

Critical readings: The First Forty-five Stories
by Carlos Baker, from Hemingway:
The Writer As Artist.

I. Under the iceberg

‘THE dignity of movement of an iceberg,’ Hemingway once said, ‘is due to only one-eighth of it being above water’ His short stories are deceptive somewhat in the manner of an iceberg. The visible areas glint with the hard factual lights of the naturalist. The supporting structure, submerged and mostly invisible except to the patient explorer, is built with a different kind of precision — that of the poet-symbolist. Once the reader has become aware of what Hemingway is doing in those parts of his work which lie below the surface, he is likely to find symbols operating everywhere, and in a series of beautiful crystallizations, compact and buoyant enough to carry considerable weight.

Hemingway entered serious fiction by way of the short story. It was a natural way to begin. His esthetic aims called for a rigorous self-discipline in the presentation of episodes drawn, though always made over, from life. Because he believed, firmly as his own Abruzzian priest, that ‘you cannot know about it unless you have it,’² a number of the stories were based on personal experience, though here again invention of a symbolic kind nearly always entered into the act of composition.

The early discipline in the short story, and it was rarely anything but the hardest kind of discipline, taught Hemingway his craft. He learned how to get the most from the least, how to prune language and avoid waste motion, how to multiply intensities, and how to tell nothing but the truth in a way that always allowed for telling more than the truth. From the short story he learned wonderfully precise lessons in the use of dialogue for the purposes of exposition. Even the simpler stories showed this power. In the struggle with his materials he learned to keep the poker face of the true artist. Or, if you changed the image to another game, he learned the art of relaying important hints to his partner the reader without revealing all at once the full content of his holdings. From the short story he gained a skill in the economical transfer of impressions — without special rhetoric or apparent trickery. His deepest trust was placed in the cumulative effect of ostensibly simple, carefully selective statement, with occasional reiteration of key phrases for thematic emphasis.

Like James, he has been rightly called an architect rather than a manipulator, and he himself has said that prose is architecture rather than interior decoration — an esthetic fact which the short story taught him.³ The writing and rewriting of the stories gave him invaluable experience in the ‘hows’ of fiction, and suggested almost endless possibilities for future development. When he was ready to launch out into

the novel, he might have said, as Henry James did about Roderick Hudson: 'I had but hugged the shore on sundry previous small occasions; bumping about, to acquire skill, in the shallow waters and sandy coves of the short story.'⁴ The difference was that on occasion, though not invariably, Hemingway's cove dropped off quickly into waters that were deep enough to float an iceberg.

Through the year 1939, he had published fifty-five short stories.⁵ This count does not include all the sixteen short miniatures of *In Our Time* or several others which appear as interludes among the technical expositions of *Death in the Afternoon*. Most of the fifty-five were collected in 1938 in *The Fifth Column* and the *First Forty-nine Stories*. There omitted was 'The Man with the Tyrolese Hat' from *Der Querschnitt* (1936). Also still unreprinted in 1951 were three stories, first printed in *Esquire Magazine*, about Chicote's Madrid bar during the Spanish Civil War, as well as two others first published in *Cosmopolitan* in 1939. The volume of 1938 contained four stories not previously brought together: 'Old Man at the Bridge,' cabled from Barcelona in April, 1938; 'The Capital of the World,' a fine story on the 'athlete dying young' theme, with a setting in Madrid and, as leading character, a boy from Estremadura; and the two long stories which grew out of Hemingway's hunting-trip in Africa, 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber' and 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro.' But the first forty-five stories may be conveniently taken as a kind of unit, since they were all written within ten years, and since they represent what Hemingway thought worthy of including in his first three collections: *In Our Time* (1925), *Men Without Women* (1927), and *Winner Take Nothing* (1933). Taken together or separately, they are among the great short stories of modern literature.

Their range of symbolic effects is even greater than the variety of subjects and themes employed. The subjects and themes, in turn, are far more various than has been commonly supposed. Like any writer with a passion for craftsmanship, Hemingway not only accepts but also sets himself the most difficult experimental problems. Few writers of the past fifty years, and no American writers of the same period except James and Faulkner, have grappled so manfully with extremely difficult problems in communication. One cannot be aware of the real extent of this experimentation (much of it highly successful, though there are some lapses) until he has read through the first three collections attempting to watch both the surfaces and the real inward content. Even that task, though pleasurable as a voyage of discovery, is harder than it sounds. For it is much the same with the short stories as with *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*: they are so readable as straight narratives that one is prepared to accept them at face-value — to admire the sharp lines and clean curves of the eighth of the iceberg above the surface, and to ignore the real causes of the dignity or worth of the movement.

With perhaps half a dozen exceptions, each of the short stories doubly repays the closest reading. The point could be illustrated as many times as there are stories to serve as illustrations. As one example, there is the Chekhov-like 'Alpine Idyll,' an

apparently simple tale in which two American sportsmen have gone skiing in Switzerland. On the way to a village inn in a Swiss valley, the Americans pass a cemetery where a burial has just taken place. When they reach the inn, they drink at one table; at another table, the village sexton splits a bottle of wine with a Swiss peasant from the lonely mountain-country up above. When the peasant leaves to go to another tavern down the street, the Americans hear the story behind the burial.

In the winter the peasant's wife died. Since he could not bury her, he placed the body in his woodshed. There it froze stiff in the intense mountain cold. Whenever the peasant went to get wood to keep himself warm, he found that the body was in his way. So he stood it up against the wall. Later, since he often went for wood at night, carrying a lantern, and since the open jaws of the corpse provided a convenient high place, he took to hanging his lantern in his dead wife's mouth. Evidently he thought nothing of it at the time. By spring, when he was able to bring the body to the valley for burial, the mouth had become noticeably ragged. This is the shocking anecdote under which the story is built.

