

HEMINGWAY - THE DESTRUCTIVE LANGUAGE OF "OUR TIME"

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UDK/UDC: 802.0-7
Izvorni znanstveni članak
Original scientific paper

Primljeno
: 1996-10-09
Received

From the beginning to the end of Hemingway's long literary career his world is sparked with energy of reticence and silence. Hemingway's inarticulate characters do not serve as a compensation for grammatical irregularities, they represent a contempt for mere thought or speech. The article is trying to establish that Hemingway's inarticulate characters in "Our Time" serve to affirm the value of contact with the natural world and a commitment to the senses, while they disavow the controlling logic and assumptions of modern society. Silence represents the negative grace and the positive force, Hemingway also uses muteness to represent an alternative to the life-denying rhetoric of the community.

Hemingway's famous reply to Fitzgerald's notion that the rich are different from the rest of humanity - "Yes, they have more money" - suggests the tremendous gap between his and Fitzgerald's conceptions of life.

Hemingway too is the chronicler of his times, but a more cynical, pragmatic one. He prides himself on avoiding concepts, including those that equate class with identity. Articulate figures dot his works, Robert Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises*, Richard Gordon in *To Have and Have Not*, the German hunter in *Green Hills of Africa*, Harry in "Snows of Kilimanjaro" - but their

verbal proficiency and conceptual mental faculties incapacitate rather than instruct them, Hemingway's narrative does not depart from its monosyllabic level of transcription.

From the beginning to the end of his long literary career, Hemingway's work is sparked by the energy of reticence and silence. In both his style and his characters he avoids extensions of the self from the nerves to the mind, from sensation to articulation. His characters reveal their heroism through perception and action, not through their verbal or mental powers. Like Fitzgerald, he instructs us in the importance of limitations, but his boundaries are created by the individual more than by the functioning social unit, though often in reaction to their impositions of society. He demands a private grammar of life, based on a commitment to the physical world, the senses, athleticism, craftsmanship. His ideas, limited though they may seem at times, arise from his belief in traditional notions of inarticulate manhood.

In a long letter to Maxwell Perkins, Fitzgerald gives a parodistic history of what he calls the "Simple Inarticulate Farmer and His Hired Man Christy".¹ He attacks the concept of the inarticulate Homer one sees in Thoreau's farmers and woodchoppers. His inarticulate figures, like Thoreau's mirror the silence of nature and suggest the value of physical activity. They strike us as childish and naive: Wyndham Lewis calls them "dull-witted, bovine, monosyllabic simpletons".² Hemingway uses none of the projective devices of the confrontation of the intellect with silence which create ambiguity in Melville's and Fitzgerald's work. Instead, he presents his inarticulate figures directly, with new enigmatic overtones. They do, indeed, have the "feel of the soil", or at least of the bullring, like Pedro Romero, or Manuel in the "Undefeated", or of the Gulf, like Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Hemingway's inarticulate characters do not serve as a compensation for grammatical irregularities as Crevecoeur pretends his illiteracy does, but they too are valuable for the "smell of the woods" and call of the "wild" Crevecoeur promises to provide. They represent a contempt for "mere" thought or speech. Like Huck, they are most alive when alone or when isolated in a one- to- one contact with someone else. When Hemingway's characters are in love, they, like Daisy and Gatsby, are silent.

¹ Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Andrew Turnbull. New York: Scribner's, 1963., p. 68.

² Lewis, Windham. *Men Without Art*. "Earnest Hemingway (The 'Dumb Ox')", New York: Russel and Russel, 1964, p. 29.

