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HEMINGWAY AND BULLSHIT

A Thesis

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Master of Arts

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Nathan R. L. Eilers

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses Harry Frankfurt's definition of bullshit as a lens to re-examine Ernest Hemingway's aesthetic of factual details and omission. Frankfurt argues that bullshit consists of speech made with indifference to its veracity, and one who makes a habit of bullshitting may lose touch with reality. By studying three works across the author's career, "Big Two-Hearted River," "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," and *The Old Man and the Sea*, one sees that Hemingway's prose style evolves and eventually contradicts his artistic statements. Given the fact that he promotes his aesthetic while discarding it, his theory becomes bullshit. Because normative critical interpretation of the author rests largely on his aesthetic theory, it too is inaccurate. Though Hemingway misrepresents how he writes, the success of his work regardless of aesthetics demonstrates that his writing is more complex than many think and deserves a more thorough re-evaluation.

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Style, Aesthetics, and Bullshit

The relationship between Ernest Hemingway's style and aesthetic is a topic of central importance to his work. One cannot understand the enduring value of Hemingway's work without also looking at his method, and much of his legacy is based on his famous style. Style can be evaluated on two levels. The first is the more technical aspect of style, namely the diction, syntax, and arrangement of words. Analysis of a literary work on this level is precise and functions on a small scale. One dissects an author's work at its most basic level. While important, this approach is more limiting than the second, which attempts to take in a writer's comprehensive vision. This expanded form of analysis encompasses the first because authors cannot achieve their visions without using certain words in a unique way, yet it aims for a larger, more complete understanding of how writers achieve their purpose in their prose. This second, broader sense of style is the approach I propose to use in this paper.

Many scholars have already studied Hemingway's writing method, and Thomas Strychacz's thorough definition sums up the basic consensus about Hemingway's style:

Hemingway is rightly seen as the master of the simple declarative sentence, pursuing "what really happened in action" in a direct, hard-boiled style so that writing reproduces the action or event in all its completeness. Hemingway himself fostered this theory about his writing, though even for him the presentation of action was clearly twofold: an action was to be represented as truly as possible, but the totality of actions within a story was to be incomplete, for the author must select out of a continuum of the smallest number of precise details in order for the reader, when viewing the ensemble, to intuit the entire narrative. ("*IOT*" 59)

The salient characteristics of Hemingway's style are his concise prose that remains focused on details in order to allow the reader access to the part of the narrative he omits. This style constitutes his method for imbuing his stories with veracity. In other words, the enumeration of detail and its omission in the author's prose style are the means Hemingway uses to achieve his aesthetic of authenticity.

Keep it small

The first characteristic of Hemingway's aesthetic I wish to explore further is what Strychacz refers to when he mentions the simple declarative sentence, the direct style, and the selection of small details that hint at the whole. Unlike the Victorian authors whose sentences were expansive and filled with flowery description, Hemingway's prose is spare and simple. He writes that "if I started to write elaborately, or like someone introducing or presenting something, I found that I could cut that scrollwork or ornament out and throw it away and start with the first true simple declarative sentence I had written" (*AMF* 7). For Hemingway, part of the commitment to write truly is cutting what is unnecessary. Extra words hinder the reader's ability to see what the writer shows.

Hemingway learned to use spare prose while working for the *Kansas City Star*. "On the *Star*" he says, "you were forced to learn to write a simple declarative sentence. This is useful to anyone" (Plimpton 25). The *Star*'s staff was taught "to avoid the use of adjectives and to eliminate every superfluous word ..." (Dewberry 19). Journalists need to maintain a sense of objectivity in their writing, so they construct their stories using mainly facts and details. When Hemingway wrote that he pursued truth "all [his] life and

had to be content with facts, coordinates" (qtd. in Stoneback 125-26), he showed the influence that journalism had on his writing. Simple facts and coordinates provide direct access to the truth, and these are what Hemingway methodically gives the reader.

Hemingway's eschewing of extraneous details is characteristic of other Modernist writers. In "A Retrospect," Ezra Pound sets out three principles for poetry, the first two of which are "Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective" and "To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation" (3). Hemingway followed these suggestions in his prose, giving only the details that bring life to the story. For Hemingway, though, excising words did not subtract from the story's effect. Rather, the author's ability to pare down his material charged what remained with added importance (Fenton xiv). Thus, the reader receives fewer, more significant words that relate the story quickly and profoundly. By focusing his stories on small, tangible details, Hemingway kept the subject in his story directly before the reader and allowed the larger implications to exist tacitly.

Another influence on Hemingway's prose is the art of Paul Cézanne. In "On Writing," Nick Adams wants "to write like Cezanne painted. Cezanne started with all the tricks. Then he broke the whole thing down and built the real thing. ... He, Nick, wanted to write about country so it would be there like Cezanne had done it in painting" (*Collected* 629). What Hemingway admired most was Cézanne's ability to paint so that the art becomes real to the viewer without using any "tricks." Both artists accomplish such realism via "meticulous placement and repetition of key words and images to create patterns ..." (Gaillard "Debt" 76). The greater effect of both the painting and the writing results from the use of significant details presented to the reader without embellishment.

Hemingway's method relies on the idea "that experience is communicated by small details, intimately preserved, which have the effect of indicating the whole ..." (Plimpton 35).

Keeping his writing small consists of more than just presenting significant details; Hemingway's work also shies away from grandiose statements. Citing Gertrude Stein's advice to Hemingway, Hugh Kenner writes that "when she told Hemingway that remarks were not literature, she was enjoining him not to let a sentence escape from the system, and acquire a trajectory, and claim to be 'about' something" (122). The author's distrust of abstract concepts is evident in one of the most famous passages in *A Farewell to Arms*. Frederic Henry is "always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. ... I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago ..." (169). Hemingway's art walks a thin line. By keeping his words few, he infuses them with significance, but his writing must not become so abstract that it strays into imprecise concepts like glory and sacrifice. Yet it seems impossible not to address at least a few metaphysical concepts when one writes about war, romance, and nature as Hemingway ceaselessly does. Hemingway's style functions at its best when his concrete, factual prose presents the story simply while it addresses the larger issues obliquely.

Omission

While the persistent use of details keeps one's attention on the subject as it is, one finds that Hemingway's prose attains depth via implication. Ernest Hemingway's achievement consists in "setting down, so sparsely that we can see past them, the words

for the action that concealed the real action ..." (Kenner 156). The detail-filled prose functions as a veil: it calls attention to itself while permitting one to see past it simultaneously. The author wants the surface of his narratives to be able to hold the reader's interest and suggest that there are unmentioned depths to be plumbed as well. When successful, the prose is compelling in and of itself, and it also indicates that there is more to the story than the words reveal. Without these deeper implications in Hemingway's prose, the story may list facts and events without achieving profundity. Investigating what is left unsaid is an ironic task indeed, but it is essential to understanding Hemingway's aesthetics.

When discussing how he wants his writing to function, Hemingway compared his prose to an iceberg: "[T]here is seven eighths of it under water for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate strengthens your iceberg" (Plimpton 34). He gives only one-eighth of the story to the reader directly; these are the telling details, the dialogue, and the facts presented in a straight-forward manner. The onus is on the reader to access the other seven-eighths by using the part of the iceberg that shows: "The technique of cutting out any reference to the real subject-matter of a story so that the reader must do the work of inferring it—this is quintessential Hemingway" (Fenton xx). The depth to the narrative is there, but Hemingway is unwilling to directly give the reader the meaning of a story.

The excising of certain aspects of his subject matter is Hemingway's method of omission. In *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway writes that "you could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood" (43). The reader is able to feel the profundity

of the story because omission includes deeper meanings by leaving them out. This is the central aspect of indirection in Hemingway. At their best, his stories are forceful because the reader is able to penetrate the veil between the given story and the one left out and feel the full force of the emotional power without having to be given it explicitly.

Because the unspoken aspect of Hemingway's art is so important to its function, it is no surprise that "saying too much" is a recurring theme in Hemingway's life and works. The effort to avoid excess revelation in his aesthetic echoes Hemingway's superstitions about the writing process. George Plimpton comments that various times in his interview with the writer, "he stressed that the craft of writing should not be tampered with by an excess of scrutiny—that though there is one part of writing that is solid ... the other is fragile, and if you talk about it, the structure cracks and you have nothing" (21). Giving away too much about how his technique works will ruin it, just as revealing too much of the iceberg takes away its suggestive power.

The fear of over-expression appears in many of his stories. In some cases, Hemingway characters are unwilling to address a problem directly, such as Jig in "Hills Like White Elephants": "Can we please please please please please please stop talking?" (*Short* 255). In other stories, characters fear discussion will spoil something valuable, such as Nick and George's conversation in "Cross Country Snow:" "There's nothing that can touch skiing, is there?' Nick said. ... 'Huh,' said George. 'It's too swell to talk about'" (174). In "On Writing," Nick ponders how to write like Cézanne paints and concludes, "It was a thing you couldn't talk about" (*Collected* 629). The silence in all these stories endows the subject matter with power by refusing to speak about it; one feels that any attempt would be futile. Hemingway works to make the silences say

everything in his stories: "If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them" (qtd. in *Hem OW* 192). In order for omission to give the insight Hemingway seeks, he must write truly. But what does writing truly look like?

Aesthetic of Authenticity

Throughout Hemingway's writing, the pursuit of authenticity by writing truly is a primary concern. Hemingway is uninterested in writing that produces a false impression or emotion, so when he feels he cannot write, he tells himself, "Do not worry. You have always written before and you will write now. All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know" (*AMF* 7). Hemingway, of course, never spells out the nature of a "true sentence," but, as is appropriate for Hemingway, one can get at his meaning obliquely. Writing that is true is direct and gives the reader an emotion that is inherently attached to the action. Only in this way can an author create and preserve powerful moments in prose.

When Hemingway advised F. Scott Fitzgerald to "Write the best story that you can and write it as straight as you can" (109), it is clear that Hemingway's advice reflects his own standards. Writing "straight" is an interesting adjective from an author who uses indirection and omission in his fiction, so one must conclude that Hemingway does not mean that a story should be so direct that it lacks depth. Rather, straight prose does not attempt to get away with something. The words do not create a situation, world, or emotion that is extrinsic to the situation being described. "Good writing is true writing. If

a man is making a story up it will be true in the proportion to the amount of knowledge of life that he has and how conscientious he is; so that when he makes something up it is as it would truly be" (qtd. in *Hem OW* 10).

The story comes alive in the imagination as something with no extraneous or false elements. His ideals about writing parallel Pedro Romero's bull-fighting in *The Sun Also Rises*:

Romero never made any contortions, always it was straight and pure and natural in line. The others twisted themselves like cork-screws ... to give a faked look of danger. Afterward, all that was faked turned bad and gave an unpleasant feeling. Romero's bull-fighting gave real emotion, because he always kept the absolute purity of line in his movements and always ... let the horns pass him close each time. (171)

Like the matador, the writer has a duty to perform without trying to trick the audience. Just as the audience knows when the matador is faking, the reader is aware of prose that is inauthentic. Only if the author is able to control his prose and remove all fakery will the reader get an authentic emotion that does not turn bad afterward.