Actually, however, the story is not 'about' the peasant. Its subject, several times emphasized early in the narrative, is 'not ever doing anything too long.' The Americans have been trying some spring skiing high in the Silvretta. Much as they love the sport, they have found it a queerly unpleasant experience. May is too late in the season to be up there. 'I was a little tired of skiing,' says one. 'We had stayed too long. I was glad to be down, away from the unnatural high mountain spring, into this May morning in the valley.' When the story of the peasant and his wife is told, the idea of the 'unnatural' and the idea of 'not ever doing anything too long' are both driven home with a special twist of the knife. For the peasant has lived too long in an unnatural situation; his sense of human dignity and decency has temporarily atrophied. When he gets down into the valley, where it is spring and people are living naturally and wholesomely, he sees how far he has strayed from the natural and the wholesome, and he is then deeply ashamed of himself. For spring in the valley has been established by the skier's internal monologue as the 'natural' place. In the carefully wrought terms of the story, the valley stands in opposition to the unnatural high mountain spring. The arrival of this season in the area near his lonely hut has activated the peasant to bring his wife's body down to the valley for burial. But for him the descent has been especially meaningful — nothing less, in short, than a coming to judgment before the priest and the sexton. Here again, the point is made possible by careful previous preparation. One of the skiers has commented on the oppressiveness of the spring sun in the high Silvretta. 'You could not get away from the sun.' It is a factual and true statement of the skier's feeling of acute discomfort when the open staring eye of the sun overheated him and spoiled the snow he wished to ski on. But it is also a crafty symbolic statement which can later be brought to bear on the unspoken shame of the peasant, who could not get away from the open staring eye of the 'natural' people who in a sense brought him to judgment. Like 'Alpine

Idyll,' many of the stories deserve to be read with as much awareness, and as closely, as one would read a good modern poem.

The consideration of 'Alpine Idyll' makes another point relevant: the frequent implication that Hemingway is a sportswriter. In some of the hop-skip-and-jump critiques of Hemingway, the reader is likely to find 'Alpine Idyll' classified as a skiing story. But to say that Hemingway sometimes deals with sports like horse-racing, boxing, bullfighting, fishing, and skiing really tells very little even about the 'sports stories.' None of them is primarily 'about' a sport; and only ten of the first forty-five make special or incidental use of any sport at all. The point of 'Cross-Country Snow,' which opens with a breathlessly described skiing episode, is something quite different from the statement that skiing is fun. The true function of the opening is to summarize, dramatize, and establish firmly a phase of masculine living (men-without-women) which is being justly challenged by another phase of living — and in such a way that a state of tension is set up between the two. When a choice is compelled, Nick Adams, one of the skiers, readily accepts the second phase. Similarly, although one might classify 'Out of Season' as a fishing story, the point of the story is that nothing (including fishing) is done. The strength of the story is the portrayal of the officious guide Peduzzi, a fine characterization. He serves to focus sharply the 'out-of-season' theme, which relates both to the young man's relations with his wife Tiny, and to the proposal (by Peduzzi) that the young man fish out of season in evasion of the local game laws. If one turns from these to the two long stories, 'Fifty Grand' and 'The Undefeated,' both of which devote considerable space to the close descriptions of athletic events, it might be argued that here, anyhow, Hemingway's real interest is in the athletic events.⁶ Not so. His interest is in the athletes, and not so much because they are athletes as because they are people. The two stories may be seen as complementary studies in superannuation. Jack Brennan, the aging welterweight fighting his last fight in Madison Square Garden, is a rough American equivalent to the veteran Manolo Garcia, meeting his last bull under the arc lights of the bullring in Madrid.

Both men show, in crucial situations, the courage which has sustained them through their earlier careers. Both are finished. Jack earns his fifty thousand both by standing up under the intentional low blow of his opponent and by thinking fast enough under conditions of extreme pain to return the low blow, lose the fight, and win the money he has bet on his opponent. Manolo earns the right to keep his coleta, the badge of the professional matador, by a courage that is much greater than his aging skill, or, for that matter, his luck. The stories are as different in conception and execution as the Spanish temperament is from the Irish-American, or the bullfight from the prizefight. The sign at the center of the Brennan story is a certified check for fifty thousand dollars; a bullfighter's pigtail is the sign at the center of the other. One could almost believe that the stories were meant to point up some kind of international contrast.

Yet the atmosphere in which both stories transpire is one of admirable courage. The aging athletes Brennan and Garcia stand in marked opposition to another pair who are united by their too early acceptance of defeat. These are the half-symbolic Ole Andreson, the intended victim of Al and Max in ‘The Killers’ — the only real classic to emerge from the American gang wars of the prohibition era except W. R. Burnett’s Little Caesar — and the half-symbolic figure of William Campbell, the man under the half-symbolic sheet in the story half-symbolically called ‘A Pursuit Race.’

‘Half-symbolic’ is an awkward term. What makes it necessary in talking about stories like ‘A Pursuit Race’ and ‘The Killers’ is that both Andreson and Campbell are real enough to be accepted in non-symbolic terms. They are dressed in the sharp vocabulary of the naturalistic writer. We are given (almost coldly) the place, the facts, the scene, out of which grows, however, an awful climate of hopelessness and despair. It is impossible to escape the conviction that the function of these two is to stand for something much larger than themselves — a whole, widespread human predicament, deep in the grain of human affairs — with Andreson and Campbell as the indexes.

The Chesterfield-coated killers, Al and Max, are likewise the indexes of a wider horror than their cheap and ugly hoodlumism could ever be in itself. Nowadays the generic term for that horror is fascism, and it may not be stretching a point to suggest that, with ‘The Killers,’ Hemingway solidly dramatized the point of view towards human life which makes fascism possible. If that is so, then the figures of Andreson and even Campbell take on a meaning wide as all the modern world. They are the victims, the men who have given up the fight for life and liberty. Nothing can rouse them anymore.

Whatever it is that William Campbell seeks to escape by remaining in bed, the ultimate horror gets its most searching treatment in ‘A Clean Well-Lighted Place,’ a superb story and quite properly one of Hemingway’s favorites. It shows once again that remarkable union of the naturalistic and the symbolic which is possibly his central triumph in the realm of practical esthetics. The ‘place’ of the title is a Spanish café. Before the story is over; this place has come to stand as an image of light, cleanness, and order against the dark chaos of its counter-symbol in the story: the idea of nada, or nothingness. The nada-concept is located and pinned to the map by a kind of triangulation-process. The three elements consist in the respective relationships of an old waiter and a young waiter to an elderly man who sits drinking brandy every night in their clean, well-lighted café.

