

**Never the Same Iceberg: Theories of Omission,  
Misinterpretation, and Dead Metaphors in Hemingway's Work**

By

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I, the thesis advisor for the above candidate for the  
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## Introduction

The intent of this thesis was inspired by the variety of interpretations of Ernest Hemingway's fiction that have been influenced by words, metaphors, and symbols whose meanings have changed (and continue to change) over time. Writing within the language of their contemporary context and culture, all writers are vulnerable to future generations misinterpreting their writing; this fact speaks for itself in the footnotes of any critical edition of an author writing before the twentieth century. The twentieth century, though, is moving quickly towards a distant past. Almost 100 years after Hemingway began to publish his work, it is clear that the language and culture of the twenty-first century is undoubtedly different from the time for which Hemingway wrote. What is also clear is that Hemingway was aware of this fact, and his experiments in form and style, specifically the principles defining iceberg and omission theories, were experiments in how to write in a language that would be prepared to resist the many complications of time.

Other Hemingway scholars have addressed the issue. Michael Reynolds in particular seems to be drawn to it. In his essay "Signs, Motifs, and Themes in *The Sun Also Rises*," Reynolds observes that "[l]anguage continually changes: it is never the same river twice. Authors, writing for their contemporary audience, not eternity, rely on their readers sharing a common language framework" (147). "Brett Ashley and Jake Barnes," he mentions in another essay on the same novel, "are no longer our contemporaries. Hemingway, as he said of Henry James, is as dead as he will ever be; to continue to read his first novel as if it were written for our age is to be hopelessly romantic" ("The *Sun* in Its Time" 43). Hemingway might be as dead as Henry James is as dead as William Shakespeare, but the works do remain, and with them their characters, settings, events, symbols, etc. Reynolds is not wrong to urge that Hemingway's first

novel would be richer with a deeper understanding of its subtext, but to reduce the work to a “period piece” that can only be understood with a proper understanding of the historical context is to grossly underestimate the power of Hemingway’s craft.

In observing that Hemingway’s writing is subject to the passage of time one evokes a struggle shared by all writers who have ever written before, during, or after Hemingway’s time. What this observation does not suggest is that Hemingway’s fiction should be particularly vulnerable to language change. Hemingway’s linguistic and cultural proximity to twenty-first century, English-speaking Americans does not make his writing a unique case study, but his insistence on omission and attention to detail does. Especially in the early works, Hemingway’s experimentation with omitting major details, not to mention the sparseness of his prose, makes for a kind of writing that has less textual support to lean on should the meanings of any words and/or symbols change over time. That is to say, if the dignity of the movement in Hemingway’s fiction occurs despite seven-eighths of the iceberg being concealed beneath the surface, what happens if the visible eighth, the buoy that alerts the reader to the hulk underneath, is refigured or disappears? Suddenly, navigating the icy seas of Hemingway’s fiction becomes a more worrisome task, and glimpses of unsuspecting vessels torn and sunk across the sea-floor haunt the ice-pilot’s imagination.

The wreckage, however, is not what one expects. In reading through Hemingway’s collected works, that is, with the intent to piece together a list of words and symbols whose meanings may have changed over time, the reader will find two surprises. First, while one might suspect that Hemingway’s writing is particularly vulnerable to language change, the opposite appears to be true. Aside from a few glaring and perhaps unfortunate examples, gross misinterpretations appear to be anomalies rather than norms. The words Hemingway chooses and

the symbols he applies are remarkably persistent in meaning exactly what they were meant to mean. This unlikely outcome is a product of Hemingway's foresight, one which allowed him to carefully anticipate and prepare for the risks of his omissive style. Which leads into the second surprise: that Hemingway was writing with an awareness of the survival of his work over time. Evidence of this awareness can be found throughout his career, but the 1930s, a period following a successful debut that produced *In Our Time* (1925), *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *Men Without Women* (1927) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), marked for Hemingway a phase of reflection and preparation. If Hemingway was going to maintain a career in writing, he was going to reflect on how he made it so far and how he was going to continue to make it last.

During the 1930s, Hemingway wrote and published two works of nonfiction, one book of short stories, one novel, and one play. Some have declared this Hemingway's "experimental" period, and there is a chorus of agreement among the critics that this phase marks a regression in his craft that is not overcome until the triumph of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in 1940. As others have done before, particularly Carlos Baker in *Writer as Artist* (1972), I argue that the period is undervalued. My main prerogative, though, will make no attempt to persuade that the works of the 1930s mark a pinnacle in Hemingway's career, but that the fiction and nonfiction of the period reveal Hemingway's conscious awareness of his readers and future readers that would help to develop the style that will be championed in the later masterpieces. During this time, Hemingway would experiment more in form than ever before or ever again, and what these experiments would yield would not be a regression of craft, but a honing of it. If the style of the early career was crafted from intuition (and from lessons learned from Modernist masters such as Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein), the experiments of the 1930s would allow Hemingway not only to understand these intuitions, but to harness and expand upon them. For Hemingway, omission

and iceberg theories were not static philosophies, but developing ideas that could be molded and expanded through experimentation. For the purposes of this study, we will want to consider a modification of Reynolds' phrase: perhaps it is never the same *iceberg* twice.

## I

*The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing.*

–Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*

By the mid-1920s, Hemingway would publish the New York edition of *In Our Time* (1925), a collection of short stories which functions more like a story cycle or experimental novel. In the preface to Robert Stephens' valuable collection, *Ernest Hemingway: The Critical Reception*, Stephens informs his readers that the book was recognized for its "sharp, acrid style" (Stephens xi). Since it was a debut, reviewers concerned themselves primarily with the style of the stories, or chapters, and the variety of influences from which that style might have sprung. Reviewers "set out to identify the elements that must have figured in the formation of such a style and vision," drawing comparisons to predecessors such as Sherwood Anderson, Ring Lardner, Katherine Mansfield, Jonathan Swift, Henry Fielding, and many others (Stephens xi). The consensus was one of praise, and in relating the new author's style to his predecessors, the conclusion was that Hemingway possessed "an exciting style" and "was full of promise" (Stephens xi). That promise gave way to some mixed reviews of *The Torrents of Spring* early in 1926, but the anticipation of the reviewers for Hemingway's first serious novel would be put to rest before the end of the year. In the fall of 1926, Hemingway would publish *The Sun Also Rises* (1926).

For all of the novel's near-century-lifespan, reviewers have disagreed on how to interpret the work. Praise for the novel aside, first-responders seemed divided over how to interpret it. On the one hand, there are those who read the book as "a keynote of disillusionment" in which "the author tries to give an impression of sickening futility" (qtd in Stephens 40). A reviewer writing for the *Cincinnati Inquirer* describes the novel as satire, "sometimes almost horrible in its

depiction of futility” (31). At least one reviewer for the *Dial* could not contain his vitriol for the novel, writing: “[i]f to report correctly and endlessly the vapid talk and indolent thinking of Montparnasse café idlers is to write a novel, Mr. Hemingway has written a novel” (42). For many, the disillusionment and futility is most obvious in the novel’s characters. The same reviewer for the *Cincinnati Inquirer* writes: “[h]ere is a book which, like its characters, begins nowhere and ends in nothing” (31). Conrad Aiken describes all of the characters as belonging “to the curious and sad little world of disillusionment and aimless expatriates” (33). Writing for the *Boston Evening Transcript*, another reviewer goes further: “there is no single character who is sure of himself or his purpose; all of them are impotent in one way or another, or at best, ineffectual and unable to find adjustment” (35). The reviewer for the *Dial* pours more venom into his ink: “[Hemingway’s] characters are as shallow as the saucers in which they stack their daily emotions” (45). And perhaps one reviewer in a brief clip entitled “Sad Young Men” provided the most economic phrase to describe the novel’s characters: “cosmopolitan castaways” (35).

For all the declarations of disillusionment and futility, there were also responses of hopefulness and stoicism. “Jake Barnes’ generation is not ‘lost,’” insists Schuyler Ashley of the *Kansas City Star*, “though it has suffered heavy casualties” (37). “Indeed,” another reviewer writes, “one is inclined to the view that these are not a lost generation, Miss Stein to the contrary” (37). Of the characters, one reviewer laments that they “have no morals, drink too much, are blown about by their passions, have no religion and no ideals,” but ultimately concludes that “they are alive, truly real and alive, with courage and honesty” (46). Herbert Gorman implores that readers must give “Hemingway the credit of having created a group of

vividly-conceived people existing in a somewhat febrile atmosphere” (38). Gorman, though, concludes that *The Sun Also Rises* is:

...the tale of a great spiritual debacle, of a generation that has lost its guiding purpose and has been driven by time, fate or nerves (whatever one desires to call it) into the feverish atmosphere of strained passions . . . There is hardly a character in the book that is not thwarted. Yet, in spite of this, a cold twilight of beauty informs the action. –38

While many of the reviewers would agree that the action of the plot is, in fact, informed by its cast of “cosmopolitan castaways,” the discord sounds from whether the novel is satiric or redemptive.

