

NEW CRITICAL APPROACHES
TO THE SHORT STORIES OF

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

JACKSON J. BENSON, EDITOR

With an Overview Essay by Paul Smith and a Checklist to the Criticism, 1975-1990



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the Short Stories of
Ernest Hemingway**

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Edited by Jackson J. Benson

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For Charles M. Oliver
editor of the *Hemingway Review*, whose vision
and tireless effort have raised the standards of
Hemingway scholarship and provided the information
and tools which have benefited us all

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Introduction



This volume is an all-new sequel to a previous collection, *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: Critical Essays*, which was published in 1975. While a few of the essays here were originally published in the late 1970s, most were published in the 1980s and many in the last few years. In the first volume the "Comprehensive Checklist" (which broke new ground by listing the criticism by story) attempted to include all of the short story criticism, in English, from the beginning through the first part of 1975. The checklist at the end of this volume attempts to list all of the short story criticism from and including 1975 (not previously listed) up to early 1990. In doing so the checklist becomes the first comprehensive bibliography of Hemingway secondary materials published since Audre Hanneman published her *Supplement to Ernest Hemingway: A Comprehensive Bibliography* in 1975.

In my introduction I spoke of the checklist in the first volume as "a monster which has haunted and nearly overcome its creator." With this new compilation, the monster became nearly unmanageable, as I and several assistants over three years struggled with a body of Hemingway short story criticism that had grown enormous. All of the articles published in all the years prior to 1975 are roughly equal in number to those published in the decade following, and the output in the last decade is nearly double that of the preceding decade. The process of selecting the essays for this volume involved reading, evaluating, and segregating by type and topic nearly four hundred essays, published as articles or in books, from which we have been able to publish twenty-eight (plus five written just for this collection and the overview essay). Obviously, for reasons of space and distribution of topic a good many excellent essays had to be omitted.

There are a number of reasons for the immense growth of Hemingway short story criticism. Most important, I think, has been the recognition in recent years that, despite the continued popularity of several of his

novels, the short stories are Hemingway's great contribution to our literature. In addition, the antagonism inspired by the Hemingway public persona, which had turned many academics and critics against his work, has gradually, nearly three decades after his death in 1961, dissipated. Indeed, the change in the author's standing has been dramatic, although it has come so gradually over the last two decades that few have stood back and commented on it.

Those of us who have written about the author for many years, however, can feel a definite shift in the atmosphere. A good number of bright young scholars are devoting some or all of their attention to Hemingway research, many more women have become involved, and several older, well-established scholars are coming back or turning to Hemingway studies for the first time. Clearly, it is no longer an embarrassment in intellectual circles to be identified as someone who has written about Hemingway, and suddenly those who write about him no longer feel the need to be as defensive of their subject as they once were.

Beyond the elevation of Hemingway's status and the new talent this has attracted, there are other reasons why the short story criticism has not only expanded, but improved in quality from what in the mid-1970s appeared to be a criticism that was becoming sterile, ingrown, and repetitious. Perhaps the most important of these has been the availability, in the mid-1970s, of the Hemingway papers, first in temporary quarters and then at the Kennedy library. In addition, the process has no doubt been enriched by the publication of the *Selected Letters* in 1981, the previously unpublished "On the Art of the Short Story" (first published in the *Paris Review* and now reprinted in this volume) also in 1981, and, in more recent years, a series of new biographies and the posthumous publication of *Garden of Eden*. One stimulus has followed another in adding to our knowledge or altering our perspective of the man and his work.

The present volume is not only more substantial than the previous one, but its organizational pattern (which has since been imitated by other anthologists) has had to be altered to fit changes in the critical climate. The relatively recent concern with "theory" has turned our attention to methodology, the differences between critical approaches, and the philosophical underpinnings of critical processes. While the illumination of the short stories has been the primary criterion in my choice of essays, I thought it might be helpful to student and scholar, in order to respond to this concern, to display at the outset a wide variety of critical approaches, grouped together.

This section of the book contains some approaches which, like the

semiotic analysis of Robert Scholes, reflect the strict application of a theory with a specific name; others, like the essay by William Braasch Watson, were given names by me to reflect the dominant approach as I perceived it. The essay by Nina Baym does not set out to apply a specific feminist theory to "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," but it obviously applies, as many essays in recent years have, a generalized, feminist perspective to the material. Unfortunately, not every approach one might desire is represented in the section, since there are no essays on the short stories using some types of theory, such as phenomenology or deconstruction.

Lying, as I have thought of it, halfway between critical approaches and interpretative essays on individual stories are those essays grouped under Section II which focus on techniques and themes, rather than particular stories, and which discuss ideas that can be applied to several stories or the stories as a whole. New critical approaches have been joined in recent years by what can only be viewed as a wave of revisionism, and several of the essays in this section reflect this in rebutting traditional assumptions and turning to new possibilities. For example, the essay by Kenneth Lynn questions certain long-accepted tenets of Hemingway criticism, as set forth by such early commentators as Malcolm Cowley and Philip Young, and proposes a different sort of inner landscape for the writer as reflected in his work.

Indeed, with the new biographies by Michael Reynolds, Jeffrey Meyers, Peter Griffin, and Kenneth Lynn and with the textual research of such scholars as Paul Smith and Susan Beegel (both concentrating on the short story), a host of questions about the author and his work that once seemed settled have been opened up again, so that the atmosphere for discussion is freer and the opportunities for research more fertile than they have been for decades. All of a sudden, as Frederick Crews said recently, Hemingway criticism is fun once again.

The purpose of this volume remains largely the same as the first: "To bring together out of [the] welter of material many of the best essays on the stories, while trying to maintain the widest possible range of commentary." My hope is that this book will serve not so much as a collection of definitive commentaries, as a series of provocations, springboards to further discussion, while at the same time marking the way to the possibilities of new research. Again, as I said in my introduction, "Here, I would hope, we have some indication of what we have and do not have, of what we know and what we do not know." I would only add that there is much indication here also of what we thought we knew but now will have to wonder and think about further.

In two essays on the state of Hemingway criticism, one in 1975 and the other in 1988, I pointed out that one of the persistent problems has been repetition, since so many critics have written while largely unaware of what has already been said. This problem has become in recent years even more acute in response to the explosion of material—even the most well-intentioned scholar must have some difficulty in finding and reading everything he should read as background to his criticism. This is the main justification for our checklist, for confronting the monster. Call it a civic duty. Or putting deeds where one's mouth is.

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The Art of the Short Story

Ernest Hemingway



In March 1959 Ernest Hemingway's publisher Charles Scribner, Jr., suggested putting together a student's edition of Hemingway short stories. He listed the twelve stories which were most in demand for anthologies but thought that the collection could include Hemingway's favorites and that Hemingway could write a preface for classroom use. Hemingway responded favorably. He would write the preface in the form of a lecture on the art of the short story.

Hemingway worked on the preface at La Consula, the home of Bill and Annie Davis in Malaga. He was in Spain that summer to follow the mano a mano competition between the brother-in-law bullfighters, Dominguín and Ordóñez. Hemingway traveled with his friend, Antonio Ordóñez, and wrote about this rivalry in "The Dangerous Summer," a three-part article which appeared in Life.

*The first draft of the preface was written in May, and Hemingway completed the piece during the respite after Ordóñez was gored on May 30th. His wife, Mary, typed the draft, and, as she wrote in her book *How It Was*, she did not entirely approve of it. She wrote her husband a note suggesting rewrites and cuts to remove some of what she felt was its boastful, smug, and malicious tone. But Hemingway made only minor changes.*

Hemingway sent the introduction to Charles Scribner and proposed changing the book to a collection for the general public. Scribner agreed to the change. However, he diplomatically suggested not printing the preface as it stood but rather using only the relevant comments as introductory remarks to the individual stories. Scribner felt that the preface, written as a lecture for college students, would not be accepted by a reading audience which might well "misinterpret it as condescension." [Scribner to E. H. June 24, 1959.]

The idea of the book was dropped.

Hemingway wrote the preface as if it were an extemporaneous oral presentation before a class on the methods of short story writing. It is similar to a transcript of an informal talk. Judging it against literary standards or using it to assess Hemingway's literary capabilities would elevate it beyond this level and would be inappropriate. Both Hemingway's wife and his publisher were against its publica-

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tion, and in the end Hemingway agreed. It appears here because of its content. Hemingway relates the circumstances under which he wrote the short stories; he gives opinions on other writers, critics, and on his own works; he expresses views on the art of the short story.

The essay is published unedited except for some spelling corrections. A holograph manuscript, two typescripts, and an addendum, written for other possible selections for the book, are in the Hemingway Collection at the John F. Kennedy Library.*

Gertrude Stein who was sometimes very wise said to me on one of her wise days, "Remember, Hemingway, that remarks are not literature." The following remarks are not intended to be nor do they pretend to be literature. They are meant to be instructive, irritating and informative. No writer should be asked to write solemnly about what he has written. Truthfully, yes. Solemnly, no. Should we begin in the form of a lecture designed to counteract the many lectures you will have heard on the art of the short story?

Many people have a compulsion to write. There is no law against it and doing it makes them happy while they do it and presumably relieves them. Given editors who will remove the worst of their emissions, supply them with spelling and syntax and help them shape their thoughts and their beliefs, some compulsive writers attain a temporary fame. But when shit, or *merde*—a word which teacher will explain—is cut out of a book, the odor of it always remains perceptible to anyone with sufficient olfactory sensibility.

