Joseph Mitchell, his famous books (*Up in the Old Hotel*, 1992, and *My Ears Are Bent*, 1938), and Thomas Kunkel's biography, 2015.

Writing Men on the Margins: Joseph Mitchell, Masculinity, and the Flâneur

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Abstract: This study introduces the philosophies of the *flâneur*—a figure associated with the acts of wandering, observing, and reporting the realities of life on the city streets—to offer a critical reconsideration of a sociological perspective in writings of literary journalism. The study proposes that the literary journalist can be considered as a flâneur, or as a writer who employs the figure of the flâneur as a narrative device, to drive the production of (self-)reflective narratives. This approach is realized with a re-reading of one of New York City's most widely regarded literary journalists: Joseph Mitchell. Reading Mitchell's *New Yorker* profiles through a gendered lens, the article identifies Mitchell's sociologically charged investigations into the everyday experiences of men from the margins—namely immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and African Americans—as they struggle with the conflicts that shape their masculine identities. The central themes that define these conflicts are identified as the struggle with the dominant ideologies of the self-made man and breadwinner roles, the importance of homosocial relations in the shaping of masculine identity. Possibilities of alternative roles for such men appear in Mitchell's key profiles, "The Old House at Home" (1939), "The Mohawks in High Steel" (1949), and "Mr. Hunter's Grave" (1956). By re-conceptualizing Mitchell as a flâneur, that is, a wandering investigator, interpreter, and writer of the discourses of New York society during this period, 1930s–1960s, we can begin to appreciate the sociological value of Mitchell's profiles and the contribution they make to our understanding of the historical development of masculinity in the United States.

Keywords: Joseph Mitchell – masculinity – flâneur – literary journalism – New York City

Traditional definitions of the *flâneur*—from the French *flâner,* "to roam or wander"—associate such a figure with dandyism and idleness.[1] But cultural theorists who champion the sociological value of the acts of observation, interpretation, and representation of the everyday have challenged this view. They argue that the flâneur, as both a product and producer of the realities of the social environment, is a figure driven by the responsibility to offer a phenomenology of urban experience.[2] Chris Jenks and Thiago Nieves offer a list of characteristics that expound the sociological factors that drive the flâneur, the most notable points being "the desire to get to know the 'underdog'," "the creation of alternative discourses on social reality," "the analytic hauteur claimed through distance and superior vision," "the action/moral imperative that stems from embeddedness and belonging," and "a continuous reflexivity between perception and knowledge; experience and memory; sight and citation."[3] While by no means exhaustive, these are useful directions towards a conceptualization of the literary journalist as flâneur.

Such an approach offers a subtle shift in how we might understand the role of the literary journalist, moving away from the maxims of such figures meandering at a "reality boundary" to underscore the writer's sense of duty toward reporting social realities of the every day "powered by a self-defining narrative impulse.[4] This conceptualization resonates with John Hartsock's recent reflection on how we might understand the aesthetic and didactic purposes of literary journalism. Tellingly, Hartsock prefers the term "narra-descriptive" journalism to describe such writings.[5] Hartsock proposes the idea that the literary journalist considers his or her experience of daily life as "a phenomenal experience that prompts a sensory response, a viewpoint revived in the concept of the aesthetics of the everyday."[6] Such a definition of the purpose of the literary journalist—driven to produce written pieces of representation and interpretation on the everyday—evokes the flâneur. The literary journalist can be seen either as a flâneur or as one who employs the figure of the flâneur as a narrative device to drive such (self-)reflective narratives. While Hartsock offers a note of caution regarding the modalities related to ethnographic studies in literary journalism, voicing concern about the possibility of slipping into sociological positivism, the issues of legitimacy on which he ruminates—literary legitimacy alongside social-scientific legitimacy—might be better served refocused toward a legitimacy of what is, admittedly, a more abstract notion of narrative truth.[7] The flâneur's purpose is to observe, interpret, and subsequently produce a multi-layered narrative text that offers more than descriptive (social) scientific fact. As Jenks argues, "the *flâneur*, though grounded in everyday life, is an analytic form, a narrative device, an attitude towards knowledge and its social context. It is an image of movement

through the social space of modernity"[8] [italics in original]. The power of the flâneur is the ability to be both ethnographer and literary writer, to be on the street and on the page, to find the narratives that can only be found by navigating between empirical data and the poetry in the everyday, between cold hard statistics and heated human interactions, between objective fact and subjective truth, all of which stem from a sense of social responsibility toward investigation and the subsequent production of texts that may challenge normative discourses or, indeed, may inform or inspire social change. This, of course, problematizes the modalities that inform Hartsock's discussion of literary journalism, but it should be noted that Hartsock, in his rumination on such modalities, turns to one of the finest New York City flâneurs, E. B. White, as an exemplar of a writer who transcends such deterministic classifications.[9] This reformulation of literary journalist as flâneur brings us to one of White's contemporaries and one of the key twentieth-century literary journalists.

