justina’s emotions in just the right way in order to convince her to stay, which suggests that Susana’s “madness” may be a strategy for self-preservation because as long as she appears mad, and keeps Justina by her side, Páramo literally and metaphorically cannot control her.

Susana’s “madness” is also an emotional expression of the grief stemming from the death of her first husband, Florencio, her only true love. She shows marketable stoicism in the face of this tragic events. Rulfo describes that, “She half opened her eyes. Through her tangled hair she could see a great shadow on the ceiling. And through her wet lashes a dark figure in front of her” (90). This phantom from her past, her father, who tells her of Florencio’s death, barely speaks except to identify himself. Susana says to him, “Your heart is dying of grief [...] You’ve come here to tell me that Florencio is dead, but I already know. Don’t worry about me. I’ve got my sorrow put away in a safe place. Don’t let your heart burn out” (91). Susana says that grief is stashed “away in a safe place.” Susana buries her emotions when she has to in order to survive. While her instruction to not “let your heart burn out” is directed at the ghost, or memory, of her father, it is also a reminder to not give up hope and to hold tightly to the happy memories of her first husband. These memories are hers, and hers alone. This grief clearly weighs on Susana but does not suggest that she has lost her mind. Susana’s dreams while she is in her room on the Media Luna near the end of the novel also supports this view. As Pedro Páramo looks on, Susana tosses in bed and laments the loss of her first husband, crying, “Oh, why didn’t I weep, why didn’t I drown myself in tears to wash away my

grief? You don't exist, God! I begged You to protect him. To take care of him. But You don't care about anything except our souls. And what I want is his body.'" (99) Here, Susana reveals her passionate longing for Florencio, which constitutes perhaps the only respite from the oppressive atmosphere of *Pedro Páramo*. She continues:

Naked...hot with love...boiling with desire. Pressed against my trembling bosom and arms. My transparent body suspended from his, sustained by his strength.

And what will I do with my lips now, without his mouth to kiss them? What will I do with my poor lips?"(99)

Yet the people around Susana misinterpret her grief and longing as madness. After this scene, Páramo asks, "If only she were suffering from grief, and not these endless, exhausting dreams." Páramo, who, after all, has murdered Susana's father and essentially coerced her into marriage cannot comprehend Susana's emotional condition. He interprets Susana's emotional trauma as madness when in reality Susana is expressing profound grief.

Susana's interaction with her father Bartolomé reveals another facet of Susana's "madness." Toward the end of their final conversation before he is murdered, Susana rejects her identity as his daughter to which Bartolomé cries out, "Why do you say I'm not your father? Are you insane?" (83). He repeats the same question and Susana finally replies, "Of course I am, Bartolomé. Didn't you know?" (83). According to scholars like Sergio Callau Gonzalvo, the estrangement that Susana feels toward her father is a result of an ongoing incestuous relationship between the two. He uses Freud's notion of the "screen memory" to suggest that Susana may have replaced an "unspeakable" reality with a replacement memory¹⁸. He argues that, "I do not think that it very controversial to

interpret Susana's intense vision about her childhood experience of falling into a pit [...] as a mirror memory that has formed about something unspeakable" (142)¹⁹. But Rulfo does not provide enough explicit evidence to support this interpretation based on incest. Bartolomé is undoubtedly abusive to Susana throughout her life, but incest is never made clear. Alternatively, Susana's rejection of her father also suggests a questioning of her prescribed gender role within a stolidly patriarchal society. Deborah Cohn supports the idea that Susana is fully aware of what she is doing in these pivotal scenes involving Susana and her father. Cohn argues that:

[...]when she rejects Bartolomé's authority, Susana San Juan is deemed crazy, the traditional metaphor for marginalizing potentially subversive persons. She does not contest the designation, though, for it merely confirms her chosen deviance from and defiance of a shared code of conduct. (156)

Since Bartolomé, and her society, would interpret Susana's actions as mad, she does not deny this interpretation but rather embraces it as a statement of defiance against patriarchal society. Bartolomé and others view her defiance as madness, within the corrupt society of the novel, Susana's "deviance" represents subversion and, therefore, a form of hope.

Susana's death is surprisingly triumphant. Through feigned madness, Susana is able to maintain a semblance of agency against seemingly insurmountable social forces pressing against her. María Elena de Valdés asserts, "In *Pedro Páramo* all the women are real or potential victims; Susana San Juan is the only woman who through madness escapes and thwarts the exercise of power over her" (36). Valdés argues that Susana differs from other women in her community because of her ability to circumvent her

oppressed condition. Páramo cannot contain her despite his power over both her and the entire community of Comala.