The compulsive writer would be advised not to attempt the short story. Should he make the attempt, he might well suffer the fate of the compulsive architect, which is as lonely an end as that of the compulsive bassoon player. Let us not waste our time considering the sad and lonely ends of these unfortunate creatures, gentlemen. Let us continue the exercise.

Are there any questions? Have you mastered the art of the short story? Have I been helpful? Or have I not made myself clear? I hope so.

Gentlemen, I will be frank with you. The masters of the short story come to no good end. You query this? You cite me Maugham? Longevity, gentlemen, is not an end. It is a prolongation. I cannot say fie upon it, since I have never fied on anything yet. Shuck if off, Jack. Don't fie on it.

Should we abandon rhetoric and realize at the same time that what is

*This introduction is reprinted from the *Paris Review* 79 (1981), where "The Art of the Short Story" was first published.

the most authentic hipster talk of today is the twenty-three skidoo of tomorrow? We should? What intelligent young people you are and what a privilege it is to be with you. Do I hear a request for authentic ballroom bananas? I do? Gentlemen, we have them for you in bunches.

Actually, as writers put it when they do not know how to begin a sentence, there is very little to say about writing short stories unless you are a professional explainer. If you can do it, you don't have to explain it. If you can not do it, no explanation will ever help.

A few things I have found to be true. If you leave out important things or events that you know about, the story is strengthened. If you leave or skip something because you do not know it, the story will be worthless. The test of any story is how very good the stuff is that you, not your editors, omit. A story in this book called "Big Two-Hearted River" is about a boy coming home beat to the wide from a war. Beat to the wide was an earlier and possibly more severe form of beat, since those who had it were unable to comment on this condition and could not suffer that it be mentioned in their presence. So the war, all mention of the war, anything about the war, is omitted. The river was the Fox River, by Seney, Michigan, not the Big Two-Hearted. The change of name was made purposely, not from ignorance nor carelessness but because Big Two-Hearted River is poetry, and because there were many Indians in the story, just as the war was in the story, and none of the Indians nor the war appeared. As you see, it is very simple and easy to explain.

In a story called "A Sea Change," everything is left out. I had seen the couple in the Bar Basque in St.-Jean-de-Luz and I knew the story too too well, which is the squared root of well, and use any well you like except mine. So I left the story out. But it is all there. It is not visible but it is there.

It is very hard to talk about your work since it implies arrogance or pride. I have tried to get rid of arrogance and replace it with humility and I do all right at that sometimes, but without pride I would not wish to continue to live nor to write and I publish nothing of which I am not proud. You can take that any way you like, Jack. I might not take it myself. But maybe we're built different.

Another story is "Fifty Grand." This story originally started like this:

"How did you handle Benny so easy, Jack?" Soldier asked him.

"Benny's an awful smart boxer," Jack said. "All the time he's in there, he's thinking. All the time he's thinking, I was hitting him."

I told this story to Scott Fitzgerald in Paris before I wrote "Fifty Grand" trying to explain to him how a truly great boxer like Jack Britton functioned. I wrote the story opening with that incident and when it was

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finished I was happy about it and showed it to Scott. He said he liked the story very much and spoke about it in so fulsome a manner that I was embarrassed. Then he said, "There is only one thing wrong with it, Ernest, and I tell you this as your friend. You have to cut out that old chestnut about Britton and Leonard."

At that time my humility was in such ascendance that I thought he must have heard the remark before or that Britton must have said it to someone else. It was not until I had published the story, from which I had removed that lovely revelation of the metaphysics of boxing that Fitzgerald in the way his mind was functioning that year so that he called an historic statement an "old chestnut" because he had heard it once and only once from a friend, that I realized how dangerous that attractive virtue, humility, can be. So do not be too humble, gentlemen. Be humble after but not during the action. They will all con you, gentlemen. But sometimes it is not intentional. Sometimes they simply do not know. This is the saddest state of writers and the one you will most frequently encounter. If there are no questions, let us press on.

My loyal and devoted friend Fitzgerald, who was truly more interested in my own career at this point than in his own, sent me to *Scribner's* with the story. It had already been turned down by Ray Long of *Cosmopolitan Magazine* because it had no love interest. That was okay with me since I eliminated any love interest and there were, purposely, no women in it except for two broads. Enter two broads as in Shakespeare, and they go out of the story. This is unlike what you will hear from your instructors, that if a broad comes into a story in the first paragraph, she must reappear later to justify her original presence. This is untrue, gentlemen. You may dispense with her, just as in life. It is also untrue that if a gun hangs on the wall when you open up the story, it must be fired by page fourteen. The chances are, gentlemen, that if it hangs upon the wall, it will not even shoot. If there are no questions, shall we press on? Yes, the unfireable gun may be a symbol. That is true. But with a good enough writer, the chances are some jerk just hung it there to look at. Gentlemen, you can't be sure. Maybe he is queer for guns, or maybe an interior decorator put it there. Or both.

So with pressure by Max Perkins on the editor, *Scribner's Magazine* agreed to publish the story and pay me two hundred and fifty dollars, if I would cut it to a length where it would not have to be continued into the back of the book. They call magazines books. There is significance in this but we will not go into it. They are not books, even if they put them in stiff covers. You have to watch this, gentlemen. Anyway, I explained without heat nor hope, seeing the built-in stupidity of the editor of the magazine

and his intransigence, that I had already cut the story myself and that the only way it could be shortened by five hundred words and make sense was to amputate the first five hundred. I had often done that myself with stories and it improved them. It would not have improved this story but I thought that was their ass not mine. I would put it back together in a book. They read differently in a book anyway. You will learn about this.

No, gentlemen, they would not cut the first five hundred words. They gave it instead to a very intelligent young assistant editor who assured me he could cut it with no difficulty. That was just what he did on his first attempt, and any place he took words out, the story no longer made sense. It had been cut for keeps when I wrote it, and afterwards at Scott's request I'd even cut out the metaphysics which, ordinarily, I leave in. So they quit on it finally and eventually, I understand, Edward Weeks got Ellery Sedgwick to publish it in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Then everyone wanted me to write fight stories and I did not write any more fight stories because I tried to write only one story on anything, if I got what I was after, because Life is very short if you like it and I knew that even then. There are other things to write about and other people who write very good fight stories. I recommend to you "The Professional" by W. C. Heinz.

Yes, the confidently cutting young editor became a big man on *Reader's Digest*. Or didn't he? I'll have to check that. So you see, gentlemen, you never know and what you win in Boston you lose in Chicago. That's symbolism, gentlemen, and you can run a saliva test on it. That is how we now detect symbolism in our group and so far it gives fairly satisfactory results. Not complete, mind you. But we are getting in to see our way through. Incidentally, within a short time *Scribner's Magazine* was running a contest for long short stories that broke back into the back of the book, and paying many times two hundred and fifty dollars to the winners.

Now since I have answered your perceptive questions, let us take up another story.

This story is called "The Light of the World." I could have called it "Behold I Stand at the Door and Knock" or some other stained-glass window title, but I did not think of it and actually "The Light of the World" is better. It is about many things and you would be ill-advised to think it is a simple tale. It is really, no matter what you hear, a love letter to a whore named Alice who at the time of the story would have dressed out at around two hundred and ten pounds. Maybe more. And the point of it is that nobody, and that goes for you, Jack, knows how we were then from

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how we are now. This is worse on women than on us, until you look into the mirror yourself some day instead of looking at women all the time, and in writing the story I was trying to do something about it. But there are very few basic things you can do anything about. So I do what the French call *constater*. Look that up. That is what you have to learn to do, and you ought to learn French anyway if you are going to understand short stories, and there is nothing rougher than to do it all the way. It is hardest to do about women and you must not worry when they say there are no such women as those you wrote about. That only means your women aren't like their women. You ever see any of their women, Jack? I have a couple of times and you would be appalled and I know you don't appall easy.

What I learned constructive about women, not just ethics like never blame them if they pox you because somebody poxed them and lots of times they don't even know they have it—that's in the first reader for squares—is, no matter *how* they get, always think of them the way they were on the best day they ever had in their lives. That's about all you can do about it and that is what I was trying for in the story.

Now there is another story called "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." Jack, I get a bang even yet from just writing the titles. That's why you write, no matter what they tell you. I'm glad to be with somebody I know now and those feeking students have gone. They haven't? Okay. Glad to have them with us. It is in you that our hope is. That's the stuff to feed the troops. Students, at ease.

This is a simple story in a way, because the woman, who I knew very well in real life but then invented out of, to make the woman for this story, is a bitch for the full course and doesn't change. You'll probably never meet the type because you haven't got the money. I haven't either but I get around. Now this woman doesn't change. She has been better, but she will never be any better anymore. I invented her complete with handles from the worst bitch I knew (then) and when I first knew her she'd been lovely. Not my dish, not my pigeon, not my cup of tea, but lovely for what she was and I was her all of the above which is whatever you make of it. This is as close as I can put it and keep it clean. This information is what you call the background of a story. You throw it all away and invent from what you know. I should have said that sooner. That's all there is to writing. That, a perfect ear—call it selective—absolute pitch, the devotion to your work and respect for it that a priest of God has for his, and then have the guts of a burglar, no conscience except to writing, and you're in, gentlemen. It's easy. Anybody can write if he is cut out for it and applies himself. Never give it a thought. Just have those few

requisites. I mean the way you have to write now to handle the way now is now. There was a time when it was nicer, much nicer and all that has been well written by nicer people. They are all dead and so are their times, but they handled them very well. Those times are over and writing like that won't help you now.

