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“I’m a girl. But now I’m a boy too”:  
Queerness and autonomy in Hemingway’s  
*The Garden of Eden* (1986)  
and “The Sea Change” (1931)

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## Abstract

Much has been written about Hemingway's works from a feminist or queer perspective, including the relation between Hemingway's biography and his representation of female characters, female domination and homosexuality. In comparison, the queer sub-field of transgender studies, which entails analyzing gender transgression and influence, has received little attention by scholars of Hemingway studies. In this essay, I locate and analyze instances of transgender identities and gender influences regarding the question of how these interact with other identities in the novel *The Garden of Eden* (1986) and the short story "The Sea Change" (1931). In addition, I analyze how these individual identities interact with the feminist concept of relational autonomy. This essay draws the conclusion that Hemingway's portrayal of queer gender identities and their interactions in these two works of prose fiction exemplify the autonomy of these queer characters.

Keywords: Ernest Hemingway, relational autonomy, queer theory, transgender studies, contagious gendering, queer spaces

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## Introduction

Since the death of Ernest Hemingway, much debate has taken place surrounding his writing of gender expression and sexuality. Hemingway's women have generally been accepted as a product of the time Hemingway grew up in, one of struggle between the sexes as women fought for more sexual freedom and independence (Sanderson 172), and his overt heterosexuality seen as a way to reclaim the dominance men largely lost in the twentieth century (175). His posthumous publications have, however, majorly subverted the late author's image of machismo and misogyny. In particular the posthumously published and much down-edited novel *The Garden of Eden* shocked some readers for its depiction of androgyny and unconventional sexual practices, but seemed like a natural progression for Hemingway's writing to others (Moddelmog, "Hemingway and Queer Studies"). Cut from the novel was a b-plot that focused on male infidelity and bisexuality that in many ways mirrored the a-plot that was kept in the published version, which may seem uncharacteristic for the traditionally masculine and sometimes homophobic writing of Hemingway. Though the novel was initially disliked by critics for its heavy editing supposedly being disrespectful to "one of the greatest writers who ever lived" (Trogon), critical readings of the text in relation to biographical and queer studies revealed depths to Hemingway's depiction of queerness not previously afforded much attention (Moddelmog, "Hemingway and Queer Studies"). Indeed, Hemingway had included depictions of non-normative sexualities before *Garden*, most notably in the oft-written-about "The Sea Change", but *Garden* is the first and only of his novels to explore the inversion of sexual roles in heterosexual marriage, which some attribute to Hemingway's own relationship with so-called gender switching (Moddelmog, "Sex, Sexuality and Marriage").

Though much has been said about both "The Sea Change" and *Garden* regarding queer theory as a whole, less has been said about these works through a framework of the subfield of transgender studies (Moddelmog, "Hemingway and Queer Studies"). In particular, scholars have failed to consider the question of how Hemingway writes characters that transgress gender binaries. This essay focuses on this neglected topic. In order to examine Hemingway less as a proponent of the heteronorm and more as a person exploring his own troubles with gender and sexuality, one can analyze the characters that he writes as queer, regarding gender or sexuality or both. Therefore, this essay is guided by the research question of how Hemingway portrays his queer female characters as autonomous humans. In these

stories, Hemingway depicts sexual relations as a way to transgress traditional sexual and gender boundaries while struggling with one's own identity, or as Catherine in *The Garden of Eden* states, "I'm a girl. But now I'm a boy too and I can do anything and anything and anything" (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 15). Queer theory has moved away from rigid collective identities neatly separated into gender, sex, and sexuality, and has instead become focused on the individual identities of queerness that are fluid and relate to all aspects of non-standard identities and their interwovenness (Valocchi 283). This current scholarship of the relation between sexuality and individual identity supports the main argument of this thesis, as I argue that Hemingway's queer female characters in both "The Sea Change" and *The Garden of Eden* are depicted as autonomous humans that are able to make independent choices regarding their own non-normative identities. This essay will first provide a background on the feminist reconceptualization of relational autonomy, which enables the analysis of Hemingway's characters as autonomous in relation to one another, as well as queer theory and its sub-field of transgender studies and their relevance to this particular reading of Hemingway's works. Following that will be an analysis of the gender influences that are present in *The Garden of Eden* and "The Sea Change", particularly how queer identities attract and inspire change in non-queer identities and the inherent relationality that this influence entails. The next section provides an account of how the queer identities of the characters in *The Garden of Eden* both hinder and catalyze their autonomy, as well as how certain identities may constrict the autonomy of other people. The remainder of the essay will be dedicated to examining the concept of a *queer space* and how it may enable autonomy for the characters in both *The Garden of Eden* and "The Sea Change".