Hemingway seeks authenticity in his fiction by giving only what is needed to bring the story to life: "The primary intention of his writing, from first to last, was to seize and project for the reader what he often called 'the way it was'" (Baker 48).

Hemingway's task was "to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced," so that the reader experiences "the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion" (qtd in *Hem OW* 28-29). Here is where his use of concrete detail meets the method of omission. By receiving the factual events, actions, and words involved in a given situation, the reader is able to experience the story as if it were occurring to him in

actuality. When done correctly, the pieces assemble into a larger whole so that the reader will intuit the implications and the emotions of the scene automatically and instinctively. The emotions and meaning in the story need not be overtly stated because one experiences them tacitly.

Many scholars compare this method to T. S. Eliot's objective correlative. In his discussion of the faults he finds in *Hamlet*, Eliot writes that the emotion of the tragedy is in excess of what the events of the play demand. The reader feels a disjunction between the feelings Shakespeare creates and what these emotions would be in actual experience. For Eliot, "the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative,'" which is "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts ... are given, the emotion is immediately evoked" (124-25). The artist begins with an individual emotion as a goal and then selects the elements needed to bring about that emotion automatically in the reader. If the particulars the author presents fail to elicit the exact emotion the situation causes when experienced in reality, the writer has failed to portray the event "as it was."

An accurate portrayal of an event is not enough for Hemingway; the writing must come to life. Describing his objectives in writing, he says that by drawing upon experience and imagination, "you make something through your invention that is not a representation but a whole new thing truer than anything true and alive, and you make it alive, and if you make it well enough, you give it immortality" (qtd. in Plimpton 37). A story that is "alive" must exist as a tangible experience for the reader and be something more powerful that lives in the imagination and transcends the text. There are indeed

passages in Hemingway's fiction where the author achieves this effect—moments of authenticity. These moments occur sporadically throughout Hemingway's works and often feature something beautiful in nature, a sudden, life-altering event, or an action executed flawlessly. One example is Jack's boxing match in "Fifty Grand":

Walcott came up to Jack looking at him. Jack stuck the left hand at him. Walcott just shook his head. He backed Jack up against the ropes, measured him and then hooked the left very light to the side of Jack's head and socked the right into the body as hard as he could sock, just as low as he could get it. He must have hit him five inches below the belt. I thought the eyes would come out of Jack's head. They stuck way out. His mouth came open. (*Short* 297)

The action here is related in the style of a ringside announcer, and the reader watches the fight punch-by-punch. However, Walcott's low blow takes on added significance because this is Jack's final fight and he has bet against himself; it is another existential crisis wherein the individual must prove himself against a hostile universe. The author's use of carefully selected details gives an overwhelming emotion while the more universal themes exist tacitly. These moments of authenticity are the apex of Hemingway's style. In them he gives the factual, tangible details that set the story in the imagination in such a way that the omitted, grander significance is more present in its absence.

These authentic moments are counterbalanced by the skepticism and doubt that pervade the twentieth century. Kenner writes that Hemingway's drive to write meaningful prose "was menaced, perfect moments encroached on, by a different small word, which he preferred in its Spanish form, *nada*" (156). The vacillation between authenticity and disbelief is a central theme in Hemingway's fiction. The fear of *nada* rises to the surface in "A Clean Well-Lighted Place": "What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too" (*Short*

349). Each story presents another set of questions about truth and falsehood, but they are never answered decisively because they are unanswerable. It may be that nothing lasts and *nada* lies behind all experience, but if Hemingway writes a story as it was and writes it truly, perhaps he can access authenticity in his fiction.

Bullshit

Having discussed Hemingway's aesthetics of authenticity and truth, it may seem odd that I now take up the nature of bullshit. Hemingway's constant self-styling as the truth-teller raises questions. Even if one agrees that Hemingway's aesthetics can produce some form of truth in fiction as discussed above, how much is he to be relied upon to provide that truth consistently, and when does he fail to do so? Before examining the ways bullshit manifests itself in Hemingway's work, it is necessary to define the term.

The discussion of bullshit in this essay is rooted in Harry Frankfurt's definition of the word. In *On Bullshit*, Frankfurt explores bullshit as a phenomenon and attempts to find its characteristics. The author uses Max Black's definition of *humbug* as a starting point: "HUMBUG: deceptive misrepresentation, short of lying, especially by pretentious word or deed, of somebody's own thoughts, feelings, or attitudes" (6). Though this definition is helpful, Frankfurt is dissatisfied with it as an exact synonym for *bullshit* because bullshit is more careless.

A conversation between Ludwig Wittgenstein and Fania Pascal serves as an example of careless use of language. After Pascal has her tonsils removed, Wittgenstein visits and asks how she is. Pascal responds, "I feel just like a dog that has been run over." Wittgenstein is upset: "You don't know what a dog that has been run over feels

like" (24). It is an amusing anecdote, but why would Wittgenstein be angry at his friend's answer? She is obviously unwell and her statement conveys that feeling. According to Frankfurt, Wittgenstein objects to Pascal's remark because it is careless and inexact: "Her statement is not germane to the enterprise of describing reality. She does not even think she knows ... how a run-over dog feels. Her description of her own feeling is, accordingly, something that she is merely making up" (30). Pascal's simile gives only a general sense of her condition, so her use of language is detached from specific reality. One cannot say her statement is false because she does feel terrible, and a run-over dog does not feel well. Neither is the statement true, however, because an exact correspondence between her and the dog cannot be ascertained. Wittgenstein "construes her as engaged in an activity to which the distinction between true and false is crucial, and yet as taking no interest in whether what she says is true or false" (33). Pascal's statement is bullshit because there is no regard for the truth-value of her remarks. Thus, the essence of bullshit is not its degree of truthfulness or falsehood, but instead its utter indifference to reality (34). The person who bullshits does not intend to lie—to do so would be to know the truth and deny it. Rather, the statement is made without attention to its veracity.

This disregard for the truth leads to a second facet of bullshit: the one who bullshits is "trying to get away with something" (23). The words the bullshitter uses are intended to sound like they are related to the truth when they are not. Upon close examination, one discovers that the "use of language ... does not contribute to the purpose it purports to serve" (43). A bullshitter's words contribute nothing to the conversation or to the understanding of those involved because there is no tie to reality.

The words are not necessarily false and perhaps not even inferior to the real thing, but they are phony (47).

This brings Frankfurt to the discussion of craftsmanship. The bullshitter is lazy not only with respect to how much his words correspond to reality, but also to how they are made: "the bullshit itself is invariably produced in a careless or self-indulgent manner, that is never finely crafted" (21). Unlike a liar who must carefully construct his statements so that the truth will be disguised effectively, the bullshitter is free to say what he will as long as the game goes unnoticed. The effort is to perpetuate the image he wishes to create. Little attention needs to be paid to the truth-value of the words; it is how they sound that matters.

Everyone participates in the creation and proliferation of bullshit occasionally. It is a part of our society. However, the large amount of bullshit Frankfurt observes in human experience cannot be without consequences. Frankfurt posits that "bullshit is a greater enemy of the truth than lies are" (61), but how can that be? Due to the bullshitter's complete disregard for (in)accuracy of his statements, he loses his ability to distinguish between honesty and deception. This is because every person's statements about the world affect his beliefs about existence. When bullshitting becomes customary, "a person's normal habit of attending to the way things are may become attenuated or lost" (60). Thus, Frankfurt argues, one can become enmeshed and go astray as a result of one's own words.

Hemingway and Bullshit

The philosophical examination of bullshit is fascinating, but why use Frankfurt's book as a lens to study Hemingway? Bullshit is a recurring element in Hemingway's work. It shows up repeatedly in the author's subject matter, whether it be talking around an issue in "Hills Like White Elephants" or "Cat in the Rain," becoming lost in grandiose ideals in "Black Ass at the Crossroads" or "Under the Ridge," or the bull sessions men have in "Out of Season" or "Fifty Grand." The players in Hemingway's stories often lose track or deliberately ignore what is authentic and important. As the self-proclaimed teller of truth, Hemingway uses these characters and situations to highlight the interplay of truth and falsehood in the modern world.

The amount of bullshit that appears in the content of Hemingway's writing often correlates to specific elements within a given story. Nature, for example, is almost always authentic in Hemingway's writing. Thus, the more words Hemingway spends on natural settings, the more authenticity appears in the story. Action is frequently another element that is bullshit-free. Bullfighters, fishermen, skiers, boxers, and hunters leave the false behind when they are doing what is required of them in the activity and doing it well.

Other factors increase the amount of bullshit in Hemingway's content. The more Hemingway writes about interactions among people, the more likely bullshit will creep in. People are often careless with their words. Money functions the same way. If a story occurs where money is not a factor, one can expect to find less fakery in the content. Money often has the power to corrupt people and alter their words and actions. A third corrupting factor is romance and sex. Since Hemingway fervently seeks to parallel

reality, it should be no surprise that one cannot trust people when sex or romance is at stake.

Bullshit is also relevant to Hemingway's style, though not in every story. Perhaps the author's habit of reminding the reader of his pursuit of authenticity undoes him in part. Every writer who produces great works also writes works of lesser quality, and Ernest Hemingway simply cannot produce the real thing, *i.e.* authentic emotion, in every story over several decades. His aesthetics are extraordinarily difficult to attain in every work. When he achieves his aims, the style is amazing, and one easily sees how Hemingway earns a place in the canon. However, when his style fails to live up to his aesthetic of truth-telling, the minimalism can be too spare and lack depth. Additionally, the reader expects authenticity in the work because the author is so insistent on its importance, so its absence is glaring and easily observed. Hemingway's theory requires him to write demanding prose. If he omits too much, the unifying element is lost. If he strays the other way and says "too much," his ideals are undone and the powerful effect fails. The power of Hemingway's narratives corresponds to how closely his writing follows his aesthetics.

I am hardly the first to point out that Hemingway's style changes over time. Because the style becomes something other than what his aesthetic calls for, certain questions arise. First, is Hemingway aware that his style drifts away from his ideals? The growing distance between his aesthetic goals and his compositions could be evidence that Hemingway's authorial powers lessen as he ages, and some theorize that part of the reason for the author's suicide was his knowledge that he could no longer write well. However, one may also argue that the alterations in his prose are proof that Hemingway

is a more subtle author than is generally supposed. Realizing that his to-the-point prose style does not complement every subject, he willingly compromised his aesthetic and changed his prose so his subject matter was more effectively addressed.

The second issue, and the more significant one in my view, is the implications of the increasing distance between prose and theory. If Hemingway must compromise his aesthetic vision in order to fit his subject, the validity of his theory must be questioned. Hemingway writes more encompassing stories and omits less while proclaiming a minimalist aesthetic. The author states that "[t]he most essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shock proof, shit detector" and "all great writers have it" (qtd. in Dewberry 23). Does the author's shit detector malfunction? And since his aesthetic becomes separate from his prose, is his aesthetic a kind of bullshit?