But this is only half of the story. Hemingway's inarticulate characters not only affirm the value of contact with the natural world and a commitment to the senses, but disavow the controlling logic and assumptions of modern society. Silence is a negative grace as well as a positive force in Hemingway's work and he, like Melville in "Bartleby", uses muteness to represent an alternative to the life-denying rhetoric of the community. It is hard to say which comes first in his works: the silent affirmation or the inarticulate rejection. Chronologically, through, his career moves from the angry renunciation of words *In Our Time*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *A Farewell to Arms* to the rationale for silence provided by activity in the woods, on the ocean, or in the bullring. But even in his early works, as in the Burguete scenes and the bullfights of *The Sun Also Rises*, the Montreux episodes of *A Farewell to Arms*, and Nick's excursion on the river *In Our Time*, silence signals peace and contentment which is more than simply nay-saying or hard-boiled control. It is easier, however, to see the virtues of inarticulateness if we begin with brief examination of the dangers of speech.

The most obvious introduction to the characteristic dangers of language in Hemingway's world is Frederic Henry's oft-quoted distaste for abstract words which prompts his "separate peace" in *A Farewell to Arms*.

"I did not say anything. 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 bill posters 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 numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates. (*FA*, pp. 184-185)

Henry objects to the disjunction of fact and rethoric which the war reveals. Words are used to promote death, not life, to hide rather than to confront reality. Concrete "names" and "numbers" are the only meaningful words left in a world of pious political lies. His silence is a protest against his separation of words and deeds; muteness at least keeps him from having to affirm the beliefs which produce and justify the war.

Henry contrasts "names" and "numbers", which directly describe physical reality, with the "obscene", brutalising language of war. The "obscenity" of abstract concepts suggests that those terms have become not simply meaningless, but dangerous: man's confused convictions allow them to proclaim the morality of inhuman bloodshed. His silence is a passive protest, like Bartleby's "passive resistance". He denies complicity by removing himself from the language of the community, just as he later does in his escape from the army. It repeats the inactive protest of the narrator in "the Revolutinist" who, like Henry does "not saying anything" to a boy's faith in the Italian revolution (SS p. 157).

As Henry Levin observes in describing Hemingway's realism as a reaction to Wilsonian rhetoric,³ the disjunction of language and reality which Hemingway emphasises in passages like this is time-and-culture-bound:

"For a Spaniard, Hemingway notes in *Death in the Afternoon*, the abstraction may still have concreteness: honor may be "as real a thing as water, wine, or olive oil." It is not so for us:⁴ all our words from loose using have become inflated and devaluated, Hemingway is willing to recognize no values save those which can be immediately felt and directly pointed out.

Hemingway's rejection of abstractions, Levin argues, is reaction to the fatal consequences of words in the war and its aftermath rather than a result of any absolute conviction on this part that words are necessarily antithetical to experience. "Loose using" has denied the value of speech and made us dependent on physical sensation and subjective perception which are both inarticulate activities.

Examples of such inarticulate resistance to the distortions of reality created by social misuse of language appear through Hemingway's works.⁵ We see the same contrast in "Soldier's Home". Describing Krebs' return home from the war, Hemingway equates war rethoric with the assumptions that rule the interpersonal relationship in an American town. The people of the town support their beliefs by lies, exaggerations, and abstract patterns of behavior and dress which produce total regularity: "It was a pattern" (SS, p.

³ "Observations on the Style of Earnest Hemingway," Kenyon Reiew, 13 (1951) rpr. in Carlos Baker, ed. *Hemingway and His Critics: An International Anthology* (New York: Hill and Wong, 1961), p. 101.

⁴ The desire of many Hemingway's characters to speak a foreign language, particularly Spanish, can be seen as an attempt to break out of this either/or condition of lies versus silence. Traditional languages, based on different assumptions about human nature, offer a linguistic equivalent to physical experience which English does not.

⁵ Levin, H. p. 112.

147). Viewing this pattern from the spectatorial distance of his porch, Krebs finds it attractive, but he avoids all verbal contact with his community because words introduce "consequences" and "complications":

"American girls lived in such a complicated world of already defiant alliances and shifting feuds that Krebs did not feel the energy or the courage to break into it... He did not want them themselves really. They were too complicated... He did not want to get into the intrigue and the politics... He did not want to tell anymore lies. It wasn't worth it. He did not want any consequences... Now he would have liked a girl if she had come to him and not wanted to talk. But there at home it was all too complicated... That was the thing about French girls and German girls. There was not all this talking. You couldn't talk much and you did not need to talk. It was simple and you were friends." (SS, p. 147-483).