At one point, a visiting priest observes that, “they say the land at Comala is good. It’s a shame it’s all in the hands of one man. Is Pedro Páramo still the owner?” (70). Father Rentería solemnly replies, “That is God’s will,” which suggests that divine right is what supports Páramo’s claim to power. While it is clear that the *cacique* maintains complete control over the land and people of Comala, his power does not always extend outside of that locality.²⁰

It is clear from the onset of Rulfo’s novel that Susana is a woman “not of this world.” However, the way that this benefits her is not apparent until the end of the novel. Susana, tossing and turning in her bed, plagued by grief and memories of Florencio has already been stigmatized as “mad.” In this scene, “Pedro Páramo stood near the door, watching her twist and gesture, counting the long minutes of this new dream” (99). While Páramo watches her he no longer can control her. This scene signifies the shift of power away from Páramo to Susana. As Joanna R. Bartow argues, Susana’s instances of feigned madness are, “moments of Susana’s consciousness of her womanhood [and] challenges to authority” (10). Up to this point, Pedro Páramo has been able to contain Susana through a pact of marriage. But, despite his power as a *cacique*, Susana is now fully outside of his to the point that all he can do is watch from the margins of the room. While Susana is physically within Pedro Páramo’s sphere of influence, her memories, and feigned madness transport her outside of Comala and Páramo’s locus of power. The narrator further supports this notion by asking, “But which world was Susana San Juan living in? That was one of the things that Pedro Páramo never found out” (93). Not only is Susana,

through her memories, outside of the geographical space that Páramo controls, but she also occupies an entirely different world altogether. It is clear by this point that Susana, while displaying obvious characteristics of madness, is not in fact insane in any clinical sense but instead is described as such by the men around her. She is able to triumph over her captors by using this feigned madness to her advantage to regain her agency.

Despite the obvious differences between Susana and Daisy, I contend that Daisy experiences the label of madness in much the same way as Susana even if her “symptoms” are not obvious. The term “madness” can be defined as, “Imprudence, delusion, or (wild) foolishness resembling insanity” (“madness” def.1).²¹ The idea of madness “resembling insanity” is key to examining and understanding Daisy. This definition distinguishes madness from “insanity,” which suggests that madness may be more of an emotional condition than a medical one.²² Madness may not be wholly equated with mental illness, rather may also be a label applied to those people who do not act in a socially acceptable manner. At various points, Susana and Daisy are both labeled in this manner, though for different reasons and to different ends. Like Susana, Daisy’s madness may be examined as an act of agency.

Within the world of *Gatsby*, Daisy is characterized as the wealthy debutant with all the markers of economic and social superiority. Coupled with these privileges, however, are certain social expectations that she must fulfill. Jordan Baker is the first of her confidants to suggest that, despite Daisy’s intuitive rebelliousness, she must conform to the social status quo. After reading Gatsby’s love letter just before her marriage to Tom Buchanan, Daisy throws off the pearls that Tom gave her and demands that Jordan, ““Take ‘em down-stairs and give ‘em back to whoever they belong to. Tell ‘em all

Daisy's change' her mine. Say: Daisy's change' her mine!'" (76). She wants to reject the socially-prescribed role as a wife that she is about to take on. Jordan misinterprets

Daisy's outburst, and attempts to stifle her friend's rebellion. As Nick notes:

But she didn't say another word. We gave her spirits ammonia and put ice on her forehead and hooked her back into her dress, and half an hour later, when we walked out of the room, the pearls were around her neck and the incident was over. Next day at five o'clock she married Tom Buchanan without so much as a shiver, and started off on a three months' trip to the South Seas. (76)

Daisy is defeated, and does not "say another word." She is medicated with smelling salts, strapped back into her wedding dress, and collared with her string of pearls to face her marriage with complete submission. Leland S. Person Jr. argues that Daisy, "has been baptized in ice, and with her romantic impulses effectively frozen, Daisy Fay becomes 'paralyzed' with conventional happiness as Mrs. Tom Buchanan" (253). This scene represents another example of the emotional trauma that surrounds patriarchal marriage in *Gatsby*. Daisy is rebelling against Tom and her family, much in the same way that Susana resists her father and Páramo. Unlike Justina, Susana's servant, who resolves to stay with Susana in her time of need, Jordan chooses not to be a female ally to Daisy during her moment of resistance against one aspect of the patriarchal code. Instead, Jordan suppresses Daisy's emotions, misinterpreting Daisy's subjectivity as a form of madness simply because it is not socially acceptable. In short, Daisy marries Tom not out of love, but because the marriage is a fulfillment of a patriarchal social code.

