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**“Truer than anything alive”: Elements of Style and Reader Engagement in the  
Early Works of Ernest Hemingway, Joan Didion and Richard Brautigan**

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**Ph.D. in English Literature  
The University of Edinburgh  
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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself, is the product of my own work, and has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for any other degree or professional qualification. All content, except where explicitly stated by reference, is my own.

James Gilbert,

January 2023

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## Lay Summary

Twentieth century American literature represents one of the most significant periods in literary studies. From this period emerged many of the most highly regarded authors and innovative literary movements of all time. As Caroline Zilboorg notes:

The literature written by Americans during the 20th century encompasses a variety of voices... 20th century American writers, a struggle to express what it has meant to be simultaneously an individual and part of a nation, a product of both their own time and of history. They have put their feelings and ideas into words and forms that are sometimes conventional and at other times experimental, while they have used their subjects and themes and diction to confront modern experience from a distinctly American perspective. (7)

One of the most famous, distinctive and experimental voices in American literature of the first half of the twentieth century belongs to Ernest Hemingway. Born in 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois, Hemingway spent his early life split between the conventional, suburban America of Oak Park and the untamed, wild America of northern Michigan. He would go on to serve in Europe in the First World War as an ambulance driver and would later return to Europe in the nineteen-twenties as a foreign news correspondent for the *Toronto Star* while struggling to gain success as an author. The influence of these different stages in life permeate a great deal of his early fiction. From his work emerges a distinctly American voice of the modernist movement of the twentieth century.

During his time in Paris, Hemingway formed his unique, minimalist style. He shunned the ornate language and sentence structure that characterized a great deal

of nineteenth century prose, seeking to write as simply and directly with the aim of requiring the reader to participate and enact the story. The style proved effective and popular, Hemingway achieving substantial fame towards the end of the nineteen-twenties that he would enjoy until his death in 1961, an enduring fame that has resulted in his becoming arguably one of the most studied authors in the American literary canon.

Many authors have worked with elements of Hemingway's unique style. There is clearly an enduring interest in the economical use of prose, and the demand on the reader to make connections and infer meaning that it entails. Two important writers who adapted his style to form their own unique voices are Joan Didion and Richard Brautigan. Both of these authors emerged and began to garner popularity in the decade following Hemingway's death, and were, like Hemingway, writing during and about a period of significant change in mores and expectations in American society. Didion and Brautigan experimented with elements of style and explored thematic issues emerging from Hemingway's work to spark the reader's imaginative response to find meaning. An examination of the early work of Hemingway, Didion and Brautigan is fertile ground for a broadening of the critical understanding of the works of all three authors.

### **Abstract**

It is the purpose of this thesis to examine the use of elements of the style of Ernest Hemingway in his early fiction aimed to enhance reader engagement in the

experience of his fiction. The thesis will then compare the observed adaptation of Hemingway's style by Joan Didion and Richard Brautigan in their early writing with corresponding attention to the effect on reader engagement.

This thesis discusses the essential elements of Hemingway's style and thematic interests in the context of his place in the modernist movement. More specifically, the short stories in Hemingway's two first major short story collections, *In Our Time* (1925), and *Men Without Women* (1927), as well as his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), will be examined to identify the distinctive features of Hemingway's fiction. With this review, the thesis will proceed to analyze the adaptation of Hemingway's style in the early writings of Joan Didion and Richard Brautigan. Didion's early essays, particularly those found in her first collection, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968), as well as her first major novel, *Play It as It Lays* (1970), will be considered. A similar analysis of Brautigan's work will be undertaken with reference to his early novels, *Trout Fishing in America* (1967), and *A Confederate General from Big Sur* (1964).

The Hemingway short stories and novel that are the subject of this thesis were written in the nineteen-twenties. Didion and Brautigan's essays and fiction under consideration were written in the nineteen-sixties or written about American society in that era. The two periods provide an opportune point of comparison. All three authors were at a comparable stage in their development. Each had emerged to public recognition and each was demonstrating a new and distinctive style fit to address their challenging times.

While clearly different in many respects, the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-sixties both witnessed significant political, social and economic disruption. Both periods were also characterized by unprecedented prosperity (in the case of the

nineteen-sixties, continued prosperity) after years of deprivation. The resulting affluence supported the opportunity for greater personal freedom and mobility and gave rise to resistance to the moral restrictions and conventions of the previous generation. Hemingway's writing sought directness and reader engagement and was motivated to expose misguided nineteenth century conventions and also to keep pace with the social and political changes occurring in postwar Europe and America. Didion and Brautigan's writing was similarly focused on revealing the social disorder at their particular moment in twentieth century America.

Hemingway, and then Didion and Brautigan, considered a similar existential question: what is the appropriate response of an individual in a world suffering from senseless violence, misled by materialism and facing social disintegration? Hemingway's invocation of Ecclesiastes in the epigraph to *The Sun Also Rises* resounds through the work of Didion and Brautigan as well.

All three writers recognized the effectiveness of writing that depends on engaging the reader in the experience of their stories. Elements of style in Hemingway's fiction, adapted by Didion and Brautigan, required the reader's imagination to visualize landscapes, discern the qualities of the characters, resolve uncertainty in plot and ultimately discover the meaning of the text. This thesis will explore how all three writers have successfully engaged the response of the reader.

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## Introduction

### 1.0 Hemingway and The Modernist Movement

Ernest Hemingway, an American author and modernist who employed a minimalist prose style, has been celebrated for his use of sparse language and achieving great literary effect through omission. A central figure in modernist prose, Hemingway's work should be considered both for its uniqueness but also for its position within both the modernist movement and the movements that inspired many modernist schools of art and thought.

The modernist invocation to "Make it New"<sup>1</sup> implied that traditional themes and elements of style were not necessarily to be discarded, but certainly were to be reconsidered, reworked and renewed to function in a changing world. For many modernists, like poet T.S. Eliot, it was important that the "bones of the old were visible under contemporary skin" (Menand).<sup>2</sup> So while many themes of modernism can be traced to the nineteenth century, modernist writers and painters cast their work in a new form that engaged the reader or viewer to discover the meaning of a text or painting through their own imaginative efforts.

One illustration of the lineage of modernist writing is found in the exploration of the effect of industrialization and urbanization on the individual. Attention to these themes emerged in the mid nineteenth-century, prior to the start of the modernist movement. Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Man of the Crowd" (1840), is an early study of the anxieties of life for the individual in the congestion and isolation of the modern city. The precise identity of the story's narrator is not disclosed. He has been ill, and we find him at the window of a coffee house in London where he is observing

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<sup>1</sup> A declaration ascribed to Ezra Pound, also the title of his 1934 collection of essays.

<sup>2</sup> Menand, Louis. "How T.S. Eliot Became T.S. Eliot." *The New Yorker*, 12 Sept, 2011.

and neatly categorizing the passing crowd by class and occupation. He fixes upon the face of one individual, “a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression” (511) and decides to follow the stranger through the night to investigate further and determine the latter’s purpose. After a night of trailing the erratic movement of the stranger through crowded streets and alleys, the narrator concludes that the stranger has no destination. He is a “man of the crowd”. Although he interacts with no one “He refuses to be alone” (515). He falls into none of the neat categories formulated by the narrator at the beginning of the story.

Walter Benjamin, in his essay, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, contrasted Baudelaire’s flaneur who navigates the crowd with fascination with Poe’s urban wanderer who has been overwhelmed by the crowd. “The man of the crowd is no flaneur. In him composure has given way to manic behaviour” (168). Poe’s story foreshadows some of the existential themes that would be explored intensely in modernist literature.

Other writers in the 19th century were examining the dehumanizing consequences of industrialization and the conditions of urban life. The novels of Charles Dickens were populated by predators of capitalism and their victims who suffered loss and hardship in an uncaring and often squalid urban environment, often the city of London. *Oliver Twist* (1838) follows the perils of Oliver, an orphan child, through the workhouse to life on the streets of London and entrapment in criminal gang activity before being saved by a fortuitous adoption. *Hard Times* (1854) exposes the mistreatment of children and workers in the mills of the fictitious industrial town, Coketown. The story offers another illustration of the devaluation of life in industrial Britain.

This concept of isolation can be found in the works of many pre-modernist writers. In *Jude the Obscure* (1894), Thomas Hardy explores the alienation of his titular character through his rejection by his peers and by the world of academics despite his attempts to ingratiate himself within their community. In the works of Joseph Conrad, characters like the infamous Colonel Kurtz of *Heart of Darkness* (1899) attempt to remove themselves from their native society and inhabit another, often with disturbing consequences.

“The Waste Land” (1922) and other poems by T.S. Eliot, are set in a degraded urban environment and again, it is London. Eliot’s writing is separated from the nineteenth century by a devastating World War. “The Waste Land’s” “Unreal City” (61) is drained of the frightful energy of Poe and Dickens. In Eliot’s poem, the crowd that “flowed over London Bridge, so many” is a crowd that “death had undone” (62-3), whether through a literal death or a death of spirit. London is obscured by a brown fog, contaminated and ruined. Most significantly, as we shall also see in the works of the authors who are the subjects of this thesis, Eliot, the modernist poet, takes an innovative approach in his poem by abandoning the order and form of 19th century poetry. Enigmatic images and allusions to classical literature and popular culture are presented in a disjointed manner. Eliot provided a set of footnoted, explanatory notes at the end of the poem that do little to clarify the poem’s meaning. The reader is left with the challenge of mediating the disparate images and references.

Modernist writers continued to explore the theme of social dislocation on the individual. In the nineteen-twenties, writers reflected on the fate of the protagonist experiencing alienation in a society still damaged by war and now adrift in materialism. In F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), the central character,

Nick Carraway, is described as “within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life” (36). Fitzgerald was a friend of Hemingway, and such detachment is a perspective that can be observed in Hemingway’s fiction. Characters and narrators keep their distance. They look but they do not join.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.1 The Mentorship of Contemporary Writers

While Hemingway would rise in popular awareness beyond most of his fellow modernist writers, he was one of many accomplished writers exploring common themes and elements of style. Hemingway was in personal contact with many of his contemporaries. A number served as mentors who read and critiqued his work. He, in turn, did the same. However, influence is difficult to establish except perhaps where there is a direct admission. For example, Harold M. Hurwitz notes in “Hemingway’s Tutor, Ezra Pound” Hemingway stated that “I’m teaching Pound how to box and he’s helping me with my writing” (470). Nor is it necessary to prove the extent of influence of one writer on another for the purpose of this thesis. What is clear is that together, Hemingway and his contemporaries were writing about

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<sup>3</sup> An excellent example of this in Fitzgerald’s work can be found in the second chapter of *The Great Gatsby* (1925), when the narrator Nick finds himself wishing to leave a party, and subsequently imagining how the party must appear to passersby on the street outside: “I wanted to get out and walk eastward toward the park through the soft twilight, but each time I tried to go I became entangled in some wild, strident argument which pulled me back, as if by ropes, into my chair. Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life” (36). Nick feels himself to be in a position in which his subjective experience of an event is simultaneously split between an imagining of how a third-party might “look” upon this event without joining. His feeling of being both “enchanted and repelled” speaks to the difficulty with which one balances a description of a subjective, alienating experience with the knowledge that others view it independently and perhaps without sharing this emotion or concern. This is an existential quandary which Hemingway explores in his fiction as well.

existential issues in modern society and that their developing modernist style was aimed at joining the reader in the experience of their fiction.

As a founder of the Imagist movement, Ezra Pound was an important contributor to Modernism broadly, but also specifically as a critical nexus for writers. He read and edited “The Waste Land” for which Eliot wished that the blue penciling on his draft be preserved “as irrefutable evidence of Pound’s critical genius” (330). Eliot noted Pound’s generosity in giving advice to writers and poets in that he refrained from rewriting but rather, tried to understand what the writer was trying to accomplish and to help the writer to do it “in one’s own way” (333). Hemingway met Pound in 1923. Pound reviewed the draft of vignettes for *In Our Time* and Hemingway conferred with Pound regarding the content of the manuscript as the following excerpt indicates.

Dear Ezra:

I will do the hanging. Have redone the death of Maera altogether different and fixed the others. The new death is good. Don’t know about Gobar.

They should each one be headed Chapter 1, Chapter 2 etc. When they are read altogether they all hook up. It seems funny but they do. (41)

The Imagist movement emerged in the years immediately preceding World War I. Imagists were committed to freeing their poetry from the elaborate language, form and structure of the poetry of the 19th century. Imagists sought to express their objects in clear and plain language without abstraction or unneeded description. The work of the Imagist has been characterized as that of a sculptor “chipping away everything superfluous to reveal the essential form within” (Menand).<sup>4</sup> In keeping

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<sup>4</sup> Menand, Louis. “The Pound Error”. *The New Yorker*, June 9, 2008

with the Imagist's commitment to plain language and precision, in 1918 Pound published "'A Retrospect' and 'A Few Don'ts'", which amounts to a primer on the basic principles of Imagism. Pound explained the image as "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (4) which gave the reader "the sense of sudden liberation" (4). In creating the image, Pound advised that no superfluous word or adjective should be used that did not reveal meaning. Abstraction and description should be avoided: "The natural object is always the best symbol" (4-5).

Hemingway's early fiction incorporates some key principles of Imagism, and as Robert Charles Clark notes regarding Pound's contribution, Hemingway:

...consistently expressed admiration for Ezra Pound. Along with the central Imagist principles of precision and suggestiveness, Pound's primary contribution to Hemingway's development was in his emphasis upon the importance of linking images with specific emotions. In Hemingway's fiction, narrators rarely supply direct information about feeling. Images and actions are reported objectively, as "truly" as possible. (98)

In an interview for *The Paris Review*, Hemingway stated that as a reporter he was always searching for "the unnoticed things that made emotions, such as the way an outfielder tossed his glove without looking back to where it fell...the things that moved you before you knew the story" (58). Hemingway's image of the outfielder tossing his glove without looking back is an image that expands in meaning. The glove is a valuable piece of equipment that takes months for the outfielder to break in, and yet it is tossed away. Why? This is a game, and at one level, the action invokes the childlike impulses of play. As Pound encouraged: "Let the action speak for itself. Let images convey meaning. If action is presented

truly, precisely, using only its essential elements, then readers without being told, will respond emotionally as the writer intended” (Reynolds, 31). One might imagine that the outfielder can trust the honour of his teammates not to touch the glove as the game rushes on and his team goes on the offensive. He will find his glove where it fell and dust it off when the inning is over. What happens in between is yet to be revealed. All this emerges from one single image.

Gertrude Stein is another contemporary figure worthy of consideration as Hemingway was also exposed to her work and technique at a formative stage in his writing career. Stein’s collection of three stories, *Three Lives*, was published in 1909. These stories exhibited elements of style that would become features of modernist fiction. The writing in *Three Lives* employed simple diction, novel punctuation and repetition of words, phrases and themes. Stein described the effect of repetition as “a constant recurring and beginning”, a “prolonged present” (7).<sup>5</sup>

Hemingway met Stein in 1922 through Sherwood Anderson’s introduction. Stein reviewed and critiqued Hemingway’s draft for *In Our Time*, including “Big Two Hearted River”, stories in which we see use of plain language and reliance on repetition to convey the inescapability of thoughts and events. Thus, in “Big Hearted River Part I”, Nick Adams’ descent into sleep after a long day’s trek is irresistible: “He

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<sup>5</sup> In Stein’s “Melanctha”, the longest story in *Three Lives*, some of these techniques can be observed: “I don’t see Melanctha why you should talk like you would kill yourself just because you’re blue. I’d never kill myself Melanctha just ‘cause I was blue. I’d maybe kill somebody else Melanctha ‘cause I was blue, but I’d never kill myself. If I ever killed myself Melanctha it’d be by accident, and if I ever killed myself by accident Melanctha, I’d be awful sorry” (52). The use of simple diction and repetition in this excerpt is particularly noticeable.

was sleepy. He felt sleep coming. He curled up under the blanket and went to sleep” (169). With that, Part I of the story ends.

Hemingway emphasized the importance of Stein’s accomplishments in *A Moveable Feast* (1964). He praised her story “Melanctha” in *Three Lives* as a good sample of experimental writing and continued: “She had also discovered many truths about rhythms and uses of words in repetition that were valid and valuable” (18). In return, Hemingway also had occasion to review Stein’s writing before publication. He persuaded Ford Maddox Ford to serialize her lengthy novel *The Making of Americans* (1925) in *The Transatlantic Review* and accepted the task of proofreading her work.

Stein also conversed with Hemingway about art and modern artists: “She talked, mostly, and she told me about modern pictures and about painters” (17). Stein would use visual art as a means to “instruct” Hemingway about his own writing: “It’s good...that’s not the question at all. But it is *inaccrochable*. That means it is like a picture that a painter paints and he cannot hang it when he has a show” (15). Hemingway came to see images used by visual artists as something from which a writer could learn about literary technique. He uses the example of Cezanne<sup>6</sup>: “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 in them. I was learning very much from him but I was not articulate enough to explain it to anyone” (13). It appears that the idea of the image was important to

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<sup>6</sup> Stein was also interested in the works of Cezanne: “Stein was an avant-garde writer frequently inspired by visual art...Stein sought enrichment through Post-Impressionist painters, such as Paul Cezanne. She was particularly influenced by Cezanne’s composition” (Pollok, 44).

Hemingway in the composition of prose, something that was clearly of importance to his contemporaries as well.

Sherwood Anderson was yet another modernist writer whose work impressed Hemingway. Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* was published in 1919, in between Stein's *Three Lives* (1909) and Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925). Anderson had met Stein in Paris and Hemingway in the United States. He was instrumental in encouraging Hemingway to relocate to Paris and introduced Hemingway to both Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein.

Anderson not only gave Hemingway access to a circle of extraordinary writers who would offer vital critical guidance, but he also provided Hemingway with further examples of the power of plain language to capture the emotion of his characters. As Leo Gurko notes:

The long, complex, zigzag sentences of the classic American novelists- Hawthorne, Melville, and particularly Henry James - were suitable instruments for communicating ideas and observations. Anderson believed that thinking got in the way of feeling and sense impression, which to him were the decisive elements in human life. He wanted to free them from interference of any kind. He wrote as his characters felt, in quick exaltations, in brief, even monotonous spurts of prose that, on first appearance, seemed more natural and lifelike than the formal literary manner of the earlier age. (17-8)

Hemingway's interest in Anderson's writing, particularly in his short story cycle, *Winesburg, Ohio*, is evident in his early work. In his first collection of short stories, *In Our Time*, characters are driven by "sense impression" using "brief, stripped and economical" (17) sentences much like Anderson's. In the stories in *Winesburg, Ohio*, simple language and simple description can be found, for

example, the description of Belle Carpenter from the start of “An Awakening”: “Belle Carpenter had a dark skin, grey eyes and thick lips. She was tall and strong” (163). Places are also described simply: “The farmhouse was painted brown and the blinds to all of the windows facing the road were kept closed. In the road before the house a flock of chickens, accompanied by two guinea hens, lay in the deep dust” (151). It is also worth noting that linking many of Anderson’s stories in the collection is the presence of a young male character named George Willard. A similar technique is employed by Hemingway in the recurring presence of Nick Adams in *In Our Time*, in several stories and breaking through in one of the vignettes (Chapter VI).

However, unlike Anderson, Hemingway was more experimental in the overarching composition of *In Our Time*. Where Anderson's stories are contained within his fictional Ohio town, Hemingway’s stories in *In Our Time* jump between northern Michigan and Europe, before, during and after the war. Hemingway included in the first American publication of *In Our Time* the distinct vignettes or “inter chapters” that give the entire collection a disjointed quality. Though originally “In Hemingway he [Anderson] found a willing and enthusiastic pupil” (Gurko,18), Hemingway would later disparage Anderson with the publication of *The Torrents of Spring* (1926), a satirical attack on what he had come to see as Anderson’s growing overindulgence in sentimentality, the failure to omit that which should be inferred by the reader.

Authors in the Modernist movement in the early 20th century who were attempting to “Make it New” encompassed a wide range of writing from the work of James Joyce to F. Scott Fitzgerald to the sometimes overlooked American detective

fiction represented by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Detective stories such as Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) and Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939) rely on unique, hard edged language without description, terse dialogue and scenes that speed by, often without substantial effort to develop a coherent plot.

