

## HEMINGWAY'S LIMITED VOCABULARY OF SENSATION

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Hemingway's writing has been presented through his use of language. It has been pointed out that his writing shows a careful and controlled use of language trying to present the inarticulate side of life-as-experience. Being primarily concerned with the actualities of life, words merely serve Hemingway to transcribe life's experiences. Prompting the movement outward of emotion he reduces the use of words, their use must be the most minimal and instinctual given the motion and fact which determine it. He uses his strange truncated style of writing in order to express thought processes of his characters as has been indicated by using examples from his short stories: «Big Two-Hearted River», «In Another country», «Soldier's Home», «The Killers», and some other works by Hemingway. A parallel has been drawn with Melville and mostly Mark Twain, two nineteenth century writers. The conclusion has been reached that Hemingway's individuals seem to be more vulnerable than the protagonists of either Melville's or Twain's works, therefore Hemingway's «silences» and «inarticulateness» have been more pronounced. Hemingway's grammar of inarticulateness thus serves to show his characters ways of accepting the way of life by exhibiting the special code of discipline they are forced to observe as a compromise with life, and a way of survival; Hemingway's dispensation with the destructive rhetoric of language has been made full use of in his transcription of life's experiences.

Hemingway's writing exhibits the controlled, careful use of language, it always seeks to express the inarticulate side of experience. Writing, like living, must begin from the physical facts of existence and remain subservient to them:

»I wish I could remember the story about the wisteria vine.«  
»It wasn't important. It was the vine that was important, Tatie.«<sup>1</sup>

Hemingway as a writer is primarily concerned with the actualities of his experience, not the words by which he transcribes those experiences. This requires of him, as it does of his characters, an ability to see clearly, which is a wholly inarticulate act only distorted by codes of language, and a capacity to convey his emotions in a way that will free the reader from the blinders of his own euphemistic training and »nau-

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, New York, Scribner's, 1964, str. 54-55.

sea in regard to experience. « He aims, as he says in *Death in the Afternoon*, to reproduce »the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion« and which, if stated »purely« enough, remains valid.<sup>2</sup> The causation is clear: emotion-literally, »to move outward« — is a product of motion occurring in time, in »sequence«, within a given circumstance and environment of »fact«.

What the terms »motion« and »fact« mean, however, is less clear. Krebs' inarticulate spectatorship, for example, is a motion of the senses though it denies the need for physical movement and involves nothing which we could with any certainty call thought or emotion. Emotion, we discover, is often nothing more than recognizing, as Jake Barnes does, that a cathedral is »nice and dim«. In such cases, emotion barely exceeds the ability to acclaim the existence of fact: »dim« is purely descriptive, »nice« the vaguest and least abstract of value judgements.

To remain true to the conditions that prompt a reaction, and free from outside influence in one's reactions, the movement outward of emotion, like the use of words which follow upon it, must be the most minimal and instinctual possible given the motion and fact which determine it. So, in consequence, we have the strange truncated style of Hemingway's writing, and the truncated thought processes of his characters. To see »purely« is based on such an excessive demand for elimination that only the senses and the physical world, »names« and »numbers«, remain after the word's sayings have been unsaid.

In »Big Two-Hearted River«, we see Nick trying to find himself through this slow process of eliminating false versions of experience in order to discover the true »sequence of motion and fact« on which real emotion must be based. He begins, like Thoreau, by going into isolation within the physical world; once again, »simplyfying« means shutting one's mouth in order to imitate the inarticulate reality of the physical world. He talks to himself once and utters an additional exclamatory sound as he burns his mouth: »His voice sounded strange in the darkening woods. He did not speak again.«<sup>3</sup>

It is not only that Nick finds speech inappropriate in this natural setting, but that the very inappropriateness of the language is part of the safety and security he finds in the woods. Speech is one of the »needs«, like thinking and writing, which Nick seeks to get away from by returning to the »old« place of his childhood:

»His muscles ached and the day was hot, but Nick felt happy. He felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs. It was all back of him.«<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, New York, Scribner's, 1954, str. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, New York, Scribner's, 1953, str. 215., (dalje): SS.