The debate continues today. As recently as the Spring 2018 issue of *The Hemingway Review*, Donald Daiker continues to defend the novel from interpretations that attempt to pigeon-hole the narrative into a satiric, disillusioned portrait of the so-called “lost generation.” For Daiker, these contradicting interpretations are a symptom of the dual epigraph to the novel which positions Stein’s notorious declarative sentence “[y]ou are all a lost generation” next to a passage from Ecclesiastes. While many of the castaway lot take Stein’s declaration as representative of the narrative, Daiker urges that the epigraphs were intended to be contradictory. The passage from Ecclesiastes, then, is to be read as the author’s response to Stein’s dismissive phrase, and the reader is left to infer that all generations are, in fact, lost.

Daiker, of course, is sounding a horn that has been blown before. Indeed, luminary critic H.R. Stoneback, whom Daiker cites, has devoted much of his prolific career to dispelling any myths regarding disillusionment and futility in the novel. His *Reading Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises*, the first volume of the Reading Hemingway series, is a book length study that has persuaded many readers that to read the novel as a pessimistic one is to miss the point. The commentary, described as “an exercise in close reading,” leaves nothing untouched. Stoneback exhausts “every aspect of what might be regarded as part of the submerged iceberg of

[Hemingway's] fiction" in a reading that leaves little doubt that the novel was indeed intended to be redemptive and hopeful (xi). Stoneback's studies of the novel, beginning in the late 1970s, precede Daiker by forty years. And Stoneback has long argued "that Hemingway does not present Gertrude Stein's 'lost generation' proclamation as a slogan to be endorsed, but as fatuous grandiloquence to be undercut" (4). He continues to add that this "undercutting" is not only presented by "the wisdom reflected in the second epigraph, from Ecclesiastes, but also by the action and design of the novel" (5). The next near-three-hundred pages go on to demonstrate that point.

Though the book is unmatched in terms of research and insight, others have taken on similar tasks yet reached different conclusions. In his essay "The *Sun* in Its Time: Recovering the Historical Context," Michael Reynolds sets out to identify and elaborate on the important contextual elements that have been lost in the fifty years between the publication of the novel and the year he was writing. "The places and the weather may look the same," he maintains, "but all else has changed. The music has changed. The clothes have changed. The prices, the moods, the politics, the values—all irrevocably changed" (43). At times in the essay, Reynolds appears to lean towards a redemptive interpretation. "Jake's novel," he writes, "is an act of redemption written by a troubled man struggling to maintain some sense of dignity" (61). At other times, however, he abandons that thought. "[T]he result," he writes, "is a novel about the corruption of Jake Barnes, whose hopeless love for Brett leads him to pimp away his membership in Montoya's select club of *aficion* . . . Jake Barnes has destroyed one of the last values left him in an already impoverished world" (63). Ultimately, Reynolds concludes that "Jake's final condition frequently escapes the contemporary reader, who lacks the historical context for

reading the novel” (63). Somehow, then, the same historical context led one Hemingway biographer and another Hemingway critic to contrasting conclusions.

Whether it is safer to trust the biographer or the critic is another question, but the root of the problem itself probably stems from what Stoneback describes as the “labyrinthine” structure of the novel. “Labyrinths,” he writes, “*suggest* wrong turns and dead ends but they also convey the certain knowledge that there is a way through the maze, a path that must be followed to reach the center” (xii; emphasis added). The trouble with *The Sun Also Rises* is not that readers are inventing conclusions that misrepresent the text, but that these conclusions are being drawn from pieces of the text that do not represent the whole. Readers navigating the wrong turns and dead ends of the novel read writing on the walls that describe futility and despair, and so they follow the signs until they reach some darkened corner. With seemingly no place left to turn, in darkness the wanderers make out for themselves what the maze was all about. These readers, however, have yet to complete the labyrinth. The darkened corner is not the center, but a threshold to be crossed through if the journey is to yield any reward.

Hemingway himself was no stranger to the issue. By adopting a labyrinthine structure and submerging the bulk of the story beneath the surface, he practically invited reviewers to miss the point. On October 25, 1926, after the novel was first published, he wrote to Maxwell Perkins: “[t]he Sun should be out soon I imagine. I’ll be curious to see the reviews” (*The Letters of Ernest Hemingway: Volume 3* 131). The reviews would come in, and after reading a couple more written by the *New York Times Book Review* and Conrad Aiken, Hemingway wrote Perkins again: “It’s funny to write a book that seems as tragic as that and have them take it for a jazz superficial story. If you went any deeper inside they couldn’t read it because they would be crying all the time” (148). He knew the journey to the center of the novel was difficult, and that

it would elude many, yet still kept faith that many would make the effort. “It was refreshing,” he wrote to Perkins regarding a review from the *Boston Evening Transcript*, “to see someone have some doubts that I took the Gertrude Stein thing very seriously—I meant to play off against that splendid bombast” (158). In fact, in this same letter, Hemingway chooses to make the labyrinth a little easier to navigate. Writing in regard to the first printing of *The Sun Also Rises*, which included a longer version of the passage from Ecclesiastes, Hemingway asks Perkins to “lop off the Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity—What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?—delete all that” (158). Cutting so that the quotation begins with “One generation passeth away,” Hemingway hoped that the opposition between the two epigraphs would be made “much clearer,” allowing readers a better opportunity to get “[t]he point of the book,” that Hemingway “didn’t mean [it] to be a hollow or bitter satire but a damn tragedy with the earth abiding forever as the hero” (158). In addition to the direct conversation between the two epigraphs making things “much clearer,” the deletion of vanity, as Stoneback points out, is also “astute” in that the repetition of vanity “might seem to diminish the cyclical sense of renewal that he wishes to emphasize—the sun *rising* on the abiding earth” (5). The center of the novel, a story of circular renewal with a labyrinthine structure, is a place Hemingway hoped his reader could reach, and his effort to provide this experience was balanced by his desire to provide a reward that was fulfilling in the effort needed to gain it, but not so difficult that only a few could reap the benefits.

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There is a small scene that begins the third chapter of *The Sun Also Rises* in which Jake Barnes observes the passing of day and coming of night. Looking on from a café terrace, Jake

watches as the steady stream of Parisians, horse-cabs, and taxis flow through the streets, each preparing for the daily transition from afternoon into evening:

It was a warm spring night and I sat at a table on the terrace of the Napolitain after Robert had gone, watching it get dark and the electric signs come on, and the red and green stop-and-go traffic-signal, and the crowd going by, and the horse-cabs clippety-clopping along at the edge of the solid taxi traffic, and the *poules* going by, singly and in pairs, looking for the evening meal. I watched a good-looking girl walk past the table and watched her go up the street and lost sight of her, and watched another, and then saw the first one coming back again. She went by once more and I caught her eye, and she came over and sat down at the table. The waiter came up. –22

And so, the sunlit streets of the first two chapters give way to electric lights that set the stage for the entrance of Lady Brett Ashley. The scene may only be a fragment of the novel, and may even be overshadowed by other scenes within that chapter (dinner with a poule, dances at the bal musette, declarations of misery in the back of a cab), but within this small scene is an even smaller symbol: a traffic light.

The “red and green stop-and-go traffic signal” that Jake observes at the beginning of chapter 3 looks forward to the “mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic” during the final scene of the novel. While the significance of the traffic light for Jake or Hemingway might only be guessed at, the image is surprisingly flexible in the interpretations it allows its readers to make. Those beholden to a futile reading of the text might interpret the traffic light as symbolic of routine or monotony. The recurring image, then, suggests a symbolic “trap” that Jake and the rest of the “lost” generation are caught in. Their flight to Spain and return to Paris might finally be taken as attempts and failures to escape the trap, the mounted policeman still directing their paths at the end of the novel. Those reading the novel as a hopeful narrative might interpret the traffic light as symbolic of Jake's ritualistic behavior, indicating that the stop-and-go nature of the light switching from red to green maintains order on the streets, reflecting the order that Jake strives for and achieves at the novel's conclusion. The image, however, is complicated by the

passing of time. To contemporary readers, the symbol favors pessimistic interpretations. Traffic lights today, at virtually every other intersection on twenty-first century roads, can rarely be conceived of as anything other than routine, monotonous, and boring. Stoneback, however, warns against such interpretations, explaining that “[c]ontemporary readers should be aware, before concocting some elaborate red light-green light symbolism or suggesting that Jake's watching the light change indicates his boredom, that this traffic light is a great novelty since very few were first introduced in Paris in the mid-1920s” (31). That specific traffic light, Stoneback notes, “may well have been the very first traffic light in Paris” (31). Given this historical context, monotony is replaced with the cutting-edge. The interpretative playing field is, so-to-speak, levelled out for the well-informed and careful reader. Those who are unfamiliar with the history of traffic lights, however, are left behind.