In her book *Hard-Boiled* (2000), Erin A. Smith illustrates the convoluted nature of the plot in detective fiction with a story about Howard Hawks's making of Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1946), of which William Faulkner was notably a screenwriter, into a film. As the script was being finalized, neither the author, director or screenwriter was able to determine which character had committed a murder central to the plot. Smith points out that this fiction was composed of "a sequence of action packed scenes, violence, drinking, and tough talk" that "did not respect the unities of bourgeois cultural organization and logic" (82-3). But these stories were exciting and resonated with everyday life in working class communities, with people who worked in factories where they performed a specific task and did not expect to see how the finished product came together at the end the line.<sup>7</sup>

Hemingway's story, "The Killers", borrows from this style of detective fiction. The two hit men are tough talkers who use menacing idioms of the street to intimidate the unfortunate staff and single patron in Henry's Lunch-Room, using intimidating and demeaning speech, "I'd blow his head off" (219), and later, "You

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<sup>7</sup> Georg Lukacs in his essay, *Reification and the Consciousness*, observed that with the division of labour in modern industry the worker lost contact with the finished product and his work was reduced to repetition of specialized functions. His human qualities became "mere sources of error" (5) in a purely rational, mechanized system. The disjointedness inherent in this experience reminds one of the "shocks" Benjamin observes Poe's narrator experiencing in "A Man of the Crowd". These are sudden disruptions and dislocations caused by the overwhelming and impersonal nature of urban life and industrialization that are often reflected in the experimental styles characteristic of much of modernist literature.

ought to play the races, bright boy” (219). What the reader knows about their identity and their plans is learned from dialogue that is sharp and aggressive, there is no real narrative assistance and the plot is never resolved. We do not know why the killers were pursuing their victim nor whether they succeed in killing him; however, the story works in the manner of a Hammett-Chandler novel, creating moment-to-moment suspense through fast-paced dialogue.

The elements of style that were developed by the original members of the modernist movement inspired many future writers who recognized the effectiveness of reader engagement in communicating themes of personal and social crisis.

## 1.2 Writers Who Followed Hemingway

Hemingway’s work was shaped by the example and criticism of many contemporaries. His writing, in turn, has been instructive for many writers who followed and who have worked with elements of Hemingway’s style. In addition to Joan Didion and Richard Brautigan, some of these authors include Raymond Carver and Richard Ford. Hemingway’s influence was not exclusive, but evident and important. Raymond Carver’s work provides a good example of this.

In essays and book reviews, Carver returns to principles of writing expressed by Hemingway, that the writer’s job is to tell the truth and to write so clearly about action and emotion that the work “becomes part of the reader’s experience” (150). Hemingway’s words are held up by Carver as a standard of good writing.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Arthur F. Bethea notes that when asked about his favourite short story, Carver remarked that an author “could learn a lot” (91) from Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants”. Bethea goes on to state that “Although we can’t determine exactly what he learned from Hemingway, Carver’s method in ‘Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?’ and in many stories to follow is quite comparable to the minimalist or precisionist technique of ‘Hills Like White Elephants’. Both stories share minimalist traits such as simple diction, direct syntax and the absence of an omniscient narrator to clarify thematic meaning...Carver’s stories, as well as Hemingway’s, employ...omission” (91-2).

We also see reflections of Hemingway's prose in Carver's writing. In an early story, "The Aficionados", the characters are a man and a woman in an unnamed Spanish speaking town. They are awaiting an unexplained event in "the Arena" later in the day. Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* is recognized as an "aficionado" because of his appreciation of bull fighting. In Carver's story there is a festival in progress as there was in Pamplona and one clear possibility is that the approaching contest in the arena is a bullfight. Carver may have purposely used these references to set up his surprise ending. Carver's description of the scene is plain and direct, reminiscent of Hemingway:

The patio is dark and has a smell like rotting wood. There are squat black arches encircling it and one of these opens into a street. It is noon. The pallid dead brilliance makes him dizzy for a moment. Heat ripples rise from the adobe walls that close in the narrow street. His eyes water and the air is hot and dry on his face. (48)

The sentences are short and the words used are simple. Only basic information is provided to the reader. There is a lifelessness to the scene that foreshadows the ritual killing of one of the aficionados by the other in the final scene. Similar to Hemingway, the presence of simple but striking imagery presents omissions that must be filled by the narrator's imagination.

Like Hemingway, Carver drew inspiration from many sources. Carver writes of his respect for the writing principles and style of many predecessors: Ezra Pound, Sherwood Anderson, James Joyce and above all homage to Anton Chekov, "Chekov is the greatest short story writer who ever lived" (146). He critically reviewed the works of his contemporaries, including those of Richard Brautigan and Richard

Ford.<sup>9</sup> While clearly admiring Hemingway, and aware of the associations made between Hemingway's work and his own, Carver downplayed the link, once joking, "Anyway, I don't write fishing stories" (195). However, there is a clear connection that allows us to see how an interest in adapting elements of Hemingway's style has persisted in the works of other authors.

In this thesis, I have chosen to consider elements of style in the early writing of Ernest Hemingway and the application of these elements in the work of Joan Didion and Richard Brautigan. It is clear that many techniques associated with Hemingway were neither his creation nor was he exclusive in his use of them. However, Hemingway is chosen because his work exemplifies important themes and elements of style of modernist literature and because it is evident that Didion and Brautigan both felt Hemingway's writing to be of importance to their own development as writers.<sup>10</sup>

It is also clear from the above discussion that Didion and Brautigan were not alone in their study and use of features associated with Hemingway's writing. Many other writers who followed Hemingway did as well. I have chosen these two writers for study for the following reasons.

There is substantial evidence that both writers studied and experimented with elements of Hemingway's style. Both authors have used Hemingway's style to effectively engage the reader in the issues of social disorder of their times. I believe

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<sup>9</sup> "Brautigan Serves Werewolf Berries and Cat Cantaloupe" (187) and "Richard Ford's Stark Vision of Loss, Healing" (192), both included in the posthumously published Raymond Carver collection, *No Heroics, Please* (1992).

<sup>10</sup> Evidence of this can be found for Didion in her 1978 interview with *The Paris Review*, and in her essay "Last Words" (3), and for Brautigan in William Hjortsberg's extensive biography *Jubilee Hitchhiker* (262). The excerpts from these respective texts will be explored in greater depth later in the body of this thesis.

it is valuable to study how reader engagement has enhanced the communication of meaning in Didion's and Brautigan's texts.

Moreover, Didion and Brautigan are important writers whose work warrants greater study than it has received to date. Other writers whose work deserves greater critical attention could well be included in this discussion. However, further examination was beyond the practical scope of this thesis.

## 2.0 Hemingway, Modernism and Reader Response Criticism

This thesis will proceed with close textual analysis of the subject texts to consider how techniques found in Hemingway's fiction have been adapted in the writing of Didion and Brautigan. Before continuing, it is useful to set out the elements of style that are relevant to reader engagement and to consider how they work. Why, for example, does Hemingway seek to engage the reader by describing the weather as "hot" or "very hot"<sup>11</sup> rather than by saying that the temperature is thirty degrees Celsius?

Hemingway maintained that the truth or a "true sentence" was discovered through experience, stating in *A Moveable Feast* (1964) that: "All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know...It was easy then because there was always one true sentence that I knew or had seen or had heard someone say" (12). Hemingway's concept of the truth was to give the reader the means to experience an emotion directly so they too could experience this sensation or emotion that had moved him. With the provision of basic information and the omission of detail, the reader is given the latitude to create a "truth" that might

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<sup>11</sup> In "Big Two-Hearted River" it is described as being "a hot day" (163), while in "Hills Like White Elephants" it is "very hot" (211).

overlap with both Hemingway's experience and suggested meaning and their own subjective experience. What are the elements of style that are designed to bring the reader face to face with the challenges in Hemingway's stories? A working list would include the following: plain language without descriptive details; declarative sentences; conjunctive sentences connecting unrelated images; deliberate omission of information; obvious repetition of words and phrases; evocative images triggering an emotional response, dialogue in everyday speech, indirectly revealing character and plot, and narration that observes but does not explain.

Each of these elements in its own way requires the reader's imaginative effort to resolve uncertainty and find meaning. These elements establish the relationship between author and reader. In saying no more than the day is "hot", the author drives the reader to remembered sensations, such as the intense feel of sun on skin, sweat, thirst, lethargy and so on, rather than referencing a precise but abstract measurement of temperature that would likely trigger little or no imaginative response. The critic, Reynolds Price, expressed Hemingway's intent by assuming Hemingway's voice to speak to his readers: "you must enact this story for yourself...Notice the chances I've left for you: no noun or verb has been colored by me. I require your senses" (203). There is a balance at work in this communication process. The author encourages the reader to engage the unknown expanse of their imagination, but reader engagement does *not* imply a random result. Here, the "chances" have been set by the author for the reader to work with, with the reader being guided towards a series of possible interpretations that may arise from the reading of the text. While each reader's interpretation will differ, it will fall within a field of possible outcomes.

This thesis will embark upon a close analysis of the use of these elements of style by Hemingway, Didion and Brautigan. The literary effect is to enliven the reader: to make the story real through participation. Necessarily, the effort that engages the reader in sensing the object of the fiction and in connecting disparate images and ideas delineates the relationship between the author and the reader in the realization of the work. Before proceeding to examine the practice of the three authors in engaging their readers, it is instructive to consider the specific critical theory, reader response criticism, that relates to the role of reading in the creative process. This theory underlies the writing techniques that aim to involve the reader. The central issue in this critical theory concerns what is happening when a literary text is read. How is the author's intended meaning communicated, received and realized by the reader? With the benefit of this critical work, the operation of these elements of style become clearer.

I will begin by reviewing some of the essential thinking of Roland Barthes, Georges Poulet and Wolfgang Iser regarding the creative relationship between author and reader. Although their emphases differ, these theorists recognize the fallacy of believing that a literary text has a single meaning, a meaning embedded by the author and awaiting discovery through critical study. Rather, the process of reading a literary text is transformative; it is the reader who discovers, indeed partly creates meaning through imaginative efforts stimulated and structured by the author, so that any given text's "meaning" is therefore partly dependent on the reader.

In his essay "The Death of the Author" (1967), Barthes maintains that a literary text does not have "a single theological meaning" set by "the Author God", but rather that the text is drawn from "innumerable centres of culture" (146). The multiple sources of writing mixed by the author to compose the text are always focused upon

and are only fully revealed within the perception of the reader. Every text is “eternally written in the here and now” (145) awaiting the reader to turn the page. Ultimately, it is language that speaks to the reader not the author. Barthes concludes that “the text’s unity lies in the reader not the author” (148). It is, therefore, the reader in Barthes analysis who alone has the perspective to determine meaning. And so, for example, an author such as Hemingway in writing *In Our Time* can prepare a path for the reader by combining stories and vignettes, but the text is ultimately “inscribed” on the reader and can only be experienced through the act of reading. In the words of Reynolds Price, the author has left “chances” for the reader whose imaginative choices the author cannot fully control.

Georges Poulet, in his essay “Phenomenology of Reading” (1969), offers another perspective on the experience of reading, one that emphasizes interaction with the consciousness of the author. Poulet asserts that in the act of reading, he immediately became aware of “a rational being, a consciousness” (1321) that was open and allowed the reader to think and feel what it did. Poulet describes the act of reading as loaning his consciousness to another “who thinks, feels, suffers and acts within me” (1323). For Poulet, the text is the medium through which the authors preserve their ideas and feelings. To understand a literary work was to let the author reveal himself “to us in us” (1324). But the reader’s role is not a passive one. Poulet noted that the reader’s understanding of a literary work is a process by which objects rise from the depths of consciousness “into the light of recognition” (1323). Or, to repeat what Pound said, images gave to the reader: “the sense of sudden liberation” (4). Poulet described the words, images and ideas in the text as “mental entities”

(1321), like fish in an aquarium dependent on the reader's consciousness for survival (1321). Poulet is describing an interaction between the consciousnesses of author and reader in which neither is really dominant. Both appear to be participating in realizing the meaning of the text.

Reader response theory explores this relationship between text, reader and meaning. In "The Act of Reading" (1978), Wolfgang Iser submits that a literary "work" (21) is virtual in nature, coming into existence only once the reader applies his experience and imagination to the writer's text through the reading process. In Iser's analysis, texts have no independent meaning; rather, meaning is generated by the reader's imaginative work on "indeterminacies" (24) in the text. And correspondingly, Iser submits that only when a reader is given the opportunity to participate actively in resolving these indeterminacies, will the reader regard the text as real (10).

Iser follows the evolution of reader engagement from 18th and 19th century literature to the modernists of the 20th century. In earlier novels, authors sought to provide the reader with a more settled reality through detailed description and narrative explanation. These texts provided a high level of determinacy. Iser argues that novels such as Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742), and Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), were transitional novels that increased demands on the reader. In these novels, established morality and belief fail to accommodate and explain the breadth of human experience, requiring the reader to choose an established view with its limitations, or alternatively find the balance among various social perspectives, each of which have been revealed to be deficient in some way. Accordingly, in these novels, the opportunity for reader participation increases in proportion to the increase in indeterminacy in the text. Iser references James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) as a

culmination of this progress towards indeterminacy and reader engagement.

Whereas the 19th century novel endeavored to give the reader an illusion of reality, in *Ulysses* the high degree of indeterminacy renders the meaning of everyday life illusory. The text “sends the reader off on a search for meaning” (27) and, in the end, the enlightened reader will come to realize that their projected meanings can never cover all the possibilities arising from the text.

Reader response criticism has been challenged for supporting an interpretive approach that is arbitrary because of its reliance on the subjective conclusions of the reader. In *The Act of Reading*, Iser disputes this concern and maintains that the author’s text guides the reader in their imaginative journey. The author’s strategies in the text “lay down the lines of how the text is to be actualized” (85). This is achieved through the use of conventions consisting of social or historical norms and literary references with which both author and the “implied reader” are familiar (34). Iser termed this body of extratextual references the “répertoire”. Use of conventions affords the author the ability to build context and thereby control the meaning of what is said and done in the text that otherwise has no corresponding reality in the real world. The baseball glove that is tossed away without care is a good example of the use of convention. The author knows that the image will resound because the “implied reader”, at least the American reader, will likely relate to the rules, customs and experience of the game.

The author also controls the strategy by which the text is organized and the sequence in which the possibilities of meaning are presented to the reader, the “textural structure” (35). By way of example, Iser reviews the control of the author over the unfolding of perspectives in the text presented through: (i) the narrator, (ii) the characters, (iii) the plot, and (iv) the perspective “marked out for the reader”. The

interaction between different perspectives is ongoing and fluid. Iser distinguishes between the perspective attracting the reader's attention at the present moment, which Iser terms "theme", e.g. a new episode in the plot, and all the previous perspectives up to that point, which he terms the "horizon" (97). Information in the horizon will affect how the reader understands the perspective before him in the moment and that perspective will alter all past perspectives visible in the horizon. The intended connection between these perspectives is not explained in the text. There are gaps. It is the function of reading to synthesize these perspectives into meaning.

The development of Hemingway's character Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) is illustrative of the way that multiple perspectives can work to guide the reader in actualizing the meaning of the text. What does Jake's character signify in regard to the novel's epigraph? Does the reader conclude that Jake lives with purpose or is he another expatriate member of a generation who is lost? Hemingway has constructed a complex character whose dimensions emerge from many different sources. The novel begins with Jake's detailed summary of Robert Cohn's personal history, but no corresponding information is provided by the narrator about Jake. It is revealed that he is a writer living in Paris, that he was injured in the war and that he met Brett while convalescing. We do not know exactly what he is writing, how he met the other expatriates, why he has organized a group adventure to Spain or what his plan in life is more generally.

As the various perspectives in the text are presented, the reader gathers information for themselves; so that, read through the lens of Iser's methodology, the reader learns from the narrator about Jake's anguish over Brett. From the words of

other characters such as Brett and Bill Gorton we know Jake is a loyal and trusted companion, from other characters such as Robert Cohn and Montoya there is disdain. The action in the novel adds further perspective. Jake is observed savoring life in the ways that he can: eating, drinking, fishing in the wilderness, enjoying the ritual of the festival and engaging with the intricacy of the bullfight. But at the same time his status as an aficionado is tarnished by his corrupting of Romero; he behaves with pettiness towards Cohn and he helplessly persists in a relationship that he knows can never be fulfilled. And, in the first person, we learn of Jake's sleepless distress over his war wound, his cynical credo that "Enjoying living was learning to get your money's worth" (119), and his disappointment over his failed Catholicism. It remains for the reader to bridge the gaps between these divergent perspectives through imaginative effort to determine whether Jake lives a life of meaning within the existential boundaries of the novel's epigraph, or not.

In the end, Iser's analysis converges with Hemingway's aim to enable the reader to find truth through experience. Hemingway wrote in a letter to his father: "when you read something by me you actually experience the thing" (286). Iser wrote: "Literature simulates life, not in order to portray it, but in order to allow the reader to share in it" (29).

The remainder of this Introduction discusses the fundamental writing principles and thematic interests of the authors. The objective is to preview the textural analysis that will follow in the main body of this thesis by introducing the ideas that appear to have informed the use of elements of style. For example, both Hemingway and Didion speak directly about the differences between facts that happened and facts as they are adapted for a fictional purpose. Both also speak of their view of honorable conduct under duress. Together, awareness of writing

principles and thematic interests will illuminate why the author has included or omitted information as they chose the “repertoire” of the text and organized perspectives into a “textual structure” in order to guide the reader in actualizing the text towards meaning.

### 3.0 Hemingway: Writing Principles and Essential Themes

#### 3.1 Writing Principles

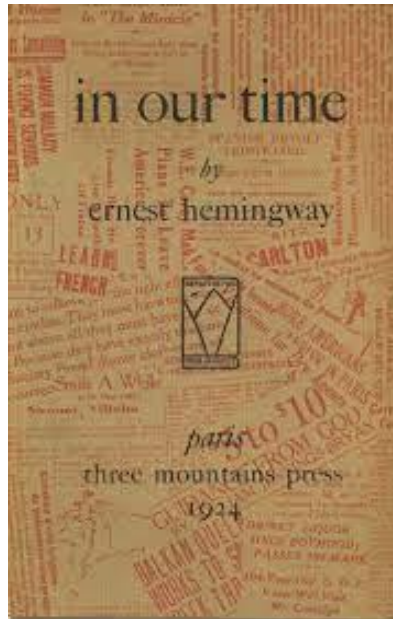
When Hemingway began working as a cub reporter for the *Kansas City Star*, he was presented with guidelines that encouraged new reporters to: “write graphic, vigorous prose and to tell a story clearly and swiftly” (Sanderson, 15) and to “avoid extravagant adjectives” (Donaldson, 233). Another, experienced *Star* journalist, Lionel Cahoun Moise “had strong opinions on what constitutes good prose: ‘Pure objective writing,’ he would declare, ‘is the only true form of storytelling’” (Sanderson, 15). Hemingway would later say in an interview with *The Paris Review* that his time as a reporter was helpful because he was “forced to learn how to write a simple declarative sentence” (43). Early in his career, Hemingway endeavored to master “allusion and implication by omission” (Clark, 2). This is the technique Hemingway would call “the principle of the iceberg” (57), and which will be discussed in detail in this thesis. An excerpt from an article, “German Inn-Keepers”, Hemingway wrote for the *Toronto Star* in 1922, provides one of many examples of the emergence of this technique in his writing:

A German police dog barked at us, a man stuck his head out of the door of the gasthaus and looked at us. We were not sure this was the place we had been sent to, so we walked a little way down the road that ran through the

clearing to see if there was another inn in sight. There was nothing but the valley, the white road, the river and the steep wooded hills. We had been walking since early in the morning and we were hungry. (36)

Here we see the beginnings of the minimalist style Hemingway would go on to perfect in his stories. Simple sentences describing basic physical actions, and the omission of description creates an eerie sense of the narrator's surroundings, which we will soon find out more directly are unfriendly and inhospitable when a German inn owner is rude and dismissive towards Hemingway and his companion. The description of natural surroundings is basic and without simile or metaphor, but it is enough to suggest an empty desolateness that underscores the sense of anxiety without further development.

While working as a reporter, Hemingway was tasked with covering diverse subjects, both at home and abroad. From the execution of mob bosses in Chicago to the Genoa Conference of 1922, to the plight of refugees in Turkey, Hemingway covered a wide range of news events, and was keenly aware of the domestic and international changes in politics and culture occurring early in the nineteen-twenties. This well-developed awareness of the changing times would also inform Hemingway's fiction, both stylistically and in terms of semantic content. His first collection of short stories, *In Our Time* (1925), lends its title partly to a consideration of contemporary issues. In its first print run, the collection featured a cover designed to look like a newspaper, collages of text on the cover appearing like a mish-mash of different newspaper headlines:



“Hard cover collage for Hemingway’s *in our time* published by Bill Bird in 1924” (Reynolds, 182)<sup>12</sup>

In a letter to Edward J. O’ Brien, editor of *The Best Short Stories* series, Hemingway describes his new short story collection:

It is to be called In Our Time and one of the chapters of In Our Time I sent you comes in between each story. That was what I originally wrote them for, chapter headings. All the stories have a certain unity – the first five are in Michigan – starting with Up In Michigan – which you know and in between each one comes bang! The In Our Time – It should be awfully good I think.  
(154)

Hemingway’s “bang!” describes the less than one-page reports of world events that follow each story and represent a sudden intrusion into his carefully crafted story cycle, a sort of news update. They describe the First World War, the actions of American criminals, bullfighting, the hanging of a mob boss, and civil

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<sup>12</sup> The edition pictured above is described as “Tan boards, lettering in black, decorated with collage of red lettered newspaper headlines” in The First Edition Rare Books website inventory: “In Our Time.” *The First Edition Rare Books*, 28 Apr. 2023, [thefirstedition.com/product/in-our-time/](http://thefirstedition.com/product/in-our-time/).

unrest in Europe, content which is drawn, largely, from Hemingway's own personal experience in reportage. Consider the following excerpt from Hemingway's newspaper article "King Business in Europe", in which he describes a meeting related to him by a friend who had met the King of Greece:

We had whiskey and soda at a table under a big tree. The king said it was no fun being shut up there. They hadn't given him any money since the revolution and wouldn't let any of the Greek aristocracy visit him. They wouldn't let him go outside the grounds...