The old waiter and the young waiter are in opposition. They stand (by knowledge, temperament, experience, and insight) on either side of one of the great fences which exist in the world for the purpose of dividing sheep from goats. The young waiter would like to go home to bed, and is impatient with the old drinker of brandy. The old waiter, on the other hand, knows very well why the old patron comes often, gets drunk, stays late, and leaves only when he must. For the old waiter, like

the old patron, belongs to the great brotherhood: all those ‘who like to stay late at the café . . . all those who do not want to go to bed . . . all those who need a light for the night.’ He is reluctant to see his own café close — both because he can sympathize with all the benighted brethren, and for the very personal reason that he, too, needs the cleanness, the light, and the order of the place as an insulation against the dark.

The unspoken brotherly relationship between the old waiter and the old patron is dramatized in the opening dialogue, where the two waiters discuss the drinker of brandy as he sits quietly at one of the tables. The key notion here is that the young and rather stupid waiter has not the slightest conception of the special significance which the old waiter attaches to his young confrere’s careless and unspecialized use of the word nothing.

Young Waiter: Last week he tried to commit suicide.

Old Waiter: Why?

Young Waiter: He was in despair.

Old Waiter: What about?

Young Waiter: Nothing.

Old Waiter: How do you know it was nothing?

Young Waiter: He has plenty of money.

They are speaking in Spanish. For the old waiter, the word nothing (or *nada*) contains huge actuality. The great skill displayed in the story is the development, through the most carefully controlled understatement, of the young waiter’s mere nothing into the old waiter’s Something — a Something called Nothing which is so huge, terrible, overbearing, inevitable, and omnipresent that, once experienced, it can never be forgotten. Sometimes in the day, or for a time at night in a clean, welllighted place, it can be held temporarily at bay. What links the old waiter and the old patron most profoundly is their brotherhood in arms against this beast in the jungle.

Several other stories among the first forty-five — perhaps most notably the one called ‘A Way You’ll Never Be’ — engage the *nada*-concept. And whoever tries the experiment of reading ‘Big Two-Hearted River’ immediately after ‘A Clean Well-Lighted Place’ may discover, perhaps to his astonishment, that the *nada*-concept really serves as a frame for what is ostensibly one of Hemingway’s happiest stories.

If we read the river-story singly, looking merely at what it says, there is probably no more effective account of euphoria in the language, even when one takes comparative account of The Compleat Angler, Hazlitt on the pleasures of hiking, Keats on the autumn harvest, Thoreau on the Merrimack, Belloc on ‘The Mowing of a Field,’ or Frost on ‘Hyla Brook.’ It tells with great simplicity of a lone fisherman’s expedition after trout. He gets a sandwich and coffee in the railway station at St.

Ignace, Michigan, and then rides the train northwest to the town of Seney, which has been destroyed by fire. From there he hikes under a heavy pack over the burned ground until he reaches a rolling pine plain. After a nap in a grove of trees, he moves on to his campsite near the Two-Hearted River. There he makes camp, eats, and sleeps. Finally, as sum and crown of the expedition, there is the detailed story of a morning's fishing downstream from the camp. At the surface of the story one finds an absolute and very satisfying reportorial accuracy. The journey can even be followed on a survey-map.

During one of the colloquies of Dean Gauss, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway in the summer of 1925, 'Big Two-Hearted River' came up for consideration. Both of Hemingway's friends had read it in the spring number of Ernest Walsh's little magazine, *This Quarter*. Half in fun, half in seriousness, they now accused him of 'having written a story in which nothing happened,' with the result that it was 'lacking in human interest.' Hemingway, Dean Gauss continues, 'countered by insisting that we were just ordinary book reviewers and hadn't even taken the trouble to find out what he had been trying to do.' This anecdote is a typical instance of the unfortunately widespread assumption that Hemingway's hand can be read at a glance. Dean Gauss remarks that his own return to the story was profitable. There was much more there than had first met his eye.⁷ For here, as elsewhere in Hemingway, something is going on down under. One might echo Hamlet's words to the ghost of his father: 'Well said, old mole, canst work i' the earth so fast?' — and with just Hamlet's mixture of admiration and excitement. Malcolm Cowley, one of the few genuinely sympathetic critics of Hemingway, has suggested that 'the whole fishing expedition . . . might be regarded as an incantation, a spell to banish evil spirits.'⁸ The story is full of rituals. There is, for example, the long hike across the country — a ritual of endurance, for Nick does not stop to eat until he has made camp and can feel that he has earned the right to supper. There is the ritual of home-making, the raising-up of a wall against the dark; the ritual of food-preparation and thoughtful, grateful eating; of bed-making and deep untroubled sleep. Next morning comes the ritual of bait-catching, intelligently done and timed rightly before the sun has warmed and dried the grasshoppers. When Nick threads one on his hook, the grasshopper holds the hook with his front feet and spits tobacco-juice on it — as if for fisherman's luck. 'The grasshopper,' as Cowley says, 'is playing its own part in a ritual.' The whole of the fishing is conducted according to the ritualistic codes of fair play. When Nick catches a trout too small to keep, he carefully wets his hands before touching the fish so as not to disturb the mucous coating on the scales and thus destroy the fish he is trying to save. Down under, in short, the close reader finds a carefully determined order of virtue and simplicity which goes far towards explaining from below the oddly satisfying effect of the surface story.

Still, there is more to the symbolism of the story than a ritual of self-disciplined moral conduct. Two very carefully prepared atmospheric symbols begin and end the account. One is the burned ground near the town of Seney. The other is the swamp

which lies farther down the Big Two-Hearted River than Nick yet wishes to go. Both are somehow sinister. One probably legitimate guess on the background of the first is that Nick, who is said to have been away for a long time, is in fact a returned war veteran, going fishing both for fun and for therapeutic purposes. In some special way, the destroyed town of Seney and the scorched earth around it carry the hint of war — the area of destruction Nick must pass through in order to reach the high rolling pine plain where the exorcism is to take place. In much the same way, the swamp symbolizes an area of the sinister which Nick wishes to avoid, at least for the time being.

