

# **Hemingway's Early Manuscripts: The Theory and Practice of Omission**

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IN A LETTER Hemingway wrote to Fitzgerald in December of 1925, there is a passing remark that says something of his impressions as a young writer of the Parisian Twenties. He noted his recent reading and then added a slighting comment on what others of his generation seemed to be learning. He allowed that a writer

*should learn about writing from everybody who has ever written that has anything to teach you. But what all these bastards do is learn certain concrete ideas that are only important as discoveries. Like if I were now, suddenly, to discover the law of gravitation.*

However fair that assessment, it is interesting for the rather restive attitude toward his apprenticeship it reveals, and more so for the question it raises about what might have counted for Hemingway as an original idea or new discovery of a literary law.

Some thirty years later he remembered that winter of 1925 as 'the end of the first part of Paris', and this letter to Fitzgerald, with its note of willingness to be taught even though the prospects for originality seem slight, reflects the sense that something had come to an end at a moment when little new was in the offing.

In September of that year he had not only the achievement of the *In Our Time* stories to work from, but the first draft of *The Sun Also Rises* waiting for revision. He turned instead to *The Torrents of Spring* and wrote it in a little over a week in late November. Whatever motive or merit that parody of Sherwood Anderson had, it served, as one of Hemingway's friends said, as a 'cold-blooded contract-breaker' with Anderson's publisher, Horace Liveright.

Hemingway's later apology to Anderson was ingenuous: he said he had simply fulfilled the higher obligation a writer has to his art to demonstrate that another writer's work was 'rotten'. On the face of it that letter to Anderson is astonishing, and perhaps for that reason it seems curiously sincere. Somehow Hemingway did feel obliged to some exalted notion of his art to parody the declining work of the friend whose letters and advice had introduced him to Paris.

Whatever his intention, *The Torrents* became for many of his contemporaries and later critics early evidence of his reputation as a writer with a 'need to think badly of anyone to whom he was indebted'. It is difficult not to think of those instances in which he ridiculed or disparaged Stein and Ford and Fitzgerald and Eliot as a result of some need, if not compulsion.

There may be clinical reasons for this almost whole-scale cancellation of his real or imagined literary indebtedness, but the momentary impatience in that letter to Fitzgerald in 1925 suggests another sort of explanation. His first admission that he had come to Paris to learn from those who could teach confirms Malcolm Cowley's recollection in *Exile's Return*. Cowley remembered coming to Paris in 1921 as an experience something like writing an examination paper or reading the *Lives of the Saints*. For Hemingway, who was not all that well prepared, the examination would have been a difficult one.

He arrived in Paris, a 22-year-old, with little more than his unpublished juvenilia, less than a year's experience as a journalist, and his random reading after the literary curriculum of Oak Park. And with no more than this he had to fulfill those introductions from Anderson extolling his extraordinary talent to the likes of Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound and James Joyce, for whom critical positions and literary theories were complex matters of real moment. It was they who were Cowley's 'saints' and they who set the standards for the questions that asked for definitions of the critical problems that they had faced, the solutions they had discovered, and — most difficult of all — whether to follow them or not.

The letter to Fitzgerald is something of a note for Hemingway's answer. What others had been doing seemed to him to be 'specific' resolutions of critical issues restricted to a single work. (He often used the adjective concrete to mean specific, as in the familiar passage in *A Farewell to Arms* about abstract words in contrast to 'the concrete names of villages.' Moreover, such ideas were important only when they were discoveries, and he was not about to rediscover them, much less rediscover someone else's rediscoveries. His point was the one Ezra Pound had made in *A Retrospect* a decade earlier: 'to find out what has been done, once for all, better than it can ever be done again, and to find out what remains to do.' But the differences in tone are suggestive and more than those one would expect between a public document and a private letter.

Pound writes with a programmatic conviction of precisely what remains to be done and how to do it; Hemingway betrays uncertainty and impatience. Pound welcomes the challenge before which Hemingway seems querulous. Hemingway's refusal to rediscover what struck him as obvious and universal in the work of his contemporaries may write

off some part of his recent literary education; but with it he implies that there are fundamental principles still to be discovered, and perhaps in his own fiction.

If that was the case, he seems unaware of it, or — as is more likely in a letter to Fitzgerald in 1925 — he is keeping it to himself. Granted, this may be a heavy burden of inference from what, after all, is a casual letter to a friend, but that letter raises the question of Hemingway's conception of his own literary theory and practice.

That he might have even entertained the notion of a theory seems unlikely, given his ingrained hostility to critics; so unlikely, in fact, that when he writes in *A Moveable Feast* that his omission of the end of the story 'Out of Season' was the result of a 'new theory', one's first suspicion is that he is being ironic. But he was serious, and the 'theory of omission' has been treated seriously in several critical studies.