<sup>4</sup> Ernest Hemingway, SS, str. 210.

Thus, unlike Thoreau, Nick feels compelled to abandon all mental as well as verbal activity to find his essential, elemental self. We need not account for this fact as Philip Young does by suggesting that Nick seeks to escape from the psychologically mutilating war.<sup>6</sup> Nick's convalescence in the woods is obviously a retreat from the outside world, but his caution and his fear of his mind are no more extreme than Santiago's in *The Old Man and the Sea*, Manuel's in the «The Undefeated», or Jake Barnes' in his fishing trip. Like them Nick notes his sensations and paces his reactions. His exhaustion and involvement in the minute details of setting up camp negate the forces of mind, thought, and language that had controlled him and leave his senses open to an involvement with the woods he remembers from his youth. He replaces language and thought with physical activity. As in Thoreau, the reduced «conversation» with the world of men returns him to his sensations, to «the old feeling».<sup>7</sup>

«Already there was something mysterious and homelike. Nick was happy as he crawled inside the tent. He had not been unhappy all day. This was different though. Now things were done. It had been a hard trip. He was very tired. That was done. He had made his camp. He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it. Now he was hungry.»<sup>7</sup>

Nick is satisfied with very little: a home he himself had provided, and the exhaustion which his war has produced. His primary satisfaction comes from his feeling of safety: «Nothing could touch him». The «good place» — the woods — allows him to respond through his senses — recognize his hunger — but it is valuable as much for its exclusion of the impositions of the outside world as for the satisfactions of camping itself. Like Frederic Henry, he escapes his individuality, which is a product of his social alliances, to exist in the security of his isolation.

Hemingway's style here suggests Nick's mental caution. Moving in short, sharp, repetitive statements, the phrases parallel Nick's inching movement from sensation to sensation, from observation of fact to sensation with facts. Like his like from Seney, moving from the burnt town to the grassy landscape of the hills, he moves from the absences of negatives («Had not been unhappy») to positives.

Nick avoids all thoughts and memories of his social self. He tries to clear his mind of all life except the present and the earlier wanderings of a long forgotten time. The only way to return to the present/past is by destroying all the accumulated residue of social life — speech, thought, writing, relationships with other men which have been controlled by social position — all the adult areas of his self.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Young, *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration*, University Park, Penn., Pennsylvania University Press, 1986, str. 47.

<sup>6</sup> Ernest Hemingway, SS, 210.

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Hemingway, SS, str. 215.

. These woods values are limiting, but, by their very limitations, they suggest the form of moral thinking which arises from a participation in physical reality which social codes deny. Nick's precision, love of technical details, and joy on primary sensation are a product of the boundaries he sets on his thinking. Over and over, the refrain of caution is repeated: »He did not want to rush his sensations any.«<sup>9</sup> He remembers his past, for example, through an argument with Hopkins about how to make coffee, but cuts off the memory the moment discomfort comes in the form of social position, Hopkins' inheritance and the rift it caused in their fishing comraderie: »His mind was starting to work. He knew he could choke it because he was tired enough.«<sup>9</sup>

Nick finds it safe to remain within the limits of his known sensations. He does not venture into the swamp, which he fears, or the equally fearful mental landscapes of the past. He finds the retreat from the pressures which had absorbed him, but the story offers no suggestion of a way of reconciling his silent, primitive contentedness in fishing with the world of words that drove him there. Like Krebs and Frederic Henry, he has made life livable by eliminating the social and verbal aspects of it and reducing his experience to a physical awareness.