Her friend Jordan later proves again to be an antagonist to Daisy's desire for freedom and agency. Like the scene on Daisy's wedding night, Jordan crushes Daisy's

sentiments. While in New York, Daisy asks, “What’ll we do with ourselves this afternoon? [...] and the day after that, and the next thirty years?” (118). She makes an all-compassing observation about her current emotional condition. Robert Wood Sayre and Michael Löwy describe this condition as, “boredom [...] which leaves its stamp on the endless idle days of the happy few” (138-139). Yet Daisy’s words can convey a more profound sense of hopelessness. As if to shake this sentiment out of Daisy, Jordan responds, “Don’t be morbid, [...] Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall” (118). This brief scene reinforces the idea that Daisy’s perceived “madness” becomes apparent only when the characters around her identify her actions as socially unacceptable. To Jordan, the idea that Daisy’s lamentations are “morbid” simply indicates that such a sentiment is not regarded as appropriate for polite conversation.

This depiction of Daisy as hysterical, “morbid,” or mad extends to the climax of the novel, during the confrontation between Gatsby and Tom, in which Daisy is caught in the middle. Tom explains Daisy’s apparent attachment to Gatsby by saying that, “The trouble is that sometimes she gets foolish ideas in her head and doesn’t know what she’s doing” (131). Even though Tom’s words do not directly call Daisy mad, they still characterize her in such a way that sets her apart from normal society, because, as Tom suggests, she acts in a careless fashion that is not socially acceptable. Daisy’s “foolishness” reappears when Nick describes the death of Myrtle Wilson, Tom’s working-class mistress whom Daisy runs over with a car. With Daisy and Gatsby speeding home to East Egg from New York City in Tom’s coupe, the narrator uses Gatsby to describe the tragedy:

“You see, when we left New York she was very nervous and she thought it would steady her to drive—and this woman rushed out at us just as we were passing a car coming the other way. It all happened in a minute, but it seemed to me that she wanted to speak to us, thought we were somebody she knew. Well, first Daisy turned away from the woman toward the other car, and then she lost her nerve and turned back.” (143)

Critics like Scott Donaldson have noted that Daisy “commits vehicular manslaughter, then compounds the felony by letting others think Gatsby was driving” (196). While Daisy is undoubtedly culpable, what is equally notable is that Daisy is not afforded an opportunity to speak about the accident. She remains hidden away by Tom.

It is not Daisy who speaks during this pivotal scene, but Gatsby. He describes her as “very nervous.” While this adjective does not directly characterize her as mad, the emotional state of being nervous, especially in connection with a woman, can historically be seen as being synonymous with “madness” simply because “nervousness” is a stereotypically feminine trait in the eyes of patriarchal society. Phyllis Chesler writes about this phenomenon at length and situates her discussion within the broader context of women and psychiatry. She argues that:

Men are generally allowed a greater range of “acceptable” behaviors than are women. It can be argued that psychiatric hospitalization or labeling relates to what society considers “unacceptable” behavior. Thus, since women are allowed fewer total behaviors *and are more strictly confined to their role-sphere than men are*, women, more than men, will commit more behaviors that are seen as “ill” or “unacceptable.” (39)

As Chesler explains, the field of psychiatry, for many years, was inherently gendered in its diagnosis and treatment of patients. Therefore, since Daisy's "nervousness" is not socially acceptable, and is also stereotypically gendered as feminine, this trait connotes mental illness in the view of the patriarchy. Much like the word "hysterical" that carries special historical significance when associated with women, Gatsby's use of the word "nervous" and Tom's use of the word "foolish" both describe the actions of a woman that are not socially acceptable and, thusly, must be medicated as if she were clinically insane.

The medicine that Daisy receives is a regiment of conditioning to render her "symptoms" dormant. Fitzgerald gives hints of this many times throughout the novel, but one of the most poignant examples of this numbness comes through when Daisy attends Gatsby's last party. In reaction to the emotional vibrancy exuded by some of the guests, she displays a subtle disgust. Daisy exclaims, "I like her [...] I think she's lovely"(107). Despite what Daisy says, Fitzgerald reveals her real feelings, or lack thereof toward the people of West Egg. He writes, "the rest offended her—and inarguably, because it wasn't a gesture but an emotion. [...] She saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand" (107). Whether her revulsion is based in jealousy or upper-class resentment toward this display of "new money," it is undeniable that the "emotion" that is most abrasive to Daisy in this moment. In stark contrast to Daisy's moments of emotional honesty and agency, this shows Daisy rejecting the same level of passion. This rejection of West Egg exuberance can be interpreted as a side effect of Daisy's social conditioning. This not only renders her impotent in her own emotions a majority of the time but also creates this adverse reaction toward the emotions of others. Just as Jordan,

Gatsby, and Tom characterize Daisy's outbursts as madness, she identifies the same features as flaws within other people.