The distance between Hemingway's theory and his style often varies with the subject matter he addresses; therefore, the interplay between contextual and stylistic bullshit warrants further consideration. Of course there is no actual separation between content and style. How the words are composed and what they say are two characteristics of the same prose. However, one must make the distinction in order to better evaluate how the prose functions.

Methodology

This thesis explores how Hemingway's prose evolves over time and the implications of the stylistic changes. By examining three stories spread across his literary career, one can observe the gradual shift in his style away from his early aesthetic. "Big Two-Hearted River," published in 1925 demonstrates how powerful Hemingway's prose

can be when aesthetic and style align. The story features concrete details that carry it, while the broader implications are omitted in such a way that the reader understands them tacitly. Eleven years later, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" still features powerful description and factual portrayals, but the story contains more psychological perspectives about the characters' emotions and more narratorial commentary of the sort that Hemingway eschews elsewhere. By 1952 and the publication of *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway's prose is so symbolic that the details of the narrative do not hold the reader's focus and one proceeds immediately to the various implied meanings.

These shifts in Hemingway's work are significant because they call for a re-evaluation of the author's aesthetic, style, and reputation. Does the Nobel Prize winner knowingly abandon his own artistic ideals as his career progresses, or is he unaware of the alterations in his work? Using the alterations in his prose as evidence of Hemingway's willingness to abandon his aesthetic, one must decide how valid his artistic theory and literary reputation are. The traditional understanding of Hemingway as the proponent of tight prose that omits the emotion of the story is not accurate because it does not take into account the various techniques he employs in his fiction. Is Ernest Hemingway's iceberg theory of writing the salient legacy of his work, or, in the final analysis, is it bullshit?

"Big Two-Hearted River"

I begin my exploration of Hemingway's style and aesthetics by taking up one of his most famous short stories "Big Two-Hearted River." This early story is frequently anthologized and often studied by scholars, and it deserves its accolades. "Big Two-Hearted River" is an excellent example of how Hemingway wants his writing to function, and it is a perfect dovetailing of Hemingway's theory with his prose. He keeps tactile details in front of the reader at all times, while omitting the central issues in the story. The combination of details and omission produces a vivid and thought-provoking narrative that is filled with authentic emotions and suggestive power. This meeting of aesthetics and style produces an almost unflinching sense of authenticity throughout the narrative.

"Big Two-Hearted River" is the final story in *In Our Time*, which he published in 1925. Like so many of his works, Hemingway's inspiration for the story came from his own experience. He spent many hours of his youth in the woods and on the water. The inspiration for the story may have been a fishing trip the author took with two friends to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in 1919 (Lynn 103).

It is significant that "River" is the capstone of *In Our Time* as it seems to encapsulate what Hemingway is after in his first, full-length work. The book contains many excellent stories about the subjects for which Hemingway is now famous: strained relationships ("The End of Something," "Cat in the Rain"), physical and mental wounds

("Soldier's Home," "The Battler"), and sports ("Out of Season," "Cross-Country Snow"). All these themes are present, either implicitly or explicitly, in "Big Two-Hearted River." However, the story differs from the others in that its protagonist, Nick Adams, is alone. The isolation seems to enable both Nick Adams and his creator to grapple with the complicated existence they live.

"Big Two-Hearted River" is one of many sporting stories that is not "primarily 'about' a sport" (Baker 121). The sport involved is a vehicle to get the protagonist into nature. Hemingway is another in a long line of authors for whom natural settings provide truth and authenticity: "I've written a number of stories about the Michigan country—the country is always true—what happens in the stories is fiction" (*Selected* 153). In this respect, Hemingway is the heir of Henry David Thoreau, who went to the woods to "front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach" (72). In this story, Nick Adams is separated from the complications of humanity and the city. The woods of Michigan are an escape from the problems and pains of life, and the reader senses that Nick is truly fishing for tranquility.

Perhaps the most amazing facet of "Big Two-Hearted River" is that it succeeds without a plot. One could summarize the events of the story very briefly: Nick walks to his camping spot, sets up camp, sleeps, goes fishing and catches two fish. Hemingway is well aware of his story's lack of plot: "[Big Two-Hearted River] is about 100 pages long and nothing happens and the country is swell, I made it all up, so I see it all and part of it comes out the way it ought to ... (*Selected* 122). Clearly, Hemingway is after something that surpasses a good yarn. In "Big Two-Hearted River," he seeks to "endow a story in

which 'nothing happens' with an inner drama of terrific intensity" (Lynn 102), and he thoroughly succeeds by writing prose that exemplifies his aesthetic theory.

Eyes on Detail

"Big Two-Hearted River" is replete with substantial and powerful details. The reader's eyes are almost unfailingly on an object or a scene. This constant focus on details performs several important functions: it creates the sense of authenticity via specificity, it permits the reader to experience the story, and it allows the symbols to bring in more levels of meaning without becoming allegorical.

"Big Two-Hearted River" is replete with detailed passages that provide a sensory experience. Almost immediately in the story, Hemingway establishes the setting as Nick looks into the river to watch the fish:

He watched them holding themselves with their noses into the current, many trout in deep, fast moving water, slightly distorting as he watched far down through the glassy convex surface of the pool, its surface pushing and swelling smooth against the resistance of the log-driven piles of the bridge. (*Short* 194)

Here the description is vivid and deep. Hemingway sets everything out before the reader in great detail using only facts. The writing stresses the importance of seeing the thing as itself. Set before the reader are fish and a river that are so skillfully created that they seem real. The fish are evoked by only the mention of which way their noses point. The water, however, is brought to life with continuous detail; the speed, depth, motion, and even the distortion of the stream are set forth rapidly. This flowing stream of details echoes the river in the story so effectively that the passage invokes the feeling one has when watching moving water. The setting bursts off the page into the imagination as a tangible

place. The tight, lucid prose adds to the verisimilitude of the scene because the reader is not told anything extraneous.

In addition to making the setting real for the reader, the detailed, fact-telling style also evokes a sense of experience. Hemingway is not satisfied to tell the reader a good story; he wants the reader to enter into the text to the degree that one experiences the story the same way Nick does. This experiential approach is evident when Nick prepares his dinner:

He started a fire with some chunks of pine he got with the ax from a stump. Over the fire he stuck a wire grill, pushing the four legs down into the ground with his boot. Nick put the frying pan on the grill over the flames. He was hungrier. The beans and spaghetti warmed. Nick stirred them and mixed them together. They began to bubble, making little bubbles that rose with difficulty to the surface. There was a good smell. Nick got out a bottle of tomato catchup and cut four slices of bread. The little bubbles were coming faster now. (200)

The degree of exactitude is extraordinary. In the hands of another author, the first sentence would read, "Nick started a fire," because the reader already knows that fire-starting involves wood and something with which to chop it. Instead, Hemingway takes the reader through the actions step-by-step. One sees Nick going to the stump for pine chips and stabilizing the grill. That the firewood is pine suggests a specific smell for the fire because pine smells different from other woods.

The cooking process is even more sensory. Nick is eating beans and spaghetti. As they cook, one sees them begin to bubble. Again, one knows that bubbles are an inherent part of cooking, but Hemingway does not leave it to the imagination. The reader must see it. The reader knows the food is heating because Hemingway describes the increasing speed of the bubbles. By the time the food is ready, the reader is as hungry as Nick.

"There was a good smell" is curiously vague, but the author reaches a threshold by presenting so many concrete details that one does not notice that the olfactory description is absent. The accumulation of details creates a sensory experience for the reader. When one reads "Big Two-Hearted River," it is as if one were present with Nick throughout.

Another function of the details in "River" is indirection. With one's eyes set on concrete description and factual details, the symbolic implications work tacitly and, therefore, effectively. If one were so inclined, one could read "Big Two-Hearted River" as a symbolic journey; the elements are all present. Nick puts his regular life behind and ventures into the woods. His experience communing with nature provides him a foundation and identity. He walks into the river to be washed clean and start over. In this highly allegorical reading, Nick leaves civilization to commune with nature in order find himself again. What is remarkable about "Big Two-Hearted River" is that Hemingway is able to suggest all these archetypes and thwart an allegorical reading simultaneously. Details like Nick putting sweet fern under his backpack straps or eating onion sandwiches keep the reader's focus on this individual fishing trip. The precise facts of this particular journey into these specific woods prevent one from immediately jumping from sign to signifier, word to implication. There is too much substance in what Hemingway describes for the reader to proceed directly from story to symbolic reading.

But as the stream of details flows by, eventually larger questions loom in the back of the reader's mind. Who is Nick? Why is he here? What is so important about this fishing trip? In this way, the details cause one to ask other, more profound questions, and the reader realizes that the answers have been omitted.

Omitted Implications

Engaging though the sensory details of "Big Two-Hearted River" are, inevitably the reader asks deeper questions only to find that Hemingway leaves out many of the things one expects to find in a story. The reader is not told about Nick at all, nor does one know from where he came. Most significantly, Hemingway does not provide a context for Nick's foray into the woods. Instead, he shows the emotion of the story and Nick's psychological condition by inserting symbolic clues into the text for the reader to find and interpret.

The first clue that something is amiss comes immediately after Nick disembarks the train. The town he expects to find is no longer there: "Seney was burned, the country was burned over and changed, but it did not matter. It could not all be burned. He knew that" (195-196). First there is the apprehension of the situation, as Nick surveys the damage to the town and neighboring land. Then, Nick quickly dismisses these thoughts and tells himself that the fire does not matter. After walking awhile, he stops and notices that even the insects are charred: "Now, as he watched the black hopper that was nibbling at the wool of his sock with its fourway lip, he realized that they had all turned black from living in the burned over land. . . . He wondered how long they would stay that way" (196). Clearly something dreadful has happened. Seney is destroyed, and the countryside is scorched to the point where the insects are blackened. Nick realizes that something disastrous has happened but does not take it in. He actively does not think, and one is left to wonder why. Nick is right, however, that not everything is burned. Eventually he reaches grass and forest.

The scorched land is not the only example of Nick refusing to think about something. When fishing, Nick hooks an enormous trout but is unable to reel it in. For most fishermen, the thrill of almost catching a sizeable trout is part of the joy of fishing, but Nick is overwhelmed by it. "Nick's hand was shaky. He reeled in slowly. The thrill had been too much. He felt, vaguely, a little sick, as though it would be better to sit down" (209). He goes ashore, and eventually "[it] went away slowly, the feeling of disappointment that came sharply after the thrill that made his shoulder ache. It was all right now" (209-210). Hemingway shows us Nick's frailty and tells us of his disappointment, but the reader is left to wonder why an experienced fisherman is overcome by losing a fish.

Perhaps the most suggestive clue comes at the end of the story. Looking downstream, Nick sees that river flows into a swamp:

Nick did not want to go in there now. He felt a reaction against deep wading with the water deepening up under his armpits, to hook big trout in places impossible to land them. ... In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure. Nick did not want it. He did not want to go downstream any further today. (213)

Something about the swamp causes a profound reaction in Nick Adams. The repetition of "did not want" emphasizes the fear that rises in Nick. This overwhelming emotion is echoed by the water rising up to his armpits in a place wherein he cannot accomplish his goal. The swamp is dark and filled with snares. Rather than it being simply a poor place to fish, Nick sees it as a "tragic adventure," and by this point there is too much evidence that something is wrong with Nick for the reader to ignore. The swamp is another example of a symbol in Hemingway's work that remains real for the reader while suggesting much more.