But to return to this story. The woman called Margot Macomber is no good to anybody now except for trouble. You can bang her but that's about all. The man is a nice jerk. I knew him very well in real life, so invent him too from everything I know. So he is just how he really was, only he is invented. The White Hunter is my best friend and he does not care what I write as long as it is readable, so I don't invent him at all. I just disguise him for family and business reasons, and to keep him out of trouble with the Game Department. He is the furthest thing from a square since they invented the circle, so I just have to take care of him with an adequate disguise and he is as proud as though we both wrote it, which actually you always do in anything if you go back far enough. So it is a secret between us. That's all there is to that story except maybe the lion when he is hit and I am thinking inside of him really, not faked. I can think inside of a lion, really. It's hard to believe and it is perfectly okay with me if you don't believe it. Perfectly. Plenty of people have used it since, though, and one boy used it quite well, making only one mistake. Making any mistake kills you. This mistake killed him and quite soon everything he wrote was a mistake. You have to watch yourself, Jack, every minute, and the more talented you are the more you have to watch these mistakes because you will be in faster company. A writer who is not going all the way up can make all the mistakes he wants. None of it matters. He doesn't matter. The people who like him don't matter either. They could drop dead. It wouldn't make any difference. It's too bad. As soon as you read one page by anyone you can tell whether it matters or not. This is sad and you hate to do it. I don't want to be the one that tells them. So don't make any mistakes. You see how easy it is? Just go right in there and be a writer.

That about handles that story. Any questions? No, I don't know whether she shot him on purpose any more than you do. I could find out if I asked myself because I invented it and I could go right on inventing. But you have to know where to stop. That is what makes a short story. Makes it short at least. The only hint I could give you is that it is my belief that the incidence of husbands shot accidentally by wives who are bitches and really work at it is very low. Should we continue?

If you are interested in how you get the idea for a story, this is how it was with "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." They have you ticketed and

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always try to make it that you are someone who can only write about themselves. I am using in this lecture the spoken language, which varies. It is one of the ways to write, so you might as well follow it and maybe you will learn something. Anyone who can write can write spoken, pedantic, inexorably dull, or pure English prose, just as slot machines can be set for straight, percentage, give-away or stealing. No one who can write spoken ever starves except at the start. The others you can eat irregularly on. But any good writer can do them all. This is spoken, approved for over fourteen I hope. Thank you.

Anyway we came home from Africa, which is a place you stay until the money runs out or you get smacked, one year and at quarantine I said to the ship news reporters when somebody asked me what my projects were that I was going to work and when I had some more money go back to Africa. The different wars killed off that project and it took nineteen years to get back. Well it was in the papers and a really nice and really fine and really rich woman invited me to tea and we had a few drinks as well and she had read in the papers about this project, and why should I have to wait to go back for any lack of money? She and my wife and I could go to Africa any time and money was only something to be used intelligently for the best enjoyment of good people and so forth. It was a sincere and fine and good offer and I liked her very much and I turned down the offer.

So I get down to Key West and I start to think what would happen to a character like me whose defects I know, if I had accepted that offer. So I start to invent and I make myself a guy who would do what I invent. I know about the dying part because I had been through all that. Not just once. I got it early, in the middle and later. So I invent how someone I know who cannot sue me—that is me—would turn out, and put into one short story things you would use in, say, four novels if you were careful and not a spender. I throw everything I had been saving into the story and spend it all. I really throw it away, if you know what I mean. I am not gambling with it. Or maybe I am. Who knows? Real gamblers don't gamble. At least you think they don't gamble. They gamble, Jack, don't worry. So I make up the man and the woman as well as I can and I put all the true stuff in and with all the load, the most load any short story ever carried, it still takes off and it flies. This makes me very happy. So I thought that and the Macomber story are as good short stories as I can write for a while, so I lose interest and take up other forms of writing.

Any questions? The leopard? He is part of the metaphysics. I did not hire out to explain that nor a lot of other things. I know, but I am under no obligation to tell you. Put it down to *omertá*. Look that word up. I

dislike explainers, apologists, stoolies, pimps. No writer should be any one of those for his own work. This is just a little background, Jack, that won't do either of us any harm. You see the point, don't you? If not it is too bad.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't explain for, apologize for or pimp or tout for some other writer. I have done it and the best luck I had was doing it for Faulkner. When they didn't know him in Europe, I told them all how he was the best we had and so forth and I over-humbled with him plenty and built him up about as high as he could go because he never had a break then and he was good then. So now whenever he has a few shots, he'll tell students what's wrong with me or tell Japanese or anybody they send him to, to build up our local product. I get tired of this but I figure what the hell he's had a few shots and maybe he even believes it. So you asked me just now what I think about him, as everybody does and I always stall, so I say you know how good he is. Right. You ought to. What is wrong is he cons himself sometimes pretty bad. That may just be the sauce. But for quite a while when he hits the sauce toward the end of a book, it shows bad. He gets tired and he goes on and on, and that sauce writing is really hard on who has to read it. I mean if they care about writing. I thought maybe it would help if I read it using the sauce myself, but it wasn't any help. Maybe it would have helped if I was fourteen. But I was only fourteen one year and then I would have been too busy. So that's what I think about Faulkner. You ask that I sum it up from the standpoint of a professional. Very good writer. Cons himself now. Too much sauce. But he wrote a really fine story called "The Bear" and I would be glad to put it in this book for your pleasure and delight, if I had written it. But you can't write them all, Jack.

It would be simpler and more fun to talk about other writers and what is good and what is wrong with them, as I saw when you asked me about Faulkner. He's easy to handle because he talks so much for a supposed silent man. Never talk, Jack, if you are a writer, unless you have the guy write it down and have you go over it. Otherwise, they get it wrong. That's what you think until they play a tape back at you. Then you know how silly it sounds. You're a writer aren't you? Okay, shut up and write. What was that question?

Did I really write three stories in one day in Madrid, the way it said in that interview in *The Paris Review* and *Horizon*? Yes sir. I was hotter than a—let's skip it, gentlemen. I was laden with uninhibited energy. Or should we say this energy was canalized into my work. Such states are compounded by the brisk air of the Guadarramas (Jack, was it cold) the highly seasoned bacalao vizcaíno (dried cod fish, Jack) a certain vague

loneliness (I was in love and the girl was in Bologna and I couldn't sleep anyway, so why not write.) So I wrote.

"The stories you mention I wrote in one day in Madrid on May 16 when it snowed out the San Isidro bullfights. First I wrote 'The Killers' which I'd tried to write before and failed. Then after lunch I got in bed to keep warm and wrote 'Today is Friday.' I had so much juice I thought maybe I was going crazy and I had about six other stories to write. So I got dressed and walked to Fornos, the old bull fighter's cafe, and drank coffee and then came back and wrote 'Ten Indians.' This made me very sad and I drank some brandy and went to sleep. I'd forgotten to eat and one of the waiters brought me up some bacalao and a small steak and fried potatoes and a bottle of Valdepeñas.

"The woman who ran the Pension was always worried that I did not eat enough and she had sent the waiter. I remember sitting up in bed and eating, and drink the Valdepeñas. The waiter said he would bring up another bottle. He said the Señora wanted to know if I was going to write all night. I said no, I thought I would lay off for a while. Why don't you try to write just one more, the waiter asked. I'm only supposed to write one, I said. Nonsense, he said. You could write six. I'll try tomorrow, I said. Try it tonight, he said. What do you think the old woman sent the food up for?

"I'm tired, I told him. Nonsense, he said (the word was not nonsense). You tired after three miserable little stories. Translate me one.

"Leave me alone, I said. How am I going to write it if you don't leave me alone. So I sat up in bed and drank the Valdepeñas and thought what a hell of a writer I was if the first story was as good as I'd hoped."

I have used the same words in answering that the excellent Plimpton elicited from me in order to avoid error or repetition. If there are no more questions, should we continue?

It is very bad for writers to be hit on the head too much. Sometimes you lose months when you should have and perhaps would have worked well but sometimes a long time after the memory of the sensory distortions of these woundings will produce a story which, while not justifying the temporary cerebral damage, will palliate it. "A Way You'll Never Be" was written at Key West, Florida, some fifteen years after the damage it depicts, both to a man, a village and a countryside, had occurred. No questions? I understand. I understand completely. However, do not be alarmed. We are not going to call for a moment of silence. Nor for the man in the white suit. Nor for the net. Now gentlemen, and I notice a sprinkling of ladies who have drifted in attracted I hope by the sprinkling of applause. Thank you. Just *what* stories do you yourselves care for? I

must not impose on you exclusively those that find favor with their author. Do *you* too care for any of them?