My interest here is in how the idea of implication, which is what it amounts to, attained the status of a theory — and a new one at that — for both Hemingway and his critics. Those who have considered it have, until recently, had to do so without Hemingway's manuscripts for supporting evidence of what was omitted and where. As a consequence of this and Hemingway's own frequent references to the idea, the theory has been invoked to account for a variety of 'things left out' — an Italian's suicide, a boy's fear of death, World War I, Chicago, a dead wench, and an emasculated narrator — so that it takes some stretch of the imagination to conceive of those things as having been 'there' at 'first', wherever and whenever that was.

In most instances the theory has been construed to describe a single and distinct creative act. The manuscripts of the early stories, however, suggest that elements of the original conception of a story were ordinarily omitted or deleted at two stages in a complex process of writing.

Finally, that theory of omission is, it seems, only a corollary of the more interesting one he discovered during the writing of 'Big Two-Hearted River.' He alluded to it in *A Moveable Feast* when he wrote that sooner or later his readers would come to understand his stories 'the same way that they always do in painting'.

### **The Theory of Omission 1923 — 'Out of Season'**

*I had omitted the real end of [ 'Out of Season ' ] which was that the old man hanged himself. This was omitted on my new theory that you could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood.*

The theory may well have been new to Hemingway. But most of his literary friends in Paris in the 1920s, like Ezra Pound, would have seen it as a version of the commonplace that the structures of literature, like the sentences of the language, imply more than they

state and make us feel more than we know. (Incidentally, someone less considerate of young writers than Pound might have suggested that it was the literary equivalent of the law of gravitation.) Nevertheless, Hemingway remembered it as being new; and partly, I suspect, because its appearance was so dramatically appropriate to the events of those years. He and Hadley were in Cortina d'Ampezzo in the spring of 1923. That December she had lost all but two of his manuscripts in the Gare de Lyon on her way to join him in Lausanne. There had been several months of a 'bad time' when he 'did not think [he] could write any more'.

Then after a row with Hadley and an unsuccessful day of fishing, he wrote 'Out of Season', as he later told Fitzgerald, as 'an almost literal transcription of what happened.' It was the first story he was 'able to write . . . after losing everything', and it broke the ground for the remarkable achievement of 1924.

Of the ten new stories of *In Our Time*, the two that he told Fitzgerald he rated the best were 'Indian Camp' and 'Big Two-Hearted River.' Each of them alludes to something left out, and each originally included enough manuscript material for Scribner's to justify publishing them as the Nick Adams stories, 'Three Shots' and 'On Writing.' It is a dramatic account: the tragic loss of the manuscripts, the hopeless winter, the discovery of a new theory, and then the creative triumph. It appeals to us as it must have to Hemingway. And, as Northrop Frye has said of Rousseau's social theory, it is nothing either for or against this argument to say that it is informed by the myth of the sleeping beauty.' Carlos Baker's account of the discovery of the new theory is reasonable and cautious. He questions its relevance to the story — if it worked at all, it 'worked badly' — for nothing in the story depends on or implies the old man's suicide. His caution was wise in the absence of any other evidence of the theory than the account in *A Moveable Feast* and the letter to Fitzgerald of early December paraphrased in the biography's notes. This undated letter was written within a week or two at the most of the one of the 15th of December cited earlier.

What he wrote to Fitzgerald about the story had little to do with the new theory:

*I meant it to be tragic about the drunk of a guide because I reported him to the hotel owner . . . and [he] hanged himself in the stable. At that time I was writing the In Our Time chapters and I wanted to write a tragic story without violence. So I didn't put in the hanging . . . Maybe that sounds silly. I didn't think the story needed it.*

It is not unusual for Hemingway to deprecate his own work when he writes to Fitzgerald. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that he would have written two letters in December of 1925, one telling him that there was nothing new in his or anyone else's theory of fiction, and another admitting that his idea sounds silly, if at that time the idea

had, in fact, the informing and explanatory power that he claimed for it thirty years later.

### **1932 — Death In The Afternoon**

*If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water.*

Some seven years after that letter to Fitzgerald, the first published statement of the theory appeared in *Death in the Afternoon*. In Chapter 16 he has replaced his interlocutor, the Old Lady, with Aldous Huxley. Huxley had cited a brief conversation on art between Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley as evidence of those characters in modern fiction, and their authors, who do 'their best to feign stupidity and to conceal the fact that they have received an education.' Huxley may have had a general point, but this was not a good instance; he misquoted the dialogue and misinterpreted the scene. Hemingway had the chance to give him a lesson in reading, but oddly enough he didn't. He claimed, instead, that he could not find the passage, and then admitted that it 'sounds very much like the sort of thing one tries to remove in going over the manuscript.' Allowing the point, he then shifted the discussion from that of 'the simulation or avoidance . . . of culture' to the distinction between 'artificially constructed characters', who may mouth a writer's 'own intellectual musings', and people in a novel 'who may or may not be the kind who talk of such subjects'.