From the onset of *The Great Gatsby*, it is clear that capitalism presides over all the characters and all the relationships within Fitzgerald's novel. Daisy is socially conditioned repeatedly to submit to her husband and the patriarchy as a whole. When she refuses, she is punished with labels that question her mental state and thusly attempt to invalidate her words and actions. As Mary A. McCay notes, this is not unique to *Gatsby*. She argues that:

Towards his women, Fitzgerald has a highly critical attitude that often leaves them stripped to a core that is finally lacking in enduring values. [...] He judges them more severely—as if he secretly expected more of them at the onset but put them in a world that allowed them no theater for growth. They are stunted from the start by Fitzgerald's expectations on the one hand and by the world they live in on the other. (311)

To reinforce this interpretation and also to bolster the idea that Daisy is not the only possible victim, Fitzgerald supplies scenes that connote this type of containment on a societal level.

One of the most poignant examples of how women on the whole are expected to interact within Fitzgerald's capitalism is when Daisy's daughter is born. Daisy discusses the birth of her daughter saying, "let me tell you what I said when she was born. [...] It'll show you how I've gotten to feel about—things" (16). Her daughter's birth and her feelings surrounding her marriage to Tom are inseparable. She continues:

“I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. ‘All right,’ I said, ‘I’m glad it’s a girl. And I hope she’ll be a fool—that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.’” (16-17)

Just as Daisy is essentially anesthetized the night before her wedding, once again Fitzgerald gives a description of her being heavily sedated, but this time with ether. There is an irony here in that her daughter would also have come into this world medicated because her mother was during childbirth. This repetition shows a cycle that Daisy is painfully aware of in her own life and she recognizes it within her daughter’s birth story. Further, her hope that her daughter will be a “beautiful little fool” is also telling of Daisy’s self-awareness within her society. On one hand, this scene can be interpreted as a tragic, yet realistic, reinforcement of the patriarchy. Daisy’s desire for her daughter to be a “fool” could be seen as a socially conditioned response. Lois Tyson argues that, “Being beautiful and a fool is a very marketable combination. Also, if she is a fool, perhaps she won’t know the despair of struggling against her fate, for perhaps she won’t even suffer the awareness of her fate” (48). However, contrary to scholars like Tyson, when this scene is juxtaposed with the others where Daisy’s own acts of “foolishness” are really moments of agency, it could also be argued that Daisy wants her daughter to have a level of subjectivity that she was never able to attain. While her relationship with her daughter later in her life is a pinnacle example of reified apathy at best, this birth scene could be a small glimmer of hope. Daisy’s daughter as the “beautiful little fool” could be revised to

mean “beautiful little subject” if her daughter’s “foolishness” takes the form of speech in the way that Daisy’s does.

Even though Daisy may hold out hope for her daughter’s generation, it is clear by the end of Fitzgerald’s novel that no such hope is possible for her. With Gatsby murdered, Nick thoroughly disillusioned, and Tom regaining complete control, Daisy is consumed into the abyss of East Egg old wealth and is silenced forever. Nick’s observations of the dénouement are laden with resentment. He explains:

It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made...(179)

Once again, “Tom and Daisy” are grouped together inseparably in Nick’s mind. He views her actions as part and parcel to her husbands and characterizes them both as “careless people.” While this reaction is, at least in part, entirely justified given the events of the novel, it would seem that Nick, and perhaps Fitzgerald by extension, lays an undue burden on Daisy. If one were to disregard her perspective, it is entirely possible to overlook her tragedy in the face of Gatsby’s loss and eventual murder. However, when focus is shifted away from the male characters, the true nature of her actions and her admitted flaws are revealed. Greg Forter argues that this final grouping of Tom and Daisy together is an example of how Fitzgerald’s potential misogyny is revealed. He argues that, “Being unworthy of romantic investment thus bleeds into the ‘carelessness’ that makes Daisy just as guilty as Tom instead of a woman imprisoned and objectified by her gendered idealization” (37). While Forter certainly points out a stark truth within

Fitzgerald's prose, it is too easy to simply condemn Daisy's actions, or non-action as the case may be, without fully examining the immense social pressures that press against her to force her to choose Tom in the end in the same way she was violently coaxed into marrying him in the first place.