Joseph Mitchell's conception as a New York City flâneur can be pinpointed to his exit from the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1938 to join the staff of the *New Yorker*. Mitchell's editors at the magazine gave him the time to develop his flâneurial skills as both watcher and writer of the lifeblood of New York City: its people. Mitchell wasn't interested in simply reporting facts—his was a search for the "truth" in the everyday experiences of the underdog, the marginalized, and the forgotten. Mitchell's main drive was to find the plain truths of city life and present them in the plainest manner: "We would argue endlessly about the ways of writing about New York City. . . . We never thought of ourselves as experimenting. But we were thinking about the best way we could write about the city, without all the literary framework."[10] As Mitchell remarked, "You can write something and every sentence in it will be a fact, you can pile up facts, but it won't be true. Inside a fact is another fact, and inside that is another fact. You've got to get to the *true* facts."[11]

The aim of this study is to address the absence of sociological investigation in Mitchell's writing—an absence that reflects the treatment of gender and masculinity in studies of literary journalism more widely—by identifying and examining the narratives on masculinity that appear in his works. Mitchell was not a reporter of facts but a flâneurial writer of truths, and one of these truths was the experience of marginalized men struggling to live up to the ideals of masculinity in a rapidly changing New York. As James Silas Rogers remarks in his review of Thomas Kunkel's biography on Mitchell, [12] the revelation of Mitchell's study of Franz Boas, regarded as "the father of American anthropology,"[13] surely invites a revisiting of Mitchell's work "as not only ethnographic in tone, but also by design."[14] Reading Mitchell's profiles through

a gendered lens underlines the sociological value of his profiles as snapshots of the complex condition of masculinity of those on the fringes of New York society, namely immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and African Americans.

The period in which Mitchell wrote his profiles, the 1930s to the 1960s, was turbulent for men in the United States. In the years following the Great Depression and the Second World War, the lack of job opportunities intensified the pressure upon men from all sections of society to live up to what were by then the established archetypes of manhood: the "self-made man" and the "breadwinner." The ideal of the "self-made man" appeared during the first half of the nineteenth century during the period of U.S. industrialization, which impelled the male to measure his sense of self against the attainment of social mobility, social status, and wealth. Such a social and cultural evolution signaled the separation of the public and private spheres in U.S. society, with the workplace regarded as a space for the performance and authentication of masculinity, while the home was seen as the place of domesticated and domesticating femininity.[15] This change in the conception of masculinity heralded the birth of the breadwinner,[16] a term coined in 1820 to represent the responsible man who strived toward the hegemonic ideal of self-made manhood with the ultimate purpose of supporting his family. A century later, the idea of masculinity that emerged in the decades following the Great Depression in which Mitchell wrote his profiles was one deeply rooted in patriarchal discourses of masculine power that attempted to patch up the fragile sense of masculinity on a national scale with such neuroses generating a culture of anxiety inherently tied to the security of the United States itself.[17] These neuroses extended, of course, to the parameters of race and ethnicity and the "Other." Within the context of this history of the discourses on masculinity in the United States, Mitchell, with his profiles focused on everyday people, delved deeper into these truths of people's individual inner selves and inner lives.[18] The aim of his profiles, therefore, was not merely to entertain *New Yorker* readers; rather, they were characters through which he could present with intimacy the hard truths of the ignored or forgotten men of New York City.

Immigrants in New York

Immigrants feature in prominent profiles in Mitchell's oeuvre, with one in four of Mitchell's main characters coming to make a new life for themselves in the United States.[19] And the recurring theme of these characters is the struggle to negotiate their masculine identities on the streets of a rapidly changing urban metropolis. Irish men are featured most prominently and profoundly in Mitchell's profiles. Rogers argues that the Irish "give voice to

the author's own concerns and preoccupations."[20] He identifies various traits and beliefs in these Irish men that Mitchell himself supported, namely "a refusal to participate in commercial society, a heroic attempt to stay behind the times, [and] a fear that the world passed on to future generations will no longer be, in one of his favorite words, 'genuine'."[21] By extending the appreciation of the key role of the Irish in Mitchell's writing to read their appearances through a gendered lens, we can appreciate such profiles as reports of the experience of such men in New York City, no more so than in "The Old House at Home," Mitchell's 1940 *New Yorker* piece.