The pine plain, the quiet grove where he naps, the security of the camp, the pleasures of the open river are, all together, Nick's 'clean, well-lighted place.' In the afternoon grove, carefully described as an 'island' of pine trees, Nick does not have to turn on any light or exert any vigilance while he peacefully slumbers. The same kind of feeling returns that night at the camp after he has rigged his shelter-half and crawled inside. 'It smelled pleasantly of canvas. Already there was something mysterious and home-like. . . . He was settled: Nothing could touch him. He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it.' Back in the low country around Seney, even the grasshoppers had turned dark from living in the burned-over ground. Up ahead in the swamp 'the big cedars came together overhead, the sun did not come through, except in patches; in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic. Nick did not want it.' For now, on his island between sinister and sinister, Nick wants to keep his fishing tender and if possible comic.

II. The Education of Nicholas Adams

'BIG Two-Hearted River' was based on an expedition which Hemingway once made to Michigan's northern peninsula. His determination to write only those aspects of experience with which he was personally acquainted gave a number of the first forty-five stories the flavor of fictionalized personal history. He was always prepared to invent people and circumstances, to choose backgrounds which would throw his people into three-dimensional relief, and to employ as symbols those elements of the physical setting which could be psychologically justified by the time and place he was writing about. But during the decade when the first forty-five stories were written, he was unwilling to stray very far from the life he knew by direct personal contact, or to do any more guessing than was absolutely necessary.

The recurrent figure of Nicholas Adams is not of course Hemingway, though the places Nick goes and the events he watches are ordinarily places Hemingway had visited or events about which he had heard on good authority and could assimilate to his own experience of comparable ones. Future biographers will have to proceed warily to separate autobiographical elements from the nexus of invented

circumstances in which they may be lodged. For present purposes it is enough to notice that well over half of the first forty-five stories center on Nick Adams, or other young men who could easily be mistaken for him.

They might be arranged under some such title as 'The Education of Nicholas Adams.' It could even be said that when placed end to end they do for the twentieth century roughly what Henry Adams did for the nineteenth, though with obvious differences in formality of approach. The education of Henry Adams in Boston, Quincy, Berlin, London, and Washington presented an informative contrast with the education of Nicholas Adams in Chicago, northern Michigan, Italy, and Switzerland. Nick's life in the twentieth century was on the whole considerably more spectacular than Henry's in the nineteenth; it was franker, less polite, less diplomatic. Chicago, where Nick was born just before the turn of the century, was a rougher climate than Henry's mid-Victorian Boston, just as Nick's Ojibway Indians were far more primitive than Henry's Boston Irish. Partly because of the times he lived in and partly, no doubt, because he was of a more adventurous temperament, Nick came more easily on examples of barbarism than Henry was to know until his visit to the South Seas. In place of the Great Exposition of 1900 which so stimulated Henry's imagination, Nick was involved in the World's Fair of 1914-1918. But in retrospect one parallelism stood out momentarily: both Henry and Nicholas had occasion to marvel bitterly at how badly their respective worlds were governed.

Nick's father, Dr. Henry Adams, played a notable part in Nick's early education. He was a busy and kindly physician whose chief avocations were hunting and fishing. There was opportunity for both in the Michigan wood and lake country where the Adams family regularly summered. Mrs. Adams was a Christian Scientist; her temperament was as artistic as that of her husband was scientific. After the death of Nick's grandfather she designed a new house for the family. But Nick was his father's son, loving his father 'very much and for a long time.' From the son's fictional reminiscences a memorable portrait of Dr. Henry Adams is made to emerge. He was a large-framed man with a full dark beard, a hawk-like nose, striking deep-set eyes, and an almost telescopic power of far-sightedness. Though they gradually grew apart, they were the best of companions during Nick's boyhood. In middle life Dr. Adams died by his own hand for reasons that Nick sorrowfully hints at but does not reveal.

Ten of the stories record Nick's growing-up. He recalls the move from one house to another and the accidental burning of Dr. Adams's collection of Indian arrowheads and preserved snakes. One Fourth of July, he remembers (and it is one of the century's best stories of the growing-up of puppy love) there was a ride in a neighbor's wagon back from town past nine drunken Indians, while bad news of his girl, Indian number ten in the story called 'Ten Indians,' was relayed to him by his father on his return home. Nick had already had his adolescent sex-initiation with the same girl, a half-breed named Trudy. He watched a very humiliating argument

between his father and a crew of sawyers, and a terrifying Caesarean birth and suicide (addition and subtraction simultaneously achieved) at the Indian settlement. Nick's best friend in Michigan was a boy named Bill who could talk baseball, fishing, and reading with equal ease. Both in Michigan and in Illinois Nick encountered the underworld. It was part of his informal education to be manhandled by two gangsters in a Chicago lunchroom, and to share supper with two tramps, one of them a dangerously punch-drunk ex-prizefighter, in the woods near Mancelona, Michigan.

Like Hemingway, Nick Adams went to war. The earliest glimpses of his career as soldier come in the sixth and seventh miniatures of *In Our Time*. One shows Nick fiercely praying while Austrian artillery pounds the Italian trenches near Fossalta di Piave. In the other, he has been hit in the spine by an Austrian bullet and is leaning back with paralyzed legs against the wall of an Italian church. 'Now I Lay Me,' one of the longer stories, shows Nick as twice-wounded Tenente Adams, troubled by insomnia and talking out the night with his Italian orderly, a fellow-Chicagoan. 'In Another Country' does not name its narrator, but it could well be the same young Tenente in conversation with an Italian major, a fellow-patient in the base hospital at Milan. In 'A Way You'll Never Be,' Nick is reporting back to battalion headquarters in American uniform. Though he is still recuperating from a severe wound and battle-shock, he is supposed to help build morale among Italian troops by means of the uniform. It is meant as a sign that the A. E. F. will shortly come to their support.