The latter are not 'skilfully constructed characters' — a pejorative phrase — but are 'projected from a writer's assimilated experience, from his knowledge . . . ' This strategy allowed Hemingway to consider how a writer acquires that knowledge, what he pays for that knowledge in the experience necessary to be able to understand and assimilate it, and finally the imperative to 'take his departure' from it, to be original. In this context, then, the things that a writer knows that may be omitted refer not simply to the details of a single story, but to the wider intellectual and cultural background of the larger subject 'he is writing about'.

Huxley's criticism of those writers who seem to disavow their education may have recalled those examination years that Cowley remembered. Certainly Hemingway's commentary on a writer's debt to the past and duty to be original reads like a recollection of the critical discussion of 'tradition and individual talent', from Pound's *Retrospect* to Eliot's *Sacred Wood*, that was part of the Paris curriculum of the 1920s.

The metaphor of an iceberg that Hemingway chose for his theory serves as well to suggest that the dignity of a visible talent depends on the submerged tradition beneath it. Such a recollection may explain the relatively submissive attitude of the passage, the

tacit admission of some justice in Huxley's criticism, and the more moderate claims he makes for the theory of omission as an alternative, but not necessarily better, way of writing.

### **1958 — The Paris Review**

*Anything you can omit that you know you still have in the writing and its quality will show.*

On three occasions in the late 1950s Hemingway returned to the theory of omission, thought about it at length, and finally seems to have found in it something close to a comprehensive theory of the short story.

George Plimpton had suggested an interview on the 'Art of Fiction' and met with Hemingway in May of 1954 in Spain; but apparently not much was accomplished until he returned to it in the spring of 1957.

The interview was published the following spring in *The Paris Review*. During the fall of 1957 Hemingway began writing the chapters of *A Moveable Feast* and had completed 18 by the following summer. Finally, in June of 1959 in Malaga, Spain, he had the last unpublished word on his theory in 'The Art of the Short Story', a preface intended for a new edition of his stories.

The coincidence of his interview in *The Paris Review*, writing his recollections of Paris in *A Moveable Feast* and the unpublished manuscript a year later, that reflects, and at times repeats, the interview or the recollection, makes it difficult to decide whether one is an early draft or a later revision of another. There is irony in the fact that the only one of the three which he wrote any part of and approved for publication was the so-called interview. Plimpton's introduction to the interview states that 'many of the replies in the interview, he preferred to work out on his reading board'. But Hemingway preferred even more, for in the summer of 1957 Plimpton wrote to tell him:

*I am going to work on [the interview] in the next few days and send you down a fresh copy along with your original manuscript.*

Although he preferred to write out many of his replies, later in 'The Art of the Short Story' he maintained the fiction of an informal interview. He repeats the story of the marathon composition of 'The Killers', 'Today is Friday', and 'Ten Indians' in one day of May 1926 in Madrid, and notes, with a curious logic, that

*I have used the same words in answering that the excellent Plimpton elicited from me in order to avoid error or repetition.'*

Hemingway had good reasons to write out his answers: he had rarely fared well in interviews; but more than that, by working out in manuscript his remarks in the interview, he could revise the version of the theory he had published in 1932 to

correspond with his recollection of the discovery of that theory in 1923 and its relevance to his fiction since then.

At two points in the interview Hemingway responded with a version of the theory of omission. In each instance, as in *Death in the Afternoon*, the subject at hand was Hemingway's indebtedness to other writers or artists. He had mentioned Hieronymous Bosch as one who had influenced him, and Plimpton remarked — ingenuously, it seems — that 'the nightmare symbolic quality of his work seems so far removed from your own.' Hemingway replied (or wrote), I have the nightmares and know about the ones other people have. But you do not have to write them down. Anything you can omit that you know you still have in the writing and its quality will show.

In the second instance he offered all the social and cultural history behind *The Old Man and the Sea* as a thing left out, since other writers had done it and done it well:

*In writing you are limited by what has already been done satisfactorily. So I have tried to learn to do something else. First I have tried to eliminate everything unnecessary to conveying experience to the reader so that after he or she has read something it will become part of his or her experience and seem actually to have happened.*

Here he returned to what has now become 'the principle of the iceberg' and, as it were, applied the original theory to it:

*'Anything you know you can eliminate . . . only strengthens your iceberg'.*

In the first reference to the theory he made no more claim for its effect ('its quality will show') than he had in 1932 ('the reader . . . will have the feeling as strongly as though the writer had stated them'). But in the second he makes the larger claim that appears in *A Moveable Feast*: in both the omission 'strengthens' the story, and in both the consequence is that the reader will feel or experience not just as much but 'more than they understood'.

So with the opportunity to revise his theory and with the enticement of Plimpton's interview in a journal bearing the name of the city of his apprenticeship, Hemingway began to think of his theory of omission as less descriptive than prescriptive, and not only as an alternative way of writing he had learned as a young writer, but also as an essential lesson he would teach as an older one.