Krebs' "engagements" in the war - with women and with fighting - were direct, honest, and physical, engagements with American girls, on the other hand, demand lies. The girls divorce themselves from real experience by language. Their patterned world is defined in terms of the political strategies that produced the war, "defined alliances", "shifting feuds", "intrigue", "politics". They replace the honest physical contact Krebs felt in Europe with "talking", a process of creating artificial definitions to replace simple sexual experiences.

Krebs realizes that the girls, like the rest of the town, demand an intensification of life by rhetoric: "His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities" (SS, p. 145). The "consequences" of speech are responsibility to act by the natural patterns of the town, and speak in unreal terms; both produce the "nausea in regard to experience which is the result of untruth or exaggeration" (SS, p. 146).

Krebs' only resource is silent spectatorship, Bartleby's "not". He says almost nothing during the story. He doesn't need speech to observe the patterns of the town life, or to read factual histories of the war. Silence maintains his "cool and clear" feeling, Krebs' one subjective moment of manhood, which speech destroys:

"All of the times that had been able to make him feel cool and clear inside himself when he thought of them; the times so long back when he had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do, easily and naturally, when he might have done something else, now lost their cool, valuable quality and then were lost themselves." (SS, p. 145-46)

Krebs defends himself from "consequences" by a process of elimination and separation: By *not* doing what is expected, By *not* getting

involved with other people, by *not* moving, by *not* speaking. He moves further and further from all human contact, and becomes detached, static and passive.

Krebs' passivity resembles *Bartleby's* in form, but we react to the two characters in very different ways. *Bartleby* is a haunting, pluralistic figure - a symbol of the unknown, of the other worldly, of world-weariness, of obstinacy, of rebellion. Krebs' inactivity, on the other hand, is a simpler more direct in meaning. He is a part of a dialectic of speech and silence, rhetoric and experience, and lie and truth. He functions as a literary device which allows Hemingway to point to the consequences of the town's patterns of behaviour. His front-porch lassitude and acquiescence at the end of the story makes him seem far more impotent and pathetic than *Bartleby*. Krebs lacks the resonance of Melville's figure, his silence functions less as a sign of his personality than as a part of Hemingway's social satire.

By relating events through Krebs' perspective, Hemingway establishes an I-they relationship between Krebs and the town and makes him the victim of the community's hypocrisy. His "cool and clear" feelings, preserved in memory and endorsed by the factual histories he reads, provide a vivid contrast of personal and subjective experience and the false promise the town demands. As was true of *Frederic Henry*, Krebs can protect himself from the "nausea" of verbal exaggerations only through inarticulateness. In both cases, Hemingway takes an extreme stance: if thinking, language, and high-blown feeling produce only destruction and death, then silence is the better alternative; if society demands lies, heightened emotionalism, and sentimentality, then the only solution is passive spectatorship. Krebs' life is reduced to silence and stasis. While Hemingway distinguishes him from the community by his "cool and clear" feeling of being soldier, "*Soldier's Home*" is filled with more negatives than positives. The story emphasises the thing Krebs must reject rather than the reasons for his rejection, the things he "did not want rather than the things he did, the failures of speech rather than the meaning of silence.

This negative grace is emphasised in many of Hemingways' stories. Although a character's rejection of communal values is justified by Hemingway in terms of an alternate ethic like Krebs' war experiences, the main function of silence is most of his fiction of the post-war world is a contrast which directs our attention to the deadening effects of speech. And these consequences of the acceptance of unreal language as truth are only part of his broader attack on the impotence and powerlessness which results from the brutality and inhumanity of life "in our time".

There is a fury latent in Hemingway's doctrine of silence, an anger and frustration at the failure of all verbal codes to recognize man's passion. Over and over again in his works, speech represents an imposition of abstract "patterns" onto real physical experiences. People speak because they need outside endoresment for their emotions, like the characters in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. Since people hide behind words, and demand "consequences" through words, articulation is a threat to experience.

