

## **"Consuming Sex & Gender in *The Garden of Eden*: Economic Power & the Female Expatriate Consumer**

Ernest Hemingway's fictional expatriots bring their American consumer identity with them to Europe, spending their money to appropriate as much of the European lifestyle as they can while exploring and negotiating their "American-ness." In this regard, they are the unconventional and promiscuous heirs of those Henry James characters who ventured overseas during the European season to spend and consume for the purposes of augmenting their popularity, their fashionable-ness, and, hence, their "American-ness." James's characters-- predominantly the women--spend a great amount of their money and time consuming and then packing their steamer trunks with fashionable European clothes suitable for the gender roles and class positions they hold in American society. Their consumerism serves to augment their American identity. Unlike this Victorian consumerism, the act of consuming for Hemingway's expatriots never affirms or embraces identity, but more often than not contests it--especially in the case of gender and sexuality—and sometimes in actual *contests*.

Although Hemingway's fiction abounds with expatriot characters consuming local cuisine and much alcohol, the *The Garden of Eden* perfectly illustrates the relatedness between consumerism and identity in Catherine Bourne, who consumes in order to negotiate and contest [hetero]sexuality, the gender role of the American wife abroad, and "race." For Catherine, consuming involves purchasing clothing and paying for cosmetic procedures that enable her to explore sexuality and gender identities by visually blurring them and by experimenting with performative sexual roles (sexual role reversal, ménage a trios, etc.). In an indirect way, as a consumer traveler in the south of France, Catherine can afford the luxury of darkening her body seemingly for free. Catherine uses consumerism—and her role as a woman consumer—as a tool with which she can outwardly display and then perform gender and sexuality differently, while blurring racial difference, albeit under much circumspection and scrutiny and with much controversy. While dressing herself in men's clothing and getting her hair cut like a boy seems to be an attempt at mirroring her husband, David, it can also be read as the defiant feminine act of mimicry (as Luce Irigaray defines it). Her appearance and actions do threaten David's sense of masculinity, but the fact that she can purchase—that she can consume—masculinity, threatens it as an essential male attribute. Although her physical appearance and behavior continue to alienate her from her husband, and, despite the narrative hints that she is mentally unstable, Catherine's use of consumerism as a tool still defies prescribed notions of femininity and women's sexual roles in marriage. Her performances rail against how prescribed sex and gender roles for women—and the paternalism that encourages them, that encourages women's roles as consumers, even—not only limit women professionally and emotionally, but also demean and limit their intellectual capabilities (the narrator hints at Freudian "penis envy" in describing Catherine's attitude and actions toward her husband's writing success).