"The Old House at Home" tells the history of McSorley's, "the oldest saloon in New York City."[22] The "backbone of the clientele" at McSorley's is its collection of regulars, "crusty old men, predominantly Irish, who have been drinking there since they were youths and now have a proprietary feel about the place."[23] The piece opens with a beautifully poetic paragraph that paints a wistful, even mythical, image of a "drowsy place" where "the bartenders never make a needless move" and "the customers nurse their mugs of ale."[24] And yet, such an immediate sentimental tone shouldn't mask the sociological value of the tale. What runs through the story is the fact that these Irish men have failed to live up to the unattainable ideals of the self-made man and breadwinner archetypes. In the face of such perceived failure, homosocial relations between the men is a central theme. From the separation of domestic and public spheres in the nineteenth century, and the gendering of such spheres as feminine and masculine, respectively, the performance of masculinity in social spaces has been driven by the idea that masculinity is something that can only be verified by other men. Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, in his revision of Raewyn Connell's influential concept of hegemonic masculinity,[25] one which maintains that masculinity is shaped in
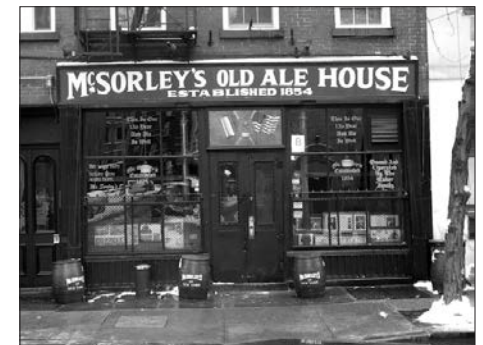
Exterior and interior of McSorley's, circa 2006. Photos by Norman Sims.

a dynamic system of gender relations,[26] argues that the organizing principle of the hierarchal framework of men in society is not solely the patriarchal narrative of the dominance of men over women, but also the power relations that shape hegemonic groups and subordinated groups of men.[27] Michael Kimmel, one of the leading figures in the field of masculinity studies, reaffirms the self-constituting role of such relationships, and the performance of men in such social situations, with his assertion that "masculinity is a *homosocial* enactment."[28] [italics in original] With their "tiny pensions" that offer them little income or financial stability, each man finds himself "alone in the world," so much so that they choose to "spend practically all their waking hours in McSorley's."[29] Mitchell's men "prefer McSorley's to their homes,"[30] a hint, perhaps, of the feelings toward the feminizing effects of domesticity. Some travel long distances to find safety in this place, where they can feel a sense of control over the men they believe they should be.

Mitchell frames the clientele's masculinity around memories of Old John McSorley, who the men see as a father figure and an archetype of manhood. Described as having "patriarchal sideburns,"[31] he was a dominant figure, someone with social standing who mixed with other "prominent men"[32] in New York. He was also someone who distrusted the developments of capitalism, technology, and the rise of institutions, most notably banks that began to shape society and dictate the agency and freedom of those who moved within it, and as such Old John becomes a symbol of a lost manhood.

In protest, Old John created this sanctuary, believing that men needed to escape to a place away from the pressures of both the changing public and domestic spheres. Women were banned, as "Old John believed it impossible for men to drink with tranquility in the presence of women."[33] The back room of McSorley's was the ultimate safe space, with the sign still hanging: "NOTICE. NO BACK ROOM IN HERE FOR LADIES."[34] It is in this room where Old John displayed his passion for masculinity-affirming memorabilia, having such items cover every inch of the walls. Mitchell lists the portraits of successful men—ex-presidents, actors, singers, sportsmen, and statesman—as well as the array of pictures, steel engravings, and lithographs, items loaded with coded messages of masculine performance and achievement.[35] Tamar Katz shrewdly reads the setting of McSorley's as "a public domestic sphere, a space in which [male] city dwellers can be at home, a space of immigrants marked not as foreign, but as quintessentially of New York City."[36] There is a clear sense of a democratization of space within the saloon. It is a place where prominent men, including Mr. Cooper, president of the North American Telegraph Company and founder of the Cooper Union, would sit "philosophizing with workingmen"[37] in a space decorated with artifacts of the com-

plicated nature of masculinity and nationhood, including "portraits of . . . statesmen," "excellent portraits of Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley," and a "copy of the Emancipation Proclamation."[38]

Mitchell's profile of the performativity of masculinity[39] in the saloon extends with the passing of the day-to-day running of the saloon from Old John to his son Bill. While Bill endeavors to continue the bar's masculinity (re-)affirming traditions, one incident—an act of subversion within the sanctuary—results in the performative nature of such masculinity being confronted and contested:

> One night in the winter of 1924 a feminist from Greenwich Village put on trousers, a man's topcoat, and a cap, stuck a cigar in her mouth, and entered McSorley's. She bought an ale, drank it, removed her cap, and shook her long hair down on her shoulders. Then she called Bill a male chauvinist, yelled something about the equality of the sexes, and ran out.[40]

Judith Butler would approve. Most famously in *Gender Trouble*, she rejects the idea of an inherent essence in gender; rather, gender should be recognized as performatively constituted as something created through a "set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame."[41] Put simply, gender, or in this case, masculinity, is "a doing" rather than being.[42]