## Background: Reconceptualizing Queer Autonomy with Hemingway's Female Characters

The concepts of *queer* and *autonomy*, both of which are central to this study, have in recent times been reconceptualized by feminist scholars. The term *queer* in particular has a long history of use in the English language. Though first being used to refer to something odd or ill, the term later took on a derogatory use for homosexuality to denote the "strangeness" and otherness of people who identified or were perceived as non-straight. In response to the AIDS crisis that ravaged gay communities in the 1980s and 1990s, the word *queer* began to be reclaimed and used as a celebratory term that meant something different from the conventional

(Bennett & Royle 260-61). Today, *queer* is not limited to merely denoting homosexuality, but rather an umbrella term that defies the binary of male/female, straight/gay, or masculine/feminine. To be queer is to be anything that falls outside of the expected monolithic structure of the heteronorm, and queerness may differ between individuals (Sedgwick 8-9). This latter statement in particular is important to my analysis of Hemingway's works. The relationships depicted in both "The Sea Change" and *The Garden of Eden* are ostensibly queer in ways that differ from one another, but both denote a transgression beyond the monogamous heteronorm. Transgender studies, arising as a sub-field of queer studies in the 1990s (Bettcher & Garry), is the framework in which much of the analysis of Hemingway's characters will take place. *Contagious gendering*, which is one of the main concepts discussed in this essay, derives from transgender identities and how these can affect and are affected by their surroundings. This entails that the analysis, though concerning parts of queer theory as a whole, is rooted in the subfield of transgender studies. This core concept is explained in the next section. This essay will refer to characters displaying non-normative sexualities, gender expressions, or both, as *queer* rather than *transgender* due to the complicated and interwoven relationship between sexuality and gender that is displayed in Hemingway's stories, but the framework that the analysis is conducted through is still ostensibly one of transgender theory. This choice of terminology is made because the term *queer* is no longer limited to binaries and is inclusive of both non-normative gender expressions and sexualities (Valocchi 283), while *transgender* solely denotes individuals who cross gender binaries.

Autonomy has often been understood as being self-sufficient and free to act as one wants (Mackenzie 34). This bare-bones descriptor would mean that every person who acts of their own volition has achieved autonomy, and if that were the case this essay would end here: the women in Hemingway's stories act as they want (under the mandate of a male author, of course), therefore they are autonomous. However, feminist reconceptualizations of autonomy reject the idea of self-sufficiency being integral to a person's autonomy in coining the term *relational autonomy*, acknowledging the effects that society and other individuals can have on one's decisions, as well as arguing for an understanding of autonomy being central to feminist studies of oppression (Mackenzie & Stoljar 3-5). *Relational autonomy*, like the term *queer*, is an umbrella term encompassing several different schools of feminist thought that disagree about how autonomy can be defined. Similarly to queerness, it can be argued that relational autonomy is individualized and that its conditions differ from person to person (Mackenzie 33-34). Additionally, Mackenzie argues that to achieve autonomy, an individual must both have

the will to achieve what they want, as well as the self-assurance and external support to do so (34). This is much different from the purely internalist descriptor of autonomy offered above, and outlines that both a strong internal drive and external support system are needed for an individual to truly be autonomous.

The question is how this reconception of autonomy fits together with queerness, which by definition is something outside the norm and therefore is not offered the protection, support, or opportunity by society supposedly required to achieve autonomy. The answer may come in the form of Emi Koyama's "Transgender Manifesto", where she argues that "trans liberation is about taking back the right to define ourselves from medical, religious and political authorities" (250). This would entail that merely identifying as *transgender*, or in the wider case as *queer*, is resisting the institutions of power by displaying agency that goes against but still works in relation to the norms of society. Additionally, the presence of vulnerability should not immediately disqualify an individual from being able to be autonomous, and certain instances of autonomy are arguably only achievable at the cost of becoming more vulnerable (Anderson 135). The connection between queer vulnerability and autonomy will be expanded upon below. When viewing selfhood as relational, Susan Brison argues that "the self is both autonomous and socially dependent, vulnerable enough to be undone by violence and yet resilient enough to be reconstructed with the help of empathic others" (38). This, I argue, fully allows queer identities to be analyzed in terms of relational autonomy, specifically through how non-normative identities are left vulnerable without the protection that normative identities are afforded by society and how the proponents of these identities assert their agency despite the external limitations set upon them.

It could however be argued that the queer female characters in *The Garden of Eden* and "The Sea Change" do inhabit the self-assurance and support to be able to express their identities and therefore fulfill Mackenzie's proposed requirements for autonomy. "The Sea Change" is not very long and therefore does not contain many characters or much context as to the world the characters live in, but the obstacles that are presented come in the form of the unnamed wife's marriage and her husband, Phil, himself. Leaving the socially accepted dynamic of a heterosexual marriage to pursue another woman is the precise action that makes the wife queer and therefore left vulnerable to judgment, but the pursuit of her desire happens not by abandoning the structure that grants her safety but rather by being allowed by this structure to pursue a queer relationship. This protective structure is the marriage to her husband, and though he is reluctant to accept her queerness, he nevertheless supports her decision to explore her

queer identity as he tells her to go to her mistress and report back to him about how it went (Hemingway, “The Sea Change” 229). This approval from her husband, in conjunction with her own will and confidence in her desire to pursue a female lover as exemplified in her quote “I have to, and you know it” and her insistence on her queer desire not being a vice (228), I believe grants the wife both the internal self-assurance and external support to fulfill the conditions for autonomy laid out by Mackenzie above, despite the state of vulnerability that she may exist in because of her queer identity.