Here is Hemingway's theory in practice. He gives precise, tactile details that create a real experience for the reader all the while hinting at the implications of these details that he has omitted. Using his iceberg metaphor, one definitely senses that what's visible in this story is only a part of a much larger whole. Without the omission, "Big Two-Hearted River" would be a plain story of man who fishes; the implicit presence that the omission brings about is what makes the story engrossing.

Authentic Experience

In *On Bullshit*, Harry Frankfurt uses an example from Hemingway's contemporary Ezra Pound to further explore linguistic hot air. Using the line "Name 'em, don't bullshit me" from "Canto LXXIV," Frankfurt writes that this use of *bullshit* "is a call for facts." The speaker in the poem "will not accept a mere report; he insists on seeing the thing itself" (Frankfurt 44-45). Facts and the thing *per se* are precisely what Hemingway's aesthetics aim for. If he provides the right details and writes them effectively, then the emotional affect manifests itself in his prose. For this reason, "Big Two-Hearted River" is a paragon of how Hemingway wants his writing to function.

As previously mentioned, the content of Hemingway's works often plays a significant role in the level of authenticity or bullshit in the story. "Big Two-Hearted River" has many built-in traits that contribute to the authenticity of the tale. First, Nick Adams is in nature, which is almost always a source of truth in Hemingway. Second, Nick is alone and therefore isolated from the corrupting influence of society. The only hint of human presence in the story outside of its protagonist is when Nick makes coffee and remembers past fishing trips with his friends and his debate with Hopkins over the

best way to make coffee. This is an echo of a bull session Nick has had with his friends, but no one is present in the story to have another meaningless exchange of words.

Interestingly, "Big Two-Hearted River" contains hardly any speech at all. At one point in the narrative, Nick says something aloud while cooking, and his voice "sounded strange in the darkening woods. He did not speak again" (200). The theme of wordlessness continues in "On Writing," the deleted ending of "River." Nick thinks, "The movies always ruined everything. Like talking about something good. ... Talking about anything was bad" (628). Alone in the woods, Nick has no need to speak, and it sounds strange when he does. Hemingway's subject of a lone fisherman eliminates hot air from his story because spoken words are a major source of bullshit, and Nick has no reason to talk. Careless speech and misrepresentation do not exist when there is no one to hear it.

The natural setting and solitude of Nick Adams help eliminate bullshit from the text, but how closely does the writing correspond with Hemingway's vision? In *The Green Hills of Africa*, Hemingway writes that "There is a fourth and fifth dimension that can be gotten" in writing (qtd. in Carpenter 192). F.I. Carpenter suggests that the fourth dimension refers to time while the fifth "has attempted to communicate the immediate experience of the perpetual now" (193). It seems the author believes that excellent writing can achieve some degree of transcendence; he pursues writing that lives in the imagination so vividly that it is timeless and incorporates ideas and themes without explicitly naming them. This is a tall order for any author, but Hemingway attempts it via his objective correlative.

For his objective correlative to work, the parade of details and facts Hemingway writes must be enough to keep the attention of the reader and give enough clues for her to

see the larger picture even though it is omitted. In "River," all the small moments and symbols from the burned over land to the swamp are never overtly symbolic, *i.e.* they always remain objects. Yet at the same time, the implications of the action, setting, and symbols of the story assert themselves covertly so that the reader feels Nick's emotions without being told. There are moments when Hemingway tips his hand and tells us the emotion he wants his reader to feel, but usually the feeling arises automatically from the words.

Perhaps the success of Hemingway's objective correlative can be evaluated by how much the readers of the story agree on what is being implied. The interpretation of "Big Two-Hearted River" has centered on the Nick-as-Hemingway, war wound theory, wherein Nick Adams returns from the Great War and flees to the wilderness to seek healing. However, Kenneth Lynn accurately points out that this interpretation is influenced "not by textual evidence, but by what the critics knew about the author's life" or "rather, by what they thought they knew" (106) and "not a single reference to war appears in the story"(104). Setting aside biographical influences, there are differences among scholars about what the central emotion of the story is. Scholars such as Malcolm Cowley and Philip Young see the story as the painful recovery of a psychologically-traumatized Nick Adams. Other scholars see it as a lovely and enjoyable trip into the woods. For Raymond Nelson, Nick Adams is "bursting with happiness and well-being" (qtd. in Opdahl 118). Yet these two differing opinions are not as disparate as they seem at first. Keith Opdahl unites the two sides, positing that the emotion the story gives "encompasses both instability and pleasure: the fragile but reassuring pleasure the wounded take in their own healing" (118).

Perhaps "Big Two-Hearted River" is the closest Ernest Hemingway comes to accomplishing his artistic goals. The story is timeless. The action could happen tomorrow just as easily as when it was published, and it is one of the author's most well-known stories. The story lives vibrantly in the imagination as its own tale, but it also suggests greater themes and references other stories outside itself. Overall, the author is effective at evoking particular emotions using unique strings of factual details. The facts leading to clearly implied emotions work especially well on a small scale and not as well on a larger one. That most critics agree that Nick Adams' venture into the woods actually tells a tale of emotional turmoil is proof that Hemingway has made his readers feel a story that is not explicit. He succeeds in giving "what the action was that gave you the excitement," writing it clearly "so the reader will see it too and have the same feeling you had" (qtd. in *Hem OW* 30).

Aesthetic Realized

"Big Two-Hearted River" is Hemingway's theory embodied in fiction. In this capstone story of his first major work, the reader sees exactly what Hemingway means in the author's aesthetic statements. The story exists as a narrative complete in itself because it consistently gives sensory and factual details that evoke the Michigan countryside and Nick's experience in it. The concrete descriptions always show the story as it progresses, but they do not give the story its emotional charge. Rather, it is the unspecified back story that captivates one's mind, and it is this that Hemingway omits. Though it is omitted, the larger questions are present due to the clues that the author places in his text. In this way, the story that is given and the one that is tacit exist and complement each other

powerfully, and the reader is led to feel Nick's struggle personally and implicitly. The subject matter of the story lends itself to the feeling of authenticity one gets from the text, but it is Hemingway's ability to unite his written text with his aesthetic theory that makes "Big Two-Hearted River" one of the best works of his career and arguably one of the best short stories of the century.

"The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber"

Hemingway's style changes significantly in the years between "Big Two-Hearted River" and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." By 1936, when "Macomber" was first published, Hemingway had written several novels, including *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, and two more short story collections. His work had earned him international renown and garnered him both followers and critics. Many of the books he published in the early 1930s received heavy criticism. In 1935 when *The Green Hills of Africa* appeared, some critics pounced on the opportunity to impugn Hemingway's work, including Bernard De Voto who stated that *Green Hills* "has few fine and no extraordinary passages, and large parts of it are dull ..." (qtd. in Lynn 426).

"The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" demonstrates that Hemingway was still able to write evocative prose. "Macomber" is compelling, action-filled, and features a controversial ending. In the terms of this paper, the story exemplifies a shift in Hemingway's writing that has been slowly developing. Carlos Baker notes that in "Macomber," Hemingway has not lost his commitment to writing truly, "but now he was ready to invent the characters, and to imagine the circumstances in which they were to be entangled" (156). This willingness to invent is a step away from the realism that characterizes his early writing career, and with more invention comes a shift in Hemingway's style.

"Macomber" is a fascinating story because Hemingway is able to make it an excellent work while simultaneously discarding some of his aesthetic aims. In "Macomber," he presents the tactile, sensory details that he consistently says are a feature of good writing, but he also focuses on the thoughts of his characters and tells the story from various points of view. Consequently, Hemingway omits fewer of the emotional implications than he does in his earlier work. Once again, the story is set in nature, but the setting loses its simplicity because its protagonist is not alone. The style is drifting away from Hemingway's theory, and one begins to question how much of his aesthetic of truth-telling is authentic and how much is bullshit.

Details and Thoughts

One can see the distance Hemingway has come from "Big Two-Hearted River" by examining the way he uses factual details in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." He does not abandon the aesthetic of factual details entirely; there are several moments in the story that match his aesthetic notion of facts leading to emotions. His description of landscape once again demonstrates his capability to paint a vibrant visual picture for his audience by stringing together illustrative details. Like the Michigan setting of "River," Hemingway evokes an Africa that is alive because it is particular. Early in the story, he describes the scenery: "So they sat there in the shade where the camp was pitched under some wide-topped acacia trees with a boulder-strewn cliff behind them, and a stretch of grass that ran to the bank of a boulder-filled stream in front with forest beyond it ..." (*Short* 14). The prose in this section functions like a cinematic camera; the lens is first on the acacia trees, then the cliff, and then it runs along grass to

the nearby stream. The uniqueness of the scene ensures that the reader does not have a foggy, generalized picture of the campsite. The specificity of the description gives the verisimilitude of the scene.

One can see Hemingway's commitment to authenticity via detail again later in the story when Robert Wilson surveys the countryside from the jeep:

There was a heavy dew and as the wheels went through the grass and low bushes he could smell the odor of crushed fronds. It was an odor like verbena and he liked this early morning smell of the dew, the crushed bracken and the look of the tree trunks showing black through the early morning mist, as the car made its way through the untracked, parklike country. (32)

The imagery here is powerful and persistent, and it adds up to a moving sensory experience for the reader. One feels the weight of the dew and sees the black trees trunks standing starkly against white mist. Unlike the vague smell given in "Big Two-Hearted River," the reader knows that these plants smell like verbena. The passage seems to zoom out from fronds to trees to mist to the car tracking its way over the landscape. Once again Hemingway uses tangible, factual details to insert the reader into a realistic African setting to experience the trip along with the characters.

Perhaps the most compelling feature of "Macomber" is its action sequences, and again one encounters these sections via precise presentation of facts. Following his own prescription for style, Ernest Hemingway avoids subjectivity by providing details based on fact. One of several action sequences occurs when Wilson and the Macomers chase down buffalo:

... the brakes clamped on and the car skidded, plowing sideways to an almost stop and Wilson was out on one side and he on the other, stumbling as his feet hit the still speeding-by of the earth, and then he was shooting at the bull as he moved away, hearing the bullets whunk into him,

emptying his rifle at him as he moved steadily away, finally remembering to get his shots forward into the shoulder, and as he fumbled to re-load, he saw the bull was down. (33)

The sentence leaves the reader breathless as Hemingway refuses to stop the action with a period until the buffalo falls. The length of the sentence adds to the effect, but the ceaseless flow of details gives the rush of action. There is the skidding car and the hunters landing on the "still speeding-by of the earth," a delightful Hemingway phrase that gives all the sensation while disregarding grammar. One hears the bullets hit the quarry with a "whunk" and watches Macomber fumble with his weapon. Hemingway makes his verbs and nouns do the work of narration. The veracity present in the description of nature and purity of action are a constant throughout Hemingway's prose, and these passages in "Macomber" remain fact and detail-oriented.