### **1959 — The Art Of The Short Story**

*If you leave out important things or events that you know about, the story is strengthened . . . The test of any story is how very good the stuff is that you, not the editors, leave out.*

'The Art of the Short Story' had a very brief history. It was to be a preface to a school text of a selection of his short stories. Hemingway began it in May of 1959, finished it in June, and Scribner's rejected it in July. It would have been inappropriate as a school text, telling the students more about Ernest Hemingway than they needed to know or perhaps should know.

He drew passages directly from George Plimpton's 1958 interview as well as from notes that A. E. Hotchner had taken during an interview at a parish house in Hailey, Idaho, in November of that year. The diction is colloquial, the syntax casual, and the attitude at times defensive, at times belligerent, as its tentative subtitle 'And Nine Stories to Prove It' suggests.

The theory of omission is here written into law. It is not only the essential feature of his stories, it also offers an evaluative standard for his works and any others in the genre. Now it is not the omission itself that matters, but the quality and quantity of what is omitted, so that the 'test of any story is how very good the stuff is that you . . . leave out.' With this criterion he briefly and randomly reviews some thirteen stories from 'My Old Man' (1922) to 'The Short Happy Life . . .' (1936). From those he selects six as examples of the theory of omission: 'Big Two-Hearted River' (1924), 'Fifty Grand' (1925), 'The Killers' (1926), 'The Sea Change' (1931), 'A Clean Well-Lighted Place' (1933), and 'The Short Happy Life . . .' (1936); and then one, 'The Undefeated' (1924), 'to show you the difference between when you leave it all in and when you take it out'.

Finally, three of those stories are used to establish an ascending order of omissions. First there is 'Big Two-Hearted River', from which 'anything about the war is omitted'. Then there is 'The Killers', from which he omitted 'more even than when I left the war out of Big Two-Hearted River. I left out all Chicago, which is hard to do in 2951 words.' And the last is 'A Clean Well Lighted Place', from which he 'left out everything. That is about as far as you can go, so I stood on that one and haven't drawn to that since'.

Reviewing Hemingway's statements of the theory of omission in their different contexts suggests that a rather commonplace idea was used on various occasions to serve various ends, until it became for him the theory of his fiction. It began almost as an afterthought in the letter to Fitzgerald of 1925. By 1932 it was his version of the conventional notion of a writer's responsibility both to follow and to depart from the tradition of his craft. Finally, in the retrospective view of 1958, it was transformed into an evaluative system for his short fiction implying a putative theory of the genre. That theory, however, has a different and more complex history in the manuscripts of his fiction of the early 1920s.

## II

### **The Practice Of Omission — Invention**



Some of the critical confusion over what Hemingway meant by his theory of omission is the fault of a conflation of two, or even three, different kinds of omission in his practice as a writer. There are clear and crucial differences between omitting ‘all Chicago’ from ‘The Killers’, deleting the introductory pages that became ‘Three Shots’ from ‘Indian Camp’, and replacing the 20 manuscript pages that were published as ‘On Writing’ with the ten manuscript pages that became the conclusion of ‘Big Two-Hearted River.’ I suspect that the decision to omit occurred before or during what Hemingway thought of as ‘inventing’ his story, whereas the decision to delete or replace was the consequence of what he invented.

For Hemingway the term invention had its ordinary meaning, the creation of something original, something ‘that is not a representation . . . [but] a whole new thing’. In this sense, he invented away from or out of what he thought of as ‘the background of a story. You throw it all away and invent from what you know’. Or as he wrote in *Death in the Afternoon*, true fiction is ‘projected from the writer’s assimilated experience’. But his sense of the term also seems close to the rhetorical concept of invention as the discovery of a structure, strategy, or argument appropriate to a writer’s subject and purpose. The manuscripts of ‘The Killers’ bear this out. In ‘The Art of the Short Story’ he wrote,

*I thought about [‘The Killers’] a long long time before I invented it, and I had to be as far away as Madrid before I invented it properly.*

That story’s first manuscript was a false start: it set the scene late on a cold winter’s day in Petoskey, with Nick walking along the streets, stopping to buy a copy of the *Chicago Tribune*, entering the Parker House to talk with George O’Neal at the lunch counter. They talk of the weather, George offers Nick a ‘shot’ of the ‘real stuff’, and Nick remarks that there’s ‘not a thing’ in the paper; then two men enter. This manuscript continues through the description of Al and Max, their ordering lunch and bullying Nick — a little more than the first two pages of the published version.

The second version, dated May 1926 in Madrid, begins as a typescript at the Killers’ entrance, follows the first manuscript with a few revisions to the moment at which the Killers leave. There the typescript is torn, and after another brief false start it is completed in pencil. Since the typescript is dated and titled (‘The Matadors’) in pencil, Hemingway’s marathon writing of the story may have been only a three- page dash; but it is more likely that he began typing at the Killers’ entrance (deleting the original beginning), and then either the heat of composition or the cold weather sent him to bed to finish it in pencil.