Catherine, the queer wife from *The Garden of Eden*, is much different from the wife in “The Sea Change”, but similarly exerts her agency through her relationship to her husband. One important detail is Catherine’s financial situation before she marries her husband, David. The text suggests that she comes from a wealthy family, as she states that she is the one providing for David (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 122) and that the money that she brought with her to the marriage is the reason that David could publish his book (156, 220). This gives her a stake in the creation of David’s books, leading to her destroying his work that she deems irrelevant or dangerous to their relationship (215-16). She also asks her husband to accept her mistress Marita into their marriage and to take her as a second wife (144), therefore attempting to legitimize her queerness by normalizing the relationship she has with Marita and David. She does not bend to the will of society nor her husband, nor does she believe what she is doing is incorrect. I believe her status as a wealthy woman in a marriage where she is able to convince her husband to accept her queer identity, as well as her self-assurance and drive to inhabit the identity she wishes to have, show that embracing queerness is not necessarily a point of invulnerability in Catherine’s life, and that she instead has the external support and internal will needed to pursue her desires.

Simply put, the label *queer*, which spans countless of individual identities, is paradoxically both an obstacle and a catalyst for autonomy. The label can be seen as hindering an individual’s pursuit of autonomy by excluding them from the protection that non-queer individuals are afforded by society, or as inherently proving the individual’s autonomy by going against societal norms to achieve personal freedom. Either belief allows the female characters to achieve autonomy in their respective works, as they arguably receive the external support that Mackenzie describes as necessary for an individual to truly achieve autonomy in the forms of their financial capital and marriages to their respective husbands. This autonomy is achieved despite the vulnerability that queer individuals are otherwise subjected to in heteronormative societies.



## Relational Autonomy and the Contagious Gendering of Catherine and the Unnamed Wife

One topic that this thesis considers central to transgender studies is the study of gender influence, or *contagious gendering*. This is the phenomenon of how individual transgender identities change the gender expressions of those around them, often causing other individuals to adopt a queer identity (Shotwell & Sangrey). *The Garden of Eden* shows the main female character Catherine doing this to her husband David quite consciously, by calling him by her own name, calling him her girl, and penetrating him in an act of sexual reversal (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 17). Gender influence is sometimes portrayed by popular media as a problematic action meant to groom or seduce children into adopting transgender identities. The truth is more likely that transgender identities merely act as a catalyst to awakening queer desires in individuals through sexual, romantic, or aesthetic attraction to a transgender individual (Adair & Aizura). Considering that role models for children, even queer ones, are decidedly heteronormative (Sedgwick 155-57), this transgender contagion is likely a result of previously non-queer individuals discovering an alternative to the heteronorm that they can identify with. Contagious gendering arguably inherently entails relational autonomy, as it implies both an autonomous choice of identity as well as the influence that others can have on one's life, similarly to Brison's conception of relational selfhood being reliant on oneself as well as others (38). In *The Garden of Eden*, I would argue that Catherine exercises contagious gendering in order to strengthen her own gender identity, though in a problematic way that diminishes the agency of the people she influences. This is discussed further in the next section. However, the positive gender influence that Adair and Aizura describe does also appear in the novel, as the characters' attraction or closeness to non-normative identities creates a desire for transgression.

The first instance of Catherine exerting gender influence over David comes in an act of sexual reversal after she has cut her hair in order to take on a more androgynous identity. During sex, they almost roleplay as other people, Catherine as her masculine persona "Peter", and David, at the behest of Catherine, as Catherine herself. All the while, Catherine calls attention to the fact that David is changing (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 17). The act of gendering happening through sexual intercourse or attraction to a transgender individual is precisely what

Adair and Aizura describe in their article, and is also what they define as a common catalyst for an individual discovering their own transgender identity. When David looks at himself in the mirror after he has been gendered to be as similar to Catherine as possible, he says “You like it. [...] You know exactly how you look now and how you are”, and goes from seeing his reflection as someone else to recognizing it as his own face that is no longer strange (84-85). This self-interaction, which happens immediately after another implied sexual encounter, implies that David enjoys the change that Catherine has brought him through the reversal of their genders, even if he is unsure of “exactly how he was” (85). Gerald Kennedy draws a similar conclusion in that David desires androgyny or femininity because of his wife’s influence (181), even though he reads David as reverting to and finding safety in masculinity by the end of the novel. Even at the end, however, David finds that he “still could be, and was, moved by [Catherine]” (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 237), implying that Catherine’s queer influence over her husband remains despite her absence.