Like all the Greeks, he wants to get over to the States." (77)

Now, consider the concluding vignette of *In Our Time*, "L'envoi":

We sat down at a table under a big tree and the king ordered whiskey and soda. We have good whiskey anyway, he said. The revolutionary committee, he told me, would not allow him to go outside the palace grounds...

It was very jolly. We talked for a long time. Like all Greeks he wanted to go to America. (181)

Hemingway has crafted from one of his newspaper articles, in parts word for word, the conclusion of *In Our Time*. This "L'envoi" (closing remarks from poet to audience), leaves the reader with a snapshot of the civil unrest in Europe, and the contrast of American stories. For Hemingway's fiction to be brought "alive", as he desires, for his prose to be truly effective, there must come with it an awareness of the moment in time which it inhabits, which he achieves in the news report-like *In Our Time* vignettes and that will be examined later.

In a letter to his father Clarence, Hemingway explains the goal of his writing:

You see I'm trying in all my stories to get the feeling of actual life across – not to just depict life – or to criticize it – but to actually make it alive. So that when you have read something by me you actually experience the thing. You can't do this without putting in the bad and the ugly as well as what is beautiful.

(286)

In this explanation that he is trying to create prose that is “alive”, we see the synthesis of style, theme and the desire to evoke a cathartic response in the reader. Hemingway has no interest in trying to “depict life – or criticize it”, but rather in making it “alive” (286). He strives to share experience with the reader. He does not want to teach a lesson. He does not want to make “it all beautiful” so that you “can't believe in it”, but rather wants to show “both sides” (286). Truly “alive” writing and the truly effective character for Hemingway exist in harmony such that, through engagement the reader's own imagination is awakened and the reader breathes life into the character.

### 3.2 Essential Themes

Hemingway's news reporting exposed the human suffering of a war in Europe.<sup>13</sup> The choice of title, cover and content of *In Our Time* can be viewed as a social commentary. The same can be said of much of Hemingway's work of the nineteen-twenties, from the questioning of post-war expatriate hedonism in *The Sun Also Rises* to the outright condemnation of war in *A Farewell to Arms*. However, as Robert Charles Clark notes American minimalists were observers not instructors:

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<sup>13</sup> In his 1922 article for *The Toronto Star*, “A Silent, Ghastly Procession”, Hemingway describes the evacuation of Adrianople: “In a never ending, staggering march the Christian population of Eastern Thrace is jamming the roads towards Macedonia...It is all they can do to keep moving...How they will be fed nobody knows, but in the next month all the Christian world will hear the cry: ‘Come over into Macedonia and help us!’” (51-2).

“Their goal was not to diagnose the cause of a social ill such as poverty or racism and then propose a ‘cure’” (24).

One of the very earliest examples of Hemingway’s social commentary relates to his disdain for the idleness and decadence of young Americans in Paris after World War I. Although he has often been (mis)represented as a champion of “the lost generation” of young American expats, Hemingway’s actual writing is highly critical of much of their decadent behavior. A 1922 newspaper article written for the *Toronto Star* entitled “American Bohemians in Paris” gives us our first insight into the author’s true disgust for some of these indolent Americans:

Paris, France – The scum of Greenwich Village, New York, has been skimmed off and deposited in large ladlesful on that section of Paris adjacent to the Café Rotonde...

They are nearly all loafers expending the energy an artist puts into his creative work in talking about what they are going to do and condemning the work of all artists who have gained any recognition. (23-5)

Hemingway is offended by their inauthenticity, their shallow attempt at “careless individuality”. The short stories are populated by aimless, and often nameless, American couples who are dysfunctional and adrift in their lives; the frequent namelessness speaks to the fact that these characters, and their personal faults, are unexceptional and ubiquitous. To illustrate, in the short story “Cat in the Rain”, the young American wife complains to her husband in the apparent comfort of their hotel room about all she wants in life – new clothes, a change in the season, silverware, longer hair and a cat, to which her husband eventually replies “shut up and get something to read” (131). In “Hills Like White Elephants”, an “American and the girl with him” (211) wait for a train at undisclosed railway junction in Spain. A

discussion about an undisclosed problem which one might conclude is a pregnancy occurs. In "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot", an American expatriate husband who writes "very long poems very rapidly" (123) and his wife entertain other travelers at their rented chateau in France. Eventually, their visitors move on to other prospects, except for the wife's friend and apparent lover, leaving Mr. Elliot alone with his poetry and wine. In "Out of Season", a sullen wife trails along with her "young gentleman" (135) husband and an Italian fishing guide. With disdain she abandons the excursion before they reach the river. These characters are largely self-indulgent and unenlightened.

Together and related to social and political commentary, Hemingway in his early fiction addressed the contrasting qualities of heroic behavior of characters facing loss or destruction. Hemingway's fiction goes beyond the superficial qualities of "bravery" or "manliness" that are often used to date or dismiss him. A more precise analysis reveals a quality of acceptance of circumstances, and an adaptation, in whatever way possible, to these circumstances. Writing about the nature of Hemingway's characters, Robert Penn Warren notes: "out of defeat or death the character usually manages to salvage something...His heroes are not defeated except upon their own terms...when they confront defeat they realize that the stance they take, the stoic endurance...mean a kind of victory" (2).

An important part of Warren's analysis is the concept of "stoic endurance". Though it is certainly true that some of Hemingway's characters are "defeated upon their own terms" (2), a great many are simply defeated, but continue to maintain, at least to the reader's mind, as predicated upon the dislocation between imagery and emotion, a stoical disposition. The argument could also be made that, despite Warren's claim, some Hemingway characters, such as Nick Adams at the end of

“Indian Camp” or Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, survive through denial of the inevitability of their situation, and in this way have adapted to desperate circumstances. In response to witnessing a suicide, a young Nick Adams assures himself that he will “never die” (70). As Brett laments that she and Jake could have had “such a damned good time together” (216), Jake’s reply, “isn’t it pretty to think so” (216), betrays a persistence in indulging in an impossible outcome. Crucial for Hemingway is the withholding of specific emotional description in order to create a character that, perhaps rather than through Warren’s “ideal” or “definition of how a man should behave” (2), adapts to a situation by any means to survive rather than succumb to despair. An unavoidable “adaptive stoicism” may be a more fitting descriptor than “enduring stoicism.”

It is a character who is exposed to despair, often existential or tragic in nature, one who adapts in whatever way possible, with whom Hemingway encourages the reader to engage cathartically. Michael Reynolds expresses this testing of values in the following terms: “take a representative man away from his supporting society, set him down in a foreign country and see if his values hold up” (225). It is the nature of the engagement of the reader that is perhaps the most important quality of Hemingway’s writing and his characters. Often the reader has access to information that the character does not have or will not accept about the odds against them. Nonetheless the character prepares for their challenge. It is the seeming inevitability of loss and uncertainty for the future that engages the reader cathartically.

In addition to exploring the “heroes” response to the risk or reality of loss, Hemingway is concerned with the ongoing existential anxiety of the human condition. As E.M. Halliday notes of Hemingway’s interest in this theme: “We are part of a universe offering no assurance beyond the grave, and we are to make what we can

of life by a pragmatic ethic spun bravely out of man himself in full and steady cognizance that the end is darkness” (3). Some characters realize this “pragmatic ethic” but many do not, instead engaging in self-perpetuating, self-destructive behavior in an attempt to escape the “darkness” Halliday describes. A passage from the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes serves as the epigraph to Hemingway’s first major novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. In Ecclesiastes, the reader is instructed by the narrator, Kohelet, that all human life is transient, holds no inherent meaning, and that to reconcile the individual with the eternal, one must accept their brief mortality.<sup>14</sup> The best life that can be expected is one in which the individual enjoys the just rewards of their labours and accepts their state of ignorance. Hemingway’s work is deeply concerned with examining how the individual responds to this crisis.

#### 4.0 Hemingway and Didion: A Preliminary Analysis

##### 4.1 Writing Principles

Joan Didion is recognized as one of the great chroniclers of the volatile social, cultural and political climates in America during the nineteen-sixties. Of her first essay collection, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, Dan Wakefield states that Didion: “brings together some of the finest magazine pieces published by anyone in this country” (1). In *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968) and *The White Album* (1979), her first two essay collections, Didion exposes the false promise of nineteen-sixties American counterculture, particularly the counterculture of California, in contrast to

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<sup>14</sup> “This is the point at which Kohelet arrived after his long journey to discover wisdom. It was a journey with highs and lows, and he wanted his readers to see both of those aspects clearly. Life is complex, and it will not do either to pretend that there is no darkness [7:2] or to imagine that there is no light [10:19]. The wisest path is a middle way that recognises the manifold vanities of life on the one hand and the value of the simple pleasures of life on the other” (Jarick, 32).

the optimism and idealism with which the social, political and technological progress of the American nineteen-sixties are generally associated.

Didion would hone her own minimalist style, one that shifts in form between her non-fiction and her fiction. In both, however, an interest in clarity and simplicity is apparent. Although the similarity in style between Didion and Hemingway is clearest in her novel, *Play It as It Lays*, echoes of Hemingway can also be observed in her essay collections. Didion acknowledged her careful study of Hemingway's writing and indeed, recalled as a young writer typing out his paragraphs in order to understand how his words and sentences worked.<sup>15</sup> The following example will illustrate this point, a comparison between a paragraph from Hemingway's short story, "In Another Country", and a passage from Didion's essay, "Goodbye to All That". In both paragraphs the narrator is a young person walking alone on a cold night in a city far from home.

In the fall the war was always there, but we did not go to it any more. It was cold in the fall in Milan and the dark came very early. Then the electric lights came on, and it was pleasant along the streets looking in the windows. There was much game hanging outside the shops, and the snow powdered in the fur of the foxes and the wind blew their tails. The deer hung stiff and heavy and empty, and small birds blew in the wind and the wind turned their feathers. It was a cold fall and the wind came down from the mountains. (Hemingway, 43)

A war is in progress, and the narrator is no longer involved in the conflict. Characteristic of Hemingway, the reader does not yet know why. There are six sentences in the paragraph, each one broken by at least one conjunction. These

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<sup>15</sup> In an interview with *The Paris Review*, Didion recalls of Hemingway's stories that, "I could see how they worked once I started typing them out. That was when I was about fifteen. I would just type those stories. It's a great way to get the rhythms into your head" (478).

conjunctive sentences work to produce a sense of movement, of the narrator's walking pace through the city. The language is simple and underscores the chill of the night, the snow powdering the fur of hanging foxes and the wind turning the feathers of the hanging birds. There is also a cheerfulness – “it was pleasant” – in the illumination of the streetlights and the lit windows. A sense of abundance is created by the conjunctive sentences describing the plentiful hanging game, but for all that, the narrator is an outsider passing through someone else's city. Consider this in comparison with the Didion paragraph:

At that time making a living seemed a game to me with arbitrary but quite inflexible rules. And except on a certain kind of winter evening - six-thirty in the Seventies, say, already dark and bitter with a wind off the river, when I would be walking very fast toward a bus and would look in the bright windows of brownstones and see cooks working in clean kitchens and imagine women lighting candles on the floor above and beautiful children being bathed on the floor above that - except on nights like those, I never felt poor: I had the feeling that if I needed money I could always get it. (229)

Didion's essay reflects on her experience working for *Vogue* in New York City after graduation from Berkeley. The paragraph begins and ends with short sentences about the banality of making money. The dominant middle sentence captures the joy of the moment. It is composed of a series of short phrases linked by the conjunction “and”. As in Hemingway's paragraph, the use of the conjunctive in the primary sentences creates a rhythm that matches the pace of walking through a city on a cold night. It is also clear, as in Hemingway's paragraph, that the narrator is an outsider looking “in the bright windows of the brownstones” (229). Didion, like Hemingway, relies on the illuminating image to convey the contrast between those in

comfort and at home and the outsider in the street. Both the narrators and the style of writing employed, maintain distance and are separate from another world which can only be observed. Didion can “imagine women lighting candles on the floor above” and “beautiful children being bathed on the floor above that” (229). As in Hemingway's paragraph, there is a joyfulness in the brightness of the evening lights and in the sense of wonder in the abundance of the city. The physical detachment of the narrators acts as a manifestation of the stylistic detachment both authors employ.

In an interview in *The Paris Review*, Hemingway explained his view of a work of fiction and the writing process that produced it. In fiction there were not black and white divisions between complete truth and complete mistruth: “From things that have happened and from things as they exist and from all things that you know and all those you cannot know, you make something through your invention but a whole new thing truer than anything true and alive, and you make it alive, and if you make it well enough, you give it immortality” (61). If we take “things that have happened” to mean fact, “things as they exist” to mean some form of subjectivity, and “things...you cannot know” to be the unknowable, we realize that the synthesis between the three does not represent a purely fictional or factual guideline to the elements that contribute to what Hemingway sees as truly good fiction. He states in the same interview that: “A writer, if he is any good, does not describe. He invents or *makes* out of knowledge personal and impersonal” (58). This implies a level of authorial autonomy that allows the author to synthesize lived experience (“knowledge personal”) with imagined, or at least observed experience (“impersonal”). For Hemingway, then, it is the goal of the author to create a hybrid of lived experience and observed knowledge.

In Didion we find a similarity in the philosophical approach to writing. In her essay "On Keeping a Notebook", Didion questions why she writes, why she decides to include what she includes in what she records, and what her goals are in trying to capture her experiences in words. She concludes that:

...the point of keeping a notebook has never been, nor is it now, to have an accurate factual record of what I have been doing or thinking. That would be a different impulse entirely, an instinct for reality which I sometimes envy but do not possess. (102)

Didion goes on to say that what is important in writing is: "*How it felt to me*: that is closer to the truth about a notebook" (103).

Though this is in reference to a "notebook", it causes us to reconsider the nature of Didion's essays. In a notebook she claims to secretly record her thoughts, experiences and impressions rather than a detailed, factual account of events. This provides a wider and more generous frame through which to read her essays; they retain their non-fictional form, but it is reasonable to hypothesize that some details and descriptions might be more representative of how they "felt" to Didion as opposed to how they existed objectively. Didion is doing with her non-fiction what Hemingway did in his fiction, and to some extent his non-fiction too, trying to capture elusive emotion through a direct style of writing that compels the reader to fill in the blanks. The line between objective fact and total fiction is secondary to this pursuit.

This idea of describing something as "*How it felt to me*" (103), is an important feature of the branch of writing emerging in the nineteen-sixties and seventies that would come to be called "The New Journalism"; investigative reporting written from

the perspective of the author, infused with some level of subjectivity.<sup>16</sup> These qualities, evident in Didion's non-fiction are, interestingly, claimed by Michael J. Arlen to have their roots in the age of reporting of which Hemingway was a part:

Then, after the First World War, especially the literary resurgence in the nineteen-twenties *writer's* world of Paris, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, etc. into the relatively straitlaced, rectilinear, dutiful world of conventional journalism appeared an assortment of young men who wanted to do it differently...Motion was part of the new vocabulary...For the first time in conventional reporting people began to move. (7)

A level of subjectivity was already permeating the newspaper reporting of the nineteen-twenties. Reporters, Hemingway included, were interested in conveying the subjective experience at the scene and the details that humanize and were not waiting for authorities to frame the story. They were describing how the event felt, as Didion does in her essays.

#### 4.2 Essential Themes

Like Hemingway, Didion was profoundly aware of the cultural and social changes occurring in her era. Hemingway's analysis of the aimless dilettantism of nineteen-twenties American expatriates is comparable in many ways to what we find in Didion's early writing, particularly in her first essay collection, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968). There are no literal expats here; the Americans in question had relocated or drifted to California from somewhere else in the U.S.A. However, they exhibit behavior that is not dissimilar from the "bohemians" of Hemingway's Paris. It

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<sup>16</sup> Some of Didion's note-worthy contemporaries associated with this movement include Norman Mailer, Truman Capote and Hunter S. Thompson. Didion is perhaps one of the foremost female figures, further highlighting the importance of her contribution.

is clear that Didion's disregard for the activists and counterculture of the nineteen-sixties approaches that of Hemingway's disdain for the indolence of Americans in postwar Paris.<sup>17</sup> Consider this passage from her essay "Where the Kissing Never Stops" on American folk music sensation Joan Baez:

[Baez] does try, perhaps, unconsciously, to hang on to the innocence and turbulence and capacity for wonder, however ersatz or shallow, of her own or of anyone else's adolescence. This openness, this vulnerability, is of course precisely the reason why she is so able to "come through" to all the young and lonely and inarticulate, to all those who suspect that no one else in the world understands about beauty and hurt and love and brotherhood. (49)

Based on her firsthand observations Didion finds that this figure, esteemed by American counterculture youth as a spiritual leader, is "ersatz" and "shallow" (49). Didion also describes a sense of entitlement similar to what Hemingway describes as "eccentricity": a belief held by Baez and fans who project their emotions upon her that they are special and unique and that "no one else in the world understands" (49) aspects of reality and emotion that are actually part of the common human experience. Didion, in her essay, "Slouching Towards Bethlehem", writes of the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco in 1967 where young people, "hippies", are congregating and "where the social hemorrhaging was showing up" (67). At the extreme, Didion describes the young, aimless inhabitants of Haight-Ashbury as victims of "society's atomization" (93), and their existence as "the desperate attempt of a handful of pathetically equipped children to create a community in a social vacuum" (93).

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<sup>17</sup> Hemingway expressed this in his 1922 newspaper article for the *Toronto Star* entitled "American Bohemians in Paris", which will be analyzed in greater detail in the body of this thesis.

In another essay in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* entitled “On Morality”, Didion writes from a lonely hotel room in Death Valley about the body of a young man discovered dead on the nearby highway. She describes a conversation with the nurse who had driven the deceased’s injured girlfriend to the hospital several hundred miles away and whose husband stayed behind with the dead man’s body, because leaving it alone in the desert would be “immoral”. Didion goes on to say that “It was one instance in which I did not distrust the word immoral...Whether a corpse is torn apart by coyotes may seem only a sentimental consideration, but of course it is more...If we have been taught to keep our promises – if, in the simplest terms – our upbringing is good enough – we stay with the body or have bad dreams” (120).

Didion places value on doing what is responsible rather than what is immediately desirable. This version of morality is what separates the mature and the capable from the immature and incompetent, something that Didion confirms in her use of the word and subsequent description of “upbringing”: “For better or worse, we are what we learned as children: my own childhood was illuminated by graphic litanies of the grief awaiting those who failed in their loyalties to each other” (121), a lesson impressed upon Didion by stories of her ancestors who settled the harsh lands of central California. Those who can act selflessly and in the interests of others have grown up, have passed adolescence and entered into maturity; they are the ones with a capacity for Didion’s version of morality.

Didion's morality resembles the adaptive stoicism of Hemingway’s characters. They are often tested to determine how they and their values will stand up under stress. Their performance in this respect differs from text to text.

## 5.0 Hemingway and Brautigan: A Preliminary Analysis

## 5.1 Writing Principles

Richard Brautigan was born in 1935 and raised in poverty in Eugene, Washington. Relocating to San Francisco in the nineteen-fifties, Brautigan began his literary career as a poet before writing his first two novels, *Trout Fishing in America* (1967) and *A Confederate General from Big Sur* (1964) in 1961. Both would be published later in the decade.

A significant voice of nineteen-sixties American literature, Brautigan was interested in and adapted elements of Hemingway's writing. Brautigan has not maintained the same level of success as Hemingway or Didion. "At the end of his life, Brautigan - despite tremendous commercial success early in his career for works like *Trout Fishing in America* - couldn't get his own work published...Brautigan's work isn't widely read today" (Enzinna). He has, however retained a cult-following, and his work is worthy of greater critical attention than it has been given. As Christopher Gair notes, "Brautigan has become trapped in his epoch...This neglect is – to say the least – curious, given the acclaim with which Brautigan's writing was greeted by critics in the 1960s and early 70s" (6).