What Hemingway invented ‘properly’ or discovered when he returned to his first manuscript is what Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren first found and praised in 1942: the structural relationships among the four scenes of action and reaction, marked

by the references to the arc-light, and the agent/agency relationships between real and apparent time, Henry and George, Mrs. Hirsch and Mrs. Bell, and implied by its omission — Ole Anderson and Nick Adams. Once that structure had been invented, the background of ‘all Chicago’ becomes at least trivial and at most distracting.

That aesthetic discovery finds an analogue in Nick’s moral discovery. George’s explanation of the terrifying event (‘He must have got mixed up in something in Chicago’) is as morally irrelevant as the deleted introduction’s gathering of explanatory references to a ‘shot of the real stuff’ and the Chicago Tribune is aesthetically irrelevant. Nick’s decision to act in tacit obedience to what he has discovered in these events is a metaphor for Hemingway’s decision to delete his earlier material in obedience to what he has discovered in his narrative. Both he and his character come to understand that there is ‘not a thing’ in the Chicago papers that will ever explain Al and Max or ‘The Killers.’

### **Revision**

The manuscript versions of ‘Big Two-Hearted River’ suggest a paradigm of Hemingway’s practice. Not all the stories display each of its features, but the nearly fifty manuscripts, typescripts, and fragments of those from ‘Up in Michigan’ to ‘The Killers’ suggest a pattern of three versions:

- 1) One, and sometimes two, manuscript versions, often with related fragments of variant introductions or conclusions;
- 2) One or more of Hemingway’s typescripts, sometimes with manuscript revisions, with which he decides upon one of the variant introductions or conclusions; and
- 3) A typescript (not by Hemingway) with relatively few revisions and close to the published version.

Of all these versions, the most interesting are the manuscripts and fragments, and the most stylistically significant revisions are between them and the first Hemingway typescript. The systematic study of those manuscripts should revise our understanding of the development of Hemingway’s early style, for many of the traditional notions of that style are founded only upon Hemingway’s published texts and public statements, while others rest on a few classic assumptions of literary history which have warranted reconsideration for some time.

Ezra Pound’s critical manifestoes and Hemingway’s remark that the poet convinced him to ‘distrust adjectives’, for example, seem to justify Harold Hurwitz’s conclusion that Pound’s

*influence is most apparent in the novelist’s early work which he helped to make tighter and sharper . . . by eliminating superfluous adjectives*

*and adverbs, and by tutoring him in the techniques of economy and precision.*

Nothing in the manuscripts of the fiction cited ('Up in Michigan', 'My Old Man', and 'Out of Season ') supports this assertion. Rather, it is derived from Charles Fenton's early study of the obvious differences between the adjectival style appropriate to a Toronto Star cable and the nominalised style of Chapter III of *In Our Time*. Hurwitz notes that Pound did not blue-pencil Hemingway's manuscripts as he did Eliot's and concludes that Pound's most profound influence on Hemingway was to reassure him of the high calling of his craft, an assurance it is not all that certain Hemingway needed.

Earlier, Carlos Baker's description of Hemingway's practice seemed to confirm our intuitions of his style and our perceptions of the young writer at work in the cafes of Paris. We were told that Hemingway

*always wrote slowly and revised carefully, cutting, eliding, substituting, and experimenting with syntax to see what a sentence could most economically carry, and then throwing out all that could be spared.*

And that seemed right; for a spare, understated style must be accomplished through elision, and a syntax so efficient must have been labored over. Some sort of activity such as this might well have gone on before he began writing, but there is little to suggest that it did once he started. He might well have written slowly, his revisions might have been careful — although there is some counter — evidence in those passages where he returns to an original version after revision.

However, there are few signs of cutting and none of any serious experimentation with syntactic alternatives. The most heavily revised passages suggest the accretion rather than deletion of details, and the syntactical revisions are relatively few and simple ones, such as the revision from a sentence to a participial clause or the reverse.

The revisions in the manuscripts of the first two pages of 'Big Two-Hearted River' are typical of many from the early period. After he rejected a three-page introduction, the apparently immediate or 'working' revisions of words, phrases, or clauses are in a ratio of three additions to three substitutions to two deletions. The most extensive revision occurs in the passage describing the trout jumping and Nick's reaction. First, there is the cancelled paragraph:

*It had been years since he had seen trout. As he watched a big trout shot upstream in a long angle burst through the surface of the water and then seemed to float down back down stream with the current to its post under the bridge. Nick's heart tightened as the trout moved. He felt all the old thrill. This remained at any rate.*

A three-page insert follows and replaces that paragraph (the new elements are underlined):

*It was a long time since Nick had looked into the ~~water~~ stream and seen trout. They were very satisfactory. As the shadow of the kingfisher moved up the stream a big trout shot upstream in a long angle, only his shadow marking the angle, then lost his shadow as he came through the surface of the water, caught the sun, and then, as he went back into the stream under the surface, his shadow seemed to float back down the stream with the current, unresisting, to his post under the bridge where he tightened, facing upstream. Nick's heart tightened as the trout moved. He felt all the old thrill. This remained feeling.*

There is only one significant deletion, the rather self-pitying 'This remained at any rate' which Hemingway caught halfway through repeating it. The substitutions are regularly toward the colloquial: it had been years to it was a long time, burst to come, thrill to feeling, and so on. The syntactical revisions are almost exclusively additions, and most of them of adverbial clauses. (Two other revisions later changed the stream to a stream in the first sentence and facing upstream to facing up into the current in the third from the last.) The revisions seem to be governed by the recognition of a triangular relationship between the kingfisher, the fish, and the fisherman. With the addition of the kingfisher and its shadow moving upstream, he was reminded that on a hot bright day he would have seen only the shadow of the moving fish until it broke the surface in its brilliant leap, and then realised that the trout itself was waiting for the kingfisher's shadow to move upstream.