You like "The Killers"? So good of you. And why? Because it had Burt Lancaster and Ava Gardner in it? Excellent. Now we are getting somewhere. It is always a pleasure to remember Miss Gardner as she was then. No, I never met Mr. Lancaster. I can't tell you what he is really like but everyone says he is terrific. The background of that story is that I had a lawyer who had cancer and he wanted cash rather than any long term stuff. You can see his point I hope. So when he was offered a share in the picture for me and less cash, he took the more cash. It turned out badly for us both. He died eventually and I retained only an academic interest in the picture. But the company lets me run it off free when I want to see Miss Gardner and hear the shooting. It is a good picture and the only good picture ever made of a story of mine. One of the reasons for that is that John Huston wrote the script. Yes I know him. Is everything true about him that they say? No. But the best things are. Isn't that interesting.

You mean background about the story not the picture? That's not very sporting, young lady. Didn't you see the class was enjoying itself finally? Besides it has a sordid background. I hesitate to bring it in, on account of there is no statute of limitations on what it deals with. Gene Tunney, who is a man of wide culture, once asked me, "Ernest, wasn't that Andre Anderson in 'The Killers'?" I told it was and that the town was Summit, Illinois, not Summit, N.J. We left it at that. I thought about that story a long long time before I invented it, and I had to be as far away as Madrid before I invented it properly. That story probably had more left out of it than anything I ever wrote. More even than when I left the war out of "Big Two-Hearted River." I left out all Chicago, which is hard to do in 2951 words.

Another time I was leaving out good was in "A Clean Well-Lighted Place." There I really had luck. I left out everything. That is about as far as you can go, so I stood on that one and haven't drawn to that since.

I trust you follow me, gentlemen. As I said at the start, there is nothing to writing short stories once you get the knack of it.

A story I can beat, and I promise you I will, is "The Undefeated." But I leave it in to show you the difference between when you leave it all in and when you take it out. The stories where you leave it all in do not re-read like the ones where you leave it out. They understand easier, but when you have read them once or twice you can't re-read them. I could give you examples in everybody who writes, but writers have enough enemies without doing it to each other. All really good writers know exactly what

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is wrong in all other good writers. There are no perfect writers unless they write just a very little bit and then stand on it. But writers have no business fingering another writer to outsiders while he is alive. After a writer is dead and doesn't have to work any more, anything goes. A son of a bitch alive is a son of a bitch dead. I am not talking about rows between writers. They are okay and can be comic. If someone puts a thumb in your eye, you don't protest. You thumb him back. He fouls you, you foul him back. That teaches people to keep it clean. What I mean is, you shouldn't give it to another writer, I mean really give it to him. I know you shouldn't do it because I did it once to Sherwood Anderson. I did it because I was righteous, which is the worst thing you can be, and I thought he was going to pot the way he was writing and that I could kid him out of it by showing him how awful it was. So I wrote *The Torrents of Spring*. It was cruel to do, and it didn't do any good, and he just wrote worse and worse. What the hell business of mine was it if he wanted to write badly? None. But then I was righteous and more loyal to writing than to my friend. I would have shot anybody then, not kill them, just shoot them a little, if I thought it would straighten them up and make them write right. Now I know that there is nothing you can do about any writer ever. The seeds of their destruction are in them from the start, and the thing to do about writers is get along with them if you see them, and try not to see them. All except a very few, and all of them except a couple are dead. Like I said, once they're dead anything goes as long as it's true.

I'm sorry I threw at Anderson. It was cruel and I was a son of a bitch to do it. The only thing I can say is that I was as cruel to myself then. But that is no excuse. He was a friend of mine, but that was no excuse for doing it to him. Any questions? Ask me that some other time.

This brings us to another story, "My Old Man." The background of this was all the time we spent at the races at San Siro when I used to be in hospital in Milan in 1918, and the time put in at the tracks in Paris when we really worked at it. Handicapping I mean. Some people say that this story is derived from a story about harness racing by Sherwood Anderson called "I'm a Fool." I do not believe this. My theory is that it is derived from a jockey I knew very well and a number of horses I knew, one of which I was in love with. I invented the boy in my story and I think the boy in Sherwood's story was himself. If you read both stories you can form your own opinion. Whatever it is, it is all right with me. The best things Sherwood wrote are in two books, *Winesburg, Ohio* and *The Triumph of the Egg*. You should read them both. Before you know too much about things, they are better. The best thing about Sherwood was

he was the kind of guy at the start his name made you think of Sherwood Forest, while in Bob Sherwood the name only made you think of a playwright.

Any other stories you find in this book are in because I liked them. If you like them too I will be pleased. Thank you very much. It has been nice to be with you.

*June 1959
La Consula
Churriana
Malaga, Spain*



Critical Approaches



The Unifying Consciousness of a Divided Conscience: Nick Adams as Author of *In Our Time*

Debra A. Modellmog



In the lengthy passage that was Hemingway's original ending to "Big Two-Hearted River," Nick Adams, having caught "one good trout" (NAS, 213), rests and reflects on many things, particularly his writing.¹ For readers of *In Our Time*, who have arrived with "Big Two-Hearted River" at the book's final story, this interior monologue (had Hemingway kept it) would have revealed some interesting facts, but none more so than that Nick has written two of the stories we have just read: "Indian Camp" and "My Old Man." Indeed, in the final scene of this ending, Nick heads back to camp "holding something in his head" (NAS, 220) and is apparently preparing to write "Big Two-Hearted River" itself. But lest we misunderstand these stories, Nick also explains his method of composition: "Nick in the stories was never himself. He made him up. Of course he'd never seen an Indian woman having a baby. That was what made it good. Nobody knew that. He'd seen a woman have a baby on the road to Karagatch and tried to help her. That was the way it was" (NAS, 217-18).

Most critics who discuss this rejected conclusion generally assume that Hemingway lost control of his art here, identified too closely with Nick, and began writing autobiography rather than fiction.² In fact, both Hemingway's critics and biographers quote from this monologue as if Hemingway, not Nick, were the speaker.³ Even when a critic, like Robert Gibb, takes Hemingway at his word, he concludes that we need not worry finally about distinguishing between Nick and Hemingway. Whether a story has been written by "Hemingway the writer who wrote in the character of Nick Adams" or by "Nick Adams the writer who, by existing, shaped the idea of a man and his cosmos" matters not, according to Gibb: "Remembrance goes both ways."⁴

Remembrance may go both ways, but Gibb is finally wrong to suggest that our understanding of a story remains the same regardless of whom we see as its author. Obviously, all words lead back to Hemingway, and I

would not wish to suggest that in stories of *In Our Time* he is introducing the kinds of author-character confusions we have come to expect from many postmodern writers. However, as I hope to show, there are some good reasons for seeing Nick as the implied author of *In Our Time*, and doing so resolves many confusions about the book's unity, structure, vision, and significance. Moreover, such an approach casts new light on Nick Adams as a character separate from yet also an extension of Hemingway.

In his book-length study of Nick, Joseph Flora states, "No one would argue that 'Big Two-Hearted River' would gain from the inclusion of Nick's several memories and theories of writing."⁵ I want to make clear from the start that I wholeheartedly agree with this statement. From the moment Nick arrives at Seney he does everything in his power to hold back his thoughts, yet in the nine pages that Hemingway finally rejected, Nick suddenly begins thinking and does so calmly and contentedly. This ending would have reduced the story's tension and given us a very different Nick Adams. That Hemingway realized this indicates how clear a vision he had formed of what he wanted to accomplish in his fiction. His letter to Robert McAlmon—written in mid-November 1924, about three months after he finished "Big Two-Hearted River" and two months after he had arranged and submitted *In Our Time* for publication—provides the fullest explanation of his reasoning: "I have decided that all that mental conversation in the long fishing story is the shit and have cut it all out. The last nine pages. The story was interrupted you know just when I was going good and I could never get back into it and finish it. I got a hell of a shock when I realized how bad it was and that shocked me back into the river again and I've finished it off the way it ought to have been all along. Just the straight fishing."⁶ In brief, Hemingway recognized that "all that mental conversation" jarred aesthetically with the rest of his story and actually contradicted its point.⁷ Wisely, he cut.

But just because Hemingway saved "Big Two-Hearted River" by removing Nick's monologue does not mean that we, like a jury commanded to disregard a witness's last remark, should automatically ignore all we learn here. Certainly critics are right that Hemingway comes close to crossing the boundary between fiction and experience in these pages, but that is a line he almost always approaches in his Nick Adams stories. As Flora notes, "Although Nick is not Hemingway, he reflects more of Hemingway than any other Hemingway hero,"⁸ and Philip Young observes that Nick has "much in common" with his creator and was, for Hemingway, "a special kind of mask."⁹ Significantly, Hemingway's letter to McAlmon disposes that he revised his conclusion because he was

worried about the artistic integrity of his story, not about his artistic persona.

Ironically, it is actually *because* Hemingway was so close to Nick and yet not Nick that he was able to conceive of surrendering authorship to Nick without destroying the illusion of his fictional world. Of course, when he wrote "Big Two-Hearted River," Hemingway had already written almost every story in *In Our Time* (only "The Battler" and "On the Quai at Smyrna" came later), and so obviously he did not plan from the time he composed these stories to attribute any of them to Nick. However, Nick shared so much of Hemingway's personality and experience that turning him into the author of the stories *ex post facto* required very little work. All Hemingway had to do was supply Nick with the relevant background, specifically a writing career and some postwar history. This he was doing in the nine pages he eventually cut out. And, as I indicated above, Hemingway actually gave Nick the background needed to be considered author of all of *In Our Time*, not just of the two stories he specifically mentions, "My Old Man" and "Indian Camp."