The inclusion of such an anecdote underlines the complexities in the performativity of masculinity, illustrating how masculinity should not, and cannot, exist at the exclusion of women. As the actions of the female protester illustrate, masculinity is not tied to the male body, but it is an act that can be performed with the right trousers, topcoat, cap, and cigar.[43] Mitchell's interest and awareness of complicating such gender issues re-emerges at notable points in his flâneurial investigations, with the profile of the bearded lady Jane Barnell in "Lady Olga" (1940),[44] as well as the examination of one New York gypsy community in "King of the Gypsies" (1942), in which it is revealed that the elevated status of men in the community is very much of their own creation, as "the women are the real breadwinners."[45] In "The Old House at Home," Bill's reaction to this performance, one which forces him to face the socially constructed nature of masculinity, is telling: "When Bill realized he had sold a drink to a woman, he let out a cross between a moan and a bellow and began to jump up and down. 'She was a woman!' he yelled. 'She was a goddamn woman!'"[46] This revelation affirms the underlying irony of the attempts at self-preservation of masculinity in McSorley's. These men who spend their lives congregating together—away from the internalized conflicts that define their masculine identities in the face of a changing national society and a changing New York—are shown to be unable to recognize, literally and figuratively, what authentic masculinity truly looks like.

Indigenous Subjects

Such internalized conflict is again a major theme of Mitchell's writing on another marginalized group in New York: Indigenous men. In "The Mohawks in High Steel" (1949), Mitchell profiles the Caughnawaga tribe, one of the colonies of "mixed blood Mohawks" in New York.[47] Mitchell's interest in writing a piece on this community is not a chance circumstance. The Mohawks played an underappreciated role in the construction of New York City, with their ability to work at high altitudes helping the metropolis to grow, both figuratively and literally, into the capital of modernity that it was to become at the turn of the twentieth century.[48]

Mitchell's reporter-at-large piece first examines the group dynamics of the Indigenous community living on the Caughnawaga reservation (now Kahnawake Mohawk Territory) across from Montreal, as well as its satellite colony in Brooklyn's North Gowanus neighborhood (now Boerum Hill). Then it focuses on one elder, Orvis Diabo, a man who embodies the conflicts affecting the Caughnawaga. The narrative emphasizes how new images of masculinity are complicating and potentially compromising the tribe's traditional ways—their beliefs, ideals, and actions. Mitchell reports on the resistance of the early generations to shift from hunting and gathering into the business of farming, choosing instead to uphold traditional roles. These stalwarts leave the reservation in groups to search for food in forests while their wives and families work the farms.[49]

However, with the growth of industry, technology, and commerce in the early 1800s, Mitchell notes how successive generations of Caughnawagas followed the dominant discourses in North America and found ways to become self-made men by learning new skills in timber-rafting, canoeing, and shoe-making—even farming. Tellingly, the men who were unable to move with the times and create a new identity for themselves under the image of self-made masculinity found themselves left behind, becoming "depressed and shiftless" while they "did odd jobs and drank cheap brandy."[50]

The landmark moment for the local Indigenous men, Mitchell notes, is the building of a cantilever railroad bridge, in 1886, across the Saint Lawrence River, from Lachine (now a borough of Montreal), to a point south of the reservation's village. Mitchell locates in this project the origin of the Caughnawaga's reputation for working at great heights without fear. Again, the homosocial relations between working men emerges as a key narrative theme. Mitchell details the importance of working in a group for the development of their masculine identities, with the processes of socialization in such an environment organically shifting the men into hierarchical systems within which the workers progress through stages from apprentice to leader. Mitch-

ell shows how such opportunities for personal and professional development led the Caughnawagas to become more ambitious, driving them to progress from steel bridges to other construction projects as they crossed the United States border to find even more work, before finally settling in New York City. Mitchell places great emphasis on the desire of the men to roam, no doubt a nod to his own flâneurial impulses. The profile reflects upon time spent away from families, where the men either travel solo or in groups to search for more work. Mitchell cites the opinions of several American foremen who believe that the need of the Caughnawagas to roam is inherent to understanding their identities: "They roam because they can't help doing so, it is a passion, and that their search for overtime is only an excuse."[51]

Following an overview of the history of the community—a narrative strategy Mitchell employs in his most sociologically driven profiles—he then turns to a key figure to present the story's central themes, in this case Diabo, a fifty-five-year-old Caughnawaga man with white blood from his mother's side. Like many of his characters, Diabo is a composite creation that embodies the ideas that Mitchell wishes to present to the reader.[52] Diabo sits with Mitchell and reflects on the concerns of the Caughnawaga men, their masculine identities split between the tribe's reservation and the urban metropolis. Diabo, born and raised on a reservation, is now a lover of New York. He is also a reader. It is while reading classics from the "Little Blue Books" series that Diabo takes the time to reflect upon himself as a modern urban male, that is, a man of reason and rationality, a man open to new ideas, and improving himself and the society he lives in. As Mitchell has him quip, somewhat tongue in cheek, "I've improved my mind to the extent that I'm far beyond most of the people I associate with. When you come right down to it, I'm an educated man."[53]

As the profile ends, Diabo appears to be another of Mitchell's men about town. In the vein of other celebrated flâneurial figures, namely Mr. Flood or Joe Gould, Diabo wanders around the city, hanging around saloons, talking to anyone who will listen. But there is a greater sociological message in such a figure as Diabo. Sitting in a saloon, he reflects upon his struggles with his masculine identity. He reveals that although he must return to the reservation—where his wife awaits, disgusted that he is spending so much time away from her and their family—he doesn't want to go. The fact is, Diabo considers himself a city man now. This central conflict defines men from this Indigenous community, and more broadly the marginalized men that Mitchell is drawn to.