The ending of Fitzgerald's novel shows not only that Daisy succumbs to the pressures of her marriage but also that these pressures are reinforced and exacerbated by the society that she lives in. Mary McAleer Balkun echoes this sentiment arguing that, "Daisy has no choice but to remain with Tom because she realizes, with the decimation of Gatsby as her example, it is the only way she can continue to exist as she has" (140). As Balkun asserts, Daisy chooses not to subvert her socially prescribed position in the end. Capitalism in *The Great Gatsby* and beyond creates people who cannot have relationships that are not economically or socially viable. Tom is the capitalist's choice so Daisy is forced to choose him because his sphere of influence, unlike Páramo's, is not limited to their estate but is prevalent throughout the society. Everything surrounding Daisy does not allow her to choose another path; her society becomes the ultimate subject that contains her to a life of objectified submission.

Susana and Daisy's madness also bear different results because of the degree of choice surrounding this label. Daisy's moments of agency, and subsequent branding of mental instability, are mostly spontaneous and occur when the current situation has boiled-over and the men back her into a corner. Her experience of madness is more situational and does not suggest a significant level of tact on her part. In contrast, Susana seems to be donning a "disguise" of madness that she can exaggerate or remove depending on what she needs to stay alive at that moment. Herein lies the final distinction

between the two women: they both experience the label of madness but Susana chooses the disguise while Daisy's is more of an unfortunate side effect of her speaking against the patriarchy. Alberto Vital discusses the power inherent in Susana's madness. He argues that, "[...] thanks to the mental unbalance, Susana can take refuge in the world of absolute subjectivity, [...] Pedro Páramo can not reach it because it is located there where the cacique intended most anxiously to escape" (121).²³ As Vital asserts, Susana is "en el mundo de la subjetividad absoluta" or "in a world of absolute subjectivity" because of her madness. He points out that Susana has created for herself a space where Pedro Páramo cannot reach her and this is why her disguise ensures her physical and mental safety. Therefore, Susana's madness in and of itself becomes an act, not only of self-preservation, but also of remarkable agency because it is rooted in personal choice.

Even though Daisy and Susana both meet different ends, both women's experiences reveal a blatant truth about the realities for women within a patriarchal society. In Fitzgerald and Rulfo's respective worlds, women face a dangerous dichotomy of either submitting to their prescribed gender roles or risk being labeled "mad." While Daisy seems to fall victim to this binary by the close of *Gatsby*, Susana's story delivers a message of remarkable hope. While indirect, Susana's skillful use of her "disguise" seems to echo Daisy's desire for her daughter to be a "beautiful little fool." Susana's actions and Daisy's fleeting wish for her daughter both show what can be possible when women "act up" in society: they can build for themselves a world outside of the patriarchy and bask in the triumphant warmth of their collective agencies.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

“So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

(Fitzgerald 180)

By the end of both novels, Rulfo and Fitzgerald’s characters are thoroughly disillusioned; the quest for wealth and identity has consumed them all. For Nick, Tom, and Daisy, this failure means bearing the weight of this reality for the rest of their lives. For Gatsby, Myrtle Wilson, Pedro Páramo, Susana San Juan, and nearly all the residents of Comala, the end result of reification is inescapable death. Like most modernist novels, *Pedro Páramo* and *Gatsby* leave little room for hope in a world where reification and patriarchy reign. However, in spite of these realities, Susana San Juan is the only character who supplies a respite from this darkness. Instead of being defeated by “madness,” she is able to use it to regain a semblance of female agency. Even though Páramo says that, “Everybody chooses the same path. Everybody goes away,” (122) can we read Susana as a triumphant character? I would argue that even though her end is tragic, it is also marked by an enabling resistance because she alone is able to “defeat” the *cacique*.

While authorial intention is always debatable, it is clear that Rulfo’s Susana embodies a very different purpose than that of Fitzgerald’s Daisy Buchanan. While Rulfo is clearly interrogating the violence that defines *caciquismo*, the fact that Fitzgerald ambiguously praises Gatsby throughout the novel shows a much different narrative objective. Nick maintains that, “Gatsby turned out all right in the end; it was what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out

my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men” (2). Nick separates the capitalist-hero Gatsby, from the worst depredations of modern capitalism. This shows a measure of hypocrisy on the part of Fitzgerald. Unlike Rulfo who progressively attacks the hacienda system and its *cacique*, Fitzgerald, by contrast, seems to support the socioeconomic status quo. Instead of perpetuating a myth like Gatsby’s “American Dream,” Rulfo depicts a more nightmarish vision of Mexican history, one haunted by ghosts and the devastating weight of history. This project has questioned the notion that the history and culture of the United States is in any sense more “progressive” than that of Mexico.