That such a small image could have such a direct impact on a scene is the risk and reward of omitting details and charging images with added meaning. Because language evolves over time, the risk potential increases while the reward potential decreases. In labyrinthine terms, rather than risk/reward business jargon, ancient writing on the walls might have aided fluent interpreters (i.e. Hemingway’s contemporaries), but for those who are foreign to the language (i.e. twenty-first century readers), the writing, even if translated, is more likely to mislead. Hemingway was not only familiar with language evolution and its relationship with writing, but he has written about it. In *Death in the Afternoon*, after the narrator/author explains the decadence of bullfighting to the “old lady,” he admits that “decadence is a difficult word to use since it has become little more than a term of abuse applied by critics to anything they do not yet understand or which seems to differ from their moral concepts” (62). He goes on to broaden his statement, however, when he says that “all our words from loose using have lost their edge” (62).

Hemingway was familiar with the fact that the meanings of words change over time, particularly words that are used frequently and without care. In the case of the traffic light, overexposure to the image makes for an over-abundance of familiarity in contemporary culture. The difficult, and sometimes impossible task for contemporary individuals to conceive of interpretations outside the status quo is a sympathetic one, and one that Hemingway thought the writer should consider. “[W]e must be careful,” the author reminds the old lady, “chucking the term decadence about since it cannot mean the same to all who read it” (62).

Michael Reynolds, always on the forefront of the linguistic discussions at hand, directs us to a telling manuscript page of *A Farewell to Arms* in his book-length study *Hemingway's First War*. On an “unnumbered manuscript page,” Reynolds informs his reader that Hemingway had typed a conversation published in the *New York Times* in 1915 between Henry James and Preston Lockwood. The quote, attributed to James, describes the deterioration of words as a result of the First World War:

The war has used up words; they have weakened, they have deteriorated like motor car tires; . . . and we are now confronted with a depreciation of all our terms, or otherwise speaking, with a loss of expression through increase of limpness, that may well make us wonder what ghosts will be left to walk. –60-61

The question of language and its depreciation, then, was very much on Hemingway’s mind while he wrote *A Farewell to Arms*, enough so that Reynolds can be confident when he claims that the “novel is an answer to James’s question about what language will remain” (61). As evidence, he cites the very famous passage on the dignity of words, here quoted in full:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names

of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the number of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates. –184-185

The impermanence of language and the permanence of place, then, becomes a dichotomy upon which the novel is structured. Frederic Henry, the story's writer, is taking on the overwhelmingly difficult task of relaying his tragic experience in an impermanent form. The impermanence of life is the source of his tragedy, and so his effort to record its details is an act of rebellion against impermanence. By vividly rooting his story in the places they travelled, Henry gives the account a backbone to resist the depreciation of abstract language and emotions.

Hemingway was careful choosing terms about because he was concerned with writing in a language that would last. In *Green Hills of Africa*, while reluctantly talking about writing and writers with Kandisky, Hemingway explains that, in prose, “there is a fourth and fifth dimension that can be gotten” (20). This type of prose, he says, “has never been written. But it can be written, without tricks and without cheating. With nothing that will go bad afterwards” (20). It is important to note that the only description of the kind of writing these dimensions allow is that it will not “go bad.” He maintains that it can be achieved “without tricks and without cheating,” but as far as describing the actual writing, he comments on nothing more than its lasting quality.

Others have offered Hemingway's solutions to “going bad.” Carlos Baker, in his indispensable book-length study *The Writer as Artist*, argues that:

Hemingway's nearly absolute devotion to what is true, coming in an age when absolute devotions are so rare, is not only the dominant drive in his whole esthetic life, but also the firmest guarantee that his works will survive. . . . Any form of truth, however, if it is put into an art form, will help the writing to survive the erosions of time. For the truth is a sturdy core, impervious to the winds of faddist doctrine and the temporary weather of an age” –64-65

In addition to truth-seeking, David Wyatt, in his book-length study of the evolution of Hemingway's craft, *Hemingway, Style, and the Art of Emotion*, explains that in the fight

“[a]gainst the depreciation of words, one fought back with style. A writer’s choice of tone and image and sentence sound and story structure became a . . . struggle to rescue its particularities from words seeking to rationalize its purposes or to anaesthetize its pain” (82). Seemingly, truth and style are the pillars on which the fourth and fifth dimensions stand. What, though, would Hemingway think of the traffic light image today? Would he consider that the symbol might have gone bad?

Of course, we cannot answer for Hemingway, but we can consider that in Carlos Baker’s “When the Warriors Sleep,” a review of *The Sun Also Rises* written in 1953 (a time when traffic lights were commonplace and even computerized in America<sup>1</sup>), he proclaims that “[n]ew acquaintances who pick it up in bookstores, college classrooms, or public libraries are still likely to find it as fresh, as enthralling, and most of all as undated as it was when it rolled off the Scribner presses in 1926” (Stephens 49). “The news about ‘The Sun Also Rises,’” Baker concludes, “is that it is still new,” and beyond that, “its survival is more or less permanently guaranteed” (49). Baker offers his own response to why the novel is still so fresh, suggesting that there are four parts of Hemingway’s writing that lend themselves to its perseverance, those being: language, fact, emotional atmosphere, and symbolic landscape (49). His definition of each attribute is clear enough. The language of the novel, “having been pruned of the temporary, the faddist[,] and the adventitious, is still in daily use among us” (49). Borrowing from Conrad, Baker describes fact as “that debt . . . which the writer always owes to the physical universe” (49). For *The Sun Also Rises*, fact is in the streets of Paris, in the cafes, rivers, and fiestas, and in the tradition of the bullfight. The ability to evoke and manipulate what Baker calls emotional atmospheres “is possible only to one for whom the moral and esthetic apprehensions of human

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<sup>1</sup> “Traffic Light.” *Wikipedia*, 19 June 2018, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traffic\_light.

situations—their truth and falsehood, their beauty and their ugliness—has the immediate force of a blow to the midriff” (49). Jake’s love for Brett, his inability to consummate that love, and his ultimate acceptance of this tragedy creates an emotional atmosphere that packs a punch. And although Baker does not define symbolic landscape in this review, the term is commonly referred to in Hemingway studies, typically when discussing the landscapes of a work that function to carry the moral and symbolic weight of a scene rather than simply setting it. For Baker, the symbolic landscape, in company with the preceding attributes, “sustains and strengthens ‘The Sun Also Rises’ from underneath, like the foundation of a public monument” (49-50).

While Baker insists that the basic strategy of employing the devices of language, fact, emotional atmospheres, and symbolic landscape are the reasons that *The Sun Also Rises* is still “new,” the present predicament shows that the language of at least some aspects of the novel is impermanent. Of course, the supporting foundation of its meticulous facts, super-charged emotional atmospheres, and heavily symbolic landscapes protect the writing as a whole from going bad, but the fact remains that the writing has always been misinterpreted, and our temporal distance from the text seems to only be increasing the frequency of those misinterpretations. Are we to simply settle with the fact that the rest of the novel is sturdy enough to stand despite the impermanence of a handful of symbols? Hemingway, as we know, would leave nothing to chance. Frustrated by any and every misinterpretation, we have reason to believe that the experiments of the next decade or so are at least in part a reaction to this issue. During this time, Hemingway would publish two collections of short stories and two books of nonfiction. All of these books experiment with form and style, each revealing in their own way a response to or meditation on the impermanence of language.

## II

*“To him things are not “like” other things.”*

—Cleveland B. Chase, “Out of Little, Much”

While the early years of Hemingway’s career would define his style as lean, athletic, and suggestive, the years to follow would be marked by a period of reflection on those traits. Following the success and criticism of *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway felt the pressure of living up to his successful breakthrough. In a letter sent to his mother in February, 1927, Hemingway wrote that “now is a very crucial time,” the words that followed, “in my career,” were crossed out (200). “[I]t is much more important,” he went on, “to write in tranquility, trying to write as well as I can, with no eye on any market, nor any thought of what the stuff will bring, or even if it can be published—than to fall into the money making trap” (200). He saw this juncture in his career as crucial to his survival as a writer. In the same letter to his mother, he even considered a six month to a year break from publishing to focus on writing. Writing to F. Scott Fitzgerald, he increased that figure to “10 or 15 years” (323). Although he would avoid such a dramatic break from publishing, he would not do so without resisting some tempting offers.