There are no Nick Adams stories of the homecoming, the process which Henry Adams found so instructive after his service abroad. The fate of the male character in 'A Very Short Story' might, however, be thought of as one episode in the postwar adventures of Nick Adams. In a base-hospital at Padua, he falls in love with a nurse named Luz — an idea much expanded and altered in *A Farewell to Arms*. But when the young man returns to Chicago to get a good job so that he can marry Luz, he soon receives a letter saying that she has fallen in love with a major in the Arditi. The protagonist in 'Soldier's Home' is called Harold Krebs, and he is a native of Oklahoma rather than Illinois. But once again the story might have had Nick Adams as its central character. Like Nick's mother, Mrs. Krebs is a sentimental woman who shows an indisposition to face reality and is unable to understand what has happened to her boy in the war.

Nick Adams returned to Europe not long after the armistice. 'Cross Country Snow' reveals that he is married to a girl named Helen who is expecting a baby. 'Out of Season' and 'Alpine Idyll' could easily be associated with Nick's life on the continent, while the very moving 'Fathers and Sons,' which stands as the concluding story in Hemingway's collected short fiction, shows Nick on one of his return trips to the United States, driving his own son through familiar country and thinking back to the life and the too early death of the boy's grandfather, Dr. Henry Adams.

The story of Nick's education, so far as we have it, differs in no essential way from that of almost any middle-class American male who started life at the beginning

of the present century or even with the generation of 1920. After the comparatively happy boyhood and the experimental adolescence, the young males went off to war; and after the war, in a time of parlous peace, they set out to marry and build themselves families and get their work done. The story of Adams is a presented vision of our time. There is every reason why it should arouse in us, to use the phrase of Conrad, 'that feeling of unavoidable solidarity' which 'binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world.' Future biographers, able to examine the Nick Adams stories against the full and detailed background of Hemingway's life from his birth on July 21, 1899, until, say, his thirty-first birthday in 1930, should uncover some valuable data on the methods by which he refashioned reality into the shape of a short story. What they may fail to see — and what a contemporary evaluator is justified in pointing out — is that Hemingway's aim in the Nick Adams stories is always the aim of an artist. He is deeply interested in the communication of an effect, or several effects together, in such a way as to evoke the deep response of shared human experience. To record for posterity another chapter in his own fictional autobiography does not interest him at all.

III. Many Circles

'REALLY, universally, relations stop nowhere,' said Henry James in one of his prefaces, 'and the exquisite problem of the artist is externally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so.'⁹ The first forty-five stories of Hemingway draw many such circles — concentric, tangential, or overlapping — in which to contain the great variety of human relations which interest him. Two of the circles, and they might be seen as tangential, are those called Home and Not-Home. Nick Adams is perfectly at home in his tent in the Michigan wilderness, but the institution that is supposed to be home for the returned veteran Krebs merely causes him acute discomfort. Bed is home to William Campbell. The sheet drawn up over his face is a protection against the Not-Home of the active world, though it is also, in movies and in morgues, the accepted ritualistic sign that the person underneath is dead. The clean, well-lighted café is much more home than his actual home to the old Spaniard who comes there nightly to stay until the place closes.

The Not-Home is another of the names of nada, which Carlyle once rhetorically defined as the vast circumambient realm of nothingness and night. It was perhaps never more sharply drawn than by Goya in the horrific etching which he calls 'Nada.' An arc of the nada-circle runs all the way through Hemingway's work from the night-fears of Jake Barnes to the 'horrorous' of Philip Rawlings and the ingrowing remorse of Richard Cantwell. Malcolm Cowley has well described him as one of 'the haunted and nocturnal writers,' akin, in his deeper reaches, to Melville and Hawthorne.¹⁰ Another way of defining nada might be to say, indeed, that it falls about midway between the 'Black Man' of Hawthorne and the 'White Whale' of Melville. In the first

forty-five stories, this besieging horror of the limitless, the hallucinatory, the heartland of darkness, bulks like a Jungian Shadow behind the lives of many of the protagonists. Outside the circle which Hemingway has drawn by the special magic of his geometry, man's relations to the shadow stop nowhere.

But the Home-circle has another alternate than that of nada. This is the idea of male companionship, rough and friendly camaraderie, an informal brotherhood with by-laws which are not written down but are perfectly understood and rigidly adhered to by the contracting parties. Hemingway summed up the matter in his title *Men Without Women*. For woman, closely associated with the Home-symbol, stands in opposition, perhaps even in a kind of enmity, to that wholly happy and normal condition which two men, hiking or drinking or talking together, can build like a world of their own. One sees this world in the Burguete of Jake Barnes and Bill Gorton, in the Gorizia of Lieutenant Henry and Doctor Rinaldi, in the Guadarrama hide-out of Robert Jordan and Anselmo, and in the Gritti Palace Hotel dining-room where Colonel Cantwell and the Gran Maestro (with their unspoken loyalties, their completely shared ethical code, and their rough and friendly badinage) discuss together the latest affairs of *El Ordine Militar, Nobile y Espirituoso de los Caballeros de Brusadelli*.

'Dramatize it, dramatize it,' cried Henry James. 'Then, and not sooner, would one see.'¹¹ The most direct dramatization of the men-without-women theme occurs in 'Cross-Country Snow.' Here Nick Adams and his friend George, between whom there is something of a father-and-son relationship, are skiing near Montreux. When they stop for wine at the inn, the obvious pregnancy of their waitress reminds George that Nick's wife Helen is expecting a child. Both men know that the birth of the child will certainly interrupt and probably destroy their comradeship. 'Maybe we'll never go skiing again,' says George. 'We've got to,' Nick answers. 'It isn't worthwhile if you can't.' George wishes, boy-like, that they could make some kind of promise about it. 'There isn't any good in promising,' says young Nick Adams. 'It's hell, isn't it?' says George. 'No, not exactly,' says Nick.

Nick and George are as free and happy as Jake and Bill at Burguete. On the other side, for Nick, is all that involvement with woman, all the approaching domestication, all that half-ruefully, uncomplainingly accepted responsibility which will arrive at the moment Nick's fatherhood begins. It is not exactly hell. That is the province of nada. Nick recognizes, without complaint, that domestic responsibility presents a powerful case. It could, conceivably, cancel out those things in his life that are symbolized by the skiing with a good companion. And really, universally, the opposed relations of Men-without-women and Men-with-women stop nowhere. The conversational episode in the inn near Montreux is simply the little circle in which they appear to do so.