In stories like »Big Two-Hearted River«, Hemingway seems to lend authority, as Harry Levin says, to William James' equation of »emotion with bodily sensation.«<sup>10</sup> Nick's power to experience the woods and internally record his contacts with the natural world is part of an almost absolute refusal to use any of his other human faculties. His mind functions by what Wyndham Lewis calls an »infantile, dull-witted, dreamy stutter (that) compels whoever uses it to conform to the infantile, dull-witted type.«<sup>11</sup> This mental paralysis is one of the consequences of the process of eliminating Hemingway feels is required to acquire contact with the physical world.

Often in Hemingway we sense that emotion and sensation are little more than Bartleby's death-in-life existence. By »preferring not« to believe in the assumptions of the world, to participate in any activities, or to face the world in rebellion, Krebs' life goes »smoothly«, as he says at the end of »Soldier's Home.«<sup>12</sup> His selfless, passive spectatorship provides the security of observation, but makes him into a person, as Wyndham Lewis has said, »to whom things happen.«<sup>13</sup> Although Jake Barnes' and Nick's sensory awareness suggest more involvement within the physical world than Krebs' »cool and clear« feelings, they too feel most secure in voyeurship. The process of emotion leaves one open to misunderstanding and pain which stasis and silence avoid.

<sup>9</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *SS*, str. 227.

<sup>9</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *SS*, str. 218.

<sup>10</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *SS*, str. 112.

<sup>11</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Men Without Art*, New York, Russel and Russel, 1964, str. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *SS*, str. 153—54.

<sup>13</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *ibid.*, str. 18.

Truth is almost always a minimal experience in Hemingway. For his modern, conscious individuals, like Krebs, Frederic Henry, Harry, Nick, or Jake, the search for elemental contact with reality must begin from a willful act of renunciation. By negating illusory ideals, feeling, and hope, the individual can, possibly, survive the fatal accidents of life and the self-defeating codes of the community to establish a zone of activity, or memory, or emotion, which affirms rather than denies selfhood. Inarticulateness is one of the boundaries for this elemental reality; silence is a way of not asking for too much.

Hemingway's ideal of form, of »grace under pressure«, emerges from his concept of experience as a bargain with fate and a product of renunciation and willed limitations. In »Another Country«, he uses the concept of »grammar« to represent this stoic survival and to reveal, by contrast, the dangers of emotions and commitment. The major at the center of the story is sustained by his interest in forms:

»The major did not believe in bravery, and spent much time while we sat in the machines correcting my grammar. He had complimented me on how I spoke Italian, and we talked together very easily. One day I said that Italian seemed such an easy language to me that I could not take a great interest in it; everything was so easy to say. »Ah, yes«, the major said. »Why, then, do you not take up the use of grammar?« So we took up the use of grammar, and soon Italian was such a difficult language that I was afraid to talk to him until I had the grammar straight in my mind.<sup>14</sup>

The difficulty the narrator experiences with the grammar becomes a metaphor for his failure to live by the forms necessary for his survival. The major, too, has broken with form in loving his wife. On her death, he realizes that control and discipline are the only way to survive with dignity in an undignified world: a world of false medals and ideals of bravery, like the narrator's; of false pronouncements, like the doctor's assurance of a cure for his wounds; of false hopes, like his desire of happiness with his wife. The accidents of life make it necessary to maintain control and avoid imprecision.

Like the discipline necessary to survive with dignity, grammar is a discipline of dignified speech. The major's acceptance of his wife's death and perseverance in the treatment which he knows will not cure him are a defensive grammar of restriction and routine which limit the possibility of pain and aid in enduring pain. Grammar is a vision of speech and life held in check by the boundaries of form. Like Jake Barnes' »hardboiled« approach to experience, it limits the distortion inherent in the movement outward through speech and the inevitable suffering which is the consequence of the movement outward through feeling. Hemingway's characters are victims, as Wyndham Lewis has said, »of

<sup>14</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *SS*, str. 270.

a sort of matter-of-fact shell shock.«<sup>15</sup> They know too much about the outrageous indignity of life, and are insular and unfeeling as a form of self-protection. Their passivity is the consequence of their sensitivity encountering too much ugliness and evil; they have no further resources with which to challenge life. In »The Battler«, for example, Nick is left speechless by Bugs' violence; in »The Killers«, by the patent inhumanity of the hoods. Awaiting his death in the latter story, the Swede silently acknowledges his incapacity to escape his fate; his daily survival under the threat of death has wiped out his will to live.