In June of 1927, Hemingway received an offer from Mildred Temple at the International Magazine Company outlining the details of a contract for the potential serialization of Hemingway’s work. Unsure about the details, Hemingway quickly wrote to Maxwell Perkins for advice on how to proceed, not knowing whether serialization “is supposed to be good or bad for the sale of a book” (251), but being sure that revenue should not be a determining factor. “[P]lease,” Hemingway insists, “throw the money end out” (251). For Hemingway, “it seemed like too much to take on at this time in [his] career” (250). Perkins would agree, as Hemingway would reject Temple’s offer, writing her that “it would be better to write on the novel with no idea of eventual serialization in mind,” repeating later that he did “not want to take an advance

which might even unconsciously affect the writing of a novel because of the necessity for submitting it for serialization” (253). Hemingway felt this was a “crucial” moment in his career, and having “never seen an American survive it,” “it” here meaning serialization, he was trying to develop new ways in which he would be better understood.

Forever fortunate to have the wisdom and support of an experienced editor, during the time Hemingway denied the serialization contract, Perkins “had encouraged a collection of short stories,” because he “believed that short stories, especially when collected, helped keep the public aware of an author and helped prepare for the novel in progress” (Flora ix). Hemingway would agree, writing Perkins on December 6, 1926:

I think [th]e next thing to figure on is a book of stories—and I think it’s very important that it should be awfully good and not hurried. Because if *The Sun* sh[ould] have some success there will be a lot of people with the knife out eager to see me slipping—and the best way to handle that is not to slip. –176

Hemingway, we now know, would not slip, as the book of stories he was working on, *Men Without Women* (1927), would be a success. Today, the collection is valued along with its predecessors and Hemingway’s other great works. The collection includes unforgettable stories like “The Undefeated,” “In Another Country,” “The Killers,” and “Now I Lay Me.” The most famous of all, however, “Hills Like White Elephants,” remains one of the most frequently discussed short stories in high school or college classrooms today. The story, which Hemingway sent to Perkins to be included in the book on June 10, has since been understood by readers, reviewers, and the like as emblematic of Hemingway’s signature style. Moreover, the story acts as a departure from his earlier tendency to avoid figurative language, particularly simile and metaphor.

The story itself tells about the brief time that an American man and a girl named Jig spend waiting for a train to Madrid. They are at a station in the Ebro valley where they share

drinks and wait for their train to arrive. Through indirect conversation, the reader learns that Jig is pregnant, and the couple is debating whether or not to keep the child. While an abortion is the specific “operation” the American man suggests, the words ‘pregnant’ and ‘abortion’ never appear within the actual text. The story is a classic example of Hemingway’s theory of omission and understatement, all information being gained indirectly through dialogue and descriptions of landscape. The tension in the story comes from a conflict between the man and woman’s desires. While the American, whose mind is rational, selfish, and literal, is in favor of what he refers to as a “simple operation,” Jig hopes, perhaps in vain, to have the child and hold on to the love of the man. The two desires are entirely at odds, and so the tension in their dialogue is immediately obvious in the second exchange of the story:

“They look like white elephants,” she said.

“I’ve never seen one,” the man drank his beer.

“No, you wouldn’t have.”

“I might have,” the man said. “Just because you say I wouldn’t have doesn’t prove anything.” (70)

By the time that the man eventually brings up the operation, the reader has already developed a sense that the couple is disagreeing about something, and, likewise, despite any explicit confirmation, Jig’s resolve at the end of the story is clear when she says “[t]here’s nothing wrong with me. I feel fine” (77).

Before any dialogue is even exchanged, tension is felt in the landscape. In the opening paragraph, the narrator describes “[o]n this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun” (69). Both characters eventually remark on the heat of the sun, but the lack of shade except for in the shadow of the station or a passing cloud prepare the reader for only small amounts of relief. Further, the “two lines of rails” suggest the urgency of train travel and a choice in destination. As Joseph Flora observes, “[t]he station carries connotations of waiting and departure; located between the two lines of rails, it accents the

possibility of choice about direction” (43). Clearly, the couple are at a junction, a word that Flora also finds appropriate as it suggests “the new direction that the story will produce for the American and the girl” (43). Hemingway eases the reader into this heated moment, and, as is characteristic of his style, does so without holding any hands, but tactfully setting the scene and writing the dialogue to create a story that is haunting in its tension and memorable for its controlled narrative.

Much else has been said of the style of the story and its signature Hemingway features, but little has been said about the fact that the title is a simile. Sure, there have been plenty of essays and discussions among students and teachers of Hemingway that have remarked that the hills are symbolic of Jig’s pregnancy, that the color white suggests reproduction, or that white elephants, what Flora describes as “venerated in parts of Southeast Asia but elsewhere are typically seen as unwanted possessions or as objects that no longer have value to their owners but might to someone else” (44), are symbolic of the child that Jig desires and the man wishes to be rid of; but what of the fact that Hemingway, who almost completely avoided similes and metaphors in *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises*, decided to make use of a simile for both the centerpiece of his story as well as its title?

Cleveland B. Chase wrote of *The Sun Also Rises*: “[i]t is an interesting fact that neither in his short stories nor in this novel does Hemingway make use of a single simile” (Stephens 42). Contemporary readers have made the same observations. David Wyatt, in his book on the style and craft of Hemingway’s fiction, observes that “[s]ymbolic readings of Hemingway’s early work prove impractical largely because of that work’s resistance to the notion that one thing can be compared to something else; it is a prose noticeably absent of metaphor” (Wyatt 42). Indeed, it is, enough so that Mr. Chase could conclude that for Hemingway, “things are not ‘like’ other

things” (Stephens 42). True, perhaps, of the early work, but the hills Jig sees are very much like white elephants, even if she later revises her comparison, and the presence and treatment of simile in the story reveals a shift in Hemingway’s style of writing.

The story is one that is first and foremost about interpretation. That is, the conflict in the dialogue stems from the conflicting interpretations the couple have regarding Jig’s pregnancy. While the referent, their child, is the same, its meaning varies. Jig’s simile is appropriate because it brings attention to this fact. Venerated by some and unwanted by others, a white elephant is the perfect symbol to represent the couple’s contrasting opinions. The first time the phrase is uttered occurs after the waitress sets two beers on the table in front of the couple. The beers are brought to the table at Jig’s suggestion:

“What should we drink?” the girl asked. She had taken off her hat and put it on the table.  
 “It’s pretty hot,” the man said.  
 “Let’s drink beer.” –69

As Flora has pointed out, Jig “initiates the first dialogue of the story,” and when his response doesn’t answer the question, she “makes the decision” (44). When she remarks that the hills beyond the dry country “look like white elephants,” it is the second time that Jig tries to initiate conversation. Her companion, however, seems uninterested in having the conversation she wants to have; he does not answer her about the drinks, and he responds rather curtly to her comment about the hills, simply offering: “I’ve never seen one” (70). Later, trying again after tasting the Anis del Toro, Jig makes another comparison:

“It tastes like licorice,” the girl said and put the glass down.  
 “That’s the way with everything.”  
 “Yes,” said the girl. “Everything tastes of licorice. Especially all the things you’ve waited so long for, like absinthe.” –71

The man’s general response to Jig’s genuine comparisons divides the couple beyond just their thoughts on her pregnancy and a possible abortion, but in the language that they each use.

Whereas Jig speaks figuratively, the man speaks literally. Her construction of the white elephant simile is received with a literal truth. While Jig can observe that the Anis del Toro “tastes like licorice,” the man only describes its most basic feature: “It’s a drink,” he says. With his practical, reasonable mind, the drink is nothing more than a drink, and when asked how it goes with water, he can only utter the unhelpful, non-descriptive phrase: “It’s all right” (71). Jig’s judgement of the drink, however, is both appropriate and informative. Made from Anise, “a plant with clusters of small yellowish-white flowers and licorice-flavored seed,” the drink does, in fact, taste like licorice (Flora 44).