Brautigan's relationship to Hemingway has been described as "almost obsessive" (Stull, 71). The evidence is found in "at least a dozen conscious or unconscious specific echoes of Hemingway in *Trout Fishing*" (Stull, 71). Loie Weber noted in an interview with William Hjortsberg about Brautigan: "He had this idealization, admiration for Hemingway...He would periodically just talk about Hemingway. He had a real romantic investment in the lifestyle of Hemingway, the outdoorsman, the seeming he-man. He always talked about his life, image, style, being" (262). At the same time, Brautigan sought to develop his own style. Hjortsberg notes: "Brautigan instinctively understood the futility of imitating Ernest

Hemingway's lifestyle. He determined to create a style of his own, one that would indelibly identify him in a reader's mind" (262). This departure from imitation of lifestyle made itself manifest in Brautigan's writing as well.

What immediately sets Brautigan apart is his unique synthesis of Hemingway inspired minimalist prose and surrealism. As John Tanner notes, Brautigan's work can be recognized by an "idiosyncratic combination of Hemingway minimalism and the flamboyantly surreal" (99). Similar to Hemingway in his use of short, declarative sentences and simple dialogue, Brautigan laces his writing with strange similes and metaphors, often bordering on the hyperbolic, and surreal, often unknowable imagery: "The creek was made narrow by little green trees that grew too close together. The creek looked like 12,845 telephone booths in a row with high Victorian ceilings and all the doors taken off and all the backs of the booths knocked out" (55). To use a term from Iser, Brautigan relies on a "repertoire" of allusions, and through surrealistic treatment is revealing their essential qualities.

Brautigan employs the wholesome pastime of wilderness fishing as the backdrop against which he tells an unsettling story about America. As poet Billy Collins states in the afterwards to *Trout Fishing in America*, "Oddly fragmented, Brautigan's best book is a contribution to the fishing literature of Hemingway and Izak Walton, and the theme of trout fishing allows him to conduct a wandering investigation of many creeks that are tributaries to the troubled and fascinating waters of American history and mythology," (122); and as Thomas McGuane notes, "what is important is that Brautigan's outlandish gift is based in traditional narrative virtues. His dialogue is super naturally exact; his descriptive concision is the perfect carrier for his extraordinary comic perceptions" (282). In summary, Brautigan chooses to anchor his stories in a familiar, minimalist style, reminiscent of

Hemingway's: "Brautigan falls into a simpler writing that comes close to being a studied imitation of Hemingway's plain style", but at the same time disregards "novelistic conventions such as narrative plausibility, dramatic tension, chronology, character development, and logic itself" (Collins, 120). Brautigan's work of the nineteen-sixties takes its own unique form, but it is more often than "sometimes" that it "falls into" this style resembling Hemingway's.

## 5.2 Essential Themes

In his fiction, Richard Brautigan sought to expose the gulf between America's myths, ideals and promises and the harsh reality of contemporary life for many Americans. Contaminated trout streams and a cowardly war hero call attention to a misguided nation. With respect to *Trout Fishing in America*, Collins noted that: "Published in 1967, this book arrived in the midst of a movement towards cultural, political and sexual liberation, and many readers who connected with the book saw it as the literary equivalent for these larger upheavals" (120). Though, like Hemingway, Brautigan came to be associated with these "countercultural" movements, it is difficult, upon closer analysis, to view his writing as an endorsement of countercultural beliefs and ideologies. Hjortsberg suggests a different identity:

Richard Brautigan, who had rejected a beatnik label, would soon find himself in the curious position of being one of the godfathers of the hippie movement. He continued his life as an impoverished artist, his appearance and dress as much a matter of necessity as style. (236-7)

Identifying neither with the early Beat or contemporary Hippie movements, Brautigan maintained detachment as an observer and commentator. In the same way that Hemingway expresses contempt for the young Americans at the Rotonde in his

newspaper article, Brautigan is said to have been “contemptuous of most hippies, whom he saw as freeloaders and dizzy peaceniks” (Wright), as well as having a horror of narcotics that seemed fanciful to his friends – “*everybody* used dope in those days except Richard” (Wright), and he would write a novel in the mid-sixties, *In Watermelon Sugar* (1968), satirizing the attempts of the Californian counterculture to create utopian communes and communities.

Didion and Brautigan learned from Hemingway’s style, and both adapted that style into a distinctive style of their own. I believe that the close textual analyses in this thesis are important to our understanding of how elements of style are used by these three authors to encourage the reader's imaginative involvement. Further, how these authors have set their readers on a similar quest to resolve the question of how the individual responds in a society in change and in distress. And, moreover, how these authors can be said to have employed elements of style that connect to reader response theory, employing the reader directly in the making of critical interpretive choices, choices that are key to the discovery of the potential meaning(s) of the literary text.

## Chapter One

### Joan Didion's Early Non-Fiction

#### 1.0 Early Years: California, Berkeley and *Vogue*

Joan Didion was born in 1934, a fifth generation Californian, the descendant of ancestors who migrated to California by wagon train. Among the families traveling west in the same year were the Donner-Reid party, which infamously quarreled with and split off from the main group, and were subsequently trapped by winter snow in the Sierra Nevada and resorted to cannibalism before being rescued. Didion's family remained with the main wagon train and reached Sacramento in the Central Valley, where they homesteaded.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout Didion's essays, California exerts a unique psychological influence upon people and events. It is a place of hope, expectation and often sudden desperation. In "Notes from a Native Daughter", Didion observes: "California is a place in which a boom mentality and a sense of Chekhovian loss meet in uneasy suspension...in which the mind is troubled by some buried but ineradicable suspicion that things had better work here, because here, beneath the immense bleached sky, is where we run out of continent" (172).

Didion studied English at Berkeley, graduating in 1956 before the campus activism of the following decade. A member of the "silent generation", she wrote later that she and her fellow students were survivors of a particularly inward time: "If I could believe that going to a barricade would affect man's fate in the slightest I would

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<sup>18</sup> Didion writes in detail of some of these ancestors in her memoir, *Where I Was From* (2003): "I know nothing else about Elizabeth Scott Hardin, but I have her recipe for corn bread, and also for India relish: her granddaughter brought these recipes west in 1846, traveling with the Donner-Reed party as far as the Humboldt Sink before cutting north for Oregon, where her husband, the Reverend Josephus Adamson Cornwall, was determined to be the first Cumberland Presbyterian circuit rider in what was then called Oregon country. Because that granddaughter, Nancy Hardin Cornwall, was my great-great-great-grandmother, I have, besides her recipes, a piece of applique she made on the crossing. This applique, green and red calico on a muslin field, hangs now in my dining room in New York and hung before that in the living room of a house I had on the Pacific Ocean" (4).

go that that barricade” (208). It was a generation of students who, in Didion's analysis were “distrustful of political highs” (206) and “convinced that the heart of darkness lay not in some error of social organization but in man's own blood” (206); an “era when campus life was socially conventional and politically dormant” (Menand, 17).

After graduation, Didion won an essay contest sponsored by *Vogue* magazine and moved to New York City to join the magazine as a promotional copywriter, writing photo captions. She remained with *Vogue* for seven years, rising to the position of Associate Feature Editor. As will be discussed in the next section, it was at *Vogue* that Didion learned the importance of the short, succinct sentence, much as Hemingway did while working as a cub reporter for the *Kansas City Star*. Allene Talmey, Didion's editor, said of her experience at *Vogue* that: “We wrote long and published short and by doing that Joan learned to write” (5-6).

These stylistic lessons had an impact on Didion's subsequent development of her fiction and non-fiction. Not unlike Hemingway, she “learned...to use active verbs instead of passive, to make sure ‘it’ always had a nearby reference, to reach for the O.E.D. to insure surprise as much as precision. And, most of all, they learned to rewrite, time and again, in search of the correct balance of elegance and excitement” (Dillon, 70). This strict adherence to maximal omission of superfluous language, the focus on the active verb and the practice of constantly rewriting and editing has come to characterize Didion's work.

In 1964, Didion wrote her first novel, *Run River* (1964), about the breakdown of a Sacramento family. The novel is perhaps the least representative of Didion's work and style, and one with which she was not particularly pleased:

I didn't know how to do anything at all. I had wanted *Run River* to be very complicated chronologically, to somehow have the past and present operating simultaneously, but I wasn't accomplished enough to do that with any clarity. Everybody who read it said it wasn't working...I just wasn't good enough.  
(Didion)<sup>19</sup>

Didion's awareness that the book is not working, that she had not yet attained that level of skill as a writer, is clear when we consider the incredible transition in quality between *Run River* and her next novel, *Play It as It Lays*. The capacity to achieve in many respects what she could not in *Run River*, chronologically and stylistically, suggests that this book, Didion's first major novel, marks the foundation, and arguably height, of her truly great fiction writing.

During the mid-sixties, Didion began writing articles for *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, *The New York Times Magazine* and other magazines. In 1968, she published *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, a collection of magazine pieces about social disturbance in California. *The White Album*, another collection of magazine pieces from the sixties and seventies, was to come later, but addressed many similar social and existential issues as can be found in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. These two seminal collections present the reader with a very similar challenge: to seek meaning that the author has been unable to find. In *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, it is Yeats' poem, "The Second Coming" (1920), that provides the organizing idea for the essays.<sup>20</sup> The "centre" of American society is not holding and Didion accepts that she must attempt to come to terms with rampant disorder. *The*

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<sup>19</sup> Didion, Joan. "The Art of Fiction". *The Paris Review*. Issue 74, 1978.

<sup>20</sup> Two particular lines from Yeats' poem resonate in Didion's writing. Near the start of the poem, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" (3), and at its conclusion, the line from which she takes the title for her essay collection: "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last/Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" (21-2).

*White Album* begins with the related proposition that humans need a narrative to connect and explain troubling events in order to remain sane.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.1 Hemingway and Didion: A Common Formative Experience and its Impact on Style

As touched on earlier, Ernest Hemingway and Joan Didion both began their careers in commercial media. Hemingway was a beat reporter for the *Kansas City Star* and later a foreign correspondent working in Europe for the *Toronto Star*. Didion was a junior editor with *Vogue* magazine in New York City. In their respective positions, Hemingway and Didion developed their skills under the pressure of deadlines and the strict supervision of demanding superiors, learning to write as the medium required: directly, concisely and with precision.

In an interview in *The Paris Review*, Hemingway attributed his mastery of the sentence in part to his training as a reporter with the *Kansas City Star*: “On the *Star* you were forced to learn to write a simple declarative sentence. This is useful to anyone. Newspaper work will not harm a young writer and could help him if he gets out of it in time” (43).

In this newspaper reporting there is early evidence of Hemingway’s emerging style and skill in engaging the reader with the rhythm of his sentences and the use of evocative imagery. To illustrate, in Hemingway’s report for the *Toronto Star* titled “A

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<sup>21</sup> Didion’s investigation of the wayward “children” of Haight Ashbury in “Slouching Towards Bethlehem” does not result in any “coming to terms” with chaos beyond confirming that society is in fact “atomizing”. In “The White Album” Didion fails to explain how the disparate images emerging from events that range from her mental illness to the Manson murders fit into any narrative she was aware of. In these collections, the reader follows Didion from story to story in which she first establishes her proximity to the subject, builds to a revelation that is startling and then moves on without resolution to the next scene bearing yet another “disparate image” (11). The reader’s judgment is engaged to evaluate the credibility of Didion’s report and their imagination to look for the narrative where Didion purports to have failed.

"Silent Ghastly Procession" published in 1922, he captures the fear and desperation of a column of refugees fleeing an advancing army in eastern Thrace:

It is a silent procession. Nobody even grunts. It is all they can do to keep moving. Their brilliant peasant costumes are soaked and draggled. Chickens dangle by their feet from the carts. Calves nuzzle at the draught cattle wherever a jam halts the stream. An old man marches bent under a young pig, a scythe and a gun, with a chicken tied to his scythe. A husband spreads a blanket over a woman in labor in one of the carts to keep off the driving rain. She is the only person making a sound. Her little daughter looks at her in horror and begins to cry. And the procession keeps moving. (51)

The short, declarative sentences mimic the rhythm of a forced march. A multitude staggering forward in the rain, fearful and silent. The image of an old man burdened by a confused array of possessions: livestock, a farm implement, a weapon and "with a chicken tied to his scythe" (51) reinforces the profound feeling of dislocation and uncertainty about what is to come.

Joan Didion began her writing career in the late nineteen-fifties, composing photo captions for *Vogue* magazine. These captions, which appeared in the margin of magazine pages, created a storyline to enliven the accompanying photographs of rooms and furnishings. In the preface to her collection, *Telling Stories*, Didion provided the following example of a photo caption that she had authored:

Opposite, above: All through the house, colour, verve, improvised treasures in happy but anomalous coexistence. Here, a Frank Stella, an art nouveau stained-glass panel, a Roy Lichtenstein. Not shown, a table covered with frankly brilliant oilcloth, a Mexican find at fifteen cents a yard. (4)

The caption gives the photograph a narrative. The language is so tight that there are no verbs in the first two sentences. And yet, without verbs, there is movement; the captions besides the photograph lead the reader on a tour through the house, even into unseen areas: “Not shown: a table covered with frankly brilliant oilcloth, a Mexican find at fifteen cents a yard” (4). And, like Hemingway, Didion in this early work creates mystery through omission: Who lives there? Where is the house? What other treasures and rooms are not shown?

While somewhat superficial in nature, this work was demanding. Didion defended her work for *Vogue* and its importance to her development as a writer:

It is easy to make light of this kind of “writing,” and I mention it specifically because I do not make light of it all: it was at *Vogue* that I learned a kind of ease with words...a way of regarding words not as mirrors of my own inadequacy but as tools, toys, weapons to be deployed strategically on a page. In a caption of, say, eight lines, each line to run no more or less than twenty-seven characters, not only every word but every letter counted. (5)

Hemingway and Didion learned similar critical skills in their respective newspaper reporting and magazine writing. Both media compelled the young writers to practice economy of language, to engage the reader through images that would spark interest and association, and to tell a compelling story without room for detail. These are skills that distinguish the subsequent works of both Hemingway and Didion as authors.

## 1.2 Sentences, Paragraphs and the Composition of Omission

Didion, when asked by an interviewer whether any writer had influenced her more than others, responded: “I always say Hemingway, because he taught me how

sentences worked. When I was fifteen or sixteen I would type out his stories to learn how the sentences worked. I taught myself to type at the same time” (4).

Didion’s study of Hemingway’s language and storytelling continued throughout her life. In her 1998 essay, “Last Words”, Didion explores the care with which Hemingway chose and arranged his words. She begins the essay by setting out the first paragraph of *A Farewell to Arms*, followed by her close reading of the paragraph. These opening paragraphs, first Hemingway’s, then Didion’s, are lengthy but necessary to set out in full below to demonstrate Didion’s lifelong effort to understand how Hemingway’s writing worked.

Hemingway’s opening paragraph:

In late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterward the road bare and white except for the leaves. (3)

Below is Didion’s analysis of the paragraph:

That paragraph, which was published in 1929, bears examination: four deceptively simple sentences, one hundred and twenty-six words, the arrangement of which remains as mysterious and thrilling to me now as it did when I first read them at twelve or thirteen, and imagined that if I studied them closely enough and practiced hard enough I might one day arrange one

hundred and twenty-six such words myself. Only one of the words has three syllables. Twenty-two have two. The other hundred and three have one. Twenty-four of the words are “the,” fifteen are “and.” There are four commas. The liturgical cadence of the paragraph derives in part from the placement of the commas (their presence in the second and fourth sentences, their absence in the first and third), but also from that repetition of “the” and of “and,” creating a rhythm so pronounced that the omission of “the” before the word “leaves” in the fourth sentence (“and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling”) casts exactly what it was meant to cast, a chill, a premonition, a foreshadowing of the story to come, the awareness that the author has already shifted his attention from last summer to a darker season. The power of the paragraph, offering as it does the illusion but not the fact of specificity, derives precisely from this kind of deliberate omission, from the tension of withheld information. In the late summer of *what* year? *What* river, *what* mountains, *what* troops?  
(3-5)

Didion’s analysis not only examines Hemingway’s style, but reflects his style in composition. As Adrienne Lafrance notes, “The structural latticework of the essay both lays out Hemingway’s style and adopts aspects of it to drive the piece forward. For example, she writes about Hemingway’s omissions as narrative choices, and then uses omissions just as he did” (2).

And indeed the omissions are clear in the Hemingway paragraph, as they are in Didion’s own. The opening paragraph of *A Farewell to Arms* creates an ominous sense of movement towards the unknown. There is a river swiftly moving, troops marching, dust rising and leaves beginning to fall. And finally, the troops are gone,

the road is white with settled dust and the dust is covered with fallen leaves. Didion's analysis examines the basic components of the paragraph: a word count by syllable, the use of punctuation and its effect on cadence, the presence of the conjunction "and" and the article "the", and how this all foreshadows the story to come. As she notes, there is detail, but also information deliberately withheld to drive the story forward. The location is not revealed and the reader does not know whose troops are marching through the village or where they are going.

Didion's textual analysis is followed in her essay by a passage that demonstrates what she has learned from Hemingway. Didion reviews the famous and infamous aspects of Hemingway's biography: his time in Paris with Hadley in the nineteen-twenties, the bulls in Pamplona, fishing for marlin in Cuba, boxing in Bimini, crossing the Ebro with Spanish loyalists, kneeling beside "his" lion or "his" buffalo. She notes how his readers have read about and reflected upon his excesses and humiliations.

Didion's summary of Hemingway's life is lengthy but the informed reader would see immediately that it is incomplete. The power of Didion's prose summarizing the highlights of Hemingway's life lies in deliberate omission, that is, from the "tension of withheld information": there is not yet any mention of Hemingway's death.

Later in the essay, Didion deals with this final moment in the author's life with disturbing precision and detachment:

Early on the Sunday morning of July 2, 1961, the celebrated author got out of his bed in Ketchum, Idaho, went downstairs, took a double-barreled Boss shotgun from a storage room in the cellar, and emptied both barrels into the center of his forehead. "I went downstairs," his fourth wife, Mary Welsh

Hemingway, reported in her 1976 memoir, *How it Was*, “saw a crumpled heap of bathrobe and blood, the shotgun lying in the disintegrated flesh, in the front vestibule of the sitting room.” (7)

Didion’s description of Hemingway’s suicide is remarkably similar to Hemingway’s own prose. Didion is detached. She does not mention Hemingway by name in this paragraph, instead he is referred to as “the celebrated author”. But she omits no other detail this time, setting out the time, date, location, brand of shotgun, where the shotgun was stored, amount of ammunition discharged, the location of the wound and the carnage discovered by his wife. “Last Words” is a valuable essay because it not only reveals Didion’s study of Hemingway’s language and style but also illustrates her practiced skill working with his aesthetic.

To Didion, Hemingway “was a writer who had in his time made the English language new, changed the rhythms of the way both his own and the next few generations would speak and write and think” (8). One can readily list the stylistic features of Hemingway’s writing: the short, declarative sentence, the use of illuminating images in place of simile or metaphor and a minimalist approach to storytelling, what Hemingway describes as the “the iceberg principle”, in which all unnecessary information is eliminated. Chris Anderson notes that Didion herself is “a framer of pictures, an arranger of images” (136); it is clear to see that this is another quality inspired by Hemingway, careful placement of the image balanced with omission of emotion. These technical features associated with Hemingway’s fiction were the instruments chosen by him to give a story life. Hemingway’s aim was to elevate observed fact to a higher truth: “From things that have happened and from things as they exist and from all things that you know and all those you cannot know, you make something through your invention that is not a representation but a whole

new thing truer than anything true and alive, and you make it alive, and if you make it well enough, you give it immortality” (61).

In her essay, “On Keeping a Notebook”, Didion also distinguishes between observed fact and its transformation in her writing. She concedes that “I tell what some might call lies” (134). It was the personal truth of the observation that mattered, so while it may not have snowed “that August in Vermont” and the ground may not have frozen “that was how it felt to me and it might as well have snowed, could have snowed, did snow” (134).

Hemingway explains style as the writer’s attempt to make something new. Didion explains style in equally personal terms as the product of all of the choices made by the artist in the creative process: “every word chosen or rejected, every brush stroke laid or not laid down - betrayed one’s character. *Style is character*” (126). Style then is the sum of the writer’s choices in attempting to write something new and different.

### 1.3 The Example of Hemingway’s Structure in *In Our Time*

The structure of Hemingway’s early fiction may well have served as a model for Didion’s early essays in which disparate images defy order or explanation. Hemingway began *In Our Time* in the early nineteen-twenties after the close of World War I. The title is derived from a passage in the *Book of Common Prayer*: “Give peace in our time, O Lord” (36). *In Our Time* was originally published by The Three Mountain Press in 1924 as 18 vignettes, each one a separate chapter, written in italics, most chapters no more than a paragraph in length in a run of 300 copies. As seen in the image in the introduction to this thesis, the cover was designed to look like a collage of newspaper reports. The chapters dealt primarily with violence

involving war, refugees, crime, bullfighting, execution and political assassination. They resemble news reports from the front, told dispassionately and directly.