The excessive attacks of the world upon the self in Hemingway's works make the individual more vulnerable than in any of the authors of the nineteenth century. Even in Twain, to whom Hemingway is frequently compared, there is more sense of the alternative than we find in Hemingway's world. Despite all the savagery of *Huck Finn*, Huck continues to pursue the future; there is always an uncharted territory ahead of him. Hemingway's silence is far more extreme. Alfred Kazin correctly observes when he says that »despite (Hemingway's) indebtedness to Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, he had no basic relations to any pre-war culture.«<sup>16</sup>

While both Twain and Hemingway find a resource in passivity and silence against a hypocritical world of false words, Hemingway faces the world with more self-consciousness and a greater sense of his inevitable failure. His characters must will their inarticulateness; when they do, they are left with only a minimal experiences of physical sensation. Their life is reduced to a constant struggle of control.

Although Huck is »lonely« within his illiterate vocabulary, he is not absolutely inarticulate. He has an alternate language by which he communicates with Jim on the raft. It is, like the vocabulary of Hemingway's characters, a highly illogical, associative language made up of a few, simple words which denote material reality and the vague, equalizing connective »and«, but it is not a product of control or will. It is, rather, the natural expression of the intuitive person Huck is. His idiosyncratic mismanagement of words supplies Twain with a rich vocabulary of experience, a fresh and intimate language to replace the Widow Douglas' impersonal pieties.

Also, Huck is a participatory human being; his existence depends on activity rather than speech, feeling rather than thought. As an unsocialized child, he is less conscious of the verbal threats of the community than he is of his physical danger: he runs away from Pap only when his life is threatened, from the Grangerford home only when the family

<sup>15</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Ibid.*, str. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds, An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Fiction*, New York, Harourt, 1942, str. 332—33.

is murdered; he is afraid that the robbers of the *Walter Scott* might kill him; he fears Sherburn's gun, not his speech. He is inarticulate in social situations and feels constrained in the structured forms of grammatical speech, but this is so primarily because his world is non-verbal, rather than, as in Hemingway, because one is forced to be anti-verbal in order to survive. Huck is unconscious of how language reflects personality, though Twain is obviously quite aware of the coincidence of style and perception. His friendship with Jim is a product of shared adventures. The two of them are what they have done. They can explore the unknown only through the limited perspective of what they do know, and explain the unaccountable accidents of their trip only by their superstitions. Their world order is provided by their contiguous association of events. Their limited experience and their unlimited imaginative ability to relate all unexplainable experiences back to their beliefs in an immediate way allows them to account for, and thereby accept, all the misfortunes they encounter.

Hemingway's character's can neither explain, nor fully accept, their fate: »I cannot resign myself,« the major says in »In Another Country.«<sup>17</sup> This threat of the unknown leads to the excessive lassitude of figures like Krebs, the cautious deliberation of figures like Nick, and the angry dissatisfied violence of Hemingway himself. The fact that his characters do not speak or think or even feel reduces the quantity of experience they must struggle with. By demanding too much, or loving »too much,« Harry tells us in »The Snows of Kilimanjaro,« he »wore it all out« while »when your affections are not too involved you give much better value for the money.«<sup>18</sup>

Hemingway tries to reject the unknown by shaping the given world. He does not like surprises as Twain does. The flowing river is the symbol we most remember from Twain, or perhaps Huck lighting out for the territories, which is simply a human equivalent of it: the wanderer seeking the uncharted frontier. The bullring is Hemingway's central metaphor: the ritualistic encounter of man and beast within a prescribed set of boundaries of tradition and physical enclosure surrounded by a judging mass. Twain's river pilot respects the fact that the course of the river constantly changes, that the book is never finished; Hemingway's pilot, on the other hand, fears it.