Closely related to the Men-without-women theme is that of fathers and sons. In the early Nick Adams stories Nick is seen as the son of a father; in the latest, he is the

father of a son. Some half-dozen of the first forty-five stories draw circles around the father-son relationship. It is movingly dramatized, for example, through Nick's sympathy with his father's shame and anger after the encounter with the sawyers, in which Dr. Adams has been insultingly bested. The following conversation closes 'The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife':

'Your mother wants you to come and see her,' the doctor said.

'I want to go with you,' Nick said.

'All right. Come on, then,' his father said. . . .

'I know where there's black squirrels, Daddy,' Nick said.

'All right,' said his father. 'Let's go there.'

At the other end of the line there is Nick's unspoken sympathy for his own son 'Schatz' in the little story called 'A Day's Wait.' Not knowing the difference between Fahrenheit and centigrade thermometers, the boy (who had gone to school in France) naturally supposes that with a temperature of 102 degrees he will certainly die. It was common talk among his French schoolmates that you could not live with a temperature of 44 degrees, normal being 37 degrees. During the day's wait, he manages to keep a firm and stoical grip on himself. When he learns the truth, which is also the time when Nick first understands what is troubling the boy, the hold gradually relaxes. 'The next day,' says Nick, with a laconic quality that nearly conceals his own emotion, the boy's hold on himself 'was very slack and he cried very easily at little things that were of no importance.' A third aspect of the father-and-son theme is the inevitable and paradoxical gulf between generations. It shows very clearly in the early story, 'My Old Man,' with its contrast between Joe's adoring innocence and his father's vicious world of thrown horse-races. But the paradox of togetherness and separateness is nowhere more poignantly dramatized than in the Nick Adams story called 'Fathers and Sons.' One great skill of the story is its compression of the generations of men, until the whole Adams clan of grandfather, father, son, and son's son are seen in a line, each visible over his son's shoulder. Each father is near his son, each son near his father. Yet between each generation comes the wall which neither side can fully cross — or would want to if it were possible.

IV. Many Marriages

Paradox is also at work in what may be called Hemingway's 'marriage-group,' that very considerable number of the first forty-five stories where the subject is some form of male-female relationship. Like Chaucer or Shakespeare or Keats or Browning, he watches with fascination the odd wave-like operation of attraction and repulsion between the two sexes. In his poems 'Meeting at Night' and 'Parting at Morning,' Browning dramatizes the magnetic attraction of a tryst, and the 'need for a

world of men' which afterwards draws the lover away as rapidly as he came. Hemingway's stories often engage this paradox.

The women in Hemingway nearly always fail to understand fully the strength and extent of the attraction-repulsion phenomenon. Often, however, they are compelled — and it is on the whole an unhappy experience for them — to recognize its existence. One example will serve. 'Up in Michigan,' the earliest story in the collection, written in Paris in December, 1921, is one of the very few which Hemingway chooses to tell from the woman's point of view. Here a fine, neat country girl named Liz Coates worships a fine handsome blacksmith named Jim Gilmore from a respectful distance. One foggy evening, after a hunting trip, a good dinner, some whiskey, and exposure to the heat of an open fire, Jim rudely, painfully, and crudely seduces Liz, on a cold boat dock. Afterwards, being unable to talk to or even to wake her importunate lover, Liz covers him with her coat and walks home. This story is the first in a long line of similar instances where male virility, though often rough and wayward in its manifestations, seems to be the axis on which the world of womankind revolves.

'Cat in the Rain,' another story taken in part from the woman's point of view, presents a corner of the female world in which the male is only tangentially involved. It was written at Rapallo in May, 1923. From the window of a hotel room where her husband is reading and she is fidgeting, a young wife sees a cat outside in the rain. When she goes to get it, the animal (which somehow stands in her mind for comfortable bourgeois domesticity) has disappeared. This fact is very close to tragic because of the cat's association in her mind with many other things she longs for: long hair that she can do in a knot at the back of her neck; a candle-lighted dining-table where her own silver gleams; the season of spring and nice weather; and, of course, some new clothes. But when she puts these wishes into words, her husband mildly advises her to shut up and find something to read. 'Anyway,' says the young wife, 'I want a cat. I want a cat. I want a cat now. If I can't have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat.' The poor girl is the referee in a face-off between the actual and the possible. The actual is made of rain, boredom, a preoccupied husband, and irrational yearnings. The possible is made of silver, spring, fun, a new coiffure, and new dresses. Between actual and possible stands the cat. It is finally sent up to her by the kindly old inn-keeper, whose sympathetic deference is greater than that of the young husband.

In 'The Kreutzer Sonata,' Tolstoi presents an extreme example of the mild schizophrenia where a desired involvement and a desired freedom co-exist in the mind of the male. Two of Hemingway's stories approach the same problem in a comic spirit. In 'The End of Something,' Nick bluntly concludes his serious love affair with Marjorie, evidently by previous agreement with his friend Bill. In 'The Three-Day Blow,' while the wind of autumn rises in background accompaniment, Nick and Bill converse on the mature wisdom they showed in having stopped the love affair

before it went too far. Despite this wisdom, Nick cannot help feeling uncomfortable about the finality of the termination. Thus when Bill rather cynically guesses that it might not be so final after all, Nick is wonderfully relieved. He can always go into town where Marjorie lives on the coming Saturday night. It is 'a good thing to have in reserve.' Despite the need for detachment after involvement, Hemingway's work always stresses the essential normality and rightness of the male-female relationship.¹² Anything which distorts it, anything which brings it to an unhappy conclusion, is basically a kind of tragedy. In 1918, for example, there was a major in a Milan hospital whose wounded right hand had shrunk until it was no bigger than a baby's. Before the war he had been the best fencer in Italy. He was now using an exercise machine which was supposed to strengthen and enlarge the withered hand. Beside him at these sessions was a young American, taking similar treatments for a wounded leg, but more hopeful of its restoration. One day the major asked the American if he were married, and the American replied that he would like to be.