After her companion denies her attempts to communicate, Jig tries to negotiate. “They don’t really look like white elephants,” she says, “I just meant the coloring of their skin through the trees” (72). She retracts her simile and explains the comparison in terms her companion might understand, yet he still resists and moves the conversation back to drinks (“Should we have another drink?” [72]). Earlier, when she first remarks about the hills, Hemingway adds that “the man drank his beer” after offering his blunt response. In their next exchange, he finally initiates the conversation with a comment on the drinks (“The beer’s nice and cool” [72]). His next lines, however, show that the man’s fixation on drinks had been a sort of strategy for building towards speaking directly about the proverbial elephant in the room. “It’s really an awfully simple operation, Jig,” he says, “It’s not really an operation at all” (72). Note that the man, here, is denying comparisons. For him, like Mr. Chase’s early review of Hemingway, “things are not ‘like’ other things.” As we have seen so far, however, things in this story are very much like other things; for Jig, the hills *do* resemble white elephants, Anise del Toro *is* like licorice, and an abortion *is* like an operation.

In this story that separates man and woman, metaphoric and mundane, there also lies the division of natural and mechanical. Of the setting, Flora observes that “[a]ssociations of life and nourishment connected with a river give way to associations of mechanization and speed connected with the two lines of rails” (43). If the characters are to be split along this dividing line, Jig should obviously be paired with the natural. It is Jig who not only compares the hills to white elephants, or comments on the natural taste of Anise del Toro, but is described multiple times in a short span as looking towards the hills.<sup>2</sup> The American man, however, in his insistence to go through with the “simple operation,” denies the natural. While Jig looks to the hills, he looks “at her and at the table” (75). After she pleads for him to stop talking, he looks “at the bags against the wall of the station” (76). On the bags, he notices the “labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent nights” (76). When he carries the bags to the other side of the tracks, “He looked up the tracks but could not see the train” (77). What he sees, suitcases, stations, hotel labels, rails, etc. are all devices for their travel and remnants of their past. It is significant, then, that the man cannot see the train, for he can no longer see a future for their relationship. Whereas Jig longs for the permanent, the eternal, the man sees only the transient. The train may arrive eventually, but it will also depart. The hills, the trees, and the river, however, will remain.

In dividing characters along natural and mechanical borders, as well as figurative and literal, Hemingway aligns the figurative with the natural and the mechanical with the literal. While Jig sees and talks about the child as a continuation of love and life and an affirmation of the everlasting earth, her companion sees it as a threat to his transient life and a denial of the

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<sup>2</sup> “The girl was looking off at the line of hills” (70); “The girl looked across at the hills” (71); “The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station. Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, were the mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees” (74); “They sat down at the table and the girl looked across at the hills on the dry side of the valley” (75).

temporal self. Just as his characters find themselves at a junction between the temporal and the eternal, Hemingway wrote from his own crossroads. Having to reflect on the descriptive but omissive style that earned him both success and misunderstanding, his considerations moving forward were crucial. Hemingway must have been confident in his suggestive style, but misinterpretations of his work were plenty, and he knew there were more linguistic tools at his disposal to make sure that his readers got it. Of course people would interpret things differently, individual contexts always vary with each interpreter. Hemingway, however, was working on ways to write and remain confident that his point would not be overlooked. Metaphors and similes, which he previously avoided, would prove to compliment, not contradict, his direct style. The characters in "Hills" can be taken as an actual representation of the junction between literal and figurative writing in Hemingway's career. The American man, whose words are practical, is a product of his time. He is understandable and persuasive, but ultimately sterile. Jig, however, breathes life into the hills. Her comparisons connect her emotionally with eternity, and her pregnancy is a sign of her fertility. It comes as no surprise, then, that at the end of this story it is Jig who has direction. She does not look for the train that will take them nowhere because she accepts the river that will carry her forever. Unlike the man who is burdened by the load of their suitcases, she is unburdened by the weight of their child. Hemingway's championing of her resolve for the everlasting is equivalent to a recently acquired acceptance and incorporation of a sort of emotional expressionism.

## III

*...in a little while we ran out of Aragon and down to the bank of a sand river, half a mile wide, of golden-colored sand, shored by green trees and broken by islands of timber and in this river the water is underneath the sand and the game comes down at night and digs in the sand with sharp-pointed hoofs and water flows in and they drink.*

–Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa*

The relationship between practical and emotional would remain in Hemingway's mind for years to come. While Hemingway was working on stories for *Men Without Women*, he was also thinking ahead to “a long book on the Bull Ring” (*Letters vol. 2* 214), a treatise on bullfighting in which he would “attempt to explain that spectacle both emotionally and practically” (*Death in the Afternoon* 343). The toreo had captivated him for many years, it appears briefly in the vignettes of *In Our Time*, is described in detail in *The Sun Also Rises*, and is the subject of the first story in *Men Without Women*, “The Undefeated.” Hemingway knew that the book was going to be long, and he expected the project to take about “5 or 6 years” to complete (214). By the end of 1926, he had a very clear vision of what the book would include when he wrote to Perkins in December:

I will keep the bull fight book going and might do the first part and get it out of the way up to date. It will have illustrations—drawings and photographs—and I think should have some colored reproductions. It is a long one to write because it is not to be just a history and text book or apologia for bull fighting—but instead, if possible, bull-fighting its-self. As it's a thing that nobody knows about in English I'd like to take it first from altogether outside—how I happened to be interested in it, how it seemed before I saw it—how it was when I didn't understand it my [o]wn experience with it, how it reacts on other—the gradual finding out about it and try and build it up from the outside and then go all the way inside with chapters on everything. It might be interesting to people because nobody knows anything about it—and it really is terribly interesting—being a matter of life and death—and anything that a young peasant or bootblack can make 80,000 dollars a year in before he is twenty three does something of interest to people. I think a really true book if it were fairly well written about the one thing that has, with the exception of [t]he ritual of the church, come down to us intact from the old days would have a permanent value. But it has to be solid and true and have all the dope and be interesting—and it won't be ready for a long time. But you can figure on it for the future if you like. –175

He was right about the project taking a long time, it wouldn't appear in print until 1932, six years after he described the book to Perkins, and seven after he conceived of it (214). He hoped the book would "last right on through" (214), and the six years of planning and writing seems to have paid off. Today, the book is considered by many to be the best book English of its kind, some even believing it among the best books ever written on the toreo in any language (Baker 144). His descriptions of the details of the bullfight are, in classic Hemingway fashion, accurate, informative, and easy to understand. Despite being explanative by nature, the book is hardly tiresome. Moreover, the book was more than just a book about bulls. For Hemingway, the book was to be "bull-fighting its'self."

In writing *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway undertook the responsibility to qualify the toreo in terms of art, specifically writing. Mike Reynolds, like many others, sees a connection between bullfighting and writing: "this book about bulls and their matadors is equally a book about the writer, his writing, and the relationship of both to the reader" (79). Indeed, Hemingway makes the comparison obvious a number of times within the text itself: "[i]f a man writes clearly enough anyone can see if he fakes" (47); "all our words from loose using have lost their edge" (62); "[p]rose is architecture, not interior decoration" (168); and, of course, the famous definition of iceberg theory towards the end of the book (191).<sup>3</sup> These observations on the nature of writing earn the attention of any discussion regarding the nature of art. "It cannot be too strongly emphasized," Baker insists, "that the initial impulse behind the book was esthetic" (146).

For Hemingway, the toreo was similar to writing. In a loose sense, he likens the bullfighter to a writer, the bull to writing, and the spectator to the reader. Reynolds understands that matador and writer are not one-in-the-same, admitting that they "appear to be antithetical to

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<sup>3</sup> For discussion on iceberg theory in the context of this essay, see the fourth movement of this thesis.

each other: the one contemplative, the other active,” yet he finds the comparison appropriate in that they “bear metaphoric similarities” (79). Of these similarities, he lists that there is “the same possibility that [the writer’s] skills will diminish, that he will fall from the public eye, that his courage will fail” (79). Both matador and writer, if they are to be truly successful, must provide the spectator and reader with the show that they want to see. A matador and a writer can be honest, or dishonest. For Hemingway, of course, honesty was the only form of art. “[I]n real bullfighting,” Hemingway describes, “the matador should remain still, should measure the speed of the bull by movement of his wrists and arms holding the cloth, and should dominate and direct the bull’s course” (134). This clean, confident form of bullfighting would provide the most elevated experience for the spectator, and all the other tricks “such as making statuesque passes in the direction of the bull’s natural voyage, no matter how brilliant, it is not true bullfighting, since it is the animal that is dominating, not the man” (134). From earlier in the text, we should be reminded of Hemingway’s feelings about tricks in writing:

If a man writes clearly enough any one can see if he fakes. If he mystifies to avoid a straight statement, which is very different from breaking so-called rules of syntax or grammar to make an effect which can be obtained in no other way, the writer takes a longer time to be known as a fake . . . True mysticism should not be confused with incompetence which seeks to mystify where there is no mystery but is really only the necessity to fake to cover lack of knowledge or the inability to state clearly. Mysticism implies a mystery and there are many mysteries; but incompetence is not one of them. –  
47

The false writer, then, presents only an illusion of mystery, dominated by insufficient knowledge and ability, whereas the true writer dominates the mystery and presents it clearly as it is.