Mitchell has Diabo lay out the narrative of masculinity that defines Caughnawaga men. While at first the reservation man may get homesick

when he moves to the city to work on the high steel, after a certain amount of time passes "he gets used to the States." When age catches up with Diabo and he must retire, life back at the reservation is slow. He finds that people don't want to talk about their time in the city. He laments that such men, five or six years after returning, "turn against their high-steel days," even going as far as to pretend they no longer understand English.[54] Consequently, these men turn away from modern technological advancements—refusing to name their streets, refusing to accept streetlights, and resisting offers from the local council to allocate house numbers free of charge. They even question the need for a modern waterworks system. Diabo rages at their reason for not wanting to do these things: "It wouldn't be Indian."[55]

While on the one hand the worries to which Diabo confesses are worries that all men experience at his age—getting older, retirement, filling his days, and even death—there is a refined sociological and historical message here in such stories that is particular to the Indigenous community. Mitchell subverts the traditional narrative of Indigenous people as the unknowable Other. In its place he offers a study on the complexities that underpin the construction and performance of the masculine identity of this marginalized group. Mitchell creates a figure such as Diabo to give voice to these Indigenous men split between old and new worlds: between their wives and old comrades who are waiting for them on the reservation, and the lives they have created for themselves as urban males forever part of the sights and sounds of city life. As Diabo puts it, in a statement that resonates not only in terms of his experience, but very much reflects the essence of these men: "When they talk about the men that built this country, one of the men they mean is me."[56]

African Americans

Mitchell's interest in the masculinity politics of African Americans has its roots in his initial flâneurial investigations. In his first job in New York, working as a "district man" for the *Herald Tribune,* Mitchell found himself "fascinated by the melodrama of the metropolis at night."[57] His first arena was Harlem. After going off duty at three o'clock in the morning, Mitchell would wander around the streets observing the wonders of a rapidly changing New York City—"alternately delighted and frightened out of my wits"[58]—but struck by the reality faced by African-American men searching for work in an era when they were, in Mitchell's words, "last to be hired; first to be fired."[59] The increasingly more complex socio-economic conditions for African American men in the early to middle decades of the twentieth century, a time of oppression facilitated by a complex network of legal, economic, political and social practices, resulted in an African-American community

struggling for recognition as masculine subjects in a society in which race and ethnicity continued as determining markers of status and difference.[60] And yet Mitchell's treatment of men from African-American communities in his flâneurial profiles is to humanize this "Other." As Michael Kimmel writes, in the complex history of American masculinity, "manhood is less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us, having power or control over us."[61] The Other, therefore, is seen as the enemy, the threat to what is an unstable sense of self. Mitchell's profiles illustrate that African-American men were experiencing both the issues particular to their communities as well as the larger narratives that shape masculinity more broadly in society.

Mitchell's most widely regarded profile of an African American, indeed one of his most widely regarded profiles of all, is "Mr. Hunter's Grave" (1956), the story of the writer meeting George H. Hunter, an octogenarian from Staten Island. This refined study of Staten Island's black community history, from the time of their arrival as "free-Negros,"[62] to their contributions developing the oyster planting business at Sandy Ground, to Hunter's lament that "Sandy Ground is just a ghost of its former self,"[63] is the story of the mechanics of modernization.[64] And yet it is also the personal story of one man's experience of the changing times on Staten Island's South Shore. The narrative opens with Mitchell wandering through old cemeteries and old roads down by South Shore. Moseying through St. Luke's Cemetery in Rossville, he has a chance encounter with another important man in the piece, the rector Raymond E. Brock. The rector not only points him in the direction of Hunter, one of Rossville's most respected patrons, but also provides Mitchell, and the reader, with essential details about the history of the African-American community in Sandy Ground. Thomas Kunkel, for his 2015 biography on Mitchell, found that the rector is a fabrication. Critics have lamented this revelation, the strongest voice belonging to Charles McGrath in the *New Yorker*. McGrath criticizes the fact that the story "gains immeasurably from being presented as factual, an account of scenes and conversations that really took place. If we read it as fiction, which it is, in part, some of the air goes out."[65] While McGrath's stance is understandable, certainly in terms of the recent orthodoxies of literary journalism, which demand the literary journalist to be a reporter of facts rather than a yearning fiction writer, getting too involved in such binary conflicts takes the attention away from the pure motives of Mitchell's pieces and indeed their lasting impact. Put simply, such a stance fails to see what Mitchell, the flâneur—that is, a watcher, interpreter, and writer—is doing. As Rogers notes, George Core, in a 1989 essay on *New Yorker* journalists, makes the point that Mitchell "called his essays *stories*— not reports or essays or memoirs or something else—*stories*"[66] [italics in the

original]. To take this further and emphasize the sociological value of these pieces: Mitchell profiles are multifaceted. They seamlessly weave together objective observations and subjective interpretations. This is due as much to Mitchell's writing style as to his ability to present investigations of such truths in a way that only he can.