Similarly, Marita is attracted to Catherine from the beginning because of the way that she exhibits her gender identity through her androgynous haircut, which she desires for herself (90, 95), mirroring what Adair and Aizura describe as gender contagion through attraction to transgender individuals. Throughout *Garden*, Marita shifts from being a blushing and shy bisexual, to taking on the role of housewife and sexual partner for David; this culminates in Marita becoming a monogamous, heterosexual partner for David once Catherine leaves them (212). This influence largely stems from how Catherine interacts with Marita. For instance, Catherine designates Marita “wife of the day” (124), which entails her doting on David by bringing him food and drinks, and Marita trying to “study his needs” after Catherine declares that they will both take good care of him (122). Note that it is only Catherine, the openly transgender individual, that influences Marita’s gender expression, not in the sense that Marita starts transgressing gender boundaries, but that she takes on a different kind of feminine gender identity because of Catherine.

I read “The Sea Change” as involving the transformation of the male main character’s identity through his relationship with his queer wife in a similar, though less explicit, way, where the characters’ relational autonomy entails a reciprocal influence between them. Warren Bennett reads the story as a conflict between the neo-classical rationalism of the husband, Phil, and the late nineteenth century mindset of the wife. Phil believes that the wife is making a deliberate choice to pursue a woman instead of remaining in a heterosexual relationship, while the wife insists that some things are beyond the control of human beings, such as the sex that

they are attracted to (Hemingway, “The Sea Change” 229-30). Phil scoffs at the idea that attraction can be uncontrollable, but hypocritically does the same as he is transfixed by his wife’s hands even as he is arguing with her, unable to remove himself from his fetishistic view of them (229-30). This transferal of ideology as a result of queering also takes place in *Garden*. Catherine states that she must pursue a sexual relationship with a woman while David believes that she has the choice not to (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 113-14), but David, after being subjected to Catherine’s queering, exhibits a similarly uncontrollable desire for both women despite being aware of the supposed amorality of this desire (132). The implication here is that queerness transcends simply which gender one identifies as or is attracted to, but that it also entails a set of beliefs and ideologies that become inherent to oneself. Queerness, both through a reversal of gender roles and a transgression of normative sexual practices, is then “contagious” in the sense that the people involved have their identity shaped by the acts and identities of other people.

If reading “The Sea Change” through the lens of queer influence, much of the conversation that the two spouses have points to both harboring queer desires. This may be a result of their involvement with each other, which once again reinforces the presence of relational autonomy in their relationship. First comes the statement the wife makes when pleading for her husband to understand her homosexual desires: “You don’t think the things we’ve had and done should make any difference in understanding?” (Hemingway, “The Sea Change” 229). The things they have done that could lead Phil to more easily accept his wife’s queerness can be interpreted in several ways. Bennett reads this as the couple having participated in non-normative sex, such as cunnilingus, which has left Phil emasculated (233). Though I agree with the assertion that the couple has engaged in non-normative sexual acts, whatever they may be, it is difficult to read this as having had an emasculating effect on Phil. His misquoting of Alexander Pope’s *An Essay on Man: Epistle II* immediately after her question, “Vice is monster of such *fearful* mien [...] that to be *something or other* needs but to be seen” (Hemingway, “The Sea Change” 229, emphasis added), leads me to read his sexual acts with his wife less as a source of embarrassing emasculation and more as something that he desires but is afraid of showing publicly. The misquote of “frightful mien” and the omission of “to be hated” that are present in the original Pope poem changes the vice from something that repulses to something that causes anxiety, and strips the person that inhabits the vice of the judgment and hatred of others. This reading instead offers that Phil has participated in non-

normative sexual acts, perhaps queer ones, that he does not hate but needs to keep secret out of fear of correction from others.

Secondly, when the unnamed wife asks her husband to understand her queer desires, he replies “I understand. That’s the trouble. I understand” (Hemingway, “The Sea Change” 228). This stands to support my reading of Phil’s struggles with his own identity, as this statement could be read as him understanding his wife’s homoerotic desires because he himself has experienced them. Him displaying the same uncontrollable desire towards his wife’s hands that she harbors towards women, despite his mindset being rooted in logical reasoning, shows that he has been in some ways transformed by his relationship to his wife, not just sexually, but also in his way of thinking. In this sense, neo-classical rationalism could be seen as inherently oppressive to the idea of queerness as a natural urge, as seen in Phil’s misquoting of the parts of Pope’s poem that seem to reject his “vice” as something worth loathing, as well as in Phil’s changing view of sexuality as something uncontrollable instead of a deliberate choice. The act of non-normative sexual intercourse with his wife has then influenced him, and perhaps also her, to understand his own queer desires.