'The more of a fool you are,' the major said. He seemed very angry. 'A man must not marry.'

'Why, Signor Maggiore?'

'Don't call me 'Signor Maggiore.'

'Why must not a man marry?'

'He cannot marry. He cannot marry,' he said angrily. 'If he is to lose everything, he should not place himself in a position to lose that. He should not place himself in a position to lose. He should find things he cannot lose.'

The major's wife had just died of pneumonia. Death is the absolute distortion, the unequivocal conclusion. The story, and there is much more to it, is called 'In Another Country.' The country is Italy; but it is also another country still, a country (it is just possible) where a man can find things he cannot lose.

Divorce or separation is a form of death in Hemingway's marriage-group. In the ironic story called 'A Canary for One,' the narrative turns upon a point of information not revealed until the final sentence: 'We were returning to Paris to set up separate residences.' Hemingway's strategy here is to establish through dialogue a parallel between the about-to-separate husband and wife and an enforced separation about which they hear on the train-ride between Cannes and the Gare de Lyon in Paris. They share a compartment with a deaf American lady who is taking home to her daughter a canary which she has picked up during a Cook's Tour. The lady's conviction that 'American men make the best husbands' embroils the reader in a double irony. Two years before, she has broken up a match between her daughter and a Swiss engineering student on the grounds that 'I couldn't have her marrying a foreigner.' The daughter's reaction has not been favorable. 'She doesn't seem to take an interest in anything. She doesn't care about things.' The canary is a consolation

prize, a substitute interest which will obviously fail. But the lady will not give up her belief that Americans make the best husbands, even though she is in the same compartment with an American couple whose marriage has failed.

The canary (if the lady would face it) and the couple (if the lady knew about them) might together penetrate the lady's rock-ribbed assurance that she is in the right. Both the married people must henceforth content themselves with those forlorn substitutes for each other of which, in another domestic situation, the canary is the epitome. But the lady's deafness is itself a symbol of her impenetrability to suggestion; and she will never know how much the canary will mean to the about-to-separate American couple as a symbol of distortion.

Other stories explore the predicament of divorce. Mr. Johnson, a writer waiting for his train in the station café at Vevey, desperately supposes that he can blunt the edge of the shame he feels by talking over his imminent divorce with three dignified Swiss porters. Though he buys them wine, and curiously raises what for him is the central question, he is met by that sympathetic but somewhat enigmatic politeness which was to be expected.

'You say you have never been divorced?'

'No,' says one porter. 'It would be too expensive. Besides, I have never married.'

'Ah,' says Johnson. 'And these other gentlemen?'

'They are married.'

'You like the married state?' says Johnson to one of them.

'Oui. C'est normal.'

'Exactly,' says Johnson. 'Et vous, monsieur?'

'Ça va,' says the third porter.

'Pour moi,' says Johnson, 'ça ne va pas.'

Seeing then, after a futile attempt to change the subject, that his blundering investigation has come to nothing, Johnson excuses himself and goes outside. 'It had only made him feel nasty' — because he has possibly embarrassed the porters while certainly embarrassing himself, but mainly because he has recognized, with more shame and discomfort than ever, the normality of the married state, the 'abnormality' of his own, and, finally and acutely, that whole nexus of half-humorous shrugging acceptance which is summed up in the second porter's 'Ça va.' Pour Monsieur Johnson, ça ne va pas.

If the healthy, married state, or its approximate equivalent, is strongly recommended in these stories as the normal situation for men and women, one finds also the occasional recognition of other forms of abnormality than divorce. There is, for example, the extreme travesty of the relationship between 'Mr. and Mrs. Elliot,'

who at last settle into an old-maid marriage, all calm and acceptable superficially, all in jagged remnants underneath. Another story, 'The Sea Change,' examines at its crux the problem of an otherwise satisfactory liaison. The girl faces the pull of an unnatural attraction, and the lover sees that he has no choice but to let her go. Except for one pronoun, and a noun which the girl rejects as too ugly to apply to her own situation, the story might be that of an ordinary lovers' triangle, with the girl leaving one man for another. The pronoun appears in the man's fierce threat towards the third corner of the triangle: 'I'll kill her,' he cries.

V. Many Must Have It

TO SAY that Hemingway is preoccupied with such subjects would be wrong. His preoccupation is rather with the healthy norm of ordinary sexual behavior. He merely sees that the normality of the norm is sometimes most effectively measured in terms of departures from it. Furthermore, a writer dedicated, like Hemingway, to the rendering of things as they are soon recognizes that departures from the usual are numerous enough to make ignoring them a fault of seeing. His personal views, which can be determined inductively, seem to range from the artist's simple acceptance of the fact that abnormality exists up to an outright scorn full of moral echoes of disgust and disapproval, or over into an amused raillery at the expense of the afflicted. Somewhere near the area of simple acceptance would be the story called 'A Simple Enquiry,' in which an Italian major asks his youthful orderly certain guarded but leading questions. These are familiar enough in an amusing way to all who have ever been through the stock interview with the army psychiatrist at an induction center. Before this particular interview is over, the reader is aware that the major's interests are not, on the whole, scientific.

Among the humorous stories is one called 'The Light of the World.' Hemingway included it among the six or seven which he liked best, though he said that 'nobody else ever liked' it.¹³ One need not like the substance of the story, or the people, or the language. But even with these reservations, one can still enjoy the story's triumph, which is that it adds up to a very complicated defense of the normal against the abnormal. The scene is a provincial railroad depot in northern Michigan at an autumn nightfall. Two tough youngsters, coming in, find themselves in the midst of ten men and five women. The group conversation, conducted in roaring comic terms, establishes the homosexuality of one of the men to serve as contrast to the loudmouthed lying sentimentality of one of the five prostitutes. She says that she was once the true love of Steve Ketchel, a prizefighter. Her forthright contradictor, an even fatter professional tart named Alice, stands (at least in context) for the normal, the honest, and the sound. The raucous play of human emotion, bald as a turkey-egg, loud as a brawl, sets up an effective contrast to the furtive yearnings of the homosexual cook. In an odd way, and not without some strain on the moral judgment, the huge Alice in her iridescent silk dress comes to be the true heroine of

the comedy. Love may be, as the sentimental blonde asserts, the light of the world. But an even stronger light may be cast by the honest common sense of people like Alice, the Michigan Wife of Bath.