For the writer and the matador, his audience can and will see if a performance is faked, and the audience is an instrumental part of each craft. Just as the bullfighter needs spectators to attend the fights in order to be paid, so too does the writer depend on readers to purchase his books. The bullfighter, performing in front of the spectator can hear the crowd’s hoots and

hollers, claps and whistles, applause and distaste throughout the ring. Their disapproval can take the form of “throwing cushions of all weights, pieces of bread, oranges, vegetables, small dead animals of all sorts, including fish, and, if necessary, bottles provided they are not thrown at the bullfighters’ heads” (143). This physical presence, which in extreme cases can take the form of “the occasional setting fire to a bull ring” make the spectator a breathing part of the toreo. “A bullfighter,” Hemingway writes, “will not be better than his audience very long,” explaining that “[i]f they prefer tricks to sincerity they soon get the tricks. If a really good bullfighter is to come and to remain honest, sincere, without tricks and mystifications there must be a nucleus of spectators that he can play for when he comes” (143). The spectator must take a “definite position,” explaining that the choice between true and false is as much a determining factor of the performance as the performance itself:

Either you stand for the real bulls, the complete bullfight and hope that good bullfighters will develop who will know how to fight, as for instance Marcial Lalanda does, or that a great bullfighter will appear who can afford to break the rules as Belmonte did, or you accept the condition the fiesta is in now, you know the bullfighters, you see their point of view; there are, in life, always good and valid excuses for every failure; and you put yourself in the bullfighters’ place, put up with their disasters on the bulls they fail with, and wait for the bull that they want. Once you do that you become as guilty as any of those that live off and destroy bullfighting and you are more guilty because you are paying to help destroy it. –143

It seems Hemingway had similar thoughts about his own audience. As already shown, he was sensitive to their reception of his work, yet resolved to stay honest and true to his craft in order to provide more elevated and enduring responses. Hemingway knew he was only as good as his audience, and so his efforts to develop his craft were also attempts to educate his readers in order for them to understand the value of his work. In a sense, *Death in the Afternoon* is an example of this kind of education. Hemingway chooses a topic that his audience knows nothing about and, in doing so, equips them with the capability to properly assess bullfighting. While this serves as

an effort to save and protect the aspects of the bullfight that Hemingway loved, it also educates his direct audience on how to perceive his own writing.

This sort of educating appears elsewhere in Hemingway's nonfiction. Three years after the release of *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway would finish *Green Hills of Africa*, his autobiographical account of his month on safari in East Africa. In Seán Hemingway's introduction to the Hemingway Library Edition, he observes that the book "did much to shape the impression of Africa in the minds of its readers, especially those in America and Europe" (xii). In many ways, the book is very similar to *Death in the Afternoon*. In *Green Hills of Africa*, Hemingway uses the story of his hunt for kudu in Africa as another opportunity to educate his readers on something they are not familiar with, and in doing so he educates them on his theories of writing as well. During Hemingway's long conversation about literature with Kandisky, the Hemingway reader is set in the listener's place to hear some of Hemingway's thoughts on writing. From this conversation, we gather that Hemingway found fault in his predecessors for not using "the words that people always have used in speech, the words that survive in language" (16); that writers who derive "knowledge and nourishment" from each other, who he describes as angleworms in a bottle, can never leave their bottle, which may take the form of "art, sometimes economics, sometimes economic religion" (17); that "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. His thoughts on mysticism are returned to when Melville brought up:

We have had writers of rhetoric who had the good fortune to find a little, in a chronicle of another man and from voyaging, of how things, actual things, can be, whales for instance, and this knowledge is wrapped in rhetoric like plums in a pudding. Occasionally it is there, alone, unwrapped in pudding, and it is good. This is Melville. But the people who praise it, praise it for the rhetoric which is not important. They put a mystery in which is not there. -15-16

Hemingway also goes into the hazards of succeeding in publishing in his time, arguing that writers who “have made some money” increase their luxury and so are forced to keep writing in order to maintain that style of living, thus killing the writing. Finally, these writers depend on the critics, and if “they believe the critics when they say they are great then they must believe them when they say they are rotten” (18).

This entire conversation helps to give the reader a more complete understanding of the professional side of Hemingway’s career, not to mention the obstacles that Hemingway was aware that he must overcome if he were to be successful and survive the business. He considered his trade a lonely and difficult one, and later in the book he reflects on the permanence and realness of art:

For we have been there in the books and out of the books—and where we go, if we are any good, there you can go as we have been. A country, finally, erodes and the dust blows away, the people all die and none of them were of any importance permanently, except those who practiced the arts, and these now wish to cease their work because it is too lonely, too hard to do, and is not fashionable. A thousand years makes economics silly and a work of art endures forever, but it is very difficult to do and now it is not fashionable. People do not want to do it anymore because they will be out of fashion and the lice who crawl on literature will not praise them. –74-75

As Seán Hemingway wrote in the introduction, Hemingway wanted his reader to be able “to be in” the places he wrote about. He worked so hard to make this feat possible because this effect provided the eternal endurance that he writes about here. If the writer can create a real experience for his readers, then the experience will live in and be passed on by that reader, allowing it to live on forever. One of the benefits of Hemingway’s iceberg and omission theories would be that they allow the reader to complete the act of imagination. That is, Hemingway provides the form of the art, and the reader who responds to it and feels its submerged moment is becoming a part of the form.

That this relationship with the reader was Hemingway's intention was no mistake. The metaphor of the iceberg has always been apt for describing the movement of his writing, but it does not capture the reader's unique relationship to the writing. The metaphor has always been distant, cold, and crystallized, something out of reach; if someone were to actually contact the thing, it would not respond to touch. Later, in *Green Hills of Africa*, though, Hemingway describes another geographical feature that might be better suited for understanding the role of the reader in his fiction. Right after the famous stream passage, Hemingway describes a sand river:

...in a little while we ran out of Aragon and down to the bank of a sand river, half a mile wide, of golden-colored sand, shored by green trees and broken by islands of timber and in this river the water is underneath the sand and the game comes down at night and digs in the sand with sharp-pointed hoofs and water flows in and they drink. -103

The river is complete and composed and has form and structure and, of course, is more than it appears to be. Like a normal river, it has banks, is shored by trees, and is scattered intermittently with islands. The main difference, though, is that it is made of sand. Still, water flows through to maintain the dignity and shape of the river. What is so useful about this geography is that Hemingway describes how the game "comes down at night" and paws at the river in order for the water to flow and for them to have something to drink. In metaphoric terms, the river shows sand, or text, on top, its structure is maintained by the water, or subtext, flowing underneath, and the game, or reader, who paws at the sand will find water underneath. This subtext, though, is not just something that a reader can be aware of, but something that he can drink. Unlike the crystalline iceberg shining in the distance, the sand river is one whose dignity is concealed, but welcomes and rewards those who explore it.

## IV

“. . . the point is I want them all to sound as though they really happened. Then when I succeed those poor dumb pricks say they are all just skillful reporting”

—Ernest Hemingway to Maxwell Perkins, Paris, 16 November 1933

On August 15, 1932, Hemingway sent W.C. Lengel at *Cosmopolitan* a copy of “Homage to Switzerland” to be published, proudly declaring it “a new form for a story” (367). The story explores three separate but similar exchanges among three separate but similar characters while they all wait for a late train at three separate but similar stations. Part one paints the portrait of Mr. Wheeler who makes, despite being unable to follow through, sexual advances on his waitress; part two describes Mr. Johnson’s conversation with the porters and his eventual embarrassment and shame over talking too much about his divorce; and part three takes us to Mr. Harris who, approached by a member of *National Geographic*, deals with his father’s suicide. Consisting mostly of dialogue, the story is written so each of its three parts “open the same way or practically the same” (367). Each scene is set almost identically and the dialogues all begin after the lateness of the train is announced. Set in multiple stations along the same line, the three parts to the story give the impression that each conversation is occurring at the same time. This textual triptych, which Hemingway maintains is “intentional,” was designed “to represent Switzerland metaphysically where it all opens in the same way always” (367). Hemingway had hoped that his writing would be so real that “[a]nybody will have been there when they read Homage” (367). The story would be rejected by *Cosmopolitan*, but published in *Scribner’s Magazine* the following year, and finally collected in *Winner Take Nothing* in 1933.