The evidence leading to this deduction begins with a sentence quoted earlier in which Nick tells us: "Nick in the stories was never himself." The use of the plural "stories" is significant. Because Nick is not in "My Old Man," he apparently has written other stories about himself besides "Indian Camp." This hypothesis is supported by Nick's references in this lengthy monologue to people and places that play a part in other Nick Adams stories. For example, Nick thinks about fishing at Hortons Creek (NAS, 216), the scene of the breakup with Marjorie in "The End of Something," and he remembers "drinking with Bill's old man" (NAS, 215) which calls to mind "The Three-Day Blow." He also mentions his wife, Helen, a figure whose existence we learn of in "Cross-Country Snow." Finally, Nick states that his family has misunderstood his stories, believing that they were all recountings of his experience (NAS, 217). One implication of this statement is that his relatives have been reading fiction in which Nick appears as a central character and have presumed that the other characters are themselves; the most likely candidate to provoke this reaction would be "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife."

But Nick's memories of people and places are not limited to those which materialize in stories about himself. Many of his allusions also recall non-Nick narratives of *In Our Time*. For instance, the woman giving birth on the road to Karagatch, the encounter from which Nick indicates that "Indian Camp" derives, is presented without change in chapter 2. Nick also states that too much talking had made the war unreal (NAS, 217), an attitude shared by Harold Krebs in "Soldier's Home." The

matador Maera figures prominently in Nick's thoughts (e.g., "Maera was the greatest man he'd ever known," *NAS*, 216), as he does in chapters 13 and 14 of *In Our Time*. Nick even confesses that "His whole inner life had been bullfights all one year" (*NAS*, 216), an obsession that could explain why six of the fifteen chapters deal with that subject. All of these connections between Nick's memories reviewed during his fishing trip to upper Michigan and the narratives of *In Our Time* support the premise that this original conclusion supplied the personal history necessary to see Nick as the author of this book.

To repeat what I said earlier, we need not assume that Nick lost all of this past when we lost this ending. In fact, a key sentence in the version of "Big Two-Hearted River" that was finally published implies that this background did not disappear forever but simply moved, so to speak, underground. Soon after Nick starts hiking away from Seney and toward the river, he discovers that "He felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs" (*IOT*, 134).¹⁰ Exactly why Nick feels so relieved to leave behind these three needs becomes clear when we see *In Our Time* as the product of his experiences and imagination. Although obviously we cannot pin down the precise date when Nick wrote any particular story in *In Our Time*—excluding perhaps "Big Two-Hearted River"—we can, I think, safely infer that he composed most of the book after World War I. Not only do most of the stories describe events of this war or shortly thereafter (the Greco-Turkish War, American couples visiting Europe, soldiers returning to the States), but also Nick admits that "He always worked best when Helen was unwell" (*NAS*, 218), a condition that definitely arises after the war. By roughly dating the composition of these stories, we are able to connect them to that stage in Nick's life immediately following World War I, and they can, therefore, help us to understand the Nick Adams we meet in "Big Two-Hearted River."

In approaching the stories of *In Our Time* as if Nick were their author, we discover that it will, indeed, be easier to trace through them Nick's recent psychological history than his actual history. Because Nick has told us that he was never himself in his stories and because we lack the biographical evidence (letters, memoirs, interviews) that usually fill the gap between an author's life and his fiction, we are left wondering where we might find the real Nick Adams. The fact that Nick's family has taken his fiction for autobiography suggests that, like Hemingway, Nick was drawing heavily from life when he wrote his stories.¹¹ Still, we will have to guess, for the most part, at what Nick actually experienced, at "the way it was" (*NAS*, 218). But since our main interest is Nick's psyche, we need

not worry too much about our inability to sort reality from imagination. By looking for repeated patterns and by studying the subjects that Nick chooses to develop as well as his manner of presenting those subjects, we should uncover those fixations of his imagination that reveal his basic outlook on life.

Having established the parameters of our investigation, we find new fascination in one fact about Nick's history that we *do* know: "he'd never seen an Indian woman having a baby. . . . He'd seen a woman have a baby on the road to Karagatch and tried to help her." This confession about the source of "Indian Camp" indicates, first of all, that the woman Nick attempted to help has affected him deeply. As I have already noted, Nick reports this encounter directly in chapter 2 of *In Our Time*, a description which ends with the comment "Scared sick looking at it" (21). Apparently neither version alone was enough to purge Nick of this memory, and the question is why he is so preoccupied with it.

Part of the answer could lie in the transformations Nick makes when turning the experience into fiction. Not only does he concentrate on the pain and suffering of childbirth, but he also changes the witness of the delivery from an adult immersed in war and evacuation to a child involved with family life and night-time adventures. Such a transference is psychologically symbolic. It implies, first, that the older Nick views his meeting with the woman on the road to Karagatch as an initiation of the innocent. By projecting himself as a young boy present at a difficult childbirth, Nick suggests that he feels victimized by the exigencies of the adult world ("It was an awful mess to put you through," his father says—*IOT*, 18) and also reveals a lingering inability to accept suffering and dying ("[C]an't you give her something to make her stop screaming?" "Do ladies always have such a hard time having babies?" "Do many men kill themselves?" "Is dying hard?"—*IOT*, 16, 19). A strong degree of self-pity thus permeates the story, especially its final scene where the young Nick questions the all-knowing father. However, Nick also attacks that self-indulgence with self-irony by ending his story with the child's denial of his own mortality, a denial that he, a war veteran and writer, now knows to be a lie.

But "Indian Camp" discloses more about Nick than just the fact that he feels victimized and confused by life. It also reveals his despair, possibly even his guilt, over being unable to ease the suffering of the woman on the road to Karagatch. In describing the source of his story, Nick tells us that he "tried" to help this woman, a qualifier which implies failure. He reproduces that sense of helplessness and frustration in the person of the Indian father who commits suicide because he "couldn't stand things"

(*IOT*, 19). But he also places the suffering Indian mother in the professional hands of Dr. Adams, who *does* stop her pain and delivers her child. Nick thereby completes in his imagination what he failed to do in reality. Fiction serves as wish fulfillment by enabling Nick to control a world that seems to deny all attempts at such control.

Feelings of horror and frustration, and a desire not to enter the complex realm of adulthood help to explain why Nick has built two separate narratives out of his meeting with the woman in Asia Minor. But, in fact, this focus on pain and suffering—both experienced and observed, physical and mental—countered by a wish to escape or deny that vision actually forms a pattern found throughout the stories of *In Our Time*, especially those in which Nick is a central character. In “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” we are witnesses to the marriage of incompetence and insularity and find that its sole issue is incompatibility. The young Nick responds to the friction of his parents’ relationship and the myopia of his mother by ignoring the latter’s summons for that of black squirrels. In “The End of Something” and “The Three-Day Blow,” Nick discovers for himself the agony of relationships and reacts to that pain, first, by retreating from all companionship, even that of his friend Bill, and then by retreating from the home, the conventional domain of woman, to the woods where “the Marge business was no longer so tragic. It was not even very important. The wind blew everything like that away” (*IOT*, 49). Nick learns in “The Battler” about the cruelty of society and the viciousness of insanity, a lesson which ends, once again, in confused escape. And, finally, in chapter 6, the violence of war so shatters Nick’s spine and peace of mind that he vows to make “a separate peace,” to desert not only the battlefield but also the patriotism that led him to that destructive arena.

A quick glance at the six non-Nick stories which follow chapter 6—our last look at Nick until he reappears in “Cross-Country Snow”—is enough to confirm the paradigm. In fact, although the flight from pain is not depicted as regularly in these stories, the vision they present is so similar to that found in the Nick narratives that we can have no doubt that their author is the same. In “A Very Short Story” a soldier who wants to marry his girlfriend-nurse “to make it so they could not lose it” (*IOT*, 65) does lose “it.” The woman jilts him, and he subsequently loses his health when he contracts gonorrhoea from a salesgirl in the backseat of a cab. Harold Krebs, the soldier come home, loses touch with the reality of World War I and his own identity: by lying he “lost everything” (*IOT*, 70). The revolutionist, failing to comprehend the political reality of the world, is captured by the Swiss and loses his freedom; the narrator of his story

has already lost his own political idealism. And the couples in “Mr. and Mrs. Elliot,” “Cat in the Rain,” and “Out of Season” all dramatize loss of understanding, communication, and love; in place of these things they substitute reading, a cat, writing reams of poetry, a lesbian affair, fishing.

This consistency of vision found throughout the stories we have examined so far suggests that Nick has a fairly inflexible, troubled way of seeing the world. No matter what or whom he writes about, he tends to view life as a losing proposition. Gertrude Stein’s “You are all a lost generation” describes *In Our Time* as aptly as it describes *The Sun Also Rises* in this sense: Nick seems to believe that the things most worth having and caring about—life, love, ideals, companions, peace, freedom—will be lost sooner or later, and he is not sure how to cope with this assurance, except through irony, bitterness, and, sometimes, wishful thinking. Although we cannot determine definitely when such a belief was formed, the most likely candidate to have precipitated this change is, of course, Nick’s involvement in two wars—WWI and the Greco-Turkish war of 1922—which brought him face to face with many kinds of losses, especially of life and ideals. As I have already discussed, Nick was so shaken by his encounter with the pregnant woman on the road to Karagatch, an encounter that certainly included violent pain and possibly death, that he created two stories out of it. The several other narratives of *In Our Time* depicting the violence and senselessness of war (“On the Quai at Smyrna” and chapters 3, 4, 5, and 7) emphasize Nick’s obsession with these matters.