The revisions seem to demonstrate precisely what Hemingway later said he wanted to describe in his fiction:

*the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion.*

That statement in *Death in the Afternoon* is, for Carlos Baker, Hemingway's version of Eliot's objective correlative, although he allows that Eliot's is only a 'generic description' which seems to fit 'Hemingway's customary performance.' Baker also argues that 'the deletion of one's own preconceptions' is a prerequisite in Hemingway's aesthetic.

It is not certain that the brilliant stylistic performance in the paragraph from 'Big Two-Hearted River' was as customary in April 1924 as Hemingway would have liked it to be. Nor can any perception of experience, here or elsewhere, be wholly free from preconception. But Hemingway does seem to be working toward that ideal in the paragraph's revisions. In both paragraphs, 'Nick's heart tightened as the trout moved.' But in the second he locates the objective correlative of the emotion first in the sequence

of motion in the physical world (the trout ‘tightened, facing upstream’) and then finds its counterpart in the reaction of the perceiver.

I take this paragraph as an instance of what Kenneth Burke calls a ‘representative anecdote’ — and in two ways. Nick’s perception of the trout holding still at his post against the current represents the condition of inner equilibrium he is seeking. For Hemingway, the process of revision itself is representative of what he and his character will come to discover as a way of writing at the end of the story’s original conclusion.

### **Structure**

There were two good reasons, one obvious and one less so, for Hemingway’s decision to replace the original conclusion of ‘Big Two-Hearted River’ in September or November of 1924. It was obvious from the start that it broke the ‘hold’ that Nick had on his thinking. In the first manuscript, following the paragraph on the trout at the bridge, Nick

*felt he had left everything behind, the ~~necessity~~ need for thinking, the ~~necessity~~ need to write, ~~the need to talk~~ other needs*

Originally, with the word necessity, the demands or constraints upon Nick take on the associations of some impersonal law, even fate, imposed upon him from without and governing all human action; need implies a more personal, almost idiosyncratic, obligation taken upon himself and not necessarily shared by others — associations that are closer, of course, to Hemingway’s sense of his own need to write.

Although Nick had felt that he had left those needs behind, in the original conclusion he returns to them with the almost obsessive recollection of his marriage, his friends, bullfighting in Spain, and, most often, talk of writing, his own and that of others — Joyce, McAimon, Stewart, Lardner, Cummings, Anderson, and Dreiser. Hemingway recognised that this obvious inconsistency demanded a revision.

The other reason for revision is less obvious and rests on a similarity between the conclusion’s first and last sections. Once he had gotten into the retrospective section, he had difficulty finishing it; four times in the last two manuscript pages he wrote ‘The End’ or ‘ — 30 — ’ and then went on.

What finally brought him out of his reverie of Paris was the memory of Cezanne’s paintings and the recognition of ‘how Cezanne would do the stretch of river and the swamp.’ Paris fades in his mind, he stands up, and then, in a striking phrase, ‘he waded across the stream, moving in the picture’. That imaginative act marks the moment at which Nick begins to fulfill his, and Hemingway’s, most urgent need: ‘He, Nick, had wanted to write about country so it would be there like Cezanne had done it in painting. . . .Nobody had ever written about country like that’.

The obviously autobiographical character of this section is emphasised by the unnecessary appositive ‘He, Nick ‘; it is as if he had to remind himself he was writing a

work of fiction. The comment on Cezanne and the imaginative entry into a 'landscape' seem to recognize and make explicit the imaginative process in the revision of the paragraph on the trout at the bridge.

Hemingway's profound and lasting appreciation of Cezanne's paintings is beyond question. The commentary on the original conclusion of this story in Baker's biography in 1968 and its publication in 1972 italicised his other remarks on Cezanne from the letter to Gertrude Stein in 1924<sup>20</sup> through Lillian Ross's New Yorker 'Profile' and the early chapters of *A Moveable Feast* in the 1950s.

Most of these, incidentally, cluster in the later period when he was recalling and rewriting the history of his experience in Paris as a young writer. Some questions remain, however, about the fictional purpose and biographical significance of those meditations on Cezanne at the close of the story's original conclusion. The passage invites speculation about its immediate rhetorical motive and effect, its reliability as evidence of what Hemingway knew of Cezanne and how he acquired that knowledge, and, finally, its crucial importance as a mark of the transition between two distinct resolutions of, for many, his finest short story.