Hemingway's skills as a comic writer are probably not enough appreciated. 'The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio,' for example, is a fine and subtle study, depending to a great degree on the humor of character, and setting up a memorable contrast among three levels of the apprehension of reality.¹⁴ So is the portrait of the old French couple in 'Wine of Wyoming.' Here as elsewhere in the first forty-five stories, it is his championship of the normal and the natural which runs like a backbone down through the substance of the tales he elects to tell.¹⁵ His devotion to the honest and the actual is a moral decision which also happens to coincide with his esthetic views.

The record, if it is examined justly and with detachment, simply does not bear out the frequent critical implication that he invokes the spectacular or leans on the unusual to carry the burden of his stories. If 'Hills Like White Elephants' throws light into the nether regions of selfish human abnormality — which is one way of looking at the matter of abortion — one can balance it with such insights into the normal married state as 'Cat in the Rain.' The raving sentimentality of the peroxide blonde in 'The Light of the World' is neatly deflated by the solid honesty of Alice, who has long since left (if she was ever inside) her friend's cheap and banal wonderland. Even the nightly excursions of the old Spanish waiter into that vast nada which lies outside the normal world of everyday affairs are wrenched back by a final twist into the realm of the recognizable. 'After all,' he says to himself, 'it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it.' The world of Hemingway's short stories is above all the world we know. Many of us have it — or at least enough of it so that we easily recognize its outlines in his pages. His oddly continuing reputation as an 'archpriest of violence' really finds little support in the first forty-five stories. The overwhelming majority are extremely non-athletic. Their points are carried by talk far more often than by action. Outwardly, at least, nothing much happens, even though several kinds of burning emotion are implied and at intervals may erupt into the briefest violence of language. Otherwise there is seldom more movement than such as is necessary to raise a glass to the lips, row a boat across an inlet, cast a fly into a trout stream, or ski down a snowy slope into the true center of a story.

At café tables, in quiet rooms, or in the compartments of trains, men and women talk together with a concentrated diffidence which almost conceals the intensity of their feelings. Upon examination, it turns out to be this very intensity, this intensity very close to the intensity of poetry, which has deceived some of his critics into supposing that Hemingway is an exponent of violence for its own sake. Even in the relatively rare athletic stories, this is never so. He is after intensity, and his brand of intensity is to be achieved not by physical exercise but only through the exercise of the utmost restraint.¹⁶

Notes

1. *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-nine Stories*, New York, 1938, p. 369.
2. *A Farewell to Arms*, New York, 1948, p. 77.
3. *Death in the Afternoon*, New York, 1932, p. 191.
4. *Henry James, Works*, New York edition, Vol. 1, preface, p. vi.
5. For titles and publication dates of these short stories, see bibliography. 'The Man with the Tyrolese Hat' is actually an extract from *Green Hills of Africa* about the Austrian trader Kandisky.
6. Hemingway grouped these two stories with 'My Old Man' as belonging to another category than stories like 'Out of Season.' These three were 'the kind that are easy for me to write.' His own preferences among the early stories were for 'Big Two Hearted River,' 'Indian Camp,' 'Soldier's Home,' and the first and last paragraphs of 'Out of Season.' Ernest Hemingway to F. Scott Fitzgerald, from the Vorarlberg, ca. 12/20/25.
7. Christian Gauss to Carlos Baker, 12/26/50.
8. Malcolm Cowley, introd., *The Portable Hemingway*, New York, 1944, p. xix.
9. *James, Works*, New York edition, Vol. 1, p. vii.
10. Cowley, *The Portable Hemingway*, introd., p. vii.
11. *James, Works*, New York edition, Vol. 17, p. xxvii.
12. A passage of dialogue between Hemingway and the Old Lady (*Death in the Afternoon*, 179-180) bears on this point. 'Do you know any true stories about those unfortunate people?' says the Old Lady, meaning by unfortunate the sexually abnormal. 'A few,' answers Hemingway, 'but in general they lack drama, as do all tales of abnormality, since no one can predict what will happen in the normal while all tales of the abnormal end much the same.' It might be added that Hemingway everywhere celebrates the normal values of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who are in love. It is probable that he agrees with the opinion of Remy de Gourmont: 'Il y aurait peut-être une certaine corrélation entre la copulation complète et profonde et le développement cérébral.' See Ezra Pound's postscript to

his translation of de Gourmont's *Natural Philosophy of Love*, published by Boni and Liveright, New York, 1922.

13. One of Hemingway's letters to Perkins suggests that this story has some points in common with Maupassant's *La Maison Tellier*. Ernest Hemingway to Maxwell Perkins, 7/31/33.

14. This story evidently grew out of Hemingway's hospitalization in Billings, Montana, following an automobile accident in November 1930. The story was finished early in February 1933.

15. 'Wine of Wyoming' is apparently related to Hemingway's sojourn in the Sheridan area during the summer of 1928. The story contains topical allusions to the presidential candidacy of Governor Alfred E. Smith.

16. The origin of the titles *Men Without Women* and *Winner Take Nothing* may be noted for the record. The first was evidently a twist on the title of a novel by Ford, *Women and Men*. Hemingway's title was given in turn a twist by Wyndham Lewis for his critical book, *Men Without Art*. Hemingway's jocular explanation of his choice of the title was that he hoped the book would have a big sale among graduates of Vassar and homosexuals. Ernest Hemingway to F. Scott Fitzgerald, ca. late September 1927. But he had already given Perkins a serious explanation: 'In all of these [stories], almost, the softening feminine influence [is] absent,' whether as a result of 'training, discipline, death, or other causes.' Ernest Hemingway to Maxwell Perkins, 2/14/27. Hemingway had decided on the *Winner Take Nothing* title by 6/11/33. The title derives from the epigraph of the book. This epigraph, ostensibly drawn from an antique book of rules for gaming, was actually written by Hemingway himself. Ernest Hemingway to Carlos Baker, 11/22/51.