Unlike "Big Two-Hearted River," there are multiple characters in this story, so Hemingway makes use of dialogue as a third way to present factual information. In order to avoid subjectivity, he must present the characters' spoken words just as a reporter sets down speech. One expects Hemingway to set forth the dialogue simply and without comment or interpretation. Indeed, one such section of dialogue functions exactly that way. After Margot Macomber returns from her late-night rendezvous with Robert Wilson, her husband confronts her:

'You said if we made this trip that there would be none of that. You promised.'
'Yes, darling. That's the way I meant it to be. But the trip was spoiled yesterday. We don't have to talk about it, do we?' ...
'I'm going to talk.'
'Don't mind me then, because I'm going to sleep.' And she did. (29)

Here the dialogue conveys emotion without any narrative comment, aside from the brief "and she did." One feels all the emotion of the scene without the narrator mentioning betrayal, fury, frustration and fatigue. Hemingway needs to give only the words, and the reader can easily infer the emotion of the scene.

However, there are also moments in "Macomber" when Hemingway sets aside the simplicity of his earlier style and is unable to resist telling what he has already shown. After her husband discovers his courage, Margot Macomber says, "'You've gotten awfully brave, awfully suddenly'" (39). One senses her uneasiness with the changing circumstances from her words alone, yet immediately after the quote one reads that her "contempt was not secure. She was very afraid of something." The narrator confirms what the reader has guessed already: Margot is worried. The comment here is unnecessary and is something Hemingway would have edited out in his previous fiction. Yet he tips his hand to ensure his audience is following along. Such explanatory comments from the narrator do not take over the story, but their occasional presence is out of character for the author.

A more significant shift in Hemingway's style is the frequent use of his characters' minds to shape the story. "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" is not the first story in which Hemingway explores the mind of his characters; "Now I Lay Me," for example, consists largely of Nick Adams' thoughts. Overall, however, psychological exploration has not been a characteristic technique for Hemingway to this point. In this way, he differs from other Modernist writers who are fascinated by the innerscape of the mind. Hemingway generally stays on the surface and implies the depths. In "Macomber," however, the thoughts of the characters are constantly in view.

While reading the story, the thoughts of all three main characters are put on display, but the dominant psychological voice in the story is Robert Wilson's. The reader enters into the hunter's mind throughout the tale, and frequently the impression the reader receives is a result of Wilson's perceptions. Early in the story, Hemingway uses Wilson to shape one's opinion of the Maccombers: "[American women] are, he thought, the hardest in the world; the hardest, cruelest, the most predatory and the most attractive and their men have softened or gone to pieces ..." (16). Later in the story, Wilson reappraises Macomber: "Look at the beggar now, Wilson thought. It's that some of them stay little boys so long ... But he liked this Macomber now. Damned strange fellow" (38). Using characters' opinions to present a tale adds much more subjectivity and complexity to a narrative because one cannot be sure whom to trust, and what's true in the story is more difficult to pin down.

The use of several points of view in "Macomber" also shows a change in Hemingway's writing. At different moments in the story, one sees the story from four different viewpoints, including that of a lion. It is through the animal's eyes that one observes the approaching hunters: "Then watching the object, not afraid, but hesitating before going down the back to drink with such a thing opposite him, he saw a man figure detach itself from [the jeep] ..." (22). Exploring the point of view of an animal is a far cry from providing objective facts. The majority of the author's fiction features a stable point of view in the narrative, which is usually an omniscient narrator. By inserting multiple viewpoints, the story becomes increasingly subjective, and it is more difficult for the reader to have a dominant impression of what is true in the narrative. Hemingway is more willing to move away from a straight-forward style.

By giving the reader various viewpoints and thoughts in "Macomber," one must ask if Hemingway realizes that direct presentation of facts is not enough to produce the kind of depth he seeks. Would one get the impression that Margot is cruel if Wilson does not say so? Is the buffalo hunting passage enough evidence to show how much Macomber has changed without confirming it via another point of view? By employing characters to fill in interpretive gaps, Hemingway seems to admit that factual details are capable of carrying the reader only so far. The precise descriptions and action sequences give the setting and action effectively, but they are not enough to tell the story on their own. He provides depth via narrator comments, thoughts from his characters, and four points of view. If the story consists more of thoughts than details, what then becomes of Hemingway's theory of omission?

Saying Too Much

"Doesn't do to talk too much about all this. Talk the whole thing away. No pleasure in anything if you mouth it up too much" (38). Robert Wilson's comment is another in the long list of moments in Hemingway stories where garrulousness is to be avoided. It is a theme that dovetails neatly with his aesthetics of omission. Saying too much about something ruins it. Depth is achieved only by omitting. Yet "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" is riddled with moments of including what Hemingway leaves out elsewhere. With the characters' thoughts on full display, what is omitted in this story?

The line that incites Wilson's comment about talking too much is Francis Macomber's question, "But you *have* a feeling of happiness about action to come?" (38).

Emotions are the topic of discussion here, and Wilson is reluctant to discuss them as one expects from a Hemingway character. The veteran hunter is accustomed to experiencing the emotion of the hunt inwardly and not saying anything about it, but Macomber's sudden coming-of-age causes Wilson to bring out the Shakespearean quote that has been his mantra; "By my troth, I care not; a man can die but once; we owe God a death and let it go which way it will he that dies this year is quit for the next" (38). This confession embarrasses Wilson, and he wants to end the conversation for fear it will destroy the feeling. Open discussion of emotion destroying its authenticity is precisely what Hemingway fears in his writing.

Keith Opdahl writes that "Hemingway evokes the emotion within us by describing the situation, and if it is a new or unique combination of emotions, we say he has *created* that feeling within us" (114). For Hemingway, overt mention of emotions is something to be avoided. If the text does not bring forth the emotions intrinsically, then the prose fails. Yet specific mentions of emotion appear throughout "Macomber": the title character has "a feeling of definite elation" (36), Wilson "was very embarrassed," (38), Margot is "very afraid of something" (39), and these examples exclude the various mentions of emotion in the dialogue. The reader knows the various backgrounds of the characters, how they feel toward each other, and much of their thoughts. Compared to the way the author eschews any mention of emotion in "Big Two-Hearted River," it seems that hardly anything that is omitted in the earlier story is not stated plainly in "Macomber," with one crucial exception.

While firing madly at the charging buffalo, Francis Macomber feels "a sudden, white-hot, blinding flash explode inside his head and that was all he ever felt" (40).

Shortly thereafter, one learns that Mrs. Macomber has shot her husband from the car just as the buffalo is about to trample him. The surprise ending to this story contributes greatly to its popularity, and has incited critical argument about Margot Macomber's pull of the trigger. Does she murder him out of spite because she recognizes the change in her husband, or is her shot an ill-fated attempt to save Macomber? Interpreting the death of Francis Macomber is at the heart of the story, and Hemingway leaves it a mystery.

As one might expect, there exists a large amount of critical back-and-forth on how to interpret Margot Macomber's gunshot. Philip Young argues that Macomber gains masculine authority by killing the buffalo, and when his wife realizes "she can no longer rule him ... she sends a bullet into the base of his skull" (qtd. in Strychacz *Theaters* 28). Gaillard points out that the gun Margot fires, the 6.5mm Mannlicher, sounds a lot like "man-licker, as in 'man-defeater,'" and contends that Wilson's remark that "in Africa no woman ever misses her lion" foreshadows the title character's demise ("The Short" 45, 46-47). Others argue that Margot's intentions are benevolent. Kenneth Lynn contends that Mrs. Macomber's shot is evidence of her love for her husband: "From where she stood, it had looked as if the bull was about to smash into Macomber and kill him; if she had really wanted Macomber to die, her impulse surely would have been to do nothing" (436). While one can be persuaded one way or the other, Strychacz is correct in saying that "the evidence for any final reading of Margot's actions and motives is simply inadequate" (*Theaters* 15). How one construes Macomber's untimely death depends largely on the expectations the reader brings to the story. Hemingway writes in a lot of what he previously leaves out, but he omits the answer to this central question of the narrative.

Leaving Macomber's death ambiguous is a brilliant move by Hemingway, but even this omission does not seem to meld with his aesthetic theory. According to his theory, something omitted from the text should still be discernible via the words that the author gives. A close study of "Macomber" gives clues to the reader, but it does not provide an authoritative interpretation. The ambiguous conclusion of "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" is a narrative master stroke, but it does not align with Hemingway's aesthetic. The omitted motive of Margot certainly strengthens the tale, but this is in spite of the fact that the reader cannot arrive at the solution obliquely. For the majority of the work, according to his own theory, Hemingway says too much.

Truth and Bullshit

"Macomber" is a snapshot of Hemingway's writing in transition. The story contains much that is similar to "Big Two-Hearted River" in its natural setting and capacity for symbolic interpretation; however, Hemingway is quicker to tell instead of show in this story, and his objective correlative suffers as a result. While nature is still a source of truth in the story, the group dynamics do not permit the solitude and silence that Nick Adams has in the earlier work. Francis Macomber is on safari with his unfaithful wife and untrustworthy guide, and this tension gives rise to misrepresentation in dialogue. The characters are constantly saying things they do not mean and talking around the issue. Following Macomber's cowardly flight from the lion, the conversation among the three characters is filled with hot air:

'Oh no,' she said. 'It's been charming. And tomorrow. You don't know how I look forward to tomorrow.'

'That's eland he's offering you,' Wilson said.

'They're the big cowy things that jump like hares, aren't they?'
'I suppose that describes them,' Wilson said. ...
'Did you shoot it, Francis?' she asked.
'Yes.'
'They're not dangerous, are they?'
'Only if they fall on you,' Wilson told her.
'I'm so glad.'
'Why not let up on the bitchery just a little, Margot,' Macomber said ...
(17)

Hot air is language that "does not contribute to the purpose it serves. No more information is communicated than if the speaker had merely exhaled" (Frankfurt 43), and this is precisely what is on display here. Margot Macomber is not interested in the finer points of shooting eland; she uses polite conversation as a means to humiliate her husband. The tension builds until Macomber calls her on it. Later in the same discussion, Mr. Macomber's "'Have some more eland'" remark really means "shut up." Because the story features tension in its small community of characters, Hemingway incorporates the bullshit that is part of so many conversations.

"The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" lends itself in part to a symbolic reading. While "Big Two-Hearted River" keeps one's eyes on details and suggests the central issues of the story, "Macomber" features fewer details that suggest something beyond themselves and give away more of the back story. The descriptions in the story do not keep his reader's eyes focused on the scene. Rather, the reader is in constant motion among details, actions, dialogue and thoughts. The inclusion of the characters' mental states is the most damaging to Hemingway's aesthetic of detail and omission because the archetypal reading of the tale as a *bildungsroman* becomes somewhat obvious. Macomber ventures into the wild, flees a lion, has his wife cheat on him, and overcomes his fear while chasing buffalo. In case the reader might miss the change in his

protagonist, Hemingway spells it out via Wilson: "More of a change than any loss of virginity. Fear gone like an operation. Something else grew in its place. Main thing a man had. Made him into a man. Women knew it too" (38). Instead of leaving the *bildungsroman* implicit beneath the action of the story, Hemingway places obvious emphasis on Macomber's sudden maturation. By alluding to archetypal interpretations more overtly than he does in earlier stories, Hemingway allows the reader to jump to the symbolic reading of the story.