Lastly, Bennett reads the end of the story where the unnamed wife leaves to pursue her female lover as a destruction of Phil’s masculinity, as he has become just the first of many girls that his wife will be involved with (239). If read this way, the entire story is about a person’s identity unknowingly changing as a result of queer people, such as the influence that merely the existence of transgender individuals can have on cisgender people’s identities, which Shotwell and Sangrey describe in detail. The positing that queer sexual acts result in a destruction of one’s identity may be a bit drastic, but a valid interpretation nevertheless. My reading of the story entails not a destruction of masculinity, but rather a reconfiguration of Phil’s masculine identity through the subconscious gendering he receives from his queer wife. This new identity includes his acceptance of non-normative sexual identities rather than the destructive masculinity that he inhabits when first confronted with his wife’s queer desires, where he threatens to kill her lover (Hemingway, “The Sea Change” 228). The text stresses how Phil has been changed, as “his voice was not the same” and “he was not the same-looking man as he had been before he had told her to go” (230). Whether or not this means that Phil’s wife has awakened queer desires in him, his identity has undoubtedly undergone a fundamental change. In short, this reading posits that Phil’s change is a result of being influenced by his wife’s queer identity, as the spouses’ autonomy inherently exist in relation to one another.

## Gender Identity in *The Garden of Eden* - Autonomy and Constriction

To divert from the norm entails both an assertion of freedom, but also an exposure to vulnerability. When a person identifies themselves as queer and requests the respect and recognition of others, they are vouching for their own authority and legitimacy. Anderson argues that the act of vouching for oneself can however be seen as exposing oneself to further vulnerability; in the case that the community that a person asserts their legitimacy to is unreceptive to their requests, the autonomy of that person can be limited (145). Anderson does continue with theorizing that certain interpersonal relationships that involve an intimate and open self-exploration supply the individuals involved with the capacity for autonomy needed to vouch for their own identities and desires (150). Thus, vulnerability as a result of opening oneself up to someone else, for example through the act of coming out, grants the vulnerable individual(s) agency to act for themselves. Both “The Sea Change” and *The Garden of Eden* are ostensibly stories about coming out and opening up to one’s partner about exploring one’s identity, and both stories involve the queer characters using their respective partner’s — sometimes hesitant — reassurance to continue exploring and asserting their identities.

This returns the focus to the topic of contagious gendering, specifically that between Catherine and her two lovers. Though achieving autonomy would logically require a person being able to choose which way to present their identity, this has also created complications as to which identities are valid ones to take, not in the sense that some identities are less “real” than others, but in the sense that some identities are actively harmful. Cressida Heyes brings up that gender is not just an aesthetic choice of hairstyles or clothes but also an adoption of internalized values of gender, of which she argues that there exist conceptions of gender identities that should not be accepted, such as forms of masculinity that entail violence and misogyny (1111-12). Catherine actively chooses which way to present herself, which may fluctuate between man and woman and anything else, but the form of masculinity that she has adopted could easily be considered harmful to those around her, similarly to what Heyes describes. When Catherine first adopts her male persona “Peter”, it is in order to sexually dominate her husband, which in itself is not an inherently negative thing if David also desires it, which he does seem to do. The problem occurs when she encroaches on David’s own

autonomy by demanding that he cut and dye his hair similarly to hers, effectively seizing hold of David's self-expression; note that David's apprehension to androgyny appears first when he realizes that Catherine has convinced him to efface his own identity to match hers (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 177-78). Catherine thereby limits David's freedom to express himself by asserting her needs and wants as more important than his. Her version of taking on a more masculine identity comes with a need to dictate other people's lives and rule over them by enforcing her own ideals, which makes her mirror the oppressiveness of heteronormativity.

In addition to her exerting control over her husband through constricting his autonomy, she also does the same with her mistress Marita. Though the essay has already given an account of how Catherine's queer gender identity attracts and genders Marita in turn, one could argue that her influence is damaging to Marita's identity by turning her into a yes-man and accessory to the more masculine Catherine and David; she is, as Catherine puts it, "being a good wife" (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 109). Next to the "gay and excited" Catherine, Marita is "contrite and very quiet" (133), and Marita quickly falls into a submissive role to David by putting his needs and concerns over her own (103-4, 133), being "the way [David] said to be" (111), and constantly praising his writing (156, 185), in contrast to Catherine's criticisms of his stories (157, 215). Take care to notice that Catherine only ever expects her partners to act more femininely. In David's case this manifests in the form of reversing their sexual roles, but in Marita's case she is being groomed into becoming more like a housewife. Catherine even refers to Marita as "heiress" consistently throughout the novel, insinuating that her role is to take Catherine's place as housewife when Catherine "is gone" (144-45), likely meaning either when she is dead or when she deserts her identity of being a woman forever. At the end of the novel, Marita has been converted into the fully supportive wife in a monogamous heterosexual marriage (Moddelmog, "Protecting the Hemingway Myth" 260-61), having had her queerness completely effaced. This is effectively illustrated by Catherine herself, as she approaches Marita for intimacy near the end of the novel, only to be asked to leave (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 212). Now, the only person Marita is faithful to is David, despite her introduction into the three-person relationship being through her attraction to both spouses, especially Catherine's androgynous appearance. Catherine, through her gendering of her lovers, may in reality be reinforcing the heteronorm instead of subverting it by leading David and Marita to be more feminine to complement her own masculinity.