And as if we needed further evidence, the bullfighting chapters (9–14) reinforce the extent and nature of Nick’s fixation. Nick, we recall, has declared that “His whole inner life had been bullfights all one year,” and thus he implies that these narratives represent his inner experience as much as his actual experience. In general, these six chapters repeat themes and images found in the earlier war chapters: men and animals being maimed and killed, cowardice, fear, rare stoicism in the face of death, even rarer triumphs over the enemy, be it man or beast. However, the most interesting chapter in terms of Nick’s mental state is the last one in which Nick “kills off” his friend, the matador Maera, a man who, as Nick’s monologue makes clear, is still living. By projecting Maera’s death, Nick seems to be preparing himself for the inevitable, the loss of another comrade like Rinaldi whose situation in chapter 6 closely resembles Maera’s: both men lie face down, silent, still, unable to defend themselves, waiting for stretchers to carry them off the field.

In “Big Two-Hearted River” we find another hint at how much Nick is bothered by losing friends when he thinks about Hopkins, a memory

associated with bitterness and one he is glad exhaustion prevents him from contemplating further. Hopkins seems to have disappeared suddenly from Nick's circle of comrades—either because of death or wealth—for “They never saw Hopkins again,” despite plans for a fishing trip the next summer (*IOT*, 141). As Nick says in the excised conclusion to “Big Two-Hearted River”—in a statement that refers to artists but seems to have more general applications—“They died and that was the hell of it. They worked all their lives and then got old and died” (*NAS*, 219). In sum, part of what brought Nick to the Big Two-Hearted River is the same thing that brought him to writing: a need to come to terms with all the loss he has experienced in the last few years and, equally important, the loss he has come to expect.

That Nick takes his trip to upper Michigan to restore both his mind and his spirit debilitated by war has, of course, been the accepted reading of “Big Two-Hearted River” ever since critics began to assess the story formally.¹² Hence, my analysis so far has primarily enabled me to clarify the state of Nick's mind, the memories which are troubling him. However, an important question regarding Nick's trip which has never been satisfactorily settled is why he waits so long after the war to take it. Many readers of *In Our Time* have assumed that its Nick stories are arranged chronologically so that the Nick who appears in “Cross-Country Snow,” the husband and soon-to-be father, is slightly younger than the Nick who appears in “Big Two-Hearted River.” But if this chronology is correct, then we somehow have to explain why Nick, who seems healthy in “Cross-Country Snow,” could suddenly become so unstable that he must take off to the Michigan woods to escape “the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs.”

In 1972, Philip Young resolved Nick's apparent about-face by reversing the order of these two stories in *The Nick Adams Stories*. “Big Two-Hearted River” takes place, he asserted, immediately after World War I; “Cross-Country Snow” follows, displaying the success of Nick's recuperative journey to the river.¹³ Yet Hemingway's original conclusion to “Big Two-Hearted River” disputes this rearrangement, for in it Nick mentions Helen and discusses the reactions his friends have had to his marriage. Obviously, when Hemingway wrote this story he saw Nick as a married man, someone who had been back from the war for some time. But even without this external evidence, we should still, I think, date “Big Two-Hearted River” several years after the war. Support for this proposal lies in the stories that Nick has written, especially in those that come after chapter 6 describing Nick's wounding.

The non-Nick stories that follow this chapter might seem, simply by

virtue of their point of view, to be based less on Nick's actual experience and more on his imagination than those narratives in which his namesake plays a central role. However, without biographical evidence we cannot prove this. Given some of the parallels between Nick's ideas stated in the excised "Big Two-Hearted River" monologue and those presented in the non-Nick stories, it appears that Nick is still drawing heavily from his life. To repeat an earlier example, Nick claims that the war was made unreal by too much talking, an assertion that sounds very similar to Harold Krebs's discovery that "to be listened to at all he had to lie, and after he had done this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it" (*IOT*, 69).

Why Nick should choose to present some of his experiences through the medium of his alter ego and other experiences through varying viewpoints could have to do, therefore, with his sensitivity to certain subjects. In other words, Nick might romanticize a protagonist named after himself yet be willing to describe his most painful, embarrassing, and passionate experiences when safely shielded—from both his readers and himself—behind a more opaque persona. Young maintains that this is the approach Hemingway took in his writing: "he tended to smuggle certain things away in his fiction; if they were compromising or shameful and he wanted to get rid of them he chose masks much less transparent than Nick's."¹⁴ In a classic psychoanalytic paradox, the closer the matter is to Nick the writer, the further away Nick the character is likely to be. The non-Nick stories can thus hold the key to Nick's innermost secrets and fears.

The area of chronology provides the first clue that the non-Nick stories reflect those anxieties that trouble Nick most deeply. As we have seen, the first half of *In Our Time* traces the growth of Nick's alter ego from a young boy to a young man, almost qualifying it as a *bildungsroman*. However, throughout the rest of the stories, except for "My Old Man," the age of the male protagonist remains steady, from late teens to mid twenties, or approximately Nick's age at the time he wrote these narratives. And while an age correspondence between the male characters in the non-Nick stories and Nick himself does not definitely prove that the former are fictional alter egos, it does seem more than just a coincidence that Nick has written so many stories about men who are basically his age or a bit younger.

Moreover, these men share more with Nick than simply his age. Excluding the narrator of "The Revolutionist" (whose story may or may not be founded in Nick's history), all of these men are pictured in situations which we know—from the discarded conclusion to "Big Two-

Hearted River"—that Nick himself has recently experienced, specifically, returning from the war and getting married. Once again, we cannot be sure how directly Nick has drawn from his own life in creating these stories, and so the more general patterns and attitudes are what most concern us.

In the two stories about recovering soldiers, "A Very Short Story" and "Soldier's Home," the protagonists attempt to engage in normal civilian life, yet find this participation difficult. The anonymous soldier's plans for such a life are foiled when Luz jilts him; Harold Krebs is simply repulsed by the hypocrisy of postwar America and its middle-class life-style. However, both men react, rather than act, and consequently lose the chance to control their own destinies. The soldier rebounds from Luz into the arms of a nameless salesgirl who gives him not love but gonorrhea. Krebs surrenders to his family's demands to lie and to get a job and thereby contributes to the hypocrisy he detests. These stories thus show us men who are greatly confused about their futures after returning from the war.

Significantly, the problems that the soldier and Krebs have adjusting to life after the war center as much on women as on making the transition from a military to a civilian lifestyle. The soldier had been ready to change his life radically upon returning to America. He was going to give up both alcohol and his friends; all he wanted was to get a job and get married. He blames Luz for destroying that dream. Krebs "would have liked to have a girl" (*IOT*, 71), but he dreads the consequences, that is, the complications involved in close relationships. The difficulties that these two men have with women prepares us for the three non-Nick stories preceding "Cross-Country Snow," the so-called marriage group of *In Our Time*. In these stories—"Mr. and Mrs. Elliot," "Cat in the Rain," and "Out of Season"—we observe the disintegration of three marriages. And although each relationship is falling apart for its own reason, the disintegration always hinges on an awareness of the disparity between the ideal and the real.

This awareness is revealed directly in "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot," for both partners had kept themselves "pure" but were equally disappointed on their wedding night. The physical insufficiency of their lovemaking is more than just sexual frustration. Despite their efforts, they cannot conceive what they most desire: a child. In "Cat in the Rain" and "Out of Season," the general cause of the couples' discontent is more subtly conveyed, but a key phrase indicates that, once again, it comes down to unfulfilled expectations. The wife in the former story compares herself to the cat outside her hotel window when she declares, first, that "It isn't *any fun* to be a poor kitty out in the rain" and, then, that "If I can't have long

hair or *any fun*, I can have a cat" (*IOT* 93, 94; my emphasis). Like the cat in the rain, she feels shut out, unwanted, unnoticed, unloved; she and her husband do not make each other happy anymore. In "Out of Season" the husband voices a similar sentiment when he sends his wife back to the hotel with: "It's a rotten day and we aren't going to have *any fun*, anyway" (*IOT*, 101; my emphasis). The concentration in both stories on a lack of fun recalls Nick's reason for breaking up with Marjorie in "The End of Something": "It isn't fun any more" (*IOT*, 34). "Isn't love any fun?" Marjorie asks. "No," Nick answers, and so might the couples in "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot," "Cat in the Rain," and "Out of Season."

Thus, the marriage group, "A Very Short Story," and "Soldier's Home" present us with a series of portraits of failed love and/or overall dissatisfaction with male-female relationships. Such a consistently unflattering picture of love calls into question the state of Nick's own marriage. In the dropped ending to "Big Two-Hearted River," Nick says that when he married Helen he lost all his old friends "because he admitted by marrying that something was more important than the fishing" (*NAS*, 214). Although this sounds like a positive statement about his marriage, Nick contradicts himself when he says that he loved his fishing days "more than anything" and admits that he has nightmares about missing a fishing season: "It made him feel sick in the dream, as though he had been in jail" (*NAS*, 215).