Wanting to belive in the comfort of words rather than face the reality of things, people endow abstractions with emotional signifiance and confuse them with personal desires. Speech produces the "nausea" Krebs feels: it cauterizes the senses and memory. Silence and spectatorship become the only viable alternatives which recognize the inevitable separation of words and things. We see this again, for example, in "Hills Like White Elephants":

"Would you du something for me now?"

"I ll do anything for you."

"Would you please please please please please please stop talking."

"But I don't want you to ... I don't care anything about it."

"I'll scream." the girl said. (SS. p. 277)

The girls selfhood can be sustained only within her own personality; all she can ask of the man is the chance to protect her private beliefs. His distorted version of his motives in making her submit to the abortion are, like the town's demand for "consequences" in "Soldier's Home", irreconcilable with her subjective feelings. She will not join him in affirming lies, nor will he accept her version of the actual situation. Silence is simply a compromise, her way of avoiding a struggle with the outside world while perserving her right to view her life as she does.

The girl's plea in "Hills Like White Elephants" establishes an antithesis of individual and communal responses to experience in which language is equated with accepted versions of reality and silence with personal observation. Words endorse unreal beliefs and expectations; silence disavows complicity with these institutional standards.

In discussing the inarticulate figure, a character's silence is used to highlight the life-denying qualities of the common language. The individual finds no publicly accredited vocabulary adequate to his vision of reality, and becomes inarticulate. His silence signifies both the dearth of availability language and the form of his own relationship to experience. Krebs acquires his "cool and clear" feeling through action in the war, not through speech or

through, similarly, the satisfaction he finds in spectatorship he needs no validations by words.

Frederic Henry, too can establish his own monosyllabic love with Catherine after his "separate peace". But while his inarticulate joy at Montreux makes us aware of the uselessness of words for real communication between people, it also reveals the coast of social rebellion. When Frederic desert the army, he has "no more obligations" and no more "anger" (*FA*, p. 232). But without any social allegiances, he is reborn without voice or temporal existence. Frederic and Catherine both choose and are forced into inarticulateness; they must abandon social identity to live in peace. Trapped in their freedom, like Huck and Jim on the raft, their life is lived in constant treat and exposure. They can be together only as they deny all connections with the social world. They are absolutely isolated in their love; outside of the community, they live without any vocabulary or personality. They exist as they love and the selflessness of their inarticulate communion is dependent on their willful disregard for the surrounding world.

Hemingway's characters have little choice in the matter of speech they either speak the language of the community or do not speak at all. Their elemental physical experiences, like Frederic's love or Krebs "cool and clear" feeling, are intrinsically inarticulate. But even if this were not so, there would be no vocabulary available in which to try to verbalize these sentient bodily contacts. His characters are psychologically as well as society vulnerable to the misuse of language, even in their silence. This fact produces a strange absolutism in Hemingway's attitudes to language. Although Hemingway's rejection of speech begins, as Henry Levin says, from a desire to restore "some decent degree of correspondence between words and things", he often suggest that there is an inherent danger in the act of articulation itself. The "consequences" of speech not only involve the "nausea" produced by social expectations, but suggest one's private failure to trust the senses.

Excessive oral activity is almost always a sign of insecurity and uncontrollable agony in Hemingway. Characters try to avoid pain by detaching themselves from it through speech. In "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber", Macomber externalizes his cowardice by obsessive verbalizations. His self-pity aggrandizes his incapacities and saves him from dealing with himself. He talks incessantly first noting his cowardice then asking Wilson not to speak of it, and finally admitting that he is less concerned with his weakness than with the fact that his wife saw him run during the hunt (*SS*, pp. 5, 7, 11). Similarly, in "A Way You'll Never Be",

Nick's impetuous speech shows his fragile, limited control of his emotions, as do Rinaldi's obsessive verbalizations on Frederic Henry's return to the front in *A Farewell to Arms*, Nick's conversations with Bill in "The Three Day Blow" and the major's angry outburst in "In Another Country".