We must go beyond the image of the literary journalist as the factual reporter who presents facts to the reader using literary techniques and devices, to an appreciation of such activities as being examples of a flâneurial enterprise, to make sense of the complexities of the sociological truths that define everyday experience in society. And Mitchell achieves this with the insertion of key characters that, like Mitchell, are master storytellers with incredible memories, which Mitchell uses to provide context for the sociological message of his case-study investigations.

Hunter's masculine identity, like Mitchell's male-protagonist Others, is formed dialectically in the struggle between the pressures associated with his community and his performance of his masculine identity shaped by the dominant ideologies of New York manhood. This idea of "struggle" is key here. As Ronald L. Jackson II writes, black masculine identity theory is founded upon this idea of struggle, both in terms of the model of identity politics itself in that "all identity theories in some way call for a dialectics. In this case, Black masculine identities are enwrapped in an I-Other dialectic involving politics of recognition."[67] Hunter embodies this dialectical struggle. Hunter is eighty-seven years old and "one of those strong, self-contained old men you don't see much any more."[68] Hunter's life is one of struggles to define his identity. His mother is born into slavery. She escapes, but Hunter's father dies when he is a young boy. His mother then marries an abusive alcoholic who works in the oyster business. Hunter might be expected to follow the path of those young men into the Oyster business, and yet Mitchell shows how Hunter is not a stock character, but someone who writes his own story. Majors and Mancini Billson write that the history of African-American masculinity in the United States is shaped by the fact that "black men learned long ago that the classic American virtues of thrift, perseverance, and hard work did not give them the same tangible rewards that accrued to whites. . . . Yet African-American men have defined manhood in terms familiar to white men: breadwinner, provider, procreator, protector."[69] Mitchell's profile follows this thread, detailing how Hunter is clearly driven by the archetypes of the self-made man and breadwinner. Hunter creates his own company that builds and cleans cesspools so he is able to provide for his family. This all-American story comes to a tragic end, however, with the death of both his wife and their only son from cancer.[70]

The Hunter character that Mitchell presents to the reader illustrates the complexities and contradictions that characterize this performance of masculinity. Hunter is a man of tradition, of faith, and of beliefs. His tales of cooking on fishing boats with other men underline his loyalty and compassion for others. Tellingly, what his conversations with Mitchell reveal most is his lament of the changes in U.S. society. The 1950s were a time of great acceleration in the workings of society, workings realized in commercialization and consumerism. Mitchell has Hunter reflect profoundly on this, what it means for the manhood that he feels he embodies, and his criticism of a new masculinity that is emerging in the next generation of men. While Hunter reveals that he built the house that they are sitting in with his own hands—a strongly symbolic detail—Hunter laments that the new generation of African-American boys and men define themselves by what they break and what they buy to replace these objects. As Hunter remarks, "They've got more things nowadays—things, things, things . . . but they aren't built to last, they're built to wear out. And that's the way the people want it."[71] Succeeding in his earlier years in the role as self-made man and breadwinner, Hunter still harks back to these times. Hunter idealizes a long-lost model of masculinity, a time when men felt that the qualities of an authentic manhood defined the nation, a manhood defined by an inner strength and determination to succeed. And this is implied in his critical opinions of the next generation's superficial concerns with outward appearances over inner qualities, a view illustrated, in Hunter's view, in the obsession that these men have for such objects: "Most of what you buy nowadays, the outside is everything, the inside doesn't matter."[72] Hunter sees this masculine regression manifested in the father-son relationship: "You hardly ever see a son any more as good as his father. Oh, he might be taller and stronger and thicker in the shoulders, playing games at school and all, but he can't stand as much. If he tried to lift and pull the way the men in my generation used to lift and pull, he'd be ruptured by noon—they'd be making arrangements to operate."[73]

And yet, Mitchell's portrait of Hunter is clever in underlining the intricacies and even contradictions in Hunter's masculine identity. The first detail that Brock reveals about Hunter, apart from his age and current role in the community, is the importance of cooking in Hunter's life: "He's got quite a reputation as a cook."[74] Hunter, in contrast to the traditional, even old-fashioned opinions on the essential traits of manhood that he proclaims to Mitchell, performs (and quite clearly enjoys) a domesticated masculinity. This element of his masculine identity is reinforced when Mitchell goes to Hunter's house to conduct the interview. The first image we have of Hunter is that of the man in the kitchen. As Mitchell tells us, "I knocked on the frame of the

screen door, and a bespectacled, elderly Negro man appeared in the hall. He had on a chef's apron, and his sleeves were rolled up."[75] Entering the house, Mitchell comments on how they go past the parlor, past the dining room, and straight into the kitchen, where their conversation takes place. Their first discussion even regards the semantics of whether Hunter is "icing" or "frosting" a cake.[76] Hunter goes on to reveal the role of his mother in his formative years, teaching him everything she knew about cooking and therefore leading him to discover that he was naturally good with food, which led to Hunter's first job cooking on a fishing boat.[77]