Nick makes one other seemingly positive remark about marriage in this monologue when he says that he remembers the horror he once had of marriage: "It was funny. Probably it was because he had always been with older people, nonmarrying people" (*NAS*, 215). But even this confession does not indicate Nick's true feelings; marriage might not be a horror, but it also might not be a piece of cake. In "Cross-Country Snow" Nick's alter ego is similarly ambiguous. When George says—about life in general, including marriage, parenthood, responsibility—"It's hell, isn't it?" Nick responds, "No. Not exactly" (*IOT*, 111). Not exactly? Why not "Definitely not"?

In fact, the most important thing we learn about Helen may be that she's never about. In "Cross-Country Snow" Nick and George ski the mountains of Switzerland without Helen. In "Big Two-Hearted River" Nick takes his fishing trip alone. This habitual absence of Helen combined with the attitude toward relationships revealed in Nick's stories suggests that Nick's marriage is one of those "other needs" which has motivated his journey to the Michigan woods in "Big Two-Hearted River." A later Nick Adams story, "Now I Lay Me," shows Nick and his orderly, John, discussing the advantages of marriage. Although Nick doesn't instantly

agree with John that marriage “would fix up everything” (*NAS*, 134), he promises to think about it. Significantly, the patterns implied by and within *In Our Time* indicate that Nick has married soon after his return from Europe, but has since discovered that far from healing everything, as John guaranteed, marriage actually aggravated his pain. Nick’s feelings about Helen thus make up the darker depths of the swamp he must one day fish.¹⁵

In Our Time reveals one final other need which has possibly sent Nick to the river and which seems to be among those darker depths of his own mental swamp: the duties of fatherhood. As I have noted, Nick was greatly upset by his meeting with the pregnant woman on the road to Karagatch, and the horror of that scene is, of course, enough to explain Nick’s preoccupation with it. But, in fact, the several other references to pregnancy and children in the book indicate that this preoccupation has expanded into a generalization. The British narrator of “On the Quai at Smyrna” cannot forget the Greek women who were having babies, particularly those who refused to give up their dead babies. They were the worst, he declares (*IOT*, 11). Mr. and Mrs. Elliot try, without success, to have a child, even though Mrs. Elliot obviously finds sex with her husband distasteful or painful—or both. In “Cross-Country Snow” Nick assumes the German waitress is unhappy because she is pregnant but unmarried. Nowhere in *In Our Time* are the joys of pregnancy and young children described. Whenever mentioned, children and having babies are associated with suffering, unhappiness, an end of freedom and innocence, even death. As Jackson J. Benson puts it, “we are brought back again and again to pain, mutilation and death in connection with birth, sex, and the female.”¹⁶

A likely source of this association for Nick was his encounter with the woman in Asia Minor, but given this view, he would certainly face the prospect of fatherhood with great trepidation. “Cross-Country Snow” exhibits that fear both directly and obliquely. Nick tells George that he is glad *now* about Helen’s pregnancy, a distinction which points to his initial displeasure. However, the lie of that assertion is shown in his reaction to the pregnant waitress: he fails to notice her condition immediately and wonders why. The psychological answer is that to do so would mean allowing the reality of his married life to interfere with the happiness of his skiing excursion. Once again, in writing about himself, Nick reveals a desire to avoid those adult responsibilities which inhibit freedom and complicate life. To have a child means one can no longer be a child.

Neither “Big Two-Hearted River” nor its original conclusion contains any explicit evidence that Nick is or is about to become a father. Yet if we

see these various references to children as representative of Nick's feelings about fatherhood and if we assume that "Cross-Country Snow" is based in Nick's experience, then perhaps the lack of evidence itself is important. In other words, through his silence Nick could be revealing just how painful the whole matter of children has become; he does not even trust himself to think or talk about it. Thus, his impending or actual fatherhood is the most recent need that urged Nick's trip to the Michigan woods, even the one that may have directly motivated it. Interestingly, "Big Two-Hearted River" is immediately preceded by "My Old Man." Although this story depicts a strong father-son relationship, the positive image is offset by the story's conclusion with the father dead and the son feeling assaulted by life's realities. The characters form a composite of Nick, who seems near to a spiritual death, burdened by anxieties that include his memories of war, married life, and fatherhood. He thus turns to the one great pleasure which has never failed him, the one activity he knows will allow him to escape the world that is too much with him: fishing.

This explanation of Nick's actions in "Big Two-Hearted River" may make him sound much like the character he writes about who shares his name: constantly running away from suffering and responsibility. And Nick definitely possesses that desire; his fiction shows that he wishes there were some kind of escape hatch, a way out, a way back to a more carefree, careless time. However, we must be careful not to confuse Nick the writer with Nick the character. And here is where approaching *In Our Time* as if Nick were its author begins to change our understanding of both the book and Nick Adams. In "Fathers and Sons," a later Nick Adams story—both in terms of when it was written and when it takes place—Nick announces, "If he wrote it he could get rid of it. He had gotten rid of many things by writing them" (NAS, 237). Although this confession is anachronistic in reference to my present study, writing often serves as catharsis. If we view Nick's work as partly an act of exorcism, then we can assume that the Nick who has written a story is one step further on the road to health than the Nick who writes the story and two steps ahead of the Nick who is described in the story.

But we should not be overly generous in formulating this assumption, for the patterns I have found throughout *In Our Time* indicate that Nick also has not been able to heal himself in the space of one or two tales. In fact, what begins as an act of purging can end as an act of control, an attempt to contain the emotions that are playing havoc with one's insides. The repetitions of loss, suffering, violence, and general unhappiness in Nick's fiction suggest that his recent experiences have dug so deeply into

his psyche that he must continually bring them out, look them in the face, and thereby convince himself that by controlling them, they are not controlling him. And even though Nick has yet to admit to others—and possibly even to himself—that he fears such things as marriage and fatherhood, his fiction reveals that at some level he recognizes these anxieties. Such awareness is the first step toward conquering his fears.

The escape that he typically shows his namesake seeking is, therefore, not a real option for Nick the writer. Nick's fiction is his greatest effort to face life and himself. In fact, had Hemingway kept the original ending to "Big Two-Hearted River," we would have had a much clearer picture of the artist as hero. In the last scene of this conclusion, Nick returns to camp to write a story which will describe the country like Cézanne had painted it, a story very similar to the one we have just read. Lest we underestimate the significance of that enterprise—and with Nick's announcement that he writes because "It was really more fun than anything" (*NAS*, 218) it would be easy to do so—we should remember that writing is not only one of those needs from which Nick was seeking relief, but it is also an activity that will undoubtedly engage him in another need he had hoped to escape: thinking. To put this another way, in the act of writing Nick will *have* to fish that symbolic mental swamp, an effort which, in the final version of "Big Two-Hearted River," he is not quite ready to make. Of course, just how honestly and fully Nick will confront what troubles him (especially those "other needs" which are so new and sensitive that he cannot even name them, as if to do so would be to admit their reality and his own limitations) is another matter and one we cannot gauge since it occurs outside the pages and time period of *In Our Time*. The book is a record of how Nick has been and is, not how he will be.

At this record of Nick's recent mental history, *In Our Time* should thus be seen as a novel, not merely a collection of short stories. D. H. Lawrence, one of the book's first reviewers, came close to making this assessment when he called *In Our Time* a "fragmentary novel," and Young once proposed that it was "nearly a novel" about Nick.¹⁷ However, as I have argued, although Nick's mind is fragmented, confused to pieces by his accelerated entry into adulthood, *In Our Time* is not at all fragmentary. It is a complete work, unified by the consciousness of Nick Adams as he attempts to come to terms through his fiction with his involvement in World War I and, more recently, with the problems of marriage and his fear of fatherhood. Furthermore, reading the book from this perspective removes our focus from Hemingway's biographical sources, a focus which has too often caused critics to juggle the sequence of the stories in an attempt to make their chronology match the order of

events in Hemingway's life or to state simply that *In Our Time* lacks structural unity. To the contrary, the stories are ordered precisely to reflect the actual history and the psychological state of Nick Adams. As F. Scott Fitzgerald suggested in 1926, *In Our Time* does not pretend to be about one man, but it is.¹⁸

Finally, though, we do come back to Hemingway. For while this analysis of *In Our Time* has separated Nick Adams' history from Hemingway's in ways that are important to our understanding of the book, it has also revealed that Nick's inner life is similar to that of his creator in areas that readers have often failed to notice. First of all, although two of Hemingway's most recent biographers, Jeffrey Meyers and Kenneth Lynn, challenge earlier conclusions about the effects of Hemingway's participation in World War I on his psyche, there can be no doubt that at some level he was significantly affected.¹⁹ Both point out that Hemingway was obsessed by the fear of loss; as Lynn puts it, Hemingway always sank into a depression "whenever he lost anything, whether good or bad."²⁰ It seems possible that this obsession grew out of his experiences in the war, or at least increased after that time. Second, and just as important, Meyers and Lynn both show that Hemingway was afraid that marriage and fatherhood would change his life drastically, and for the worse. According to Meyers, "he was too emotionally immature (despite his wide experience) to accept domestic and paternal responsibility."²¹ Thus we can claim for Hemingway what we have claimed for Nick, that, as Lynn argues, "Uncertain to the point of fear about himself, he was compelled to write stories in which he endeavored to cope with the disorder of his inner world by creating fictional equivalents for it."²²

Yet it is Hemingway's initial inclination to turn over his stories to Nick that gives us our most fascinating look into his psyche. Besides the possibility that Hemingway recognized that making Nick the author of his stories would help unify *In Our Time*, we can also infer that by this plan he could add another layer of insulation between himself and the truths contained in his stories. Apparently the distance provided by a fictional persona was not enough room for a man whose greatest fiction was rapidly becoming the lies he passed off to friends, relatives, critics, and himself as the truth about his life.²³ Hence, in his original conclusion to "Big Two-Hearted River," Hemingway was engaging Nick Adams in the new capacity of author to run interference for him, to block out what he had disclosed about himself to himself (and others) in the writing of his fiction.