That Hemingway chose a painter as Nick's master was as much a strategy to disclaim any other writer's influence as it was to admit that of any artist's. And the protege's praise serves another rhetorical purpose: it both affirms and, in a way, qualifies his harsh criticism of his contemporaries. Cezanne's work presented the inarguable standard that such an explicit and inclusive attack would require if it were to be published (as it nearly was); yet that standard was one that others might not be expected to meet if Hemingway himself had only just discovered it, and in another art.

Where and when he found it has recently been documented by Meyly Chin Hagemann.<sup>21</sup> She identifies those Cezannes in the Luxembourg, the Bernheim Gallery, and the Stein Collection that Hemingway alluded to, as well as others he must have seen elsewhere. Her work gives one answer to the question of how much Hemingway's appreciation of Cezanne rested on a precise and thorough understanding of his, or any other painter's, aesthetic principles and techniques.

That question, of course, begs the more difficult one of how Hemingway might have translated whatever he knew of painting into the informing principles of his own art.

In *A Moveable Feast* he recorded his regular visits to the Luxembourg and, when the light was bad, to the Stein apartment. In the manuscript of 1924, Nick thinks that he knows 'how Cezanne would paint this stretch of river', and that Gertrude Stein would know 'if he ever got it right'. Later in his memoir of Paris, his recollection of her conversations implies that she might not have been all that interested in that part of his education. 'She talked, mostly, and she told me about modern pictures and painters —

more about them as people than as painters — and she talked about her work'. Unlike his other comments on Gertrude Stein, this one, even with its irony of the innocent abroad, is fair and close to her own account of her conversations on contemporary artists in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. (It is even downright polite next to those artists' own estimates of her understanding of their work.) When Hemingway wrote of what he had found in Cezanne, he settled on one simple but fundamental lesson; and even that he seemed to prefer to keep to himself:

*I was learning something from the painting of Cezanne that made writing simple true sentences far from enough to make the stories have the dimensions that I was trying to put into them. I was learning very much from him but I was not articulate enough to explain it to anyone. Besides it was a secret.*

He did, however, hint at that secret in his letter to Stein in 1924, and whether he was unable or unwilling to articulate it, he did show her the original conclusion of his new story. She recalled that in the fall of 1924 (probably November) Hemingway

*had added to his stories a little story of meditations and in these he said that *The Enormous Room* was the greatest book he had ever read. It was then that Gertrude Stein had said, Hemingway, remarks are not literature.*

The reminder, that remarks — a harsh but accurate word for the meditations in the original conclusion — are not literature, was telling. Stein's comment and his own recognition that discrete sentences, however true and simple, were 'far from enough' would have confirmed the need to recast his conclusion and give it some 'dimension', like those in the landscapes of Cezanne.

When Hemingway rewrote the conclusion he returned to the point in the narrative at which Nick had hooked and landed 'one good trout', the precise center of the conclusion's narrative structure. He wrote ten pages of manuscript with relatively few and minor revisions. What had distracted Nick earlier was the memory of a Paris conversation about the difference between the experience of fishing any one stream and all the general prescriptions in the books on fly-fishing that 'started with a fake premise'.

This led to a remark about pitting 'your intelligence against that of a fish', with which Pound had agreed; and then Paris took over from the river. At this crux in the later part of the narrative Nick pits his intelligence and more — his imagination, his skill, and all that is meant by the 'hold' he has on his thinking — against the trout and the stream with its heavy currents and dark reaches.

He fishes the stream with no premises other than those inferred from the terrain and the surface of the stream. The metaphor that informs the narrative rests in the word 'tension' and its cognates. That metaphor he had found earlier in his description of the

trout tightened against the current and Nick's heart tightened with the experience, and it resumes here with the tension on the tightened fly-line and leader that join the fisherman and fish.

The structural pattern implicit at this point in the narrative has established two opposed scenes (hooking and releasing the small trout — too little tension — and hooking and losing the large trout — too much) followed and in a sense completed by one scene (hooking and landing his one good trout). The beginning and middle of this emerging pattern may well have implied its conclusion: two further scenes that incrementally repeat the first two and provide a balance on either side of the center. In the next two scenes Nick moves into a more difficult stretch of the river in which he tests and defines the limits of his skill in the more precise presentation of his bait and in more difficult lies where the odds are against him.

In the two scenes that complete the pattern he drifts his bait among the overhanging branches, on the off-chance that the trout would go deep rather than leap into the entangling branches; but he loses it. In the second he drifts it into a submerged log, hooks and lands the trout, and then quits. The noon sun has driven the trout into places he is not yet ready to fish.

However one reads the metaphorical dimensions of that morning's fishing, its pattern or structure is clear: two sets of opposed scenes balanced on either side of one that is implied by the first set and that in turn implies the second.