Hemingway collaborated on these vignettes with Ezra Pound. Their correspondence reveals that some of the vignettes reflected actual events and one was imagined for violent effect. For example, the hanging of the mobster, Sam Cardinella,<sup>22</sup> in Chapter XV was written by Hemingway at Ezra Pound's request and actually happened. However, the matador Maera, whom Hemingway had seen in Pamplona, did not actually die in the ring as reported in Chapter XIV but rather died of tuberculosis. In writing to Ezra Pound circa 5 August 1923, Hemingway explains the content and sequencing of the vignettes: "I will do the hanging. Have redone the death of Maera. The new death is good...They should each one be headed Chapter 1, Chapter 2 etc." (41). In 1925, *In Our Time* was published again by Boni and Liveright and included the vignettes from the earlier edition together with Hemingway's first collection of fourteen short stories. Seven of the stories feature Nick Adams as the protagonist and take place in Michigan. The remainder take place mainly in Europe, involving American expatriates, revolutionaries and the victims of war. The stories deal with adjustment to loss, frustrated relationships, fear and alienation. In writing to Edward J. O'Brien, a friend and publisher of anthologies, Hemingway said:

I have written 14 stories and have a book ready to publish. It is to be called *In Our Time* and one of the chapters of the *In Our Time* I sent you comes in between each story...in between each one comes bang! The *In our time* – it should be awfully good I think. (154)

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<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting for clarification that the actual surname of the mobster was Cardinelli, but that Hemingway changed it to Cardinella for the purposes of his vignette. However, despite this minor change in spelling, it is clear that it is meant to be the same person.

In his journal article, "The Complex Unity of *In Our Time*", Clinton S. Burhans, Jr. argues that Hemingway intended to achieve a coordinated structure among the vignettes (or chapters) and the fourteen stories that comprise the 1925 edition of *In Our Time*. In this analysis, Burhans submits that the vignettes represent "the picture of the whole" (317) of the perils of the human condition, whereas the stories represent the detailed struggles of individual characters to find reconciliation and to live with honor in the face of pain and loss. Burhans claims: "In these impressionistic sketches, then, Hemingway outlines the world and the human condition as he sees them and suggests what man must be and do in such a world; and the stories derive their unifying significance as detailed explorations of the premises posed in the vignettes" (317).

Burhans contends that the vignettes and stories are two narrative streams that ultimately converge in resolution. The vignettes progress from scenes of senseless violence in war and crime to a managed expression of violence in the tragedy of the bullfight in which the observer can witness death with order and dignity. The protagonists in the stories, whom Burhans maintains are really all the same character, Nick Adams, progress from naïveté to disillusionment to awareness and acceptance of the realities of pain and loss.

The Burhans theory is interesting, but it is questionable. To begin, Nick Adams and Harold Krebs are not the same person. One is engaged, the other withdrawn and resigned. In addition, the title of the collection raises doubt that Hemingway intended progress from fear and loss to enlightenment. As noted, the title is derived from a passage in the *Book of Common Prayer*, "Give peace in our time, O Lord" (36). This is an appeal for divine intervention, hardly an expression of confidence in man's capacity to control his violence. In a related comment, but with

different emphasis, Thomas Strychacz observes: “Moreover, by echoing the plea in the English *Book of Common Prayer* to “Give us peace in our time, O Lord,” the phrase invites a new descent of the Holy Spirit into the era following the World War I apocalypse” (55). That the collection is comprised of stories that deal largely with violence, alienation, and postwar disillusionment confirm that it is more than an invitation for “a new descent of the Holy Spirit”; it is a supplication for some sort of spiritual intervention, and by extension, comprehension, of the chaotic time in which Hemingway is writing. Secondly, contrary to Burhan’s suggestion, the vignettes and the stories were not written at the same time nor with the intention that they would be published together. Several of the inter-chapter vignettes had appeared as newspaper reports (see, for example, “A Silent, Ghastly Procession” from the *Toronto Star*, October 20, 1922, which is substantially the same as Chapter II about Greek refugees in flight), six of the vignettes had been published in *The Little Review*, and ten of the fourteen stories had been previously and separately published. In these circumstances, any plan on the part of the author to carefully set off the vignettes against the stories to reveal progress from fear and danger towards acceptance appears unlikely.

References in the letters to Pound and O'Brien to “unity” appear to relate to the vignettes and the stories separately and do not make any grand connection between the two. Moreover, the horrors of the vignettes nearly always involve incidents of severe wounding, death or fear of imminent death. With perhaps the exception of Krebs in “Soldier’s Home” and Nick Adams in “Big Two-Hearted River”, most of the characters that populate the stories of *In Our Time* are personally untouched by the external violence of the surrounding vignettes. For example, the story of Mr. and Mrs. Elliot, two dilettante Americans on an aimless European

journey appears between Chapter IX, in which a matador is gored and Chapter X in which a bull gores a horse. There is no relationship between these vignettes and the characters in “Mr. and Mrs. Elliot” or their development. Rather, it is submitted that the vignettes serve as a reminder of the ever-present danger and chaos in the outside world. In his analysis, E.M. Halliday rejects any “nice relationship” (15) between the stories and the numbered chapters. Halliday maintains that Hemingway’s purpose was the opposite. Interspersing the numbered chapters with longer stories was intended: “To give a powerfully ironic effect of spurious order supporting the book’s subject: modern civil disruption and violence seen against the timeless background of everyday human cross purposes” (15).

As will be seen, Hemingway’s structure appears to serve as a model for Didion’s essays in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, in which she confronts the random violence and chaos in America in the nineteen-sixties without finding any explanatory narrative. Didion works with “flash cuts”, disparate images of distressing events to engage the reader in confronting the “atomization” occurring in American society. That Hemingway intended his vignettes to have a dramatic effect, similar to Didion’s “flash cuts” is evident in his letter to O’Brien where, in speaking of his intention in placing the vignettes after each story, he says “and in between each one comes a bang!” (154).

#### 1.4 Hemingway’s Narrative: “Romantic Individualism”

Didion writes of Hemingway’s narrative style in “Last Words”: “The very grammar of a Hemingway sentence dictated, or was dictated by, a certain way of looking at the world, a way of looking but not joining, a way of moving through but not attaching, a kind of romantic individualism distinctly adapted to its time and

source" (8). Arguably this is the reporter at work, relaying information from the outside world without bias or emotion, so as to give the reader an unobstructed view and the opportunity to decide for themselves. The writer's disciplined detachment provides accuracy and reinforces the disturbing nature of the reported events.

However, Hemingway, like Didion, is not simply reporting observed fact. Hemingway's narratives advance by inspiring the reader's participation. This narrative style can be seen, for example, in his short story "A Canary for One" which takes place on an overnight train to Paris. The narrator and his silent wife are confined in a compartment with a tedious American woman. At one point, the train passes a farmhouse on fire in the dark, perhaps the most exciting thing witnessed by the narrator on this journey, but it is left in the periphery. It is not revealed until the story's last sentence that the husband and wife are returning to Paris to set up separate residences. Nathan Heller notes that: "Hemingway's theory was that if you, the writer, could reduce what you saw in your imagination to the igniting gestures and images – don't elaborate why you feel sad about your marriage ending; just nail the image of the burning farmhouse that launched you on that train of thought - then you could get readers' minds to make the same turns at the same intersections, and convey the world more immersively than through exposition" (32).

In "For Ernest Hemingway", Reynolds Price considers the voice, "the maker's voice", behind and beneath all of the characters in Hemingway's fiction. This voice reflects Hemingway's effort to carefully curate the information given and withheld to provoke an energetic reader response:

And what it says, early and late, is always this – 'This is what I see with my clean keen equipment. Work to see it after me.' What it does not say but implies is more important – 'For you I have narrowed and filtered my gaze. I

am screening my vision so you will not see all. Why? – because you must enact this story for yourself; cast it, dress it, set it. Notice the chances I've left for you: no noun or verb is colored by me. I require your senses'. (203)

Didion also relies on the reader to enact the story or narrative for themselves. Her essays rely on the “disparate image” that goes “bang!”, or the succession of images challenging the reader to either find the connections or conclude that there are none.

Further, Didion follows Hemingway's example of “looking but not joining” in her essays and fiction. Distance and detachment are particularly effective in writing about deviation from social norms. Didion concedes that her writing may lack empathy: “I recognize that in myself - there is a basic indifference to people” (11). She, like Hemingway, maintains distance.

In the essay, “Slouching Towards Bethlehem”, Didion is introduced to and interviews a five-year old child in Haight-Ashbury who is alone and on LSD. The image is shocking. Didion reports the child's likes and dislikes, which at first seem quite normal for a child:

The five-year old's name is Susan, and she tells me she is in High Kindergarten. She lives with her mother and some other people, just got over the measles, wants a bicycle for Christmas, and particularly likes Coca-Cola, ice cream, Marty in the Jefferson Airplane, Bob in the Grateful Dead, and the beach. She remembers going to the beach once a long time ago, and wishes she had taken a bucket. For a year now her mother has given her both acid and peyote. Susan describes it as getting stoned. (128)

The interview format achieves detachment. None of her observations in these conjunctive sentences are subordinated to any other. Didion is simply gathering and reporting facts about a child whose experience is presented as both shocking and

mundane. She provides no explanation for what she has seen in Haight-Ashbury. This is, as with Hemingway, a task left for the reader.<sup>23</sup>

### 1.5 The Social Awareness of Hemingway and Didion

The above paragraph from “Slouching Towards Bethlehem” is representative in style and content of Didion’s essay work in the mid nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies. Her aim in this particular essay was to reveal what she saw as the reality of social chaos concealed behind the popular impression of an enlightened hippie movement. Her method was the use of a shocking image that culminates a forty-page report with incident after incident exposing the aimless and degenerate lives of the “children” who have drifted to Haight Ashbury. Didion closes with the fate of an actual child: a five-year-old girl on psychedelic drugs administered by her mother. The objective, like Hemingway’s use of evocative images, is to pull the reader into the experience of hopeless chaos.

Hemingway and Didion wrote in fundamentally different periods in the twentieth century. Hemingway directly experienced World War I and wrote his early work in its wake as Europe struggled to adjust to new social and political realities. His reporting and his fiction examined the personal trauma and societal disruption of

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<sup>23</sup> Didion has been criticized for focusing on deviant conduct and failing to examine motivation. Martin Amis, in his review, “Joan Didion's Style”, points out that Didion never thinks, for example, about the crazy mothers who refrain from leaving their daughter on a divider on the interstate. Amis suggests that the person beset with emotional, financial and other challenges who nevertheless continues to fulfill their responsibilities does not appear to be of interest to Didion. Didion has acknowledged this trait: “I recognize it in myself – there is a basic indifference to people” (11). This criticism appears to miss a key element of Didion’s writing; its focus on the flow of random information to which Americans are exposed in contemporary society. The information is often disturbing and it is unrelenting and comes in a form that is not fully developed with the knowledge of the perpetrator’s personal history and motivation. This is the reality that Didion’s essay is endeavoring to replicate. Moreover, the ordinary person can be credited with understanding that not every distressed mother exposes her child to death, but this understanding does not take away from the disturbing effect of the one who does.

war. And as Europe recovered from World War I, Hemingway was alert to the destabilizing contest between communism and fascism that was already underway in the nineteen-twenties.

Didion wrote in a much different context and was informed by her own unique experience in America in the decades following the Second World War. However, like Hemingway, her essays and fiction examine the instabilities of her society. The historical moment is different and the causes are distinct, but Didion shared with Hemingway an existential concern that personal and social order are vulnerable and at risk. One's character will be tested by forces that are often beyond one's control. This is a primary concern in which both Hemingway and Didion sought to engage their readers.

Much had changed between the nineteen-twenties and the nineteen-sixties. America had become the predominant world power and its political, economic and cultural influence had grown in kind. Domestically, four successive terms of Democratic presidential leadership had improved the position of many working Americans through expanded benefits, stronger labour standards and access to collective bargaining. In the nineteen-fifties and sixties, family income doubled across the labour market and the gap in wealth distribution decreased significantly (Stone, 4-10). For the first time, ordinary Americans could afford the automobiles they made and could become homeowners.

The nineteen-fifties witnessed an explosion of consumer technology, notably television, that changed norms and the expectations of many Americans. The country was in the thrall of a "ferocious consumerism" where people were driven not by what they needed, but by what they needed to consume to keep up with their

neighbours (Halberstam, 506). Americans were encouraged to believe that a better, happier life as consumers awaited in the future.

But positive trends did not last. As the nineteen-sixties progressed, wage gains slowed and wealth inequality again began to widen (Stone, 4-10). Ominous events beset America: political assassinations (John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr), racial unrest and an ongoing American military presence in Vietnam, which caused many to view the United States “as a neocolonial power” (Appy, 3), and alarmed and divided the country. In the nineteen-sixties, drug use, street crime and random violence made Americans insecure in their own cities. Serial murders, often committed by strangers and sometimes committed in the homes of their victims unnerved the population.<sup>24</sup> Bob Dylan notes the feeling of anticipation of the turmoil to come in the decade in his memoir, *Chronicles* (2004):

In a few years' time a shit storm would be unleashed. Things would begin to burn. Bras, draft cards, American flags, bridges, too – everyone would be dreaming of getting it on. The national psyche would change and in many ways it would resemble the *Night of the Living Dead* (292).

Younger Americans challenged convention and political order, blaming the older generation for their frustrations. James Dean played the rebel and anti-hero in director and writer Rod Serling's television film *A Long Time Till Dawn* (1953). Serling drew the connection between the delinquency of the nineteen-fifties and the drug culture of the nineteen-sixties: “A terribly upset, psyched – out kid, a precursor to the hooked generation of the 60's, the type that became part of the drug/rock culture... There was a postwar mystification of the young, a gradual erosion of

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<sup>24</sup> The crimes of Richard Speck, the Manson family, Richard Hitchcock and Perry Smith are all good examples. Television brought an idealized representation of middle-class life into American homes, but also brought shocking images of assassination, war and crime directly to viewers across the nation.

confidence in their elders, in the so-called truths, in the whole litany of moral codes...they just didn't believe in them anymore" (Halberstam, 482). As Theresa Richardson notes:

In the 1950's adolescents emerged as a cultural, political, and economic force parents and other adults in and out of schools had to reckon with. Adult expectations for the behavior of the young were increasingly countered by the culture of teenagers. In the 1960s as this group expanded schooling beyond high school in record numbers the phenomena of young adults still unattached to the routines of adult responsibility expanded youth culture into their twenties...This subculture, with its disconnect from traditional adulthood began to seriously critique the dominant culture including the consumerism that had indulged their childhood. (5)

The Didion essays under consideration in this thesis are largely concerned with these social changes occurring in nineteen-sixties America. The people who are the subject of Didion's essays are primarily Americans who grew up in the affluence and security of postwar America, and who were raised to expect more. She saw in nineteen-sixties America a society that was fracturing, and found "evidence of atomization [of society], the proof that things fall apart" (xi) among the "children" of Haight-Ashbury. She found similar disorder in the domestic lives of ordinary Americans and in the leadership of political, religious and cultural figures. In her essays, the narrative advanced by the person or organization is under scrutiny and is often exposed as misleading. Didion also discovers that sometimes there may be no narrative at all, only disparate images, the "atomization" of society referred to above.

## 1.6 Shared Skepticism of Political Ideology

Both Hemingway and Didion were adept satirists, keenly aware of the political and social struggles of their respective eras, both highly sensitive to and skeptical of them. Both express a distrust of political leaders and ideologies in their respective non-fiction, challenging formidable political and social figures and revolutionaries. Dispatched to Europe as a correspondent for the *Toronto Star*, Hemingway was witness to some of the period's most significant political events, from the Genoa Conference to the beginnings of Mussolini's rise. About most of the political figures he encounters, Hemingway expresses skepticism and doubt, as does Didion, often diminishing their presence physically and figuratively in an effort to undermine political zeal and the elevation of the political or cultural leader to godlike status. As Keneth Kinnamon notes, "though interested in politics, he [Hemingway] disliked politicians and especially distrusted their appeals to patriotism" (157). Further, both are aware of cultural zeitgeists and are equally skeptical of their value and the intelligence of their proponents; Hemingway's "American Bohemians in Paris" and Didion's "Where The Kissing Never Stops" are two examples of this, compared and examined in the introduction to this thesis. In this section examples of Hemingway's early reporting and short story writing and Didion's early essay writing will also be compared and analyzed.

Several similarities can be found between Hemingway's short story "The Revolutionist" from *In Our Time* and Didion's essay, "Comrade Laski, C.P.U.S.A. (M.L.)", from *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. Thematically, both are concerned with the nascent and seemingly misguided political aspirations of two individuals, their motivations viewed with skepticism and detachment. Both are also relatively short texts, Hemingway's just shy of a page and a half, Didion's no longer than three and a half pages.

Both texts reflect the political turmoil of their respective periods; Hemingway's the rise of fascism and socialism throughout Europe in the nineteen-twenties, Didion's the international rise of communism viewed with fear and anxiety in the United States. However, upon closer analysis, it becomes clear that the politics are secondary to an existential crisis both "revolutionists" are experiencing, and that Hemingway and Didion are interested in examining ideology as a device used to construct a fictitious sense of order.

Hemingway's story, Kinnamon notes, is "overtly political" (152), but it is also concerned with individual psychology. The revolutionist is "very shy and quite young" (119). His infatuation with Italy suggests that this is perhaps the first time he has ventured from his native Hungary, and the generalities which he makes about the country confirm a childlike naivete in his world view: "He was delighted with Italy. It was a beautiful country, he said. The people were all kind. He had been in many towns, walked much, and seen many pictures" (119). The young man's judgement of an entire country hinges upon cursory judgments of superficialities. That he keeps reproductions of the "pictures" he likes "wrapped in a copy of *Avanti!*" (119),<sup>25</sup> is further indication that he is constructing an identity through whatever strikes his fancy, first socialist politics, now the works of famous Italian artists (Giotto, Masaccio, etc.).

This naivete is further reflected in the conversation he has with the story's unnamed narrator:

In spite of Hungary, he believed altogether in the world revolution.

"But how is the movement going in Italy?" he asked.

"Very badly," I said.

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<sup>25</sup> *Avanti!*, an Italian Socialist Party newspaper publication.

“But it will go better,” he said. “You have everything here. It is the one country that everyone is sure of. It will be the starting point of everything.”

I did not say anything. (119)

The young revolutionist’s unbridled optimism met by the narrator’s negativity and subsequent silence confirms a telling juxtaposition in thought, as Barbara S.

Groseclose describes it, of the meeting between, “the cynicism of experience and the idealism of innocence” (570). What can be surmised is that the narrator is not as blindly enthusiastic or as “full of illusions” (Kinamon, 161) about the same ideology as the young revolutionist; does not share his zeal. The story’s ending confirms the dangers of committing too strongly to an ideology: “He was very eager to walk over the pass while the weather held good. He loved the mountains in the autumn. The last I heard of him the Swiss had him in jail in Sion” (120). Hemingway summarizes the thematic thrust of the story in these final sentences: the dangers of unwaveringly embracing an ideology. The revolutionist’s youth is summed up in his eagerness to experience new things, to cross the mountains in good weather in autumn. This openness to experience is immediately subverted by the final, following sentence in which the revolutionist is imprisoned. The naïve eagerness of youth that demands experience to form identity is what caused the young Hungarian to engage with politics; not only did it offer a young mind an exciting new way of thinking, just as Italy offers the same mind a new idea of what life can be outside of one’s home, it provides an order, a structure that is rendered meaningless at the story’s conclusion. The revolutionist is now trapped, his movements confined. The belief that an ideology would liberate him and others around the world has in fact resulted in the physical entrapment which parallels the mental entrapment innate in committing to

an ideology. The order provided thereby, Hemingway suggests, is insufficient in illuminating an understanding of oneself and others' lived experience.