Despite his migrations, Hemingway's protagonist cannot be said to wander, he cannot afford to, and feels secure only when he knows the terrain. E-motion--the movement outward--is always dangerous to Hemingway, whether it be the expression of feelings or verbalization. He-

<sup>17</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *SS*, str. 272.

<sup>18</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *SS*, str. 61, 70.

mingway replaces destructive rhetoric with a new grammar, a tighter and more controlled use of language, reducing and eliminating false, meaningless phrases and working to purify the form.

One could say that Hemingway is a grammarian; Twain is not. Grammar seems to be an obsession with Hemingway, a metaphor for precision. In *To Have and to Have Not*, for example, Harry Morgan spends his last breaths condemning his fate, but condemning it grammatically:

»A man,« said Harry Morgan, very slowly. »Ain't got no hasn't got any can't really isn't any way out.«

»Now the way things are the way they go no matter what no.«

»A man,« Harry Morgan said, . . . »One man alone ain't got. No man alone now.« He stopped. »No matter how a man alone ain't got no bloody fucking chance.«

He shut his eyes. It had taken his a long time to get it out and it had taken him all of his life to learn it.<sup>19</sup>

Grammar is Harry's last assertion against the lessons of impotence and despair that life teaches; he searches through the evasive verbiage of his life to find a phrase adequate to his understating. Form and control, like silence, separate the self from life, and serve not only as protection against the »nausea« engendered by words but as a victory over the fatal accidents and inconsequence of human existence which cannot be understood. The recognition of the unknown which prompts Melville to create the ambiguities of silence prompts Hemingway into a grammar of inarticulateness which can hold this unknown providence in check. Hemingway unconsciously accepts a compromise with life. His discipline is chosen as the best, perhaps the safest way to endure and to prevent the encroachment of time and change.

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<sup>19</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *To Have and to Have Not*, New York, Scribner's, 1947, str. 224—25.

*Sonja Valčić*: HEMINGWAY'S LIMITED VOCABULARI OF SENSATION

## S a ž e t a k

Prikazan je Hemingwayev stil pisanja preko upotrebe jezika. Istaklo se da njegov stil izražava kontroliranu i suzdržanu upotrebu jezika nastojeći sačuvati »neartikuliranost« kao paralelu sa životom — iskustvom. Budući da je on kao pisac primarno zainteresiran za realnost i činjenice, riječi mu služe samo za transkripciju životnih iskustava. Emotivnost u njegovim djelima je maksimalno reducirana, on je težio da se izdigne »izvan emocija«, tako je i upotreba riječi reducirana na minimalnu i to u svrhu izražavanja instinkta i akcija. Njegov neobičan »krnji« stil pisanja često je u službi izražaja misaonih procesa njegovih protagonista, što je istaknuto primjerima iz Hemingwayevih novela »Velika rijeka s dva srca«, »U drugoj zemlji«, »Vojnikov povratak«, »Ubice« kao i drugim djelima. Povučena je i paralela između Hemingwaya te Melvilla i Twaina, dvaju pisaca iz 19. st. To je dovelo do zaključka da su Hemingwayevi junaci »ranjiviji« nego protagonisti Melvillovih ili Twainovih djela. Stoga su i Hemingwayeve »tišine« i »neartikuliranost« glavnih junaka mnogo izrazitiji. Hemingwayeva gramatika neartikuliranosti tako, moglo bi se reći, služi da označi filozofiju života njegovih likova koji pokazuju posebnu disciplinu, te čak i treniraju određena pravila discipline i forme da bi na taj način postigli svoj kompromis sa životom. Hemingway odbacuje jezičnu retoriku da bi na taj način u cjelini uspio izraziti, odnosno transkribirati život-iskustvo.