At the end of the novel, David's gender identity has been changed as a result of Catherine's contagious gendering, but not explicitly in the way of becoming more feminine.

Instead, Catherine's queerness and impact on David causes him to search for a reconfiguration of his identity within himself, as illustrated in his story of hunting down an elephant with his father in Africa when he was a child. David recalls tracking down the elephant with his father and his father's acquaintance Juma, both traditionally masculine men who take pleasure in killing animals and feel no remorse for it, unlike David who sees his tracking down of the animal as a betrayal (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 171, 180-81). As they close in on the elephant, David feels both ashamed of himself as well as hatred for his father and Juma for humiliating and harming the creature, and refuses to be the one to end its life (199). Instead, he changes his perspective to sympathize with the elephant and loathe the hunters (201-2). Completing the story gives David the comfort he needs, as he has finally exorcized the internal conflict brought upon by Catherine's disruption of his reality (203). Though the elephant story could be read as a rejection of androgyny or femininity in favor of masculinity, such as in Kennedy's reading (182), I instead believe it to be an opportunity for David to explore his own identity and find an alternative to the violent masculinity that his father and Juma inhabit as well as an escape from the forceful gendering that Catherine exerts on him. Instead of either of these imposed identities, David finds solace in being a masculine man that values the lives of the creatures around him. Especially of interest is David asserting that his father was trying to "convert him to bring him back to the boy he had been before he had come to the knowledge that he hated elephant hunting" (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 200), which echoes the sentiment of a parent trying to "correct" their queer child. When his father later asks if he has made peace with them killing the elephant, David lies and says yes, deciding that that is one part of himself that he would have to keep secret forever (202), not unlike hiding a non-normative identity that is not accepted by one's surroundings.

Returning to Heyes' writing on the internalized values of gender identities, this shift in David's identity has supplemented him with an expression of gender that does not entail exerting violence or constricting the autonomy of other beings, arguably leaving him with a healthier form of masculinity than Catherine's. Catherine, however, finds the story unacceptable and destroys it, causing David to feel "completely hollow" (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 216). In reading this story as a way for David to explore his own identity, Catherine destroying the story is a rejection of the idea of her husband finding an identity that goes against the gender roles she has set up for them, where she expects him to either fit into the submissive femininity that she has imposed upon him or remain in the traditional masculinity that he started out the novel with. Note that Catherine refuses to let David constrain

her identity in a show of autonomy, but is willing to limit his autonomy to fit her desires. When she insists that David continue to create the written narrative of their relationship, it is at the expense of David's exploration of his own identity through his childhood stories (157-58) and his own readiness to share his non-normative identity with the outside world (188). Desperate to retain the safety of David's written narrative, where her experiences are recognized and validated, she is willing to sacrifice the stories of her husband, where *his* experiences are recognized and validated. In the end, Catherine constricts rather than frees her partners from the heteronorm by taking on the role of the dominant man and goading her partners into taking on the role of the submissive women. The pursuit of her own autonomous identity thus hinders the freedom of the people around her, exemplifying how gender influence and identity are not necessarily catalysts for achieving autonomy.

## Creating Autonomous Queer Spaces in *The Garden of Eden* and "The Sea Change"

Though autonomy can be seen as necessitating both external support and internal drive, there also exists the possibility of autonomy despite the presence of vulnerability. Anderson ends his essay by asserting that not all vulnerability strengthens an individual's autonomy, though he does propose a solution to this vulnerability: retreating into a community that validates one's autonomy (146). Here I would like to introduce the concept of *queer space*, used by Jack Halberstam in his book *In a Queer Time and Place* to describe the spaces that transgender individuals create that exist in opposition to the straight world (94). Halberstam exemplifies the creation of a queer space in the film *By Hook or By Crook*, in which the queer main characters exist in an alternate reality whose ethics and gender norms differ from our own (95). Additionally, the title of the film itself refers to the creation of a different reality where you can recognize yourself by any means, or as Halberstam puts it: "If the vigilante wants to remake the world in his own image, the queer outlaws [...] are content to imagine a world of their own making" (96).