In Didion's Comrade Laski essay, similar ideas are at play. Just as in Hemingway's story, the reader is immediately introduced to the titular "revolutionary":

Michael Laski, also known as M.I. Laski, is a relatively obscure young man with deep fervent eyes, a short beard, and a pallor which seems particularly remarkable in Southern California. With his striking appearance and relentlessly ideological diction, he looks and talks precisely like the popular image of a professional revolutionary, which in fact he is. He was born twenty-six years ago in Brooklyn, moved as a child to Los Angeles, dropped out of U.C.L.A. in his sophomore year to organize for the retail clerks, and now as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party U.S.A. (Marxist-Leninist)...is rigidly committed to an immutable complex of doctrine. (52)

There are many obvious similarities here. Laski, like Hemingway's revolutionist, is young, professes commitment to a form of socialist ideology, and most importantly, has crafted an identity around said ideology, a pursuit symptomatic of the same youthful naiveté embodied in Hemingway's revolutionist. Interestingly, Didion's description of Laski's appearance and its conflation with his revolutionary ideology, the fact that he "looks and talks precisely like the popular image of a professional revolutionary, which in fact he is" (52) further indicates that Laski is wearing a costume of sorts, acting out a role rather than seeking to implement meaningful social and political change. What he actually believes is less clear than what he actively criticizes:

...the traditional American Communist Party is a “revisionist bourgeois clique,” that the Progressive Labour Party, the Trotskyites, and the “revolutionist clique headed by Gus Hall” prove themselves opportunistic bourgeois lackeys...Laski scorns deviationist reformers...His place in the geography of the American Left is, in short, an almost impossibly lonely and quixotic one, unpopular, unpragmatic. (52-3)

The references to the many different left of center political groups that Laski condemns is Didion’s way of suggesting the meaninglessness of such ideologies. They are splintered and separated and at odds with one another, all while falling under the same umbrella of “the American Left”. That Laski views them with such scorn indicates, as Didion later concludes, that he has constructed his political ideology to provide himself with a sense of individual order within the array of leftist movements rather than for any practical and attainable political objective: “You see what the world of Michael Laski is: a minor but perilous triumph of being over nothingness” (55).

Paul Heilker views Didion’s opinion of Laski differently: “Although some might argue that her praise approaches irony, any such irony is a manifestation of Didion’s envy that springs from her inability to completely articulate ‘such extreme and doomed commitments’ herself” (31). This seems like an overly generous opinion of Laski. Didion’s “praise” is clearly satire, for if she truly did “envy” Laski this ability, it is odd that her envy would be for someone who has only been able to express these “extreme and doomed commitments” through a complete denial of social reality, choosing to exist instead within a carefully constructed façade of pedantic and useless ideology. Laski is only able to communicate the sentiment Heilker claims to be the source of Didion’s “envy” because he has chosen such an immature means of

existential self-preservation, the classification of his “triumph of being over nothingness” as “minor”, confirmation of this.

Laski’s ideology then, as with Hemingway’s revolutionary, does not serve a political end so much as an existential one, a need to create order and a sense of purpose. In both Hemingway’s story and Didion’s essay this ideology is imbued with a more religious than political quality. Just as Hemingway’s revolutionist believes “altogether in the world revolution”, Laski is certain that the “workers” will “arise” in the United States. Neither the revolutionist nor Laski have any idea as to how exactly their respective fantasies will emerge, but continue to believe in them all the same. The silence of Hemingway’s narrator in response to the revolutionist’s blind optimism is tantamount to Didion’s pronouncement of Laski as an “idealist” – both are aware of the naivete of their subject.

The religious, submissive quality of Laski’s ideology is expounded upon further in Didion’s essay:

So much security may seem curious when one considers what the members of the cadre actually do, which is, aside from selling the *People’s Voice* and trying to set up People’s Armed Defence Groups, largely a matter of perfecting their own ideology, searching out “errors” and “mistakes” in one another’s attitudes. “What we do may seem like a waste of time to some people,” Michael Laski said suddenly. “Not having any ideology yourself, you might wonder what the Party offers. It offers nothing. It offers thirty or forty years of putting the Party above everything. It offers beatings. Jail. On the high levels assassination.” (54)

Laski’s activities, and that of his Party, pedantic in the extreme, are a pursuit of unduly specific analyses designed not to enrich understanding but rather as a means

through which to further separate themselves from their peers. They do not seek to identify practical solutions to social ills, but rather to purify themselves in their beliefs. That the Party “offers nothing”, or rather, offers what appears to be only punishment and pain, reminds the reader of the religious submission of the individual to a god. It appears as though Laski is aware of the fact that his ideology is a meaningless one as he admits that it “offers nothing”, but this is not so. The idea of offering nothing does in fact offer something to Laski’s naïve mind, as Didion explains in the following paragraph:

But of course that was offering a great deal. The world Michael Laski had constructed for himself was one of labyrinthine intricacy and immaculate clarity, a world made meaningful not only by high purpose but by external and internal threats, intrigues and apparatus, an immutably ordered world in which things mattered. (54)

Laski is not interested so much in politics as he is in creating a fictitious order so as to avoid an existential dread that might otherwise arise. Like Hemingway’s revolutionist, the generalities with which he views the outside world and the specifics whereby he governs his own ideology are a product of a young mind struggling to create order and meaning. As Didion observes, it is by creating this fiction for oneself, in which there is “high purpose” but also “external and internal threats” and an “ordered world in which things mattered” that Laski safeguards himself from existential crisis. The political aspect is largely irrelevant. Hemingway’s revolutionist, through his own experiences has legitimate reason to be wary of fascists and fascism: “Horthy’s men had done some bad things to him” (119), but his embrace of socialism and unwavering certainly against the backdrop of a vague, undefined

“world revolution” belies the same naivete as Laski’s dogmatic commitment to the Party.

In both Hemingway’s story and Didion’s essay, what at first appears to be an examination of the political is revealed as an examination of individual psychology. Hemingway begins his story with a short description of the revolutionist’s political predicament: “In 1919 he was travelling on the railroads in Italy, carrying a square of oilcloth from the headquarters of the party saying...here was a comrade who had suffered very much under the Whites in Budapest and requesting comrades to aid him in any way” (119), before describing what is of primary interest to the narrator, the individual character of the revolutionist himself: “He was very shy and quite young...He was delighted with Italy...Giotto, Masaccio, and Piero della Francesca he bought reproductions of...Mantegna he did not like...a very nice boy and very shy” (119). Similarly, after briefly describing Laski’s appearance, biography, and the development of his political affiliations and beliefs, Didion states in the second paragraph of her essay that: “Actually I was interested not in the revolution but in the revolutionary” (52). Both of these texts are concerned more with the individual than the political, both equally skeptical of the efficacy of an ideology as we see in their respective endings; Hemingway’s revolutionist in an actual jail cell, Laski and his Party members in a jail of their own making, engaging in the pedantic and pointless exercises which provide them the fictitious order they crave, in this case, discussing in detail the unsuccessful sales of the Party paper, which Didion describes as “a ceremony as formal as a gathering of the Morgan partners” (54). Hemingway and Didion conclude that political ideology is something which confines rather than liberates, that a rigid ideology is inadequate to provide comprehensive guidance in light of the complexity of individual psychology, and that the belief that such ideology

can actually bring “order” for the individual is a fiction embraced by a naïve and youthful mind.

Similar themes can be found in Hemingway’s newspaper article, “Genoa Conference”, here explored in the conflict between two political groups on the national level. As Michael Reynolds observes, Hemingway has identified the true significance of the event: “Genoa was designed to be an economic conference, not a political one, but Hemingway’s instincts were right: no matter what the economic settlements of the decade the real problem was political extremes: the far left and the far right” (42).

Hemingway’s distrust of these “political extremes” runs throughout the article, and allows him to comment not only on politics, but on the psychological ramifications it has for the individual as well. The Genoa conference was conceived in 1922 to discuss the reconstruction of Europe after World War I and to find ways for cooperation between capitalist countries and the Soviet Union. In the article Hemingway first lampoons the Italian communists, claiming that their enthusiasm for their political cause is more closely linked to alcohol consumption than true ideological conviction: “That is the way all Italian Red outbreaks start. Closing the cafes usually stops them. Uninspired by the vinous products of their native land, the Italian communist cannot keep his enthusiasm up to the demonstration point for any length of time” (26-7). He then notes that their gatherings are of a “casual and childish nature” (27). Here we see the dark humour at work in Hemingway’s reportage. That “the highest pitch of patriotism” (27) can only be achieved through imbibing alcohol indicates that the commitment to politics is less fervent than it appears and depends on physical intoxication. If he means to discredit the Italian communists by claiming that they are all drunkards who lack true conviction, he is no

more sparing of the fascists, who he also views with trepidation: "The fascisti...had a taste of unpenalized lawlessness, unpunished murder, and the right to riot when and where they pleased. So now they have become almost as great a danger to the peace of Italy as the Reds ever were" (27).

Hemingway feels no allegiance to either side; both are darkly amusing and dangerous in their own way. The juxtaposition between the drunken Italian communist and the violent Italian fascist illustrate that the feature most powerfully linking the two groups is their similar interest in debauched pursuits, one manifesting itself in celebratory drunkenness, the other drunk on violence. He goes on to say of the average Italian communist that "he does not want to fight for it, or convert the world to it, he merely wants to talk about it, as he has from time immemorial" (28). He declares of the fascists that they: "The fascisti are young, tough, ardent, intensely patriotic, generally good looking with the youthful beauty of the south races, and firmly convinced that they are in the right. They have an abundance of the valor and intolerance of youth" (28). Both of these groups, though of opposing political ideology, share a lack of awareness for what they are actually doing, what they truly believe in. The Italian communist does not care so much about the implication of their ideology as they do talking about it, while the young fascisti are convinced of the justness of their cause because they are young and arrogant. In both cases, Hemingway indicates that the politics themselves, which are equally threatening, are secondary to the creation of an identity through adherence to an ideology, that the members of both groups are struggling to create an identity for themselves as individuals that will simultaneously grant membership within a larger social group. The combination of a desire for individual order of thought through adherence to an

ideology and group approval is what drives both communist and fascist; the political content is secondary.

Hemingway goes on to describe in detail some of the brutal killings committed by the Italian communists and fascists, before examining a third party only briefly mentioned at the start of the article:

To prevent any fascisti-Red rows happening in Genoa, the fifteen hundred military police have been brought in...And, as the fascisti fear the carabinieri, when they have orders to shoot, as much as the Reds fear the fascisiti, there is a pretty good chance that order will be kept. (28-9)

Here the article reaches its satirical apex. Hemingway has just detailed some of the violent interactions between the Italian communists and fascists, and in introducing in greater detail the carabinieri, the power of the state, exposes the foolishness of these different political ideologies for what they produce: Italians murdering Italians. That none of the carabinieri are natives of Genoa and feel free to “shoot either side without fear or favour” underscores the lunacy of political divisions that result in needless human death. These carabinieri, while obviously representing the establishment, represent a regime whose day has passed, with “their three-cornered Napoleon hats”, in contrast to the more youthful fascists who “fear” them. It is doubtful that this is praise for establishment rule, but rather further indication that, regardless of political allegiance, violence will always be used to establish control when political tensions are heightened. At the same time, one cannot help but consider the imagery Hemingway uses as being evocative of a stern parent warning two wayward children to behave themselves. However, it is worth noting that Hemingway would have been only twenty-three when this article was published, still a young man himself. The object of his satire is what he sees as youthful arrogance

and the quest for an identity through ideology; and their contrast with a group characterized by actual experience, “the bravest troops and best marksmen in the Italian army” (29).

In an article published shortly after “Genoa Conference”, entitled “Russian Girls at Genoa”, Hemingway satirizes the collective, “enlightened” coming to speak together, much as Didion does in her essay “California Dreaming”. Both the conference described by Hemingway and the meetings of “The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions” described by Didion occur in opulent settings, and are attended by society leaders and elites, but both seem, to the respective authors, devoid of any true meaning or even direction in their objectives.

Hemingway begins his description of the conference by describing “The great hall of the Palazzo San Giorgio, where the sessions of the Genoa conference are held” (30). Hemingway immediately compares it in size to Toronto’s Massey Hall; an interesting comparison, as Palazzo San Giorgio was constructed by a Doge in the thirteenth century, later becoming a bank, while Massey Hall was and is a concert venue, initially conceived of by its creator, Edward Massey, as a music venue in which rich and poor alike could gather, profit being secondary to the accessibility of music to anyone interested in hearing it: “Everything beyond that is to go to reduce the price of admission, so that the hall may be to benefit the poor rather than the rich” (Bateman). Immediately there is a contrast established between the elite, aristocratic classes who largely ruled Europe at the time, and common people, leading the reader to wonder whether the resolutions made by the attendees of the conference gathering in Palazzo San Giorgio will have any practical bearing upon the lives of their constituents.

It is also interesting that Hemingway postpones description of the conference attendees, or delegates, until he has described the hall in some detail. He describes “a marble statue of Columbus sitting on a pale marble throne sunk deep into the wall” (30). A rather grand image is then contrasted with how he describes the hall’s layout: “Columbus, and the press gallery at the other end of the hall, look down on a rectangle of green-covered tables arranged in the familiar shape of tables at banquets, lodges, Y.M.C.A. dinners and college reunions” (30). Here the image of the grand palace hall is diminished by its comparison with the ordinary; a Y.M.C.A. dinner or a college reunion. Perhaps, despite their seemingly grand nature, the delegates to the conference are not as exceptional as their gathering place might be intended to imply. Hemingway also describes a plaque bearing an inscription of a quotation from Machiavelli, stating that: “Machiavelli, in his day, wrote a book that could be used as a text-book by all conferences, and, from all results, is diligently studied” (30). Though he does not mention the title of this book explicitly, it is reasonable to assume that he is referring to Machiavelli’s famous work, *The Prince* (1532), in which advice is provided on how to prevail over one’s political opponents, often through the most cunning and ruthless means possible. This provides us further confirmation of Hemingway’s apparent distrust of politicians and elites, or at least if not outright distrust his skepticism of them, their true intentions, and the efficacy of the plans that they make. Finally, Hemingway describes another plaque on which is imprinted “two letters from Columbus to the Queen of Spain and the Commune of Genoa. Both letters are highly optimistic in tone” (30). Again, there is a subtle irony at work here; the optimism surrounding the conference and its imagined effects rendered, as we will see at the end, in a rather pessimistic tone.

Only then, after four paragraphs describing the hall itself, does Hemingway begin to describe the delegates: "They cannot find their place at the table, and stand talking" (30). This first description of the delegates immediately establishes both an overarching feeling of confusion surrounding the conference, as well a level of incompetence on the delegates' part: "The rows of camp chairs that are to hold the invited guests begin to be filled with the top-hatted, white-mustached senators and women in Paris hats and wonderful, wealth-reeking fur coats. The fur coats are the most beautiful things in the hall" (30-1). Here, another jab at the elites at this gathering, made explicit in the mention of the "wealth-reeking fur coats". That these coats are "the most beautiful things in the hall" illustrates Hemingway's feeling towards his surroundings, both the architectural and the human, again diminishing the self-importance of the assembled elites.

Turning to the hall itself again, Hemingway describes "the pale marble effigies of the fine, swash-buckling pirates and traders that made Genoa a power in the old days when all the cities of Italy were at one another's throats" (31). This comment carries more than one meaning. Hemingway is both comparing the tendencies of contemporary delegates attending the conference to the hostile nature of their ancestors, on display in the form of artwork in the hall, as well as hinting at the instability of postwar Europe, the conference intended to be a way to negotiate the rebuilding of the continent after the catastrophe of the First World War, in which the nations of Europe were "at one another's throats".

Hemingway's attention is increasingly directed at the participants. His description of Marcel Cachin, leader of the French communist party, provides an example of what he sees as political hypocrisy: "Marcel Cachin, editor of *Humanite*, circulation 250,000, and leader of the French communist party, comes in and sits

behind me. He has a drooping face, frayed red mustache and his black tortoise shell spectacles are constantly on the point of sliding off the tip of his nose. He has a very rich wife and can afford to be a communist" (31). First, what appear to be somewhat impressive credentials are listed, then a physical description of decrepitude is provided, and then the hypocrisy of wealth is revealed. Italian General Gonzaga is described as having "a withered apple of a face" (31); Charles Blair Gordon, leader of the Canadians, as "blonde, ruddy-faced and a little ill at ease" (32), and Dr. Wirth, German Chancellor, as "like a tuba player in a German band" (32). They are, as Kinnamon notes, "less than flattering" (158) descriptions. What might appear on a first reading as insulting, is, in reality, an attempt to reduce elites and political figures to human scale. These are not special people, they have positions of power, but they are, when the façade of titles is stripped away, normal and unremarkable human beings. These descriptions are consistent with Hemingway and Didion's attitudes towards the broader political movements that they represent that are not remarkable in principle, but may be threatening in practice.

The article's ending reinforces this point. The Soviet delegation finally enter and are given, by Hemingway, the same treatment as their counterparts:

Litvinoff, with a big ham-like face, is in the lead...After him comes Tchitcherin with his indeterminate face, his indefinite beard and his nervous hands. They blink at the light from the chandelier. Krassin is next. He has a mean face and a carefully tailored Van Dyke beard and looks like a prosperous dentist. Joffe is last. He has a long, narrow, spade beard, and wears gold rimmed glasses.  
(32)

That the Soviet delegation, for whom the other delegates have waited, is also described in all of their physical imperfection and ordinariness serves to reinforce

Hemingway's interest in humanizing these figures, removing from them the façade of grandeur, much as he does with the physical space they all share, the hall itself, throughout the article.

Hemingway follows this with a description of the secretaries to the Russian delegation, after which the article is named: "A mass of secretaries follow the Russian delegates, including two girls with fresh faces, hair bobbed in the fashion started by Irene Castle, and modish tailored suits. They are far and away the best looking girls in the conference hall" (32). The secretaries, who are unnamed, and no doubt viewed by the rest of the conference as of no importance, are the only two Hemingway describes positively with no derisive remarks about physical imperfection or conceit. They have "fresh faces" and "are far and away the best looking girls in the conference hall" (32). The implication is that the average person is of equal value to the great statesman or political leader. These secretaries may be unnamed and forgotten, but they are also the only two figures in the article who are not described by amusing attribute or demeanor.

Historian Kenneth O. Morgan says of the Genoa conference:

Genoa was a watershed in international diplomacy...Never again would such a large, rambling assembly, on the lines of Paris in 1919, be convened, until San Francisco in 1945...There was too little detailed preparation, too much generalized optimism, too many disparate issues muddled up with one another. In many ways, it was a parody of summit diplomacy at its worst.

(316)

It would appear, based on Hemingway's conclusion to the article that, to some extent, he anticipated such a result: "The Russians are seated. Some one hisses for silence, and Signor Facta starts the dreary round of speeches that sends the

conference under way” (32). There is a hiss “for silence”, already suggesting an undercurrent of hostility, and the speeches are “dreary”. Here we have an indication of what is to come: a long, drawn-out process in which positions will be stated and ultimately nothing will be achieved. Though Hemingway could not have known the exact outcome of the conference, as this article was published on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1922 and the conference did not conclude until May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1922, it is reasonable to hypothesize from Hemingway’s assessment of the delegates to the conference, and his skepticism of political ideology as expressed in this and his previous “Genoa Conference” article, as well as in his short stories, that there is a lack of optimism on the author’s part surrounding political machinations and dealings. It is perhaps best described not as outright condemnation, through which alternative solutions are offered, but rather as an overall skepticism towards prevailing ideologies that were not sufficient to serve the purposes of either individual or social progress.

Didion explores a similar theme, the failing of an apparently elite group to provide political or cultural solutions and guidance in her essay “California Dreaming”. In this essay, Didion explores the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, an apparently elite and somewhat “mysterious” group of people who meet regularly in a mansion on the Pacific coast, devoting their time to “what they like to call ‘clarifying the basic issues’” (60). It becomes clear, through close analysis, that these people are to Didion much like the delegates to the Genoa conference are to Hemingway: individuals who, though they may hold prestigious roles in society and great public influence are unremarkable and largely ineffective in their confused efforts.

It is reasonable to hypothesize that the essay, published in 1967, borrows its title from the famous pop song of 1965, “California Dreamin’” by The Mamas and the

Papas, a popular Los Angeles based band. The song itself is concerned with a narrator who, while longing for the warmth of California in the midst of a cold, New York City winter enters a church: "Stopped into a church/I passed along the way/Well, I got down on my knees/And I pretend to pray/You know the preacher likes the cold/He knows I'm gonna stay" (Phillips, Phillips). The narrator's seeking the church for warmth, but only pretending to pray so as to be permitted further respite from the cold presents a confused image of an individual in a place of spiritual guidance feigning engagement with it for alternative, self-interested reasons. The preacher is happy to have lured another victim into his lair; he is, like those in charge at The Center, hiding behind lofty ideals to attract followers. This narrator inhabits a role much like Didion does over the course of her essay: she visits the centre not because she takes any great stock in its cultural or political exchanges and influence, but rather to observe what she appears to view largely as an exercise in futility. The narrator enters the church to stay warm, Didion attends the centre for a story. Further, "California Dreaming" implies a collective fantasy amongst the people that she goes on to describe in the essay, people who are operating on a more superficial than intellectual, or practical, plane.

It does appear, on the surface, that the Center's goals, and the issues that it wishes to address are noble ones, but what also becomes clear is that they are elusive, rooted in perhaps the same misguided optimism that plagued the Genoa Conference. They are described by Didion as falling into:

...several broad areas...The City, say, or The Emerging Constitution. Papers are prepared, read revised, reread, and sometimes finally published. This process is variously described by those who participate in it as "pointing the

direction for all of us toward a greater understanding” and “applying human reason to the complex problems of our brand-new world.” (61)

Such broad subjects, by their very nature, evade any actual meaning. So many different things could be meant by “greater understanding” and “the complex problems of our brand-new world” (61). Serious study would require a multitude of different minds exploring different avenues of thought and opinion, but as Didion observes, the Center is “a favoured retreat for people whom the Center’s president, Robert M. Hutchins, deems controversial, stimulating, and, perhaps above all, cooperative, or *our kind*” (60).