However, despite Hemingway's desire, which increased as he got older, to deny that he was troubled, immature, or anything less than a

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courageous man, *In Our Time* suggests—as it does for Nick—that finally he could not deceive himself. Norman Mailer once said that “It may even be that the final judgment on [Hemingway’s] work may come to the notion that what he failed to do was tragic, but what he accomplished was heroic, for it is possible he carried a weight of anxiety within him from day to day which would have suffocated any man smaller than himself.”²⁴ Hemingway’s public image still persists as that of a brave man constantly proving himself in battles with both men and animals. *In Our Time* reveals, through the unifying consciousness of Nick Adams, a more substantial kind of bravery, for it indicates that the greatest opponent he wrestled with was himself.

Decoding Papa: “A Very Short Story” As Work and Text

Robert Scholes



The semiotic study of a literary text is not wholly unlike traditional interpretation or rhetorical analysis, nor is it meant to replace these other modes of response to literary works. But the semiotic critic situates the text somewhat differently, privileges different dimensions of the text, and uses a critical methodology adapted to the semiotic enterprise. Most interpretive methods privilege the “meaning” of the text. Hermeneutic critics seek authorial or intentional meaning; the New Critics seek the ambiguities of “textual” meaning; the “reader response” critics allow readers to make meaning. With respect to meaning the semiotic critic is situated differently. Such a critic looks for the generic or discursive structures that enable and constrain meaning.

Under semiotic inspection neither the author nor the reader is free to make meaning. Regardless of their lives as individuals, as author and reader they are traversed by codes that enable their communicative adventures at the cost of setting limits to the messages they can exchange. A literary text, then, is not simply a set of words, but (as Roland Barthes demonstrated in *S/Z*, though not necessarily in just that way) a network of codes that enables the marks on the page to be read as a text of a particular sort.

In decoding narrative texts, the semiotic method is based on two simple but powerful analytical tools: the distinction between story and discourse on the one hand and that between text and events on the other. The distinction between story and discourse is grounded in a linguistic

Because of the author’s restrictions against reprinting “A Very Short Story” as a whole in any work other than a volume made up exclusively of his own work, the full text of the story has not been included here. The reader is requested to consult the text of “A Very Short Story” in Hemingway’s *In Our Time* or *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons (The Scribner Library), before reading this essay. My apologies for the inconvenience.

observation by Emile Benveniste to the effect that some languages (notably French and Greek) have a special tense of the verb used for the narration of past events. (See "The Correlations of Tense in the French Verb," chapter 19 of *Problems in General Linguistics*. See also Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse*.) This tense, the aorist or *passé simple*, emphasizes the relationship between the utterance and the situation the utterance refers to, between the narration and the events narrated. This is par excellence the mode of written transcriptions of events: *histoire* or "story." Benveniste contrasts this with the mode of *discours* or "discourse," in which the present contact between speaker and listener is emphasized. Discourse is rhetorical and related to oral persuasion. Story is referential and related to written documentation. Discourse is now; story is then. Story speaks of he and she; discourse is a matter of you and me, I and thou.

In any fictional text, then, we can discern certain features that are of the story: reports on actions, mentions of times and places, and the like. We can also find elements that are of the discourse: evaluations, reflections, language that suggests an authorial or at least narratorial presence who is addressing a reader or narratee with a persuasive aim in mind. When we are told that someone "smiled cruelly," we can detect more of story in the verb and more of discourse in the adverb. Some fictional texts, those of D. H. Lawrence for example, are highly discursive. To read a Lawrence story is to enter into a personal relationship with someone who resembles the writer of Lawrence's private correspondence. In contrast, Hemingway often seems to have made a strong effort to eliminate discourse altogether—an effort that is apparent in "A Very Short Story."

The distinction between story and discourse is closely related to another with which it is sometimes confused, and that is the distinction between the *récit* and *diégésis* of a narrative. In this case we are meant to distinguish between the whole text of a narration as a text on the one hand and the events narrated as events on the other. We can take over the Greek term, *diegesis*, for the system of characters and events and simply anglicize the other term as recital, or just refer to the "text" when we mean the words and the "diegesis" for what they encourage us to create as a fiction.

The text itself may be analyzed into components of story and discourse, but it may also be considered in relation to the diegesis. One of the primary qualities of those texts we understand as fiction is that they generate a diegetic order that has an astonishing independence from its text. To put it simply, once a story is told it can be recreated in a recognizable way by a totally new set of words—in another language, for

instance—or in another medium altogether. The implications of this for analysis are profound. Let us explore some of them.

A fictional diegesis draws its nourishment not simply from the words of its text but from its immediate culture and its literary tradition. The magical words “once upon a time” in English set in motion a machine of considerable momentum which can hardly be turned off without the equally magical “they lived happily ever after” or some near equivalent. The diegetic processes of “realistic” narrative are no less insistent. “A Very Short Story,” by its location in Hemingway’s larger text (*In Our Time*) and a few key words (Padua, carried, searchlights, duty, operating, front, armistice), allows us to supply the crucial notions of military hospital, nurse, soldier, and World War I that the diegesis requires.

This process is so crucial that we should perhaps stop and explore its implications. The words on the page are not the story. The text is not the diegesis. The story is constructed by the reader from the words on the page by an inferential process—a skill that can be developed. The reader’s role is in a sense creative—without it no story exists—but it is also constrained by rules of inference that set limits to the legitimacy of the reader’s constructions. Any interpretive dispute may be properly brought back to the “words on the page,” of course, but these words never speak their own meaning. The essence of writing, as opposed to speech, is that the reader speaks the written words, the words that the writer has abandoned. A keen sense of this situation motivates the various sorts of “envoi” that writers supplied for their books in the early days of printing. They felt that their books were mute and would be spoken by others.

In reading a narrative, then, we translate a text into a diegesis according to the codes we have internalized. This is simply the narrative version of the normal reading process. As E. D. Hirsch has recently reminded us (in the *Philosophy of Composition* [Chicago, 1977], 122–23), for almost a century research in reading (Binet and Henri in 1894, Fillenbaum in 1966, Sachs in 1967, Johnson-Laird in 1970, Levelt and Kampen in 1975, and Brewer in 1975—specific citations can be found in Hirsch) has shown us that memory stores not the words of texts but their concepts, not the signifiers but the signifieds. When we read a narrative text, then, we process it as a diegesis. If we retell the story, it will be in our own words. To the extent that the distinction between poetry and fiction is a useful one, it is based on the notion of poetry as monumental, fixed in the words of the text and therefore untranslatable; while fiction has proved highly translatable because its essence is not in its language but in its diegetic structure. As fiction approaches the condition of poetry, its precise words

become more important; as poetry moves toward narrative, its specific language decreases in importance.

In reading fiction, then, we actually translate from the text to a diegesis, substituting narrative units (characters, scenes, events, and so on) for verbal units (nouns, adjectives, phrases, clauses, etc.). And we perform other changes as well. We organize the material we receive so as to make it memorable, which means that we systematize it as much as possible. In the diegetic system we construct, time flows at a uniform rate; events occur in chronological order; people and places have the qualities expected of them—unless the text specifies otherwise. A writer may relocate the Eiffel Tower to Chicago, but unless we are told this we will assume that a scene below that tower takes place in Paris—a Paris equipped with all the other items accorded it in our cultural paradigm.

Places and other entities with recognizable proper names (Napoleon, Waterloo, Broadway) enter the diegesis coded by culture. The events reported in a narrative text, however, will be stored in accordance with a syntactic code based on a chronological structure. The text may present the events that compose a story in any order, plunging in *medias res* or following through from beginning to end, but the diegesis always seeks to arrange them in chronological sequence. The text may expand a minute into pages or cram years into a single sentence for its own ends, but the minutes and years remain minutes and years of diegetic time all the same. In short, the text may discuss what it chooses, but once a diegesis is set in motion no text can ever completely control it. “How many children had Lady Macbeth?” is not simply the query of a naive interpreter but the expression of a normal diegetic impulse. Where authors and texts delight in equivocation, the reader needs certainty and closure to complete the diegetic processing of textual materials. From this conflict of interests comes a tension that many modern writers exploit.

The semiotician takes the reader’s diegetic impulse and establishes it as a principle of structuration. The logic of diegetic structure provides a norm, a benchmark for the study of textual strategies, enabling us to explore the dialogue between text and diegesis, looking for points of stress, where the text changes its ways in order to control the diegetic material for its own ends. The keys to both affect and intention may be found at these points. Does the text return obsessively to one episode of diegetic history? Does it disturb diegetic order to tell about something important to its own discursive ends? Does it omit something that diegetic inertia deems important? Does it change its viewpoint on diegetic