I argue that the couple's honeymoon in *The Garden of Eden* is their attempt to create a queer space in which their autonomy and identities are validated, in much the same way as the queer crooks in this film construct their own reality. Much like the title of the novel suggests, the Bournes indulge in food, wine, and sex almost endlessly in several paradise-like settings



where there exist no worries and few other people to police them about their behavior, or “a simple world” when David had never been “truly happy in any other” (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 14). Formal institutions such as the law are notably absent in the novel, only bearing mention when the couple discuss how to avoid legal interference, such as when considering the legitimacy of their newly formed three-person relationship (144) or finding out which countries let them bathe nude (30). Catherine insists on her and David looking the same (81-82) and asks him to perform non-normative sexual acts (17), all while refusing to settle in a single gender identity, going so far as to claim that being a girl is a “god damned bore” (70). Additionally, David writes the narrative of their relationship throughout the novel (27, 105), seemingly attempting to legitimize their non-normative sexual relationship by showing their reality from their perspective. In this way the couple is creating their own reality of indulgence where they, not unlike queer outlaws, refuse the norms and establish their own identities as legitimate in a world that does not represent them. Catherine herself puts it best: “Why do we have to go by everyone else’s rules? We’re us” (15). Kennedy even describes *Garden* as an “playground of androgynous desire” for Hemingway (179), setting it apart from his other works. This “playground” could then be seen not only as an alternate reality created by the characters, but a queer reality created by Hemingway himself.

On the contrary, one could instead read *The Garden of Eden* as inherently being heteronormative because of the way that it has been edited to fit in with the myth of Hemingway, which entails that all non-normative story elements that may threaten the public’s conception of Hemingway’s masculinity have been effaced from the published manuscript. This would also entail that the reality of the edited and published version of *The Garden of Eden* constricts the characters’ autonomy instead of enhancing or enabling it. Debra Moddelmog makes this claim, stating that the editor has “filtered Hemingway’s work through the lens of the cultural myth of Hemingway” (“Protecting the Hemingway Myth”, 256). Perhaps most important for this essay is Marita and David’s relationship after Catherine has exited the narrative. The edited novel portrays the newformed couple’s sexuality as completely normative, while the unfinished manuscript instead implies that David is invigorated by the abnormality of their relationship (261); the source for said abnormality is revealed by Marita, who states that she took inspiration from Catherine’s non-normative sexuality and the pleasure that David derived from it (Moddelmog, “Protecting the Hemingway Myth” 261-62). This non-normative sexuality, which involved female-on-male penetration, was thus excised from the published version in order to not portray the ideal heteronormative relationship of Marita and

David as involving the reversal of sexual roles or female domination, effectively erasing any queerness from the heterosexual couple's relationship.

In addition to this, one could debate the sexual reversal that *was* retained in the published novel. Richard Fantina, in his provocatively titled essay "Pegging Hemingway", proposes that the inclusion of female-on-male penetration in Hemingway's works is not "entirely progressive"; this because Hemingway disavows the dominance of the phallus at the same time as he upholds other parts of a heteronormative or male-dominated society, such as by rejecting male homosexuality and female transgression into the male realm outside of the bedroom (58-63). In short, the novel could be seen as not embracing queerness, but rather fetishizing it to allow the characters to participate in queer heterosexuality (64-65). The non-normative parts of the story thus exist as an extension of the norm and not in opposition to it, simply because the transgressive acts they take part in elicit excitement *because* they are meant to be taboo and forbidden, not because they are normal to the characters. In comparison, "The Sea Change" might offer a less heteronormative perspective due to its male main character's tacit acceptance of his wife's queerness and willingness to let her pursue her female lover without his involvement, rather than the fetishized view of androgyny and female homosexuality that David expresses in *Garden*. Despite whatever intent or values the author may have implanted into the stories, a transgender reading of *Garden* as a queer space created by the characters is still valid, though perhaps contentious.

Regardless, the queer world that the Bournes create together does not last long, which threatens their autonomy in exploring their own identities in different ways. Catherine's mental state worsens and David regrets agreeing to non-normative sexual practices, ultimately resulting in Catherine leaving David and Marita to pursue a purely heterosexual life together. In Kennedy's reading of *The Garden of Eden*, David enjoys the androgyny that is thrust upon him by Catherine quite suddenly, but the couple is unable to sustain their genderqueer identities because of the way that it forces them to oscillate between male and female, ultimately fracturing their identities and forcing them out of androgyny (180-81). Unlike Kennedy, my reading of the novel does not come to the conclusion that androgyny is the reason for David and Catherine's unraveling, the latter of which is affected the most, nor is it the undoing of the reality that they had created together. Instead, I read the main cause as being the inability to be safe in one's own identity because of the pressure that one faces from one's surroundings regarding the way that one should behave and present. In Catherine's case the pressure comes in the form of David insisting that she is being deviant and trying to convince her to retain only

her womanhood, while in David's case it stems from Catherine's desire to masculinize herself by feminizing David and her insistence on dictating the way their relationship with Marita progresses. Catherine puts it plainly herself: "I broke myself in pieces in Madrid to be a girl and all it did was break me in pieces" (Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* 192); to force a will or identity that is not one's own will ultimately break them. Fantina gives a different reason for the disillusionment of their androgynous reality, namely that while David enjoys Catherine dominating him, he does not accept her transgression of gender boundaries because of his notion of masculinity (61). Even in Fantina's reading, the reason that their queer space falls apart is not because of any inherent frailty in androgynous identities, but rather because of the heteronorm that David is unable to let go of.