Hutchins’ pronouncement is in itself very limiting, even paradoxical: to want members whom he “deems” to be “controversial” and “stimulating”, but who are also entirely “cooperative”. It is difficult to imagine how any of the “goals” of the Center, vague as they may be, could possibly be achieved by simply amassing a group of likeminded people committed to cooperate in their results. Even to be likeminded in emphasizing the importance of controversy and stimulation is to be, in a certain way, reductive. One is reminded of Didion’s Laski, blindly committed to his Party ideology, just like Hemingway’s Italian communists and fascists. A rigidity in an approach to thought inevitably becomes ideological and ultimately confining. Further, that the Center is comprised of a select group of people who are “members” reminds one again of the membership of political parties explored by Hemingway and Didion, the focus being on a need to create an identity and a sense of belonging as much as to achieve the professed goals of the ideology or organization itself.

Didion goes on to explore the frivolous output that is the result of the Center’s efforts: “I have long been interested in the Center’s rhetoric, which has about it the kind of ectoplasmic generality that always makes me sense I am on the track of the

real soufflé, the genuine American *kitsch*" (61). Didion's description of the Center and its members is rife with irony. This is evident in her classification of the Center's "rhetoric" as "ectoplasmic generality" and "genuine American *kitsch*", alongside her simultaneous reassurance that her visit to the Center "was in no sense time wasted" (61), followed by the subsequent exposure of the mundane, pretentious contents of one of their "high-powered" (61) talks. Though there is an inescapable level of sarcasm in her statement that it "was in no sense time wasted", the reader can also take Didion at her word. Didion's time at the Center, and her observations, confirm the meaninglessness of its supposedly profound objectives. As demonstrated by a conversation she subsequently describes about violence in society, in which one participant banally blames "Westerns on Television" (61) and another agrees, when a group's thought becomes homogenous, as per Hutchins' already expressed desire for the Center, it becomes, like a political ideology, next to worthless in addressing "the complex problems of our brand-new world" (61).

There is also, as with Didion's Laski or Hemingway's Genoa Conference delegates or arrogant young Italian fascisti, a level of pompousness, of self-importance at the Center that perpetuates a continued belief in its own legitimacy:

Every word uttered at the Center is preserved on tape, and not only colleges and libraries but thousands of individuals receive Center tapes and pamphlets...Seventy-five thousand people a year then write fan letters to the Center, confirming the staff in its conviction that everything said around the place mystically improves the national, and in fact international, weal. (61)

The Center's proselytizing reminds one of the preacher in the song by The Mamas and the Papas, someone who believes that they sit in a position of elite leadership, ready to dispense wisdom to those who will listen. Didion's probing as far as to who

is listening reveals greater detail of the Center's identity crisis, and is met with a confused deflection from those within the organization: "The notion that providing useful papers for eighth-grade current-events classes and reading for regular teenagers might not be at all times compatible with establishing 'a true intellectual community'" (62). Again, Didion makes apparent the identity crisis that the Center is suffering. It is both "intellectual" and "anti-intellectual", exclusive and elevated yet accessible and ordinary. Hutchins does not know, despite being the Center's president, more than anyone else seems to know, what the Center is or is not, describing its members paradoxically as an "intellectual community" (62) comprised of individuals who do not "regard themselves as intellectuals" (62). Hutchins' reliance on the words of Adlai Stevenson<sup>26</sup>, politician, diplomat and candidate for President, provides a concrete political connection, and one which Didion might be including as further means to hint at the Center's "practical" failure, rather than "utility", referencing Stevenson who suffered devastating losses to Dwight Eisenhower in two separate presidential elections. Finally, in this passage Didion presents further evidence of the irony inherent in the Center's condemnation of anything "undemocratic", juxtaposed with the earlier desire on the organization's part to remain homogenous in thought and opinion.

Didion notes towards the end of the essay that the Center has long run out of money from its original Ford Foundation grant, the Center requires one million dollars a year to maintain itself, and that "Some twelve thousand contributors provide the million a year, and it helps if they can think of a gift to the Center not as a gift to support some visionaries who never met a payroll but 'as an investment [tax-exempt]

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<sup>26</sup> "Hutchins likes to quote Adlai Stevenson on this point: 'the Center can be thought of as a kind of national insurance plan, a way of making certain that we will deserve better and better'" (Didion, 62).

in the preservation of our free way of life” (62). What the Center is, Didion finally concludes, in its truest form, is a gift that garners support through tax incentives and the spouting of vague platitudes presented as intellectual, cultural or political national thought. Didion continues: “It helps, too, to present the donor with a fairly broad-stroke picture of how the Center is besieged by the forces of darkness, and in this effort the Center has had an invaluable, if unintentional ally in the Santa Barbara John Birch Society” (62). Again, there is an irony in an organization that paints itself as the victim of “the forces of darkness” allying itself with a far-right group that opposes the civil rights movement and the equality of women. Here we are reminded again of Hemingway’s communists and fascists; the Center does not care as much about being a “democratic” institution as it does about its own survival, selling false intellectual credentials and taking the donor’s money. The similarities between the Center and a far-right organization are perhaps greater than would have been initially apparent absent Didion’s investigative gaze. Like the communists and the fascists, these are organizations that seek to impose an order, to self-preserve and create identity; the actual values are secondary, and in the case of the Center, seemingly impossible to identify in any meaningful way. Finally, Didion reveals the Center’s final and perhaps most important source of funding: “Actually, even without the Birch Society as a foil, Hutchins has evolved the  $E=mc^2$  of all fundraising formulae. The Center is supported on the same principle as a vanity press. People who are in a position to contribute large sums of money are encouraged to participate in clarifying the basic issues” (62-3). She goes on to list the various celebrities who have been admitted to membership, and the various subjects they discuss, from the comedian Steve Allen, discussing “Ideology and Intervention” to the actor Paul Newman, discussing “The University in America” (63). By allowing

American celebrity elites to buy their way into the Center, by giving them access to the “big table”, the Center reveals that meaningful analysis is secondary to its primary purpose, its desire for money in order to ensure its own preservation.

Between actors Jack Lemmon and Paul Newman there is another facile exchange, equally meaningless to that Didion which mentions previously regarding violence in society and Westerns on television:

...and another concerned citizen, Jack Lemmon. “Apropos of absolutely nothing,” Mr. Lemmon says, pulling on a pipe, “just for my own amazement – I don’t *know*, but I *want* to know –” At this juncture he wants to know about student unrest, and, at another, he worries that government contracts will corrupt “pure research.”

“You mean maybe they get a grant to develop some new kind of *plastic*,” Mr. Newman muses, and Mr. Lemmon picks up the cue: “What happens then to the humanities?” (63)

Another hollow conversation expressed in empty abstractions, confused and disjointed, unsure of its aims, and arriving at no real conclusion. It is a perfect dialogical parallel for the nature of the Center itself. Didion’s shift from referring to Jack Lemmon to Mr. Lemmon, which she does also with Mr. Newman, previously referred to in the same paragraph as Paul Newman achieves the same end as Hemingway’s belittling descriptions of the physical appearance of different world leaders at the Genoa Conference. Jack Lemmon and Paul Newman, household names at that time in American popular culture, are mockingly elevated to “Mr.”, but by denying them their first names, Didion also denies them the identity of their celebrity status, further underscoring the frivolity of their “big idea” conversation. By becoming Mr. Lemmon and Mr. Newman, they are reduced to normal status. The

thin veneer of intellectualism under which can be found a meaningless conversation acts a parallel to their exposure as normal human beings; something that appears superficially profound and important is rendered meaningless and even perhaps foolish. Mr. Lemmon and Mr. Newman are no longer Hollywood stars, but rather ordinary, even silly, men, much as Hemingway's Soviet delegation, so long expected at the conference, are of ordinary and sometimes silly appearance despite their political positions; human beings that "blink at the light from the chandelier" (32) under which they pass.

Didion concludes the essay by describing the result of these pretentious talks:

Everyone goes home flattered, and the Center prevails. Well, why not? One morning I was talking with the wife of a big contributor as we waited on the terrace for one of the Center's ready-mixed martinis and a few moments' chat with Dr. Hutchins. "These sessions are way over my head," she confided, "but I go out floating on air." (63)

The contributor's wife does not understand the sessions, but they still leave her with a sense of elation. She does not understand these "sessions" perhaps through no fault of her own, since they appear to be nonsensical and frivolous ("clarifying the basic issues"). Nonetheless, she is taken in by the Center's façade and she leaves impressed by what she observes and hears. Like Hemingway's impressionable young Hungarian in "The Revolutionist", the woman has been sold something that appears to provide an identity, a membership in something larger than herself, but which she does not fully understand, and which is ultimately meaningless. That they are both waiting to drink "the Center's ready-mixed martinis" is another reminder, alongside the membership of celebrities and the Center's location in a mansion on the Pacific coast that this is an institution for the elite, much as Hemingway's Genoa

conference is a gathering for wealthy male senators and their female counterparts who wear “wealth-reeking fur coats”. These people do not appear to be interested, despite what they may profess, in the average citizen, beyond controlling and influencing them, and ultimately exploiting them. Again, we are reminded of the preacher from the song with which Didion’s essay shares its title who “likes the cold”; any method through which to popularize and preach one’s ideology for personal gain is desirable for these figures, towards whom Didion and Hemingway share a healthy skepticism. Didion’s query “Well, why not?” indicates that though she may herself view the Center as a confused and ultimately ridiculous institution, her skepticism leaves her immune to its absurdities. Much as Hemingway does not identify with communism or fascism, exposing both as ultimately misguided in their attempts to create and impose ideology and social order, Didion has exposed and dismissed the work of the Center and is indifferent to its effects. She will remain untouched by them. For Didion, like Hemingway, skepticism and an unwillingness to accept platitudes disguised as profound thoughts at face value is a liberating tool that allows one to remain on the periphery and retain and develop one’s critical acumen.

### 1.7 “Expatriates” and Social Change

In the introduction to this thesis, a brief analysis and comparison was made between Hemingway’s newspaper article “American Bohemians in Paris” and Didion’s essay “Where the Kissing Never Stops”. In both texts there is a similar thematic interest in youth who have left home to seek meaning, often appearing arrogant, foolish and irresponsible in their actions. The writers share a skepticism in the efficacy of such migration, though, to some extent, it is also an activity that both writers engaged in in their own lives. Just as both write stylistically from a shared

experience working for newspapers and magazines, both write with insider knowledge of the experience of an expatriate. This writing is also often possessed of a political as well as cultural slant; these youth are misguided but can also be identified as products of society in the midst of significant change. In this section we will consider the shared thematic interest between the two writers in expatriates, youth and national upheaval using examples from Hemingway's reportage and early fiction and Didion's early essay writing.

The eponymous essay in Didion's *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* chronicles the events surrounding the youthful counterculture and rebellion in San Francisco's infamous Haight-Ashbury district. Structurally, the essay takes the form of various scenes, in which Didion reports on her interactions (primarily) with different countercultural figures, sometimes interspersed with fragments of italicized song lyrics. Eva-Sabine Zehelein describes the complementary fragmentation of structure and theme:

The first two paragraphs preceding the Haight-Ashbury kaleidoscope establish a synopsis, and the first sentence is already programmatic or repetitive: "The center was not holding" (84). Just as the text splits up into numerous disconnected atomic fragments, so does—and that is Didion's overriding thesis and theme—American society as she perceives it. American society is deeply involved in an incessant process of disintegration. (5)

It is not unreasonable to make a structural connection between these "disconnected atomic fragments", as Zehelein classifies them, and the overarching structure of Hemingway's *In Our Time*. Just as the vignettes and stories in Hemingway's collection are disconnected from one another, but address similar thematic concerns, so do Didion's scenes of the destructive behavior of youth in Haight-Ashbury convey

thematically an image of a chaotic postwar American cultural experience. Didion takes this a step further. She has written the scenes without connecting them in a linear narrative, interspersing them with one another, revisiting, shifting focus and revisiting again in order to create the “kaleidoscope” effect Zehelein describes. We might, in fact, imagine Didion’s scenes as the stories in Hemingway’s collection, the short, italicized snatches of song lyric or spiritual proclamation the equivalent of Hemingway’s inter-chapter vignettes; concise reports that remind us of the disorder we might lose sight of when we search for connections in the text as a whole.

What Zehelein describes as “disintegration” might be more accurately described as sudden cultural shift; what appears to be disintegrating is in fact abruptly altering, in this case, through sudden changes in American values, not dissimilar to the changes that Hemingway observes in his own writing. What is most starkly apparent in this shift in values is a rejection of the past generation’s tradition. Though one might argue that this is symptomatic of every generation, it is arguable that the changes occurring during periods of economic prosperity in twentieth-century, postwar America gave rise to a more fundamental division between the values of the older and younger generations than in other periods.

Didion certainly perceives the changes occurring; she seeks to understand them in order to glean some meaning regarding this generational shift. Just as she observes the frivolity of the “intellectual” activities of the Center in “California Dreaming”, she struggles to understand what value system and ideology, if any, the youth of Haight-Ashbury possess. At the start of “Slouching Towards Bethlehem”, Didion presents us with two different versions of America in the mid to late nineteen-sixties. In the first:

Adolescents drifted from city to torn city, sloughing off both the past and the future as snakes shed their skins, children who were never taught and would never learn the games that had held the society together. People were missing. Children were missing. Parents were missing. Those left behind filed desultory missing-persons reports, then moved on themselves. (67)

Against the backdrop of this bleak, wayward America stand the youth: already described by Didion as aimless and without guidance. One notices a reporting style similar to that of Hemingway, particularly in the second, third and fourth sentences of the paragraph in which three, three-word sentences ending with the same two words follow one after another. Didion then contrasts this bleak vision of America in the following paragraph:

It was the United States of America in the cold late spring of 1967, and the market was steady and the G.N.P. high and a great many articulate people seemed to have a sense of high social purpose and it might have been a spring of brave hopes and national promise, but it was not, and more and more people had the uneasy apprehension that it was not. All that seemed clear is that we had aborted ourselves and butchered the job. (67)

This is the America of the older generation; steady, stable, prosperous. Didion's suggestion that this society "aborted ourselves and butchered the job" implies that a new generation, never fully formed, is struggling to find meaning within the American cultural, social and political framework. That the "missing children" (67) are assembling in San Francisco, on America's west coast, reflects the youthful expatriate movement of the nineteen-twenties, except instead of travelling across the ocean to Europe, the youth travel across the American continent to California. This is a commonality shared by Didion and Brautigan, as will be seen later, which further

confirms California as being, in the nineteen-sixties, the destination of the young American seeking escape and adventure.

There is, amongst this generation, an obvious identity crisis that does not appear, to Didion, to be surmountable. Like Comrade Laski, or the members of the Center, the young people she encounters in Haight-Ashbury do not know what they stand for, what value system they have, united only in their conviction that they are dissatisfied with the conventional America of the previous generation, seeking liberation through drug-abuse and what they perceive to be activism. The reader is given a taste of this aimlessness and this use of drugs in Didion's first encounter with a young person in Haight-Ashbury:

"What are you looking for," he says.

I say nothing much.

"I've been out of my mind for three days," he says. He tells me he's been shooting crystal, which I already pretty much know because he does not bother to keep his sleeves rolled down over the needle tracks. He came up from Los Angeles some number of weeks ago, he doesn't remember what number, and now he'll take off for New York, if he can find a ride. I show him a sign offering a ride to Chicago. He wonders where Chicago is. I ask where he comes from. "Here," he says. I mean before here. "San Jose, Chula Vista. I dunno. My mother's in Chula Vista."

A few days later I run into him in Golden Gate Park when the Grateful Dead are playing. I ask if he found a ride to New York.

"I hear New York's a bummer," he says. (68-9)

Immediately apparent are the stylistic similarities with Hemingway's writing. The concise sentences often no more than five or six words long, the detachment on

Didion's part, requiring the reader's effort to draw their own conclusions about the more particular details surrounding this kid's history, circumstances and how he will survive. There is also the dialogue, concise and direct, in which the character being addressed speaks in explicit dialogue, while the narrator does not, something characteristic of much of Hemingway's work.

Louis Menand has remarked on the characteristics of the New Journalism in Didion's essay as she appears to participate in life on the streets to give force to her observations, while, in fact, keeping her distance:

Didion used a vernacular voice that mimicked the laid-back aimlessness of Haight speech. More New Journalistically, she adopted a Haight personality. She blended into the scenes; she internalized its confusions. She gave readers a sense that she was putting herself at risk by reporting this story, that she might get sucked into the Haight abyss and become a lost soul, too.

(5)

Didion lures the reader into her writing just as she lures those she interviews into voluntary conversation. She employs conversational detachment to convince the reader and the interviewee of her accessibility and objectivity. The reader must hunt out Didion's meaning. This is similar to Hemingway's technique of omission, although in Didion's essays the connections are often not to be found.

This vignette, among the shortest in the essay, is significant in that it encapsulates the different thematic interests Didion will pursue throughout. First there is the drug abuse. When the youth sits down and asks, "what are you looking for" (68), the implication is made that he might have drugs to sell to Didion. This is followed by the admission that he has been "out of his mind" for three days "shooting crystal". Secondly, there is the surrender to aimlessness: the young man knows that

he came from Los Angeles, but does not remember when. He professes some interest in going to New York City, but “only if he can find a ride”, and when Didion encounters him in San Francisco a few days later, he has apparently changed his plans, because he has heard “New York’s a bummer”. He does not know where he came from and has no real idea where he is going, and though Didion describes this in terms of geography, it is an obvious metaphor for the trajectory the young man’s life is taking; one shared by many of his contemporaries. He has no capacity to evaluate his options or plan his actions. In commenting on the aimlessness of the Haight-Ashbury youth Menand points to an obvious contributing factor: “There was nothing unusual about finding, at the core of a life-style trend of which the use of controlled substances is an integral feature, a group of full-time dropouts” (8). But there is more at work here than simply drugs and disillusionment. It is what this behavior represents more broadly: the young man represents a divide between the younger and the older generations in America. Again, Didion uses geography as a metaphor for a broader disconnect. The fact that the young man does not know where Chicago is belies a lack of awareness of not just American geography, but of American identity itself. The young man does not know where one of the country’s largest cities is because it is meaningless to him, just as the value systems of conventional, postwar America serve no purpose for him. This is reinforced by the fact that he is confused about where he is from: “San Jose, Chula Vista, I dunno. My mother’s in Chula Vista” (69). Though he is an American, he isn’t really sure of his place of origin, and is seemingly unconcerned with it, suggesting a disaffection with his national identity. That Didion runs into him again at Golden Gate Park watching the Grateful Dead is also significant. Here a park constructed in America’s previous century plays host to one of the nineteen-sixties’ most famous and experimental rock

groups. The contrast between past and current culture is amplified by this evocation of contemporary pop culture against the backdrop of a previous age. In this short vignette, Didion has established the thematic interests that will be developed in the rest of the essay.

The Grateful Dead are mentioned again soon after in another vignette about the young girls who “live on the celebrity and power and sex a band projects...there are three of them out here this afternoon in Sausalito where the Grateful Dead rehearse. They are all pretty and two of them still have baby fat and one of them dances by herself with her eyes closed” (71). These young girls have found a “direction” of sorts in their mutual attraction to a popular band, but they are shown to be as aimless as the drug addled youth Didion encountered earlier: “I ask a couple of the girls what they do. ‘I just sort of come out here a lot,’ one of them says. ‘I just sort of know the Dead,’ the other says” (71). The repeated, noncommittal “I just sort of” confirms an uncertainty as to what these girls “do”, which they admit to in the second half of their respective sentences. Their words are vague and meaningless, they are anchored only in an association with celebrity pop culture. But this pop culture, even counterculture, that the Grateful Dead represent, is not enough to provide the girls with any substantial sense of identity or direction, as we see in the closing lines of the vignette: “The boys take a break and one of them talks about playing the Los Angeles Cheetah, which is in the old Aragon Ballroom. ‘We were up there drinking beer where Lawrence Welk used to sit,’ Jerry Garcia says. The little girl who was dancing by herself giggles. ‘Too much,’ she says softly. Her eyes are still closed” (71). Identification with celebrity is not enough to offer these young girls meaning, as exemplified by the little girl dancing at the end of the vignette. She is “by herself”, separated from the group, and “her eyes are still closed”. She is a metaphor

for how Didion views this generation of youth; alienated, alone, blind and without identity. Her words, "Too much", are meaningless and they can be interpreted in any number of ways as a response to Garcia's statement. However, in a broader sense, they encapsulate what Didion perceives as an overwhelming maelstrom engulfing disenfranchised American youth; there is too much meaninglessness, too much ignorance and too much simultaneous conviction and uncertainty amongst the young people of this generation.