Getting Away with It

The surprise ending of "Macomber" saves the story from obvious symbolic interpretation. When Margot pulls the trigger on the Mannlicher, two things happen: the plot twist grabs the reader's attention completely, and the *bildungsroman* structure is undermined. If one notices the coming-of-age narrative structure, Macomber's sudden death brings the reader's focus back into the action of the story to wonder about Margot's intentions. Also, the sad ending of Macomber's short happy life is atypical of what the *bildungsroman* structure prescribes. Instead of reaching maturity via passing through trials and living a different life, he is shot before he gets the chance. Hemingway's prose moves away from his aesthetic for most of the narrative by including psychology and archetypal structure, but the finale of the story undoes an allegorical reading at the last.

In *On Bullshit*, Harry Frankfurt describes what seems to be the oxymoron of well-made bullshit. In various situations and careers, there are people who "dedicate themselves tirelessly to getting every word and image they produce exactly right," yet "however studiously and conscientiously the bullshitter proceeds, it remains true that he

is also trying to get away with something" (23). This notion echoes what Hemingway does in "Macomber." The story is finely crafted in parts and is featured in a myriad of fiction anthologies as one of the author's best stories, yet several elements of the story do not align with the aesthetic that Hemingway so consistently proclaims. The death of his protagonist at the end refocuses the reader's attention on the compelling plot of the story and allows the writer to get away with bullshitting the reader about his style and aesthetic.

Ernest Hemingway maintains his amazing talent at describing natural settings and action, yet he includes much of the emotion and implication he previously leaves out. He is no longer content to confidently set forth the facts that lead his readers to an authentic emotion. He guides his reader through the tale, making explicit what is ascertainable to the attentive reader, and, consequently, the symbolic reading that is latent in other works becomes obvious. Yet the events of the story are so compelling that one cannot help but admire and enjoy the work. By keeping the ending a mystery, Hemingway creates a story that lives in the imagination and lasts beyond his generation. Whether Hemingway intentionally abandons his stated artistic principles in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" to try another style or simply does not notice how his prose diverges from his theory, he gets away with writing a story that contradicts his aesthetic because it ends well.

The Old Man and the Sea

While composing what became the last novel published in his lifetime, Ernest Hemingway wrote, "This is the prose that I have been working for all my life that should read easily and simply and seem short and yet have all the dimensions of the visible world and the world of a man's spirit. It is as good prose as I can write as of now" (*Selected* 738). This book, *The Old Man and the Sea*, won Hemingway the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and contributed greatly to the Nobel Prize he won the year after that. The novella restored Hemingway's literary reputation with critics and the public alike and was the capstone on his remarkable writing career.

The Old Man and the Sea marks both a return and a departure in Hemingway's writing. Its simplicity echoes Hemingway's style in his earlier works. The author's style is more pared down again after years of more grandiose language with longer, more grammatically complex syntax. It also takes up a familiar theme: fishing. Like "Big Two-Hearted River," the novella tells the story of one man in nature seeking fish in dangerous territory, but the peril in the book is mainly physical in nature instead of the emotional turmoil Nick Adams undergoes.

Yet *The Old Man* is also unique in the Hemingway canon. It exists somewhere between a short story and a novel. Its protagonist is older and a Cuban. Having lived in Finca Vigia for several years, the author is familiar with the Cuban culture, people and way of life, yet he is also an outsider. Much of the dialogue in the novella is heavily

influenced by Spanish as are some of the ideas. It is an interesting example of an author imaginatively projecting himself into the mindset of another culture while maintaining his authorial identity.

Most importantly for the purposes of this paper, *The Old Man and the Sea* is a far cry from Hemingway's aesthetic, although he does not acknowledge it. As always, the author sets forth illustrative and factual details that are the hallmark of his writing, but he fails to omit anything in the story. The details do not imply the depth they do in previous stories because Hemingway leaves nothing out. Unlike "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," the point of view in this story is stable; the omniscient narrator focuses only on Santiago and the events surrounding him. Due to the simplicity of the story and those passages where the author makes the implications explicit, the novella slips into symbolism and allegory. Thus, though Hemingway provides specific details to give verisimilitude, the reader does not experience authentic emotion via implication, and Hemingway's aesthetic vision is undermined. With the publication of *The Old Man and the Sea*, one sees clearly the gap between what Hemingway says his work is doing and what it actually accomplishes. Is Hemingway bullshitting his readers or himself by advocating his aesthetic and disregarding it simultaneously?

Focus on Thoughts

Ernest Hemingway's ability to paint a vivid scene in prose using details is again on display in *The Old Man and the Sea*. In telling the tale of Santiago's pursuit of the great marlin, Hemingway trades landscape for seascape. This, however, does not mean that the novel's scenery is any less vividly portrayed:

The clouds over the land now rose like mountains and the coast was only a long green line with gray blue hills behind it. The water was a dark blue now, so dark that it was almost purple. As he looked down into it he saw the red sifting of the plankton in the dark water and the strange light the sun made now. (35)

Here again are facts that create a vibrant picture in the reader's imagination. Hemingway uses color like a painter, delicately highlighting the greens, grays, blues and reds of the world that Santiago inhabits. One sees everything from the distant coastline to the depth of the water. Only the "strange light" of the sun does not elicit a clear response from the reader as *strange* is not an evocative adjective. This passage and others like it carry out Hemingway's desire to have his readers live the story rather than just read it, and the success of the picture is achieved with well-placed details. One can see that Hemingway is still able to craft language.

Neither has Hemingway lost his skill at relating action sequences that make one experience the events of the story. It is the factual details that give the excitement when the first shark comes to eat the now-dead marlin strapped to the side of Santiago's skiff:

The shark closed fast astern and when he hit the fish the old man saw his mouth open and his strange eyes and the clicking chop of the teeth as he drove forward in the meat just above the tail. The shark's head was out of water and his back was coming out and the old man could hear the noise of skin and flesh ripping on the big fish when he rammed the harpoon down onto the shark's head ... (101-102)

Aside from another careless use of *strange*, the motion of the scene is the result of excellent diction and syntax. The reader sees the mouth and hears the teeth click and the flesh tear. The verb *rammed* gives the feeling of a specific kind of forceful motion. The run-on sentences give a sense of breathlessness, as Hemingway strings his clauses

together with multiple *ands*. The descriptive diction and skillful syntax make for a perfect melding of information and feeling.

Passages like the one above, however, do not constitute the bulk of the narrative; rather, it is the thoughts and speech of Santiago that tell the story. For the majority of the narrative, the reader's attention is focused on Santiago's solitary voyage on the water. Once again the issue of speech versus silence surfaces in Hemingway's work, and again silence is favored: "It was considered a virtue not to talk unnecessarily at sea and the old man had always considered it so and respected it. But now he said his thoughts aloud many times since there was no one to annoy" (39). In this story, the protagonist is an old man who no longer follows the maritime mores. Santiago thinks aloud partly because of his solitude, but one cannot help but feel that he also no longer cares what people think of him. The thoughts of the old man appear regularly throughout the story. Often Santiago's thoughts and words interact as if he were in conversation with himself. On page eighty-nine, Santiago thinks, "I'm tired than I have ever been ... and now the trade wind is rising. But that will be good to take him in with. I need that badly," and then says, "I'll rest on the next turn as he goes out." By consistently telling the reader what Santiago thinks and feels, Hemingway again says "too much."

In *The Old Man*, Hemingway's fiction strays even further into the realm of the mind because Santiago's inner dialogue must carry the story and even provide much of the conflict. The decision the writer makes in "Macomber" to use the thoughts of the characters to tell his story is taken further in this novel. Indeed, Santiago's mindset is of central importance to the story because the narrator relates only part of the action. Hemingway makes his protagonist both the subject and the vehicle of narration. It is

through the fisherman's eyes that the reader views the final struggle with the marlin: "You are killing me, fish, the old man thought. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother" (92). Santiago's feelings and thoughts are the story. The novella does not have enough plot, characters, and changing scenery to hold the reader's attention for over one hundred pages if its author presents only facts and details. Hemingway consistently undermines his own artistic ideas by stating emotions and thoughts in *The Old Man* because he realizes that his iceberg aesthetic cannot function in the story.

The tangents that appear sporadically throughout the work are perhaps the strangest departure from Hemingway's stylistic ideals. Ernest Hemingway is renowned for his tight, spare prose that includes only the most revealing and pertinent words, yet *The Old Man* contains passages that are superfluous. Consider the author's explanation of the Spanish interjection *ay* on page 107: "There is no translation for this word and perhaps it is just a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands and into the wood." Perhaps one can argue that this didactic passage serves to enlighten the readers who are unfamiliar with Spanish, but Hemingway is never shy of quoting various languages elsewhere in his fiction without explanation. If the passage read, "'Ay, galanos,' he said aloud," what would be lost besides the overt comparison between Santiago and Jesus Christ? If anything, the feelings of fatigue and defeat are more present when the word is unexplained, a principle Hemingway himself frequently expounded.

The recurring discussion of baseball is another example of unnecessary tangents. Early in the story, Manolin and Santiago discuss the American League:

'The Yankees cannot lose.'
'But I fear the Indians of Cleveland.'
'Have faith in the Yankees my son. Think of the great DiMaggio.'
'I fear both the Tigers of Detroit and the Indians of Cleveland.' (17)

This conversation is inane, extraneous, and odd. The story has nothing to do with baseball. The only function this conversation has is to introduce Joe DiMaggio into the tale, and it is evident that Hemingway wants to draw a parallel between Santiago and DiMaggio. While being pulled by the great fish, Santiago thinks, "Do you believe the great DiMaggio would stay with a fish as long as I will stay with this one? ... I am sure he would and more since he is young and strong. Also his father was a fisherman" (68). The Yankee Clipper leading his team despite a bone spur in his heel is the measure by which the aged fisherman evaluates his attempt to reel in the giant fish.

While it makes sense that a Cuban fisherman follows baseball, the addition of a second sport is only a distraction in this novel. The metaphor in Hemingway's sporting stories is that a given game is a microcosm of existence. The courageous fight Santiago wages against the fish parallels humanity's battle with the universe, much like Ahab and the whale in *Moby-Dick*. The implication would be more potent if Hemingway downplayed the comparison between sport and life and let it exist tacitly. Adding a second sport by which the old man can compare his performance in his sport is redundant and undermines much of the metaphorical power in Santiago's misadventure. By this point, not only is Hemingway including what he previously omits in his work, he is also adding elements that draw attention to what was once left out. The beautiful, detailed passages still supply beauty and the sense of authenticity, but they are overwhelmed by the number of words that are either not germane or are spent highlighting the

metaphorical implications of the text. In short, the absence of omission in this text leads to an allegorical reading.