The role of cooking in Hunter's life is explicated further during their discussion of Hunter's role as a provider for people of the church. Not only does Hunter cook every Sunday for the pastor of the church, and will be cooking dinner for a group of ten that very evening, but he also cooks Thanksgiving Dinner for the people of his church.[78] This detail mustn't be overlooked— Hunter embodies an alternative role for the African-American male, that of bread maker rather than breadwinner. And this alternative role appears in other Mitchell stories about marginalized men. In "Houdini's Picnic" (1939), Wilmoth Houdini, the self-styled "Calypso King of New York," also provides for his community. As Houdini calls to Mitchell upon leaving their conversation to help with dishing the paylou and the patties at the event they are attending, "Everybody depend on me. . . . After a picnic I go to bed for a week."[79] There is a thread, therefore, in Mitchell's profiles of such male figures subverting the expected role of men focused sternly on self-making by adopting what might be considered a more traditional feminine role of providing for their communities through their work with food.

Conclusion

Reading Mitchell through a gendered lens underscores masculinity as a key theme in his work. Revering Mitchell as a flâneurial figure, one who saw it as his duty to be a reader, writer, and interpreter of everyday city experiences, affirms the sociological value of Mitchell's investigations. The analyses of Mitchell's profiles on immigrants, Indigenous people, and African Americans are built upon the philosophies of the flâneur advocated by Jenks and Neves, namely the desire to know the underdog in society, a pursuit powered by a simple moral imperative to find the truth in the everyday experience of such men. Moreover, such flâneurial profiles reveal the existence of alternative discourses in society, particularly in terms of the possibility of counterhegemonic models of masculinity. Ultimately, Mitchell's stories illustrate that these flâneurial activities of observation and interpretation inspire the sense of continuous reflexivity of the flâneur proposed by Jenks and Neves, leading

to rich narratives characterized by perception and knowledge, experience and memory, and sight and citation.[80]

The flâneurial sketches examined above affirm the vital insights offered by Mitchell into the everyday experiences of men on the margins who wrestle with the expected performances of their masculinity in their communities. Mitchell's profiles also illustrate how these forgotten men were shaped by grander narratives of men endeavoring to adhere to the dominant ideologies of authentic American manhood. Such an approach to reading Mitchell's work—one informed by the key theories of the dynamic fields of gender studies and masculinity studies—will address the lack of attention towards the issues of gender and masculinity in Mitchell's profiles and, indeed, works of literary journalism more broadly. Such gender-focused interdisciplinary studies on the wider impact of literary journalism can only benefit our understanding of the gendered nature of the discourses that shape and define social, cultural, and (gender) political realities in the United States and beyond.

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Notes

1 The most widely known and discussed flâneur is that of Charles Baudelaire in "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863), 1–40. The role of Baudelaire's flâneur is to define "that quality which you must allow me to call 'modernity' . . . by 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable," 12–13. The flâneur was brought into the academy by Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*, his study of nineteenth century Paris and the impact of the urban metropolis on the human psyche. Benjamin, "The Flâneur," 416–55.

2 See Tester, *The Flâneur*; Jenks, "Watching Your Step"; Jenks and Neves, "A Walk on the Wild Side"; Soukup, "The Postmodern Ethnographic Flaneur"; Ferry, *Masculinity in Contemporary New York Fiction.*

3 Jenks and Neves, "A Walk on the Wild Side," 4.

4 Norman Sims offers an extremely useful introduction to the richness of the genre of literary journalism in "A True Story," Chap. 1 in Sims*, True Stories*, 1–24. See also Sims, "The Problem and the Promise of Literary Journalism Studies," 7–17.

5 Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 10; see also 14, 53.

6 Ibid., 4.

7 Ibid., 146–48.

8 Jenks, "Watching Your Step," 148.

9 Hartsock, *Literary Journalism,* 14. See also Ferry, *Masculinity in Contemporary New York Fiction,* 18–25, for a discussion of E. B. White as a New York flâneur whose writing underscores the discourses of masculinity in the metropolis.

10 Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 242. Also quoted in Yagoda, *About Town,* 142–43.

11 Fiennes, introduction to *Up in the Old Hotel*, xii.

12 Rogers, "Defusing the Joe Mitchell Bombshell," 172–75.

13 Jonaitis, preface to *A Wealth of Thought*, xi.

14 Rogers, "Defusing the Joe Mitchell Bombshell," 173.

15 Michael Kimmel writes on the implications of the "separation of the spheres" for the American family in *The Gendered Society*, 113–21.

16 Kimmel, in *Manhood in America*, 11–29, 15, dates the arrival of the masculine figure of the breadwinner between 1810 and 1820. See also Kimmel, *The Gendered Society*, 119–26.