A reading of the manuscripts of these two conclusions dramatises the disparity between them: the longer, more random, personal, and contentious original and the shorter, more ordered, impersonal, and resigned final version. The first turns to the past with a recollection of Paris and a discursive account of the world of the young man as a writer.

As much as anything he ever wrote, it contemplates the theory of his fiction. The second advances into the future and foreshadows the 'end of the first part of Paris.' It is presentational, giving us a portrait of the young man as an artist alone on the river. As much as anything in Hemingway it demonstrates the practice of his original art.

The critical importance I have placed on the manuscripts of 'Big Two-Hearted River' will not be secure until all those of the other stories between 1922 and 1926, and especially those before the summer of 1924, have been more closely studied. One could argue that the discovery of presentational meaning in rewriting its conclusion in the fall of 1924 could have occurred during the writing of 'Indian Camp' the previous spring, or a year before that with 'Out of Season.' I have not considered the chapters of *In Our Time*, however stylistically interesting they are, for the obvious reason of their brevity.

The manuscripts of 'My Old Man' show little revision, a fact that — for all Hemingway's disclaimers — may be attributed to Sherwood Anderson. 'Out of Season'



was written with an anger that would not allow him to punctuate, much less revise, the manuscript. Other than the major deletion of ‘Three Shots’, the manuscripts of ‘Indian Camp’ show few of the working revisions of ‘Big Two-Hearted River.’ And none of the stories of 1924 and 1925 has variant conclusions (or introductions) as radically different as those two endings I have considered.

What distinguishes ‘Big Two-Hearted River’ from all the others is that it is self-reflexive, the first of the Nick Adams stories written about a writer and his past and future writing.

The manuscripts of ‘Up in Michigan’, the earliest of his first three published stories, mark the distance he had come in three years in Paris and elsewhere in Europe. Both the stylistic and structural revisions are indecisive, inconsistent, and at times, I think, dead wrong. There are three tries at an introduction and three at a conclusion. He chose the best of the three conclusions:

*Then she walked across the dock and up the steep sandy road to go to bed. A cold mist was coming up through the woods from the bay.*

But he rejected the first of the three introductions, and later moved it to its present position as the fifth paragraph in the story. It began

*A steep sandy road ran down the hill to the bay through the timber.*

That paragraph as an introduction with its reference to the sandy road would have been more appropriate to the conclusion he chose. It also confirms the impression that the four paragraphs that now precede it are background – ‘all Horton Bay’ – which could and, to my mind, should have been omitted.

The third of those paragraphs is that which is most often cited as evidence of Sherwood Anderson’s influence, and sometimes Gertrude Stein’s. The paragraph’s diction and syntax are meant to reflect Liz Coates’s growing awareness of her affection for Jim Gilmore. With the exception of the first and last sentences, all begin with or include the colloquial forms: ‘She liked it the way . . .’, ‘She liked it about . . .’, or ‘She liked it how it’. But in the first manuscript four of the five sentences that began with those forms were revised to a more formal syntax, and then restored to their original Andersonian style for publication.

A second passage with traces of at least a momentary influence occurs in the rather breathless ten lines of dialogue and description of the climax of the sexual act out on the dock. Recall that this was the story that Gertrude Stein pronounced inaccrochable, or not for public showing. In one of the typescripts the ten lines are circled and heavily canceled; but then Hemingway had third thoughts and wrote in the margin, ‘Pay no attention.’ In one passage he rejects and then accepts the influence of Anderson, and in the other he accepts and then rejects the (not only) practical advice of Stein.

None of the manuscripts of the stories in the two years following 'Big Two-Hearted River' shows this much indecision. There are revisions, of course, and some of them are extensive, but by and large, like those in 'The Killers', they are informed and directed by what seems to have become an almost instinctive sense of style and structure.

Hemingway's experience of Paris in the 1920s seen through the conventional records of literary historians, the letters, the memoirs of conversation, the reviews and pronouncements in the then artistic capital of the world all favor the assumption that he arrived there ready and willing to put into practice those theories offered him as private advice or public programs. However, the history of his theory of omission does not, I think, lend much support to that assumption.

He was not a particularly attentive student in the informal classrooms of Ezra Pound or Gertrude Stein — he was thinking about fishing. When his prose reflects their ideas, when it turns to consider theory, his syntax stumbles. When his critical statements are aligned with their presumed sources, a preface of Conrad's or an essay of Eliot's, they seem like fragmentary recollections of occasions that may once have had, but now have lost, their relevance. In many ways, he was the Byron of his generation — and not least in that, as Goethe said of the earlier romantic, 'As soon as he thinks, he is a child.' There is, of course, no real distinction between a writer's theory and practice. It is a commonplace that there is nothing so practical as a good theory; and the record of Hemingway's manuscripts demonstrates that the outlines of his best theory are implicit in his practice. On matters of theory and practice, he was, like his narrator in *The Sun Also Rises*, a latter-day pragmatist — and he might have said:

*Perhaps as you went along you did learn something. I did not care what it was all about. Maybe if you learned how to write, then you'd know what it was all about.*