Omitting Nothing

Ernest Hemingway never had a high opinion of literary critics, but he seemed to hold a special dislike of symbolic readings of his work. When George Plimpton asked him about the symbols in *The Old Man and the Sea*, he said, "I suppose there are symbols since critics keep finding them. If you do not mind I dislike talking about them and being questioned about them" (30). In a letter he wrote to Harvey Breit, he is puzzled by Carlos Baker's interpretations of his work: "Do you suppose he can con himself into thinking I would put a symbol into anything on purpose. [sic] It's hard enough just to make a paragraph" (*Selected* 867). Yet, purposefully or otherwise, the author himself makes it difficult to read *The Old Man and the Sea* without finding symbols in the text. Hemingway has come so far from allowing the facts of the story to imply what he omits that he consistently spells out symbolic and allegorical interpretations of his own work in the text.

The story starts out simply enough; Santiago has not caught a fish for eighty-five days, and he ventures out to deeper waters to try his luck there. But as soon as the old man hooks his marlin and gets pulled for some time, Hemingway's story leans toward symbolism. Santiago thinks, "My choice was to go there to find him beyond all people. Beyond all people in the world. Now we are joined together and have been since noon. And no one to help either one of us" (50). This passage is heavy-handed, especially for Hemingway. The reader already knows everything here mentioned from elsewhere in the

text, but it seems the author cannot resist the urge to ensure his reader sees the allegory of the fishing trip. The passage reads almost mythically: the old man has gone out too far and has become one with a fish in a fight to the end. Santiago tells the fish, "I'll stay with you until I am dead" (52). Later, the fisherman tells himself that it does not matter that he has proven himself in the past—he must do it again (66). Elsewhere, the poor fisherman demonstrates his talent for existentialist creeds: "But a man is not made for defeat ... A man can be destroyed but not defeated" (103), and "I'll fight them until I die" (115). By this point the particulars of the book fade and the existentialist reading becomes almost impossible to overlook.

The existentialist reading of *The Old Man* is only one symbolic reading the text supports. One can also find gestures that make Santiago into a Christ figure. First, there is the passage describing *ay* as the sound of the fisherman who feels a nail pierce his hand as mentioned above. The Christian symbolism is more obvious when Santiago finally lands and carries his mast on his back, falling because of its weight, until he lies down to sleep with his arms extended out to his sides and his palms up (122). While it is a stretch to turn the entire book into a Christian allegory, the obvious symbolism directs the reader away from the world of the story again and points to something larger. The use of symbolism is "an admission that the fact is more than a fact, that behind it lie other planes of meaning and reality" (Maloney 191). Hemingway has completely discarded his early ideals of keeping his stories small.

Perhaps the most interesting symbolic interpretation of the novella is the parallel between Santiago and his author. Like his author, Santiago is an old man still working to make a living by his trade, which he has done for a long time; he is an older, Cuban Nick

Adams. The fisherman knows many tricks and has the resolution (23), but he has not had luck recently. He sets out for the deep waters in an attempt to bring in a fish that will restore his reputation, believing that "he could beat anyone if he wanted to badly enough" (70). The parallelism with Hemingway is too resonant to dismiss. "It is not so much that Santiago was a fisherman in whom the writer saw himself; rather that Hemingway was a writer who thought he could disguise himself as Santiago" (Young 26). The points of comparison between author and character are so numerous that this disguise is rendered ineffective while making another allegorical option viable.

Philip Young argues that any attempt to distill the novel into allegory is too simplistic: "If we ask ourselves what *The Old Man and the Sea* is 'about' on a public and figurative level, we can only answer 'life,' which is the finest and most ambitious thing for a parable to be about" (22). This may be true, but Hemingway does not seek to write parables. With so much of the book consisting of symbolic implications and obvious parallels in the story, it is impossible to read *The Old Man and the Sea* without finding symbolism. John Aldridge accurately points out that one "must question the vitality of a story that becomes a myth too quickly, that is accepted as universal before it has been felt as particular" (qtd. in Lynn 565). While earlier stories offer hints of symbolism, Hemingway staves off metaphor and allegory by keeping the reader focused on the details of the narrative. Conversely, the author's final novel suggests symbolic readings that present Santiago as everything from Everyman to Christ to Hemingway. The fisherman is all things except a Cuban fisherman. By pointing to various symbolic and allegorical options, the entirety of Hemingway's iceberg floats on the surface in the text of *The Old Man*.

Brimming with Bullshit

Like the two stories discussed previously, *The Old Man and the Sea* is not devoid of moments of authenticity when one feels the emotion naturally rising from the details without it being directly stated. However, the plot is utterly unrealistic. Even though the sporting subject matter is familiar territory for Hemingway, *The Old Man* is the first story in which Hemingway completely abandons realism. Though some aspects of the book are true to life, Hemingway no longer feels constrained to provide the truth only. The central event of the story, the task of bringing in a marlin of enormous size after being at sea for several days is impossible. Robert Weeks writes that Santiago's "combat with the fish is an ordeal that would do in even a vigorous young man," and the battle between fish and man that Baker calls "'gallantry against gallantry'" is "more nearly fakery against fakery: a make-believe super-fish dueling a make-believe super-fisherman" (35, 37). The plot rests upon a central impossibility. So far from writing a series of facts that give the story its power, the crux of the novella is a fake premise.

The Old Man and the Sea features beautiful details that are nonetheless insufficient to hold the reader's attention, repeated inclusions of what Hemingway normally omits, and a fakery at the center of the subject matter; is it then too much to say that *The Old Man* is brimming with bullshit? Once again, Harry Frankfurt is *apropos*:

[The] essence of bullshit is not that it is *false* but that it is *phony*. In order to appreciate this distinction, one must recognize that a fake or a phony need not be in any respect inferior to the real thing. ... What is wrong with a counterfeit is not what it is like, but how it was made. (47)

Method is what separates the real thing from a phony, and for a writer this means style in the largest sense of the word—the author's artistic vision. By 1952 when *The Old Man* was published, Hemingway had changed his style to the point that it contradicted his aesthetic. It is not that Hemingway denied the truth as it pertained to fishing or was unaware of it. Rather, he wrote a story that seems indifferent to reality. This disregard for the facts of his story undoes his objective correlative. Unrealistic details cannot give rise to authentic emotions, especially when the depth of the story that used to be implied is plainly given. While similar in many ways to his earlier prose, *The Old Man and the Sea* is a completely different kind of Hemingway story.

Perhaps the stylistic differences between Hemingway's early and later work is more easily seen by comparing the two anglers in "Big Two-Hearted River" and *The Old Man and the Sea*. Both stories feature a fisherman alone in a natural setting, but their intentions are markedly different. Nick Adams does not care how many fish he catches (*Short* 211) and fails to reel in the largest trout he hooks. He is overwhelmed by the attempt and refuses to fish the swamp. Santiago purposefully sails into deep water in order to catch the marlin that other fishermen avoid. Although the old man catches the enormous fish after an incredible (and unbelievable) struggle, he is unable to bring his catch into harbor in one piece. Hemingway's artistic success parallels these fishing trips. When, like Nick, he focuses on the small things—the suggestive details—he writes powerful stories with profundity. When his work grasps at largesse and symbol, like Santiago's ambitious foray away from shore, the effort weakens his prose, and he is unable to craft a meaningful tale.

Successfully Fake

Perhaps it is too much to hold Hemingway so strictly to his aesthetic, especially when his work succeeds without always following it strictly. After all, writers ought not to be censured for using different approaches. Yet Hemingway's legacy is built firmly on his fact-based style: "Hemingway is above all a realist; his aim had always been to communicate the facts exactly; and his reputation rests squarely on his success in doing so" (Weeks 38). Fairly or unfairly, one expects some degree of realism when reading his fiction.

The Old Man and the Sea is a moving book in many ways, and it shows that Ernest Hemingway had not lost his ability to describe a scene or relate action in a compelling way. But unlike his earlier work, the facts presented are overshadowed by the symbols and obvious gestures toward the world outside the text. The novel slips too quickly from the story of an individual man battling a singular marlin into any number of allegorical readings and symbolic interpretations. The realism upon which Hemingway builds his reputation is also undermined by the utterly impossible events of the story. *The Old Man and the Sea* is a book that completely disregards its author's aesthetic, yet it restores his renown as an author and finally wins him the Nobel Prize he covets.

Re-evaluation

The reader has seen how Ernest Hemingway's prose changed in three works spread across his career. As his writing progressed, it became increasingly distant from his aesthetic theory. Writing "truly" and setting down the event "as it was" no longer represented the only aim of his prose. His writing incorporated other techniques that included psychology and overt symbolism. Due to these changes, one must consider the implications that this gradual change in style has had in the evaluation of Hemingway's work.

Before moving on, however, some potential objections to my argument deserve attention. Perhaps the first objection one might have is that three stories are too small of a sample to argue for this alteration in style in Hemingway's entire canon. This is a weighty objection indeed, as Ernest Hemingway is the author of several novels and dozens of short stories. One can argue that there are scattered later stories in which the style mirrors the author's earlier work. My argument is not that Hemingway's writing demonstrates an increasing distance from his aesthetics in every instance. Rather, his divergence from his aesthetics is a general trend as his writing progresses. Fiction (like any art) is not a medium that is easily examined for consistency. Artists have tendencies and change their work, and understanding these shifts is a valuable part of understanding the work. These three stories are indeed a small section of Hemingway's work, but they are nonetheless illustrative.

A second objection might be that I go too far in expecting Hemingway to use the same aesthetic goals and write the same way throughout his life. Writers are artists, and artists must create. Like all people, artists age, experience new things, and change their tastes. Hemingway lives twenty-seven years between the publications of *In Our Time* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, and his life alters dramatically and repeatedly in that period. It would be foolish not to expect his later work to be different from the earlier stories. My purpose in evaluating the changes in his writing is to compare his changing style to his aesthetic beliefs that remain static in order to better understand his legacy. Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954 for "his mastery of the art of narrative ... and for the influence he has exerted on contemporary style" ("Nobel"); these two aspects, art and style, are the basis of his reputation. Critics must generalize when they evaluate an author's achievement, but how accurate is our idea of how and with what ideals Hemingway writes?

His letters, interviews, and various passages demonstrate that Hemingway never changed his artistic ideals about what constitutes good prose. For example, Hemingway stated in 1925, "I'm trying in all my stories to get the feeling of the actual life across—not to just depict life ... but to actually make it alive. So that when you have read something by me you actually experience the thing [*sic*]" (*Selected* 153). Almost thirty years later, he wrote something very similar: "You have to take what is not palpable and make it completely palpable ... so that it can become a part of the experience of the person who reads it" (*Selected* 837). Hemingway set out the same aesthetic principles regardless of his age, yet his writing was dramatically different. He was either unaware that his later

prose contradicted his aesthetics, or he purposefully disregarded his early aesthetic in later works, while espousing the same artistic ideals.