Just as the idea of “American exceptionalism” is out-dated, so too is the idea of a literary canon that is only comprised of authors from the United States. Instead of this limiting reading list, hemispheric literary scholarship opens up new possibilities not only for scholars but for students. The young generation of students is attuned to the globalizing impact of technology. To limit these students’ scope to American literature is to miss an opportunity to educate students about the new realities of their transnational world. Rather than allowing our pedagogy to reinforce borders, higher education should be a space of cultural and diversity inclusion.

As Neil Larsen argues, Rulfo’s works “are fictions about history before they are about culture, about time before they are about space” (139). While Larsen speaks specifically about Rulfo, the same concept can be applied to Fitzgerald. Both novels reflect the times that created them. Whether in the bustling metropolis of New York City or the ghost-town of rural Comala, the voices that cry out from *Gatsby* and *Pedro Páramo* are the voices of anguish and despair that are rampant in societies plagued by the

ethos of the market and, therefore, by reification. But are there any whispers of hope? Daisy Buchanan does want a better life for her daughter. Similarly, Susana San Juan creates an entire world of memories that cultivates her agency and freedom. When the women of a society are uplifted, the entire society is uplifted. Though often silenced by patriarchy, it is women, like Susana and Daisy, whose words and actions create an opportunity for a better world: an escape from the realities of reification and patriarchy.

NOTES

¹ “I came to Comala because I was told that my father, a certain Pedro Páramo, was living here. My mother told me so, and I promised her I would come to see him as soon as she died” (Rulfo 1).

² Páramo’s role as the *cacique* bleeds over onto the institution of religion in Comala causing spirituality to become reified as well. Questioning the evident corruption within organized religion, Rulfo uses Father Rentería’s interaction with Páramo to display this hypocrisy. During Miguel Páramo’s funeral service, Father Rentería initially refuses to bless him because he feels that he is not worthy because Miguel had killed his brother and raped his niece, among a myriad of other crimes. However, his resolve is shaken when confronted by the monetary power and stature of Pedro Páramo. Rulfo writes:

Pedro Páramo came over to him, kneeling at his side. “I know you hated him, Father. And I don’t blame you. They say it was my son who killed your brother. You think he also violated your niece Ana. [...] But forget them now, Father. Forgive him, as perhaps God has forgiven him already.” He placed a fistful of coins on the bench and stood up. “Take this as a gift for the church.” [...] Father Rentería picked up the coins one by one, and approached the altar. “They are Yours,” he said. “He can buy salvation, and You know if this is the price of it.” (23-34)

Cohn remarks that Páramo is effectively, “displacing God himself” (152). He buys the blessing that subsequently reifies any shred of spirituality that may have been left in Comala and replaces the authority of the priest with himself; at the very least claiming the space of spiritual intermediary if not “God” himself as Cohn suggests.

³ Lucas Páramo, Pedro Páramo's father and previous boss of the Media Luna, further propels his son's thirst for wealth and power. Don Lucas saw his son as "a good-for-nothing" and told his foreman, Fulgor Sedano, to look for new jobs after his death and not to "expect a damned thing from him" (35). Lucas Páramo's disdain for the failures of his son serves as an additional reason behind why Pedro Páramo so aggressively pursues his own rise to power.

⁴ This is my translation of Vital. Here is the original: En este momento, el futuro cacique sólo cuenta con su seguridad en sí mismo, manifiesta en el verbo imperativo aparece en una fórmula de cortesía. Pedro Páramo puede obedecer a un pragmatismo absoluto mientras no se toque el único amor que le importa (73).

⁵ This commodification of an individual goes back to how Pedro Páramo is characterized from the very beginning of Rulfo's novel. While much of this portrayal is centered on his role as a *cacique*, a good amount of it is also focuses on his evil nature as a product of *caciquismo* and reification. For example, his illegitimate son, Abundio Martínez, gives one of the first and most prominent descriptions provided of Pedro Páramo when Juan Preciado meets him on the road to Comala. Abundio describes his father by saying that, "He's hate. He's just pure hate" (4). He goes on by painting a picture of Pedro Páramo that is based on his possessions and wealth instead of any paternal relationship. Abundio continues:

"See that mountain, the one that looks like a pig's bladder? Good. Now look over there. See the ridge of that mountain? Now look over here. See that mountain way off there? Well, all that's the Media Luna, everything you can see. And it all

belongs to Pedro Páramo. He's our father but we were born on a petate on the floor. And the real joke is that he took every one of us to be baptized." (4)

The only association that Abundio has with his absent father is the vast expanse of land that he rules over. Even his baptism is commodified in that the only time that Pedro Páramo identified as Abundio or Juan Preciado's father was for their baptism. This is only a façade of paternal care and would have only served to solidify his standing in the community and the church. Therefore, even his children are only of value as long as they serve a purpose to him. Just as Fulgor's relationship with Pedro Páramo is reified, so too are Pedro Páramo's relationships with his various children.