*Winner Take Nothing* is Hemingway’s third collection of short stories. The collection, however, was not received as well as its predecessors. In response to these new stories, Robert Stephens observes, “critical approval began to swing away from Hemingway” (xviii). A reviewer

for the *New Yorker* admits that while he enjoyed the stories, “the volume as a whole (more later) seems to me less satisfactory than ‘Men Without Women’” (136). Part of the problem for the reviewers, it seems, grew out of the echoing agreement that Hemingway’s style had become too familiar. “We have accustomed ourselves to Ernest Hemingway,” one reviewer writes for the *Saturday Review of Literature* (137). “Hemingway has had so many imitators,” another writes, “and his manner has become so familiar in other men’s writing that until we get back to his own work we half forget what Hemingway himself is like” (142). For some, Hemingway is so much like himself that “it must be admitted that ‘Winner Take Nothing’ marks no advance in the author’s established art” (141).

We might respond to these criticisms by arguing that “Homage to Switzerland” is, perhaps, Hemingway’s boldest experimentation with the form of a story. Composed of three separate stories occurring simultaneously, this textual triptych is unlike any previous work. Its unique attention to the likeness of people, places, and time adds a fresh perspective to the relationships between like things. The reader ponders at what a recent divorcee has in common with a man whose father committed suicide; or at the significance that two of the station clocks described are nondescript yet one is described as carved and wooden. Each of the characters are positioned in a frame and at a time so that their behaviors and actions can be compared simultaneously. This effect, it would seem, is a major element of what Hemingway was trying to do during this period: “to make . . . a picture of the whole world” (*Selected Letters* 397).

The phrase above is taken from a letter written to Pauline Pfeiffer’s parents in which Hemingway explains his intentions with *Winner Take Nothing*:

I am trying to make, before I get through, a picture of the whole world—or as much of it as I have seen. Boiling it down always, rather than spreading it out thin. These stories are mostly about things and people that people won’t care about—or will actively dislike. All right. Sooner or later as the wheel keeps turning I will have ones they *will* like. –397

Before, he tried a picture of bullfighting, later he would try big game hunting, but here he would take advantage of the flexibility of a collection of stories and attempt to get the whole thing. Judging by its criticisms, he was right that most people wouldn't care, and that some would actively dislike it. Still, most reviewers seemed to offer a truce by selecting the stories they thought stood above the rest. While a reviewer for the *Kansas City Star* remarks that "readers are led to think that such sharply etched strokes must mean something even when they don't," he concludes by adding that "Hemingway fans will tell you there are some of his finest stories in this collection, particularly 'Wine of Wyoming' and 'The Gambler, the Nun and the Radio'" (141). Another finds "[t]he Gambler story is from every point of view the most successful in the book" (146). The disagreement over the stories, actually, somewhat amused Hemingway, enough for him to ask Perkins: "[d]oes it seem any significance to you that they all say there are 3 really good stories and nearly all pick 3 different ones?" (401).

One story in particular, however, seemed to gather the attention of multiple reviewers. "After the Storm," the first story within the collection, was praised by Louis Kronenberger, who disliked the other stories, as "the first and finest in the present book" (143). "For sinister atmosphere," the *Time* reports, "Hemingway has never been better than in 'After the Storm'" (144). T.S. Matthews, writing for the *New Republic*, describes "After the Storm" as "an almost magical story, of the kind that will haunt a reader for years" (145).

Perhaps a result of the poor reviews, *Winner Take Nothing* and "After the Storm" are underrepresented in Hemingway scholarship. Both David Wyatt's and Carlos Baker's book-length studies dedicated to exploring and understanding Hemingway's craft have little, if anything to say about the story or collection. Wyatt, in over 200 pages of analysis, never mentions the story, and only once mentions the collection, but even that is simply to describe that

Nick Adams is a recurring character in Hemingway's short stories (35). Baker is slightly more comprehensive, yet the only mention of "After the Storm" is his note that the story appears in the May, 1932 issue of *Cosmopolitan* (414). In a book that manages to dedicate chapter-length analytical meditations on the other works of the period,<sup>4</sup> it is surprising to find that *Winner Take Nothing* is only alluded to.

Admittedly, Baker attends to the short stories as a single unit in his sixth chapter, "The First Forty-five Stories." Of the stories collected in *Winner Take Nothing*, only "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" earns a thorough analysis, while "Light of the World" is discussed for a paragraph, "The Gambler, the Nun and the Radio" and "Wine of Wyoming" split a paragraph, and "Homage to Switzerland" is discussed only in regard to the second part of the story (117-142). It is not fair, of course, to criticize a book that attempts to study the span of an entire career while also fitting everything in. The point, here, is for younger Hemingway scholars to not be misled by the work completed before them. Just because Carlos Baker does not discuss a specific story in regards to Hemingway's craft does not mean there is nothing of importance left to be said or revealed. Of course there are always new discoveries to be made. A close analysis of "After the Storm" should perfectly illustrate this point.

Although *Winner Take Nothing* was criticized for being too much like Hemingway's previous work, the style employed in the first story of the collection is very unlike the lean, terse prose of his previous stories. There is no real dialogue, the paragraphs are long and descriptive, and the narrator speaks with an idiolect that is colloquial and foreign to typical Hemingway narrators. Indeed, the narrator is a pragmatic brute: he lays low at sea to avoid law enforcement,

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<sup>4</sup> Each of the following works contain specific analytical treatment in Baker's lengthy study: *Torrents of Spring*, *In Our Time*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *Death in the Afternoon*, *Green Hills of Africa*, *To Have and Have Not*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *Across the River and Into the Trees*, *Old Man and the Sea*, *Moveable Feast*.

attempts to loot a sunken liner with dead passengers aboard, and when he sees a drowned woman through the porthole under water, he sees her for the rings on her hands as salvage. The character is so much unlike his previous narrators that Hemingway, out of frustration, wrote to his editor:

If I write about *anybody*—automatically they label the character as me. When I write about somebody that can't possibly be me—as in *After the Storm*, that unfortunate convert to Economics religion Mr. Chamberlain says it is unusually imaginative than I've attempted. What shit. —400, *Selected Letters*

Indeed, perhaps the most discussed aspect of this narrative is the fact that it comes from a true story told to Hemingway by a Key West charter boat captain named Eddie “Bra” Saunders (Baker). In the letter cited above, Hemingway claimed that “*After the Storm*” was recounted “word for word as it happened to Bra (400). Susan Beegel’s “‘Just Skillful Reporting?’ Fact and Fiction in ‘*After the Storm*,’” in fact, is a detailed source study that digs through manuscripts, letters, and newspapers to attempt to unravel the historical truth of the event from the literary invention. Beegel’s research convinces that the wrecked ship described in the story was inspired by “the Spanish passenger and freight steamer *Valbanera*, wrecked on Key West’s Half-Moon Shoals in a September 1919 hurricane” (69). She does not attempt to prove that Hemingway consulted any of the sources she examines, but argues that the details of the wreck are ones “that Bra Saunders may have gleaned from more ephemeral sources . . . and repeated to Hemingway” (69). Regardless, the story is widely accepted to come from Bra’s cool recounting, and the decision to use another storyteller’s voice for the narrator of the first story of the collection is a revealing one.

The quote about reporting that Beegel includes in her title comes from Hemingway’s frustrated letter to Perkins wherein he responds to readers and critics taking his stories as facts: “[t]he point is I *want* them all to sound as though they really happened. Then when I succeed those poor dumb pricks say they are all just skillful reporting” (400). The story that Hemingway

tells is of an unnamed man who gets into a fight, knifes himself free from a chokehold, and flees to the docks when someone tells him a man was killed up the street. Not taking any chances, and under the assumption that his reputation and the knifing might implicate him in the murder, he retreats to his boat to wait out the storm from the sea. Appropriately, a hurricane had recently torn through the town, wrecking its streets, buildings, and trees and leaving his boat filled with water. Bailing the water out, the narrator leaves the dock and reflects on the storm:

Brother, that was some storm. I was the first boat out and you never saw water like that was. It was just as white as a lye barrel and coming from Eastern Harbor to Sou'west Key you couldn't recognize the shore. -3-4

In the water, the man sees “a spar floating” and knows that a wreck must be near. He finds a “three-masted schooner” in “too deep water” and sails on until he sees “all kinds of birds making over something” where he finds another wrecked ship. This ship in more shallow water, he anchors and attempts to break in. After multiple unsuccessful diving attempts he fails to break through the glass and is forced to abandon the project. By the time he is able to return to the ship, it has already been looted by “the Greeks” who “got the safe out with dynamite” (7). A haunting introduction to the theme of the collection title, *Winner Take Nothing*, the man literally takes no reward despite finding the ship first, reflecting in the final lines: “First there was the birds, then me, then the Greeks, and even the birds got more out of her than I did” (9).