17 Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety," 5–9. See also Armengol, "Gendering the Great Depression," 59–68; Schlesinger, "The Crisis of American Masculinity," 292–303; Stieglitz, "Great Depression," 195–97; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 20; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 140–45.

18 Sims, "Joseph Mitchell and the *New Yorker* Nonfiction Writers," 92.

19 This statistic is based on a survey of Joseph Mitchell's profiles from the collection, *Up in the Old Hotel.*

20 Rogers, "Joseph Mitchell's Irish Imagination," 53.

21 Ibid.

22 Mitchell, "The Old House at Home," 3.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity," 337–61; see also Connell, *Masculinities*, 67–86.

26 As Connell explains: "Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." *Masculinities*, 77.

27 Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity," 337–61.

28 Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia, 33.

29 Mitchell, "The Old House at Home," 3.

30 Ibid., 21.

31 Ibid., 4.

32 Ibid., 6.

33 Ibid., 4.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 7.

36 Katz, "Anecdotal History," 466.

37 Mitchell, "The Old House at Home," 6.

38 Ibid., 7.

39 "Performativity" is a key concept in the study of gender and masculinity in terms of its suggestion that gender, in being performative, is not something that is simply performed, but it is a performance that also produces a series of effects. See Butler, *Excitable Speech.*

40 Ibid., 11.

41 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33.

42 As Butler expands, "gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting

the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed." Ibid., 25.

[43] See Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 1–45.

[44] Mitchell, "Lady Olga," 88–104.

[45] Mitchell, "King of the Gypsies," 149.

[46] Mitchell, "The Old House at Home," 11.

[47] Mitchell, "The Mohawks in High Steel," 266. The history of the Caughnawaga tribe in New York has also been profiled in Don Owen's 1965 documentary, "High Steel." More recently, the tribe was the focus of Reaghan Tarbell's 2008 documentary, "Little Caughnawaga: To Brooklyn and Back." *Time* magazine made these men of high steel the focus of an online photo essay, Vaughn Wallace's "The Mohawk Ironworkers: Rebuilding the Iconic Skyline of New York."

[48] Wright-Tekastiaks, "Mohawk Nation," 995.

[49] Mitchell, "The Mohawks in High Steel," 272.

[50] Ibid., 273.

[51] Ibid., 278.

[52] Kunkel confirms this when he comments, "A review of both the reservation record and Mitchell's research for 'Mohawks' (it is one of a handful of stories where some of his original reporting notes survive) strongly suggests that Diabo was either a third composite figure or quite possibly a pseudonym for a veteran construction-gang leader of that period, a man named Paul Horn." Kunkel, *Man in Profile*, 174.

[53] Mitchell, "The Mohawks in High Steel," 284.

[54] Ibid., 285.

[55] Ibid., 286.

[56] Ibid., 283.

[57] Mitchell, *My Ears Are Bent*, 6.

[58] Ibid., 5.

[59] Kunkel, *Man in Profile*, 5–6.

[60] See Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents,* 1–15.

[61] Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 4

[62] Mitchell, "Mr. Hunter's Grave," 529.

[63] Ibid., 519.

[64] As Hunter divulges, until 1800 there were tremendous, big beds of natural growth oysters all around Staten Island. But between 1800 and 1820 the oysters began to peter out. The islanders reacted by bringing in immature oysters from other places, at first from other localities such as New Jersey or Long Island, before expanding further to Maryland or Virginia. Because of the growth of the oyster business, many African- American families relocated to Sandy Ground and the community continued to grow with the young men and women intermarrying with other families from surrounding areas. Some did so well that they didn't need to work on the land anymore, instead buying oyster sloops and "didn't take orders from anybody." But in 1910 "the water went bad" and "in 1916 the Department of Health stepped in and condemned the beds," until Sandy Ground became "a ghost of its former self," People then had to travel to work, the men working in construc-

tion or factories, the women in hospitals. Ibid., 515, 519.

[65] McGrath, "The People You Meet," 78.

[66] Core, "Stretching the Limits of the Essay," 208; Rogers, "Defusing the Joe Mitchell Bombshell," 172.

[67] Jackson, *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, 135.

[68] Mitchell, "Mr. Hunter's Grave," 505.

[69] Majors and Mancini Billson, *Cool Pose: The Dilemma of Black Manhood in America*, 1.

[70] Mitchell, "Mr. Hunter's Grave," 521–24.

[71] Ibid., 511.

[72] Ibid., 511.

[73] Ibid. , 511.

[74] Ibid., 505. Brock continues, "His church used to put on clambakes to raise money, and they were such good clambakes they attracted people from all over this part of Staten Island, and he always had charge of them," Ibid.

[75] Ibid., 507.

[76] Ibid., 511.

[77] Ibid., 509.

[78] Ibid., 508.

[79] Ibid., 260.

[80] Jenks and Neves, "A Walk on the Wild Side," 4.