⁶ Just as Daisy conditions her daughter to be a well-behaved and silently beautiful object in her society, so too does Pedro Páramo's violence seem to transfer to his son, Miguel Páramo. Accused and, in all likelihood, guilty of killing Father Rentería's brother and raping his niece Ana, Miguel's proclivity for brutality could arguably surpass that of his father. Besides Ana, Miguel is culpable in violating countless other women in Comala and other neighboring villages and even killing one woman's husband as a result. Once again, it is Fulgor that must be the bearer of bad news to Pedro Páramo. He says:

"Yesterday when I told him what his son did, he said: 'Just consider that I did it, Fulgor. Miguel couldn't have done it, he isn't strong enough yet to kill anybody. To do that you have to have kidneys this big.' And he held his hand out as if he were measuring a pumpkin. 'Whatever he does, just say that I did it.' [...] 'But he's so violent. He lives in such a hurry, you'd think he was racing with time. I'm afraid he's going to end up bad.' 'He's just a baby, Fulgor.' (62-63)

Pedro Páramo is trying to shelter his son and takes the blame for Miguel's actions.

However, this passage reveals some intriguing characteristics that ties Miguel to his father implicitly. Fulgor worries that Miguel "lives in such hurry, you'd think he was racing time." This echoes Pedro Páramo's lack of "patience" during his apprenticeship and, even more expansively, the "restlessness" associated with Jay Gatsby and Tom Buchanan.

⁷ Pedro Páramo's cruelty also manifests in his employees at the Media Luna. The horse-breaker, Inocencio Osorio, is infamous throughout Comala for being a "healer" of sorts whose version of medicine often involved raping the women he was treating. Ironically, his first name, Inocencio, is a masculine variation of the Spanish, *inocencia*, meaning "innocence." Eduviges Dyada, one of Pedro Páramo's servants, recounts for Juan Preciado the situation surrounding his mother's marriage to Pedro Páramo. She is the one who cryptically reveals the egregious actions of Osorio. She remembers:

"He had an affair with your mother, and with lots of others. Including myself. One time when I was sick he came to the house and said, 'I'm going to examine you, so you'll get better.' When he said that it always meant he'd handle you all over, first just your fingertips, then rubbing your hands, then your arms, until finally he got to your legs, rubbing and rubbing, so that if they were cold before, pretty soon they were hot. [...] Sometimes he'd be right, too. He couldn't be wrong every time. (14-15)

Not only are Osorio's "healing" techniques unorthodox, they are a thinly veiled excuse for him to sexually assault these women while simultaneously telling them that they were the ones who wanted it. Eduviges' mentions that "He couldn't be wrong every time" and

this reveals the sinister nature of Osorio's actions. While convincing the women that they were consenting to being raped, he repeatedly forced himself onto them effectively reducing these countless, nameless, women to nothing more than a sexual object for his own exploitation.

⁸ The fact that the house is a "Georgian Colonial" indicates that there is a historical significance to the house. This is further punctuated by Tom's own comments about his estate. He exclaims, "'I've got a nice place here,' he said, his eyes flashing about restlessly. [...] 'It belonged to Demaine, the oil man'" (7). Tom is critically aware of the status that his house connotes and he even goes as far as to describe the lineage of his house the way one might describe the lineage of a race horse. Tom's fixation with his house's previous owner, "Demaine, the oil man," further entrenches both him and his house within the world of old money.

⁹ Myrtle Wilson, Tom's mistress, has an apartment in New York City that depicts how the fashion of consumerism that has its epicenter in East Egg translates over into the less-than-extravagant homes of lower-middle class individuals. Upon visiting Myrtle's apartment for the first time, Nick observes:

The apartment was on the top floor—a small living room, a small dining-room, a small bedroom, and a bath. The living-room was crowded to the doors with a set of tapestried furniture entirely too large for it, so that to move about was to stumble continually over scenes of ladies swinging in the gardens of Versailles. (29)

Myrtle's apartment is small and crowded; besides the Valley of Ashes, it is the ultimate antithesis to East Egg. The symbols of capitalism like the "tapestried furniture" and the Versailles paintings are "entirely too large" for the space.

¹⁰ While there are many points of intriguing comparison between Daisy and Susana, it is important at this stage to also provide a caveat for this exercise. It has been noted by contemporary feminist social critics like María Elena de Valdés that there are some potential issues with attempting to apply first-world feminist theory onto a third world context. She argues that often:

Anglo-American feminists who have ventured into Latin America without an adequate grounding in the complex cultural mosaic of this part of the world have been taken aback by the sometimes aggressive rejection they have experienced by the very women they assumed would be their counterparts. (13)

As Valdés asserts, without taking cultural context into consideration, a school of thought that is meant to be inclusive can be taken in the opposite fashion. She further explains that, “Some Anglo-American feminists have assumed a position of cultural authority on the basis of their economic superiority, falsely equating the two spheres” (13).