Beyond the winner take nothing theme, this story deals directly, like “Hills like White Elephants,” with interpretation. “It wasn't about anything,” the story begins, the narrator explaining that the brawl was sparked by “something about making punch” (3). While retreating to the docks and learning about the murder, the man worries about how his fighting and reputation might implicate him with the murder. When he sees a spar floating in the water, he interprets the object not only as a sign of a wreck, but a potential for reward. In the same way, the narrator interprets the cloud of birds flocked over the second wreck. At that second wreck, he

assumes that “near the bottom something must have been open because there were pieces of things floating out all the time” (5). “You couldn’t tell what they were,” he adds, “Just pieces” (5). Those pieces, he later reflects, must have come from the boilers bursting after the ship started sinking in the quicksand. His ominous observation of “the biggest kind of jewfish” and the complete lack of any bodies turning up is haunting in its suggestion. Finally, interpretation and assumption are accepted as limited when the man can only “wonder how fast she made it” (89). “I wonder,” he continues about the captain and other passengers, “if the mate was there with him. Do you think they stayed inside the bridge or do you think they took it outside” (89).

If we accept that the story is caught up in the interpretations of an individual, it comes as no surprise that the core image of the story, a sunken ship, is warped. First of all, the wreck means something different to each of its interpreters. For the man and the Greeks, the ship is equated to its monetary value, estimated to be about “five million dollars worth” (5). The birds and the jewfish, however, respond to the wreck as a feast. Further, for Hemingway’s readers, the wreck is whatever the reader brings to the text: a tragic account of the loss of the lives aboard the ship, a tale of failure despite admirable execution, etc. What is most revealing, though, is the narrator’s description of the ship. Despite the water being “clear” and the narrator seeing “everything sharp and clear,” the man “saw it was all dark under water like a long shadow” (4-5). When he floats over, he looks down at the ship “just lying under there all under water as big as the whole world” (4). He claims it must have been “the biggest boat I ever saw in my life” (4) and that “she looked a mile long under the water” (5). Because of the refraction of light in water, the ship’s size is skewed and enlarged to massive proportions, gargantuan enough to appear “as big as the whole world.”

This hulking symbol ought to remind the reader of Hemingway's famous iceberg declaration:

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, he will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing. –169

The familiar Hemingway enthusiast might also be reminded of a 1935 *Esquire* article in which Hemingway explains:

If it was reporting, they would not remember it. When you describe something that happened that day the timeliness makes people see it in their imaginations. A month later that element of time is gone and your account would be flat and they would not see it in their minds nor remember it. But if you take it up instead of describe it you can make it *round* and *whole* and *solid* and give it life. You create it, for good or bad. –215, “Monologue to the Maestro”

Hemingway seems to be right here, as Beegel's source study describes that “the ship whose fate inspired one of his most memorable fictions is now all but forgotten in fact” (75), but I want to call attention to the adjectives Hemingway uses to describe fiction: round, whole, solid. The wreck in the keys looks like the “whole world,” is described as “rounded over,” and is very solid in that the narrator cannot even break through its glass.

It is very appropriate that the sunken vessel conjures both the submerged part of the iceberg and Hemingway's feelings regarding the permanence of fiction, and what is important to consider is the fact that the man cannot break into the ship. Whole, round, solid, and completely submerged, the vessel cannot be breached. This is a useful metaphor for understanding iceberg theory. That is, if the symbolic structure of a story is completely submerged, it is totally inaccessible. Just as a sand river only retains its form if there is water to flow through it, so too is the movement of the iceberg only detectable if part of it remains above the surface. The submerged symbolism might be accessible to the birds and the fish of the natural order, or the

dynamite and explosives in the hands of the Greeks and scholars, but, for the reader, even one who is attentive and resourceful, nothing but a memory and a story can be salvaged from the wreck.

## V

. . . the palm fronds of our victories, the worn light bulbs of our discoveries and the empty condoms of our great loves float with no significance against one single, lasting thing—the stream.

—Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa*

“After the Storm” may be overlooked by scholars in terms of its style and experimentation, but there is one last detail that should be observed before we conclude. When the narrator of the story is retreating from the fight to his boat, he describes the waste left behind from the hurricane:

There was a big channel blown right out through the middle of the beach. Trees and all are blown out and a channel cut through and all the water white as chalk and everything on it; branches and whole trees and dead birds, and all floating. —4

The description is graphic, but quickly passes by. Although it is considerably shorter than the famous Gulf Stream passage in *Green Hills in Africa*, it is comparable:

. . . and when, on the sea, you are alone with it and know that this Gulf Stream you are living with, knowing, learning about, and loving, has moved, as it moves, since before man, and that it has gone by the shoreline of that long, beautiful, unhappy island since before Columbus sighted it and that the things you find about it, and those that have always lived in it are permanent and of value because that stream will flow, as it has flowed, after the Indians, after the Spaniards, after the British, after the Americans and after all the Cubans and all the systems of governments, the richness, the poverty, the martyrdom, the sacrifice and the venality and the cruelty are all gone as the high-piled scow of garbage, bright-colored, white-flecked, ill-smelling, now tilted on its side, spills off its load into the blue water, turning it a pale green to a depth of four or five fathoms as the load spreads across the surface, the sinkable part going down and the flotsam of palm fronds, corks, bottles, and used electric light globes, seasoned with an occasional condom or deep floating corset, the torn leaves of a student’s exercise book, a well-inflated dog, the occasional rat, the no-longer-distinguished cat; all this well shepherded by the boats of the garbage pickers who pluck their prizes with long poles, as interested, as intelligent, and as accurate as historians; they have the viewpoint; the stream, with no visible flow, takes five loads of this a day when things are going well in La Habana and in ten miles along the coast it is as clear and blue and unimpressed as it was ever before the tug hauled out the scow; and the palm fronds of our victories, the worn light bulbs of our discoveries and the empty condoms of our great loves float with no significance against one single, lasting thing—the stream. —*Green Hills of Africa*, 102

This longer passage is a favorite among Hemingway scholars who use the single sentence in order to defend Hemingway from accusations of only writing short, declarative sentences.

Taking up most of an entire page, the words sprawl through the history of the world—its love, loss, culture, government, technology, passion, etc.—and attempts to capture the eternal in its description of the everlasting stream. The shorter version, in which the trees, branches, and dead birds are carried by the storm water to their decaying destiny, looks forward to all the garbage floating in flotsam and undistinguished in the Gulf Stream.

Many have suggested that the stream Hemingway refers to is a metaphor for death. Observing Hemingway's fascination with tragedy, war, hunting, and all topics concerning death, they conclude that the only certainty for Hemingway was that death always came, no matter what one did while living. The stream, though, seems much more a metaphor for life, than death. The thing about death is, it is impossible for it to be everlasting. By definition, death is literally the end of life. That is, it can only exist as the end of something else. There is no conceivable world in which death is all that remains; yet the stream, for Hemingway, flows on. The idea here is not that the eternal can be achieved in the individual. Clearly, the successes and failures of man, his pain and pleasure, defeats and victories, all of them are insignificant in the current of the stream. But the individual exists within the eternal, and reaffirms its existence by drinking from and being carried away by the stream. The earth abideth forever, we remember, and no amount of sorrow, tragedy, or death can change that.

Hemingway's writing welcomes the reader into the eternal water. By creating a writing that is resistant to time, he makes the water open to readers of all generations. His subjects—the bullfight, hunt, church, pilgrimage—are among the most timeless aspects of human culture. By attempting to capture, describe, and recreate them in their truest form, he attempts to share them

with his generation and future ones to come. But simply telling a reader about tradition will not do, he must allow for them to experience it. While his typically lean, terse, declarative prose allows for him to capture the truth, his extension to symbolic substructure and figuratively pragmatic language allows for the reader to participate in the truth-making. The iceberg of his work, which we can also understand as a sand river, is Hemingway's line in the labyrinth. His genius constructs the form and structure of the walls, but the reader's curiosity, with nothing but his faith in Hemingway's writing, must bring them inside. Ultimately, Hemingway's acts of omission are lessons in faith. They initiate the reader into practicing how to feel the intangible and have faith in the unknown. To see the world that exists beneath the surface—the iceberg beneath the water, the water beneath the sand, the subtext beneath the text—is the ultimate lesson to be learned from Hemingway's fiction. How to have faith in a hopeless world, in a self that is more than the self, in an eternity that cannot be traced, Hemingway's lessons are acts of faith, and his followers thank him by carrying his work through the stream forever.

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