Hemingway's fullest exploration of how speech serves as an outlet for fear in "The Snows of Killimanjaro". Settled at the foot of the legendary mountain Harry and his woman vent their frustrations in their conversations with each other. Dying and guilty about his failures as an artist, Harry tries to come to terms with his past through a series of internal monologues. The woman tries to enlist him in conversation in an effort to ignore his approaching death and reassure herself and his continued affection. The juxtaposition of Harry's private, unexpressed memories and the couples repetitious, petty dialogues emphasize the problem of the lost chances which Harry must reconcile himself to if he is to accept his death. His thoughts lead him back in time through the sensation and incidents of his life; they are his artistic and human resource of personal experience, his reservoir of strength. The conversation, on the other hand, guide him away from the actualities of death by offering the seductive security of social platitudes and right responses.

Harry and the woman quarrel with each other rather than argue with themselves, thus removing the necessity of understanding how their lives relate to the passing moment: "Talking is the easiest. We quarrel and that makes the time pass" (SS, pp. 53). Their conversations never resolve anything; they do not even clarify the relationship to each other. Their words dissolve into a series of petty quarrels about whether she should read to him, whether he should drink, where they stayed while in Paris. Often they talk without any concern for a subject, simply flinging invectives at each other or hiding behind esoteric word games and silly puns. "Your dammed money was my amour. My Swift and my Amour" (SS, p. 58). They can never talk about any of the significant problems that confront them, like their personal failures, their abortive relationship, or Henry's impending death. Harry cannot get the woman to admit that he might die, and is even afraid to articulate the fact to himself, as if vocalization might finalize it. Their conversations in contrast to the written work Harry wishes he had done as an artist are valuable only so long as they express false, unimportant, and unreal things.

The counter-movement of the story that works in opposition to these conversations is Harry's struggle to reconcile himself to his past. As his death approaches the conversation becomes more and more useless to him, and is replaced by longer and longer internal monologues. Constantly

moving back through his life, Harry's thoughts allow him to desert the woman and the world she represents. He comes to accept his own isolation by reconciling himself to the inarticulate aspirations that inspired his work and the weakness that prevented him from writing about his most significant experiences.

Harry's memories and the accumulated sensation of these last hours of his life provide a mechanism by which he can recapture the world of the past that he thought he had lost. Slowly, by rethinking the pain and agony of this private world, he collects the battered pieces of his former, artistic self around him again, and is able to face death more complete and assured in his silence than he could have been talking to the women.

Harry's quarrels with the woman destroy his contact with the mundane world of the valley; his memories, on the other hand, help to affirm the importance of his private isolated dreams, experiences and sensation. He admits his failures to write about his experiences but at the same time he finds that the experiences themselves are still secure within him. Accepting his death, he takes notes of the sensations and impressions involved in it, the present-tense ones of death itself, and the past ones of his reminiscences, clarified and sharpened in his mind by his present danger. He talks his way out of his present world to keep himself alive, thinks his way into a real relationship to the world to prepare to leave it.

The dangers of speech we see in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" are psychological rather than social, as they are in "Soldier's Home". Language is a readily available palliative by which the individual can ignore his obligations to his selfhood, his fears of the future, and his personal failures. Because language identifies life with the temporal flux of everyday reality, talking allows Harry to avoid a confrontation with the elemental experiences of his life, which include his impending death, his career as a writer, his understanding of the significance of physical experiences, and his personal memories. Internal convictions give way to external codes of thought and conduct. The distinction of the individual which is an outgrowth of his private idiosyncratic experiences, becomes absorbed into the patterned behavior of the social world. Harry's verbal relationship with the woman represents a moral decay of his selfhood parallel to the physical disintegration of his body we see in his gangrene. Both are associated with his weakness and acquiescence to a secure life; his refusal to confront the non verbal "consents and non-consents" which Hemingway associates with human heroism.