Perhaps Hemingway did not notice that his writing was drifting away from his aesthetics, or, more generously, he did not believe it was. A letter composed while penning *The Old Man and the Sea*, wherein he says that the prose he is writing now is "what I have been working for all my life" supports the latter idea (*Selected* 738). Hemingway lived through various accidents, concussions, illnesses, and near-death experiences; it is possible that his deteriorating health damaged his capability to fuse his aesthetics and prose as he did in his early career. If age and illness greatly contributed to his shift in style, Hemingway was an experienced author who lost the ability to distinguish the real thing, the iceberg-theory-influenced prose, from the attempt. If accurate, this frees him from the accusation of deliberate deception, but it does not dispel questions about the validity of his artistic principles.

While it is more pleasant to think that Hemingway simply did not recognize that his writing altered with time, there is too much evidence to the contrary. The large amount of negative critical feedback Hemingway received must have called the author's attention to the alterations in his writing. Before *The Old Man* was published in 1952, Hemingway had written nothing of consequence since 1938 and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. His work between these novels was savaged by critics, including Northrop Frye, who commented that *Across the River and Into the Trees* has "a great theme, and in the hands of someone competent to deal with it—say Ernest Hemingway—it might have been a long short story of overwhelming power" (qtd. in Lynn 555). Though Hemingway

often despised literary critics, he must have known that not all of these attacks were off-base.

It is also unreasonable to argue that the stylistic changes are a result of his health. Hemingway experienced multiple wounds, illnesses and accidents throughout his career, including some that occurred while producing several of the works that best exemplify his early aesthetic. The cumulative effect of his deteriorating health on his authorial powers would be quite strong by 1952 when he earned the Pulitzer Prize and reclaimed public and critical acclaim. The exact correlation between the author's health and work can never be known fully, but Hemingway displayed a repeated ability to compose works of excellence regardless of his age.

The idea that Hemingway was unaware of how his prose changed also contradicts the evidence that the author was a craftsman who meticulously examined his work. This is the author who rewrote the ending of *A Farewell to Arms* thirty-nine times because he felt words were not quite right (Plimpton 23) and always spoke of the writing process as a strenuous undertaking. Hemingway valued his writing much like Nick Adams did: "He felt almost holy about it. It was deadly serious" (*Collected* 629). Significant changes in style do not simply happen to such a deliberate, intensely committed writer.

In all likelihood, the changes Hemingway makes in his prose are deliberate, and he must have been aware that his latter work no longer featured the aesthetic ideals he claimed to follow. He was, in a sense, bullshitting his audience about the purpose of his writing. He once wrote that if "an author writes clearly enough any one can see if he fakes" (*Hem OW* 79), and he was right. Due to his own commitment to "true" writing and

his continual affirmation of what such writing consists, Hemingway's attempts to get away with fakery in his work are easily recognizable.

The Validity of Hemingway's Aesthetic

Given that Hemingway was cognizant of the increasing distance between his artistic vision and his actual prose, one must question the validity of the writer's aesthetic theory. All artistic theories arise in opposition to what exists in the era before them. Given enough time, however, each *avant garde* literary mold becomes *passé* and is swept away by its successor. Hemingway's aesthetic of detail and omission is no exception. The final analysis of an aesthetic movement or set of ideals must be the work produced by its advocates. Hemingway's writing has endured beyond his generation, and some of it derives its excellence from the author's artistic vision; however, there is a significant part of his canon that succeeds despite using his early style only partially. Other works achieve excellence without aligning with the author's aesthetic at all. Therefore, one must reconsider the value of Hemingway's aesthetic in the evaluation of his fiction.

In order to assess how applicable his aesthetic is to his prose, one must decide how accurate Ernest Hemingway's understanding of his work is. It would be foolish to discard what an author says about his work, but in Hemingway's case, the reliability of his statements is questionable. Thomas Strychacz makes the argument that Hemingway critics frequently employ a tautology: interpretive problems regarding the author's ideas about masculinity are answered with a set of "commonsense notions" regarding his style, and stylistic issues are resolved via another set of gender assumptions (*Theaters* 19). This same tautology exists between Hemingway's understanding of his writing and the prose

itself. Critics use Hemingway's own explanations of his aesthetics to assess how his prose style functions, and *vice versa*. The tautology comes apart if Hemingway's statements about his own work are fallible.

In order to evaluate the viability of Hemingway's aesthetic, one must first remember what makes the author's artistic theory successful. Hemingway's aesthetic works best when his omitted subject, which makes up seven-eighths of the iceberg, is accessible and present via the details he provides. Scenes, pictures, actions and descriptions exist powerfully and are well-portrayed consistently throughout Hemingway's work, and the author prided himself on the ability to show these elements clearly and concisely. "Big Two-Hearted River" stands as evidence that the iceberg theory can be used to craft realistic prose while enabling multiple interpretations. If the measure of success for aesthetics is the ability for the writer to bring it to life in fiction, then "Big Two-Hearted River" demonstrates that the iceberg theory can be realized. However, one has the impression that Hemingway believed his aesthetic could function in every story, and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" and *The Old Man and the Sea* show that Hemingway does not or cannot bring this ideal to fruition.

The ironic downfall of Hemingway's theory of detail and omission is that it cannot be direct enough. The theory has enormous and inherent limitations. The author must avoid anything that is not a factual, suggestive detail and eliminate any explicit mention of emotion. This effectively eliminates much of the substance of fiction, including psychological reflection, narratorial commentary, exploration of emotion, extensive symbolism, and any other departure from realism. Other authors openly engage subjects, characters, emotions, society, religion, and philosophical issues because they

make no attempt to keep these issues latent; if it is important, it must be discussed.

Hemingway's reliance on omission rendered him unable to insert depth into his narratives directly because he wanted the meaning of the story to be accessible without telling the reader explicitly. When his pared-down prose does not permit the reader to see past the details into the depths of the story, one is left with one-eighth of the meaning and a story that does not pierce the surface. Perhaps the surprise is not that Ernest Hemingway eventually strayed from his aesthetic ideals but that he was able to use his theory effectively at all. Surely Hemingway's style has been influential in English prose to this day, but if its own proponent eventually gives it up (or at least fudges it), its application must be limited.

Philip Young notes that by the time Hemingway penned *The Old Man and the Sea*, he was "trading on and no longer inventing the style that made him famous ..." (25), and he is right. By the end of his career, Hemingway's once ground-breaking style evolved into an approach that includes more direct discussion of the emotions and thoughts he previously omitted. This alteration is the tacit admission that his aesthetic ideals about style cannot always function effectively. Although Hemingway showed the suggestive force his aesthetics can have in a few of his stories, his inability to use his theory effectively throughout his canon reveals its inherent limitations and its author's willingness to bullshit his readers about his goals. Hemingway's early style simply cannot convey the narrative power its creator wanted in every story, and his later work is evidence that even he found his aesthetic too demanding in the end.

Ramifications

In *On Bullshit*, Harry Frankfurt argues that bullshit is more damaging to one's ability to tell the truth than lies are. While liars and truth-tellers play opposite sides of the same game, the bullshitter has apathy about facts and reality. Via extensive use of bullshit, which "involves making assertions without paying attention to anything except what it suits one to say, a person's normal habit of attending to the ways things are may become attenuated or lost" (60). This issue is especially of interest in respect to Hemingway because his life and work is an intriguing interplay between bullshit and truth. Throughout his life, the author purposefully misrepresented events. He claimed he was wounded 227 times in World War I, but he recovered enough to join the 69th Infantry of the Italian army and fight in three major battles (Lynn 82, 85). The second great war found him telling the story that he "assumed command of a combat team that was pinned down on the sand ... and had led it to safety in the lee of a hill" on D-Day, when in fact he was recovering from an earlier car accident (Lynn 510). Hemingway was fond of bullshit in his stories about himself. When it comes to his fiction, however, telling the truth was his most important aspiration. It seems that Hemingway's fondness for bull sessions slowly became a part of his fiction until he no longer noticed how disparate his ideals and his stories were.

The growing distance between aesthetic and prose must be taken into account when assessing Hemingway's legacy. Brief critical summaries of his work are essentially the same in any fiction anthology: "Adapting journalistic techniques in telegraphic prose that minimized narrator commentary and depended heavily on uncontextualized dialogue, these stories developed a modern, speed-up, streamlined style ..." (*Norton* 2207). Such

abbreviated evaluations of any author are simplistic, but an assessment of Hemingway's opus that is based solely on his early style, like the one above, is inaccurate. If one wishes to base his legacy on his earliest works and ignore what he produces later, then the current critical reputation of Hemingway is largely correct; however, many of his best-known works are more complex and feature a style that includes far more than the objective details that characterize his prose in the 1920s.

It is interesting to note that some scholars pick up on the developments in Hemingway's prose style, but the final consensus remains essentially the same. The question of apathy regarding reality that applies to Hemingway's theory is germane here also. If one can fault an author for saying one thing about his work without caring how accurate it is, the same standard should be applied to his critics. An evaluation of Hemingway's fiction that is presented without appertaining to the stylistic changes in the prose is also a kind of bullshit. It is too apparent that Hemingway's prose style is not always what he says it is for critics to fail to notice the changes. The mythological Hemingway, master of simplicity and omission with consistently tight prose, is too easily propounded and largely phony. Surely Hemingway accomplished excellent works of literature that exemplify the literary ideals he set forth and for which he is known, but many of his best works do not fit this mold.

Clearly, a fuller picture of what Hemingway accomplishes in his writing is needed. This more-encompassing assessment of the author's work would showcase how Hemingway alters his style to match the story he writes because subject matter must affect an author's approach. In discussions of the psychological and symbolic aspects of his work, critics would no longer pretend the author was unaware of their presence. A

broader evaluation of his canon would also explore Hemingway's willingness to experiment with his prose in order to bring about compelling stories. True, if Hemingway were alive, he might resist such explorations of his work, but the significance and value of the works that do not align with his aesthetic cannot be denied. A complete understanding of Hemingway's *oeuvre* cannot exist until the complexities of his prose are accounted for.

The relationship between Hemingway's style and aesthetic evolves significantly through his writing. The early, tight prose of "Big Two-Hearted River" demonstrates that his ideals of details and omission can produce a moving experience and authentic emotions. By 1936 and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," the prose still includes details and omission, but the appearance of psychological examination and narratorial commentary show that Hemingway is omitting less and telling more. *The Old Man and the Sea*, published sixteen years later, still has the factual descriptions of the earlier works, but the story abandons realism and is so replete with symbolism that the narrative does not stand on its own.

By altering his style, Hemingway moves away from his iceberg theory but continues to say that what he writes accomplishes the same aesthetic aim. Thus, using Harry Frankfurt's definition, Hemingway bullshits his audience about what his prose is doing and the efficacy of his aesthetic. Since literary critics base so much of Hemingway's accomplishment on his theory, his reputation as put forth in so many literary anthologies is bullshit, too. My effort to expose the bullshit in Hemingway's writing is not to devalue the author's work but rather to castigate inaccuracies. The work of Ernest Hemingway throughout his career is more diverse and experimental than is

commonly realized, and only a thorough re-evaluation of what Hemingway does in his prose and how well it embodies his aesthetic will reveal the true legacy of one of the most famous authors of the 20th Century.

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