Despite the frailty of the Bournes' queer space, I do believe that both "The Sea Change" and *The Garden of Eden* ending with the two wives leaving the narrative implies not only the creation of their own autonomous queer spaces outside their heterosexual marriages, but also is indicative of the limits of heteronormative societies. The queer female characters leave the story once their queerness is firmly established as unchangeable, leaving the non-queer male characters in a reality that is accepted by a heteronormative society, that being a reality of compulsory heterosexuality. The female characters instead leave to construct their own reality of queerness outside the pages of a story that is always going to be defined by the biases of the author and the society they reside in. This is not to imply that heterosexual authors are unable to conjure narratives that can fit queer worlds or characters, but rather that the bias of the society that Hemingway lived in may have limited his possibilities to write about transgressive characters without having to exile them from the narrative.

The similar endings of these stories do entail changes for the male characters and their identities and allows them to autonomously explore their new realities, though in different ways. In "The Sea Change", Phil is left alone at the bar, conversing with the bartender, watching his wife leave to pursue her female lover, and remarking that his reality is forever changed because of her: "You see in me quite a different man" (Hemingway, "The Sea Change" 229). In *The Garden of Eden*, David's reality is arguably happier, as he has found a woman eager to replace Catherine as the ideal partner for a heterosexual marriage in their new Eden, and a new, more nuanced understanding of his own identity as a result of both Catherine's queering and his rejection of violent masculinity in the elephant story. If autonomy can only truly be realized by being free to do as one wants without the fear of someone trying to dictate one's existence, the Bournes can only be successful in this endeavor by leaving each other, as

their disillusionment from their own identities stems from the other's rejection of their chosen identities. Similarly, perhaps the unnamed wife in "The Sea Change" can only exist without the fear of persecution if she leaves the person who binds her to a heterosexual marriage and initially criticizes her queer identity. Both endings point to the male characters continuing to exist in the comfort of a heteronormative reality, but Phil has, I argue, started to change or doubt his own heterosexual identity because of the paradigm shift that his wife's queerness has brought. He, unlike David, has no other female companion to reaffirm his heterosexuality, and his own being has unknowingly been influenced by the knowledge of his wife's queer identity. This uncertainty, even after accepting the changes in his life, I believe can be read as the start to Phil exploring his own changing, perhaps queer, identity.

## Conclusion

In this essay, I have presented several ways of understanding and achieving autonomy. My thesis shows that the queer female protagonists in two of Hemingway's stories, "The Sea Change" and *The Garden of Eden*, can be seen as achieving autonomy by deciding to come out and pursue their desires of queer relationships and individual identities. By employing concepts such as *relational autonomy*, *contagious gendering*, and *queer spaces*, this essay has analyzed these two works through the framework of transgender studies and concluded that the characters express and pursue queer desires that affect both themselves and those around them, and that this pursuit of queerness must mean that the characters are acting autonomously and relationally, influencing and being influenced by other individuals. Though "The Sea Change" contains no explicit transgender character nor characters who ever display the desire for a non-normative gender expression, a transgender reading of the characters allows one to process them as capable of affecting one another's identities and of constructing their individual queer realities. *The Garden of Eden* similarly displays both the influence that queer identities can have on other identities, as well as the desire of queer individuals to construct their own queer space. In addition, both stories end with the queer female characters leaving the narrative completely, while the characters who display no overt queer identity remain. I believe this points to the limits of heteronormative works when attempting to contain non-normative identities.

Despite the concept of queer autonomy being complex and impossible to conceive as a singular phenomenon — one could argue that there exists as many versions of queerness and

queer autonomy as there are queer individuals — I argue that the discussed characters have utilized their autonomy in their attempts to construct the realities that they want to exist in, regardless of external oppression or vulnerability. By examining the ways in which these characters willingly adopt their queerness and the way that their queerness changes the world and people around them, this essay supports the claim that queer identities can have an impact on the heteronormative environment they live in to ensure their own relational autonomy.

To conclude, the way Hemingway writes his queer female characters is by allowing them to assert their own identities in different ways. As Mackenzie argues (34), supplying people with both the internal drive and external support is needed to achieve autonomy, both of which Hemingway's characters are granted. Hemingway, whether intentionally or not, has created queer realities in which his characters are able to explore their own queerness and mutually influence each other without fear of having their autonomy restricted. As Catherine puts it, they are both girls and boys, and they can do anything and anything and anything.

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