But Harry's confrontation with the rest does allow him to reacquire the strength of his past through memory. Experience is preserved within the

individual; these inarticulate memories, which maintain the self by being exclusive to him and transcend time by being the associative product of the senses rather than the result of the rational order of the mind, allow Harry to exist in a timeless domain of silent self-sufficiency. His essential self is the disorganised accumulation of these disparate, often contradictory, experiences, which language by imposing sequence and form, can only distort into an unreal pattern of cause-and-effect.

We notice this same fear that speech only produces self-deception in Jake Barnes - caution to Brett about trying to explain her affair with Romero:

"I thought you weren't going to talk about it."

"How can I help it?"

"You'll lose it if you talk about it."

"I just talk around it." (SAR, p. 245)

Jake's remark. "You'll lose it if you talk about it," suggests that the act of articulation, simply by objectifying emotion into words is in itself a distortion. We could see this attitude in Gertrude Stein, in almost exactly the same form, as she comments on Jeff Campbell's need to speak in order to remove doubts: for Jeff Campbell, the only way to lose it was to say it."

In both cases, people use language to separate themselves from experience. The detachment required by speech divorces the self from discomfoting emotions. This power of detachment, which gives Nick Carraway so much solidity and perspective in *The Great Gatsby*, only leads to destruction in Stein and Hemingway.⁶ It invalidates emotion and memory and offers no hope of further understanding.

In almost all of Hemingway's stories and novels language and the act of articulation represents a distortion of reality. Verbalisation is a product of weakness, and results therefore, only in illusions. We see this again in Robert Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises*, who is satirized by Hemingway for believing in romantic novels like *The Purple Land*. His reading taste indicates his seduction by words, his desire to make life purer and more intense than it actually is. He cannot enjoy the excitement life can offer; he falls asleep driving through the Spanish countryside and during the Pamplona fiesta, and gets sick at the bullfights. Looking at a cathedral Cohn can only repeat guidebook phrases about it, while Jake Barnes responds through his senses:

"We went out into the street again and took a look at the cathedral. Cohn made some remark about it being very good example of something or

⁶ Stein G., *Three Lives*, p. 150.

other, I forget what. It seemed like a nice cathedral, nice and dim, like Spanish churches." (SAR, p. 90)

Jake's response is wholly inarticulate; he does not even verbalise the fact that the cathedral is "nice and dim". His associations are primarily subjective while Cohn, who must indicate his knowledge in speech, bases his response on a process of categorisations "an example of". Once again, as in Twain and Stein silence is equated with an immediated physical contact which negates abstract frameworks; speech, by relating experiences to concepts lose the actuality in the articulation.

It is evident, we can conclude, that Hemingway's inarticulate characters do not serve as a compensation for grammatical irregularities, they represent a contempt for mere thought or speech. I have tried to show in this paper that Hemingway's inarticulate characters in "Our Time" serve to affirm the value of contact with the natural world and a commitment to senses, while they disavow the controlling logic and assumptions of modern society. Actually, his long literary career shows the world sparked with energy of reticence and silence. Silence represents the negative grace and the positive force. Hemingway also uses muteness to represent an alternative to the life-denying rhetoric of the community.

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*Sonja Valčić: HEMINGWAY - POGUBAN JEZIK
VAŠEG VREMENA*

S a ž e t a k

Svijet Hemingway-a je od početka do kraja njegove duge književne karijere protkan energijom "suzdržljivosti" i tišine. Njegovi neartikulirani likovi ne služe za kompenzaciju gramatičkih nepravilnosti, oni izriču prezir prema pukim mislima i izričaju. Članak pokušava utvrditi da Hemingway-evi neartikulirani likovi u "Our Time" služe da bi potvrdili vrijednost kontakta s prirodnim svijetom i privrženost logičnoj misli, osjetilima, oni poriču logiku koja kontrolira kao i pretpostavke modernog društva. Tišina je za Hemingway-a negativna "gracioznost" i pozitivna snaga u isti mah, on koristi prigušenost da bi prikazao alternativu za "niječnu retoriku" određene sredine.