Essentially, Valdés is pointing out the fact that despite the best of intentions to break down traditional power structures, first-world feminism has the potential to commit theoretical colonialism if cultural context is ignored.

¹¹ “I looked back at my cousin, who began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling voice. It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down, as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth, but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget [...]” (9)

¹² Valdés explains this phenomenon and how its realization affects women in the same society. She posits:

Although the word *macho* has become the more universal name for this social disease, *machismo* is only one means of expression of gender inequality, and is by no means limited to Latin America. In the idiomatic usage of contemporary Mexico, *machismo* is a social relationship that promotes male superiority over the female in all aspects of life. The man comes first, has the best, receives an education, has freedom of movement, can become a productive member of society, and has his work recognized as valuable. For all these possibilities, the opposite is the lot of most women in such a social system. The male thus feels that he is a privileged being in his family and in society from birth to death. (15-16)

Under this umbrella of *machismo* would also fall the characteristic of sexual virility that Pedro Páramo displays.

¹³ Nick remembers Daisy's house in Louisville, Kentucky when they were growing up. He recounts:

The largest of the banners and the largest of the lawns belonged to Daisy Fay's house. She was just eighteen, two years older than me, and by far the most popular of all the young girls in Louisville. She dressed in white, and had a little white roadster, and all day long the telephone rang in her house and excited young officers from Camp Taylor demanded the privilege of monopolizing her that night. (74)

¹⁴ Nick remembers that Daisy, “had a *début* after the Armistice, and in February she was presumably engaged to a man from New Orleans. In June she married Tom Buchanan of Chicago, with more pomp and circumstance than Louisville ever knew before” (75).

¹⁵ As if to best Gatsby, Tom’s rebuttal redoubles the language of containment and further strips away at Daisy’s agency during the scene. He barks, “‘Sit down, Daisy,’ Tom’s voice groped unsuccessfully for the paternal note” (131). In addition to demanding that she resign herself to the submissive position of sitting, he attempts to instruct in a “paternal” manner that recalls Pedro Páramo’s desire to be both father and husband to Susana.

¹⁶ “How many times did I invite your father to live here again? I told him I needed him. I even told him things that weren’t true.” (80)

¹⁷ “If only he could discover what made her toss and turn in her sleep, as if something were destroying her from within...But even if she were herself again, would it be enough for her to know that she was the creature he loved best in all the world? And to know also, and this was more important, that she would help him depart from this world drunk with the image that erased all other memories?” (93)

¹⁸ “Screen Memory” can be defined as, “a recollection of early childhood that may be falsely recalled or magnified in importance and that masks another memory of deep emotional significance.”(Merriam Webster)

¹⁹ This is my translation. Here is the original: “[...] no creo que resulte muy polémico interpretar la intensa visión que padece Susana acerca de su experiencia infantil de la

bajada a un pozo [...] como un recuerdo encubridor que se ha formado sobre algo innombrable.” (142)

²⁰ As the *cacique* of the Media Luna, Páramo is the personification of the hacienda system and the poison apparent throughout his community. However, his power is contained within the geographical borders of Comala. A discussion between Father Rentería and a visiting priest reveals the nature of this control. Father Rentería reminisces about his days at the seminary and laments coming to Comala:

I've tried to raise grapes in Comala. They don't bear. Only oranges and berries. Bitter oranges and bitter berries. I've forgotten what sweet things taste like. Do you remember the guavas we had at seminary? [...] I brought a few seeds here, not very many, just a bagful. Afterwards I thought it would have been better to leave them back there where they grew, instead of bringing them here to die. (70).
Indicating that there is something deadly about Comala in particular, Father Rentería's observations set up a distinction between the fertility of lands outside the village and the pollution within.

²¹ This definition can be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

²² However, even more important to this idea is that madness “resembles” insanity, which connotes the notion that someone must observe the madness in order to define it as such. Therefore, in terms of the definition, it is imperative for an outside entity to identify the madness or else it is not, in fact, madness.

²³ This is my translation. Here is the original: “[...] gracias al desequilibrio mental Susana puede refugiarse en el mundo de la subjetividad absoluta, [...] Pedro Páramo no

puede alcanzarla porque se ha situado ahí de donde el cacique pretendía más ansiosamente escapar.” (121)

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