When Didion encounters Officer Arthur Gerrans, the reader is offered brief insight into how the divide between generations is viewed by the conventional figures of authority. Didion's "interrogation" of Gerrans in his own interrogation room implies that he is not in control, in the same way the older generation can no longer control the emerging, aimless younger one:

We are in an interrogation room and I am interrogating Officer Gerrans. He is young and blond and wary and I go in slow. I wonder what he thinks "the major problems" in the Haight are.

Officer Gerrans thinks it over. "I would say the major problems there," he says finally, "the major problems are narcotics and juveniles. Juveniles and narcotics, those are your major problems."

I write that down. (73)

The "problems" that Gerrans identifies, which he repeats in a refrain ("major problems...narcotics and juveniles/juveniles and narcotics...major problems"), are not the fundamental problems that Didion has observed at all. They are superficial symptoms of the larger issues she has identified. If Gerrans, despite his youth, is emblematic of the older generation's established authority, their perception of the "major problems" among the kids who have drifted to Haight-Ashbury focuses on the

symptoms of larger societal issues. In this vignette Didion leaves the reader wondering if perhaps the “atomization” of American society is an inevitable process. If the previous generation is so inept at diagnosing the problems of its children, perhaps there is a legitimacy in the next generation questioning the established values, even if they have no alternative. This idea is further underscored by the Police Department’s complete rejection of Didion at the end of the vignette:

I wonder why it is taboo to talk to Officer Gerrans.

Officer Gerrans is involved in court cases coming to trial.

I wonder why it is taboo to talk to Chief Cahill.

The Chief has pressing police business.

I wonder if I can talk to anyone in the Police Department.

“No,” the sergeant says, “not at the particular moment.”

Which was my last official contact with the San Francisco Police Department.

(74)

Hemingway’s style is reflected in Didion’s exchange with the San Francisco Police Department: reported dialogue in short sentences conveying the bluntness of the response. Thematically, this exchange further reflects the deepening gulf between the older and younger generations about which Didion is concerned. The implication is that not only do the older not understand these new, younger people, they have no desire to understand. No avenue for exchange is made available by the established authorities to the lost children in Haight-Ashbury or to those who may inquire on their behalf. Though this does not fully explain the phenomenon occurring amongst the youth Didion writes about, it does provide interesting symbolism for the increasing disconnect between the established older generation and unestablished younger one. There is no real dialogue, there is only bewilderment, indifference and rejection.

The essay is filled with different encounters Didion has that confirm this division and the lack of guidance that characterizes the lives of the young people in Haight-Ashbury. There are misguided expectations amongst this gathering of youth who have flocked here from all over America that they will in some way be delivered from the harsh realities of contemporary society: “There’ve been times I felt like packing up and taking off for the East Coast again, at least there I had a *target*. At least there you expect that it’s going to *happen*.’ He lights a cigarette and his hands shake. “Here you know it’s not going to” (76-7). This conviction that something is “going to happen”, but the complete lack of awareness as to what this something might be or how it may come to pass is representative of the aimlessness of the youth gathering in Haight-Ashbury. It is the random actions of the people Didion encounters, whether they are manifest in drug abuse, misguided activism, senseless judgements and pronouncements about society, or running from home to Haight-Ashbury, that contribute towards Didion’s belief that the center is not holding in this version of America. Towards the end of the essay, Didion provides the reader with her own assessment of the situation:

At the same time I saw in San Francisco, the political potential of what was then called the movement was just becoming clear...But the peculiar beauty of this political potential, as far as the activists were concerned, was that it remained not clear at all to most of the inhabitants of the district, perhaps because the few seventeen-year-olds who are political realists tend not to adopt romantic idealism as a life style...the signals between the generations are irrevocably jammed. (92)

Didion describes a political potential that is sinister in nature, one in which the few prey upon uninformed, immature youth, romanticizing an ideology and offering to

them as a solution, an identity. Again, one is reminded of Hemingway's Italian fascisti, who are provided with the same romance and identity, along with uniforms to make them feel all the more self-important and certain in their conviction. She is also confirming what she has been intimating throughout the essay, that there is a profound and widening disconnect between the older and younger generations in America, manifested most intensely in Haight-Ashbury. Didion goes on to explain just how intensely this phenomenon is impacting American society and culture:

We were seeing the desperate attempt of a handful of pathetically unequipped children to create a community in a social vacuum... This was not a traditional generational rebellion. At some point between 1945 and 1967 we had somehow neglected to tell these children the rules of the game we happened to be playing. (93)

For Didion, an inevitable cultural shift, caused in part by what could be seen as neglect, denial and perhaps false hopefulness on the part of the older generation, has begun and will continue until it reaches its conclusion. What she views as a social support system for youth in America, "cousins and great-aunts...lifelong neighbours who had traditionally suggested and enforced the society's values" (93) is vanishing; the conventional social structure has changed forever. She notes that this is not a "traditional generational rebellion"; something unique is happening. Didion specifically cites the years following the end of the Second World War and the present day, the postwar period, as the defining time in which the country's history lead to the formation of such a generation. In Hemingway's writing, the end of total war alongside the subsequent growth in affluence, also produced different expectations between the young and the old. Didion gives us an analysis of the distressing features of generational change in the nineteen-sixties:

Because they do not believe in words...their only proficient vocabulary is in the society's platitudes. As it happens, I am still committed to the idea that the ability to think for oneself depends upon one's mastery of the language, and I am not optimistic about children who will settle for saying, to indicate that their mother and father do not live together, that they come from "a broken home." They are sixteen, fifteen, fourteen years old, younger all the time, an army of children waiting to be given the words. (93)

Didion's equation of "mastery of the language" with the capacity for independent and critical thought reveals her conviction that an individual can only marshal their thinking constructively if they possess clarity of meaning. For her it takes the form of words; her manifold examples of meaningless speech found throughout the essay represent this lack of clarity on a linguistic level. More broadly, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the "words" Didion refers to are the foundation of effective social interaction. Without "mastery of the language" the citizenry falls back upon platitudes, generalities which lead to the dangerous political potential that Didion describes earlier. This not a call for a homogenous identity, nor a demand on Didion's part that Americans live their lives a certain way, rather, it is the warning that without providing some sort of meaningful direction to the younger generations in an ever-evolving society, a profound disenfranchisement and disconnect is inevitable. As Didion notes, the disconnected youth "create a community in a social vacuum", in which intimidation and violent ideology appear to become inevitable. She cites the behavior of the street theater group, the Diggers, towards a group of African Americans as an example of this near the end of the essay:

"In *America*," the blackface girl shrieks. "Listen to him talk about *America*."

"Listen," he says helplessly. "Listen here."

“What’d *America* ever do for you?” The girl in blackface jeers. “White kids here, they can sit in the Park all summer long, listening to the music they stole, because their bigshot parents keep sending them money. Who ever sends you money?”

“Listen,” the Negro says, his voice rising. “You’re gonna start something here, this isn’t right –”

“You tell us what’s right, black boy,” the girl says. (95-6)

Not only are the Diggers hideously racist, their actions border on violence, all in an effort to impose their ideology on individuals who, ironically, have been victims to injustices in American society and history that they, being white themselves, could never comprehend. The great irony is that the Diggers seem to believe they are somehow addressing this injustice by using racist intimidation techniques against strangers who simply want to be left alone. The fact that they harass the African Americans they encounter while in blackface is a clear indication of their lack of understanding and awareness; they do not have the “words” Didion describes, only the platitudes they have been fed, the zealous belief in what they have been told are American society’s ills. This is the dangerous political potential Didion describes at work; lack of critical thought coupled with youth under the direction of romanticized, misguided ideology.

This social dysfunction does not end with the Diggers, and it does not end with the younger generation. Didion makes this clear in the final paragraphs of the essay. As discussed earlier, in reference to Didion’s literary style, she describes Susan, a five-year-old who is on acid, much to the delight of the adults around her, who encourage her to describe to Didion what it is like to be in “High Kindergarten”. Though Didion states that Susan “lives with her mother and some other people” (96),

the mother is absent during this exchange. Here we see the ramifications of the aimlessness, lack of critical thought, and disconnect between generations upon the *next* generation of American children. A five-year-old on acid left alone by its mother symbolizes the ultimate abandonment of child by parent, younger generation by older. Didion implies that should this kind of childhood become representative for the newest generation, there is no stepping back from the brink, no hope that identity through individual critical thinking alongside collective guiding principles in American society will hold the nation together. The disconnect between generations will become even more profound, the avenues for dialogue between them even narrower.

This same thematic interest, the widening gap between the older and younger generations, can be found in Hemingway's early fiction. The title of Hemingway's short story collection *In Our Time*, is, much like Didion's *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, marked by the juxtaposition of the clarity of style and the chaotic nature of many of the themes. In the short story "Soldier's Home", a clear example of generational divide between older and younger is present. Though the main character, Harold Krebs', disenfranchisement with conventional American life is in part attributable to his struggles to readjust to civilian life after serving in the First World War, there is also a disconnect between he and his parents that is more broadly representative of a growing generational divide based on changing values in American society. The traditional, Christian faith does not serve any purpose for Krebs any longer: "I'm not in His [God's] Kingdom" (115). Nor does the traditional lifestyle in which one gets a job, marries and settles down. The story ends with Krebs vowing to leave home and get a job simply to escape his parents, much as the young people in Didion's essay migrate to California to elude parental control.

Similarly, in Hemingway's novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, we find a collection of expatriates, American and British, traveling through Europe, engaging in alcohol abuse and sexual promiscuity, deriving little if any meaning from the experience. Hemingway's expatriates foreshadow the youth in Haight-Ashbury taking drugs and living aimless lives. We see a snapshot of similar characters in another *In Our Time* story, "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot", in the group of "friends" from Paris who follow the Elliots to their rented chateau in Touraine, and later abandon them when they find "Touraine to be a flat hot country very much like Kansas" soon disappointed that "Touraine had not turned out the way it looked when it started" (125). The image of the young expatriate friends drifting from one place to another, leaving when it does not meet their expectations calls to mind the young man Didion encounters planning to travel to New York City who never follows through with his plan because he hears that "New York's a bummer" (69). In both cases, superficial impressions and information are enough to sway the young people in question in their decision-making process. Critical thinking is not employed.

It is clear that Hemingway and Didion share a thematic interest in the generational divide in their respective time periods. Both are wary of the shifting mentalities and ease with which dangerous political ideology can emerge when large groups of youth feel alienated and unable to think critically or understand the society of which they are a part. Both use a clarity of style and maintain narrative detachment that requires the reader to bridge the emotional gap between the subject being presented and the conclusions to be drawn. Reasoning and explanation may be offered as an aside, or hinted at, but in the works of both writers it is ultimately the reader who must make the connection. In such a way, Hemingway and Didion create texts which require the reader to cultivate the capacity for reflection and analysis that

they view as an essential and absent component of thought amongst the youth in their respective generations.

## **Chapter One, Part Two**

### **Didion's Early Fiction**

In an interview in *The Paris Review*, Didion declared that she always said that Hemingway was a primary influence on her development as a writer. Beyond her own admission, her writing reveals careful study and engagement with Hemingway's style. This section will consider the elements of Hemingway's style reflected in Didion's early fiction, specifically the novel, *Play It as It Lays*. For the purpose of the analysis, Hemingway's novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, will be used as the reference for an analysis of themes, structure and style. These two novels offer the opportunity for meaningful comparison in a number of areas.

#### **2.0 Unstable Times**

Both novels were written during a period of societal change. *The Sun Also Rises* was published in the decade following World War I. The characters are American and British expatriates living in Paris and travelling in continental Europe without any ultimate destination. Some are damaged physically and mentally by war. Their lives are given over to their own amusement and are lived largely without direction. Jake Barnes, the narrator, is separated by virtue of his injury from his counterparts in his apparent awareness of the nature of these pursuits, yet often participates in them to the extent that he can. Jake is the living reminder of the war, the embodiment of the generation seeking to live with it and within its wake in the tumultuous nineteen-twenties.

*Play It as It Lays* is set in Los Angeles at the end of the turbulent nineteen-sixties. Though some place it within the "Hollywood novel" subgenre, this is an oversimplified classification. As David J. Geherin notes:

...the novel is as much 'about' Hollywood as *Heart of Darkness* is about Africa or *The Stranger* is 'about' Algeria. Like these novels, *Play It as It Lays* depends upon an intimate connection between setting and theme; but also like them, its overriding thematic concern is man's relationship with himself and with existence in general. (64)

Geherin is correct in his analysis; the novel supersedes classification as a "Hollywood novel", dealing as it does with Maria's existential dread, a theme which will be explored in more detail later in this chapter. Further, the novel could equally be said to be the fictional follow-up to the subjects that Didion explores in her previously published collection of essays, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, that is, the uncertainty and chaos she perceives surrounding nineteen-sixties American culture. Though it is never clearly stated when the novel occurs, we can surmise that it is the nineteen-sixties, given that Maria, the protagonist, is thirty-one years old, and was born in a town in Nevada that later became a nuclear testing site. The Hollywood which Maria inhabits acts as a microcosm for what Didion described in her earlier work, the essay collection *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, as the "atomization" of nineteen-sixties American culture. This is represented through the continual communicative breakdowns between the primary characters, (i.e. Maria and Carter, Maria and BZ), reminiscent on an interpersonal level of what Didion describes in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* as "the signals being jammed" between the older and younger American generations. The alcohol and drug abuse and growing disillusionment with society that Maria experiences remind us of the debauchery and alienation Didion describes amongst the youth in Haight-Ashbury. This inability to communicate is manifest between generations in *Play It as It Lays* as well, as is

made clear in the interaction between Maria and her late father's friend and colleague Benny Austin, when she encounters him as an adult:

"You come see me the next time you're in Los Angeles, all right? Promise?"

"Sure, honey, swell. I'd like that."

"Listen," she said suddenly. "You remember the last you saw me?"

Remember? You and Mother and Daddy put me on the plane at McCarran?

And before that we ate spare ribs at the house? Remember?"

"Sure, honey, you bet. Next time I'm over we'll paint the town red." (150-1)

Maria's offer to entertain Benny in Los Angeles is a hollow one. Her attempts to communicate with Benny on an emotional level are ignored and, to Benny, of little interest. Here we find difficulties in communication surpassing even those of the same age group, existing between generations.

The characters in *Play It as It Lays* are actors, directors, agents and others connected with the film industry who largely "notice only the attention they are getting" (Thompson, xvi) and whose relations with each other are purely transactional. They are in constant movement from indulgence to indulgence but without apparent purpose. As Katherine Usher Henderson notes, "In the culture of Beverley Hills sexual activity, in addition to a means of sensual pleasure, is a defense against boredom and a mode of hostility...The element of affection is absent from all sexual activity, its place filled with drink, drugs, or violence" (24). Here we are reminded of the promiscuous encounters in *The Sun Also Rises*, particularly those involving Brett, which she views as largely transactional; attempts at sensual pleasure to fill an internal void. It has been noted that the frenzy of the novel "recollects the haphazard movement of that earlier 'lost generation' in *The Sun Also Rises*" (Wolff, 483). For Didion, California itself is the destination of the domestic

American expatriate: “Here is the last stop for those who come from somewhere else” (4). Maria is one such expatriate, leaving a small desert town in Nevada, first for New York City to become a model and then to Los Angeles to become an actor. In this world of self-indulgence and transactional relationships, she struggles to find acceptance for the tragedies in her life, ultimately concluding that life is a fractured series of disconnected and meaningless events.

## 2.1 Thematic Similarities

Many thematic similarities can be found between Hemingway’s early novel, *The Sun Also Rises* and Didion’s early novel, *Play It as It Lays*. As aforementioned, both novels consider the disconnect between the older and younger generations, influenced by similar periods of social and cultural turmoil. Intertwined with this is a shared thematic interest in how characters struggle or abandon attempts to find order and meaning on a personal level.

Anchoring this existential dilemma is Hemingway’s reference to the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, and how the narrator of this text explores the themes of the passing of generations and the quest for personal meaning. The novel *The Sun Also Rises* is preceded by a quotation attributed to Gertrude Stein: “You are a lost generation” (29). The origin of the remark is contested: some attribute it to Stein herself, others to the manager of a garage reproaching his mechanic for failing to repair Stein’s car on time: “The *patron* had said to him, ‘You are all a generation perdue.’ ‘That’s what you are. That’s what you all are,’ Miss Stein said. ‘All of you young people who served in the war. You are a lost generation’” (29).

Regardless of the origin, the message remains the same: the older generation views Hemingway’s as “lost”; seemingly without guidance, purpose or a sense of

responsibility. Hemingway seeks to balance the remark with a second epigraph, a passage from Ecclesiastes:

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever...The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose...The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits...All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.  
(1. 4-7)

As William Vesterman notes: "In each quotation we hear the grand manner of the great preachers and prophets addressing human temporal identity in terms of generations. Gertrude Stein speaks of the generation of World War I, Ecclesiastes of all generations" (98). Arguably, the juxtaposition of Stein's quote and the verses from Ecclesiastes give rise to an ambiguity. Ecclesiastes declares that one generation disappears and another one arrives as part of a natural cycle. A generation cannot be "lost" in a cycle that includes its coming and going and anticipates the trauma youth experience in "a time of war" as well as the pleasures of "a time of peace" (3. 8). However, the two passages can be reconciled if "lost" is interpreted to mean members of a generation who are unaware of or in denial of the natural cycle of the generations, which emerges as a theme in *The Sun Also Rises*.

Ecclesiastes offers other further reflections on the condition of man that appear consistent with existential thinking in postwar Europe. The narrator, or "preacher", in this book of the Old Testament declares that man cannot ever expect to achieve a moral existence or understand the purpose of existence, "For who knoweth what *is* good for man in *this* life, all the days of his vain life which he

spendeth as a shadow" (6. 12). Nor can a man escape the ever-present reality of death. The preacher advises of man and beasts, "they all have one breath so that a man has no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity" (3. 19). In this context, without understanding the purpose of life and knowing death is approaching, the preacher counsels that there is nothing better than for man "to eat and to drink and to enjoy the good of all of his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life which God giveth him: for it *is* his portion" (5. 18). Fittingly, Bill Gorton, Jake's friend in *The Sun Also Rises* declares during their fishing trip on the Irati: "Our stay on earth is not for long...Let us utilize the fowls of the air. Let us utilize the product of the vine" (97-8).

Ecclesiastes is relevant to the time and circumstances of Hemingway and his contemporaries because it sets out issues of morality and mortality in earthly terms. Recognizing the relevance of Ecclesiastes as an existential tract, Hemingway advised his friend, Ezra Pound: "Don't let your just disgust with the so-called Christian religion keep you from reading Ecclesiastes. The only preachers who will use it as texts do so to show that it was wrong and a great mistake to have allowed it to stay in the bible" (396).

The characters in *The Sun Also Rises* are lost in search of experience that will bring fulfillment, sensually and existentially. Brett chases fulfillment through a series of unsatisfying sexual affairs and liaisons, while naïve Robert Cohn clings to the fantasy that he can win Brett, and sacrifices his dignity in the attempt. Mike Campbell is a bankrupt, both morally and financially, who enjoys himself at the expense of others, while Jake's American friend Bill is constantly inebriated. Many of the characters drink to excess, insult and betray each other. They are expatriate tourists

looking for adventure and never penetrating the surface of experience with one exception.

Jake, the rather enigmatic narrator, maintains a greater detachment from this lifestyle than his peers. A reporter himself, as Hemingway was, Jake “relays information about the novel’s characters to the reader as an astute observer rather than as an all-knowing entity” (Puckett, 135), maintaining a certain distance.

By inference, it is revealed that Jake suffered a catastrophic injury to his genitals in the war, and throughout the novel he and Brett maintain a tortured, halting love for each other that cannot be consummated. In frustration and sadness, Brett engages in a series of affairs with other men with Jake's knowledge and, in the case of the young bullfighter, Romero, with his complicity.

While Jake participates in the revelry, he is separated by his injury. Jake is or becomes aware of the intimacies other men enjoy with Brett: Cohn, Mike, Romero. We know from their first scene together in the novel Jake’s passion for Brett is unfulfilled. In a cab, Brett breaks away from Jake’s embrace and says, “I don’t want to go through that hell again” (68). Indeed, his separation from a natural relationship with Brett is so great that he actually introduces her to Romero who is capable of providing her with the sexual pleasure he cannot. Of critical importance to Hemingway was truth discovered through first-hand experience. As Adrian Bond notes, “The body becomes integral to the truth of writing, a corroborating witness to the author’s or character’s experience” (57). Despite his occasional disparagement of her, Jake remains devoted to Brett to the end of the novel. But with the fatalism of Ecclesiastes, he will never “know” their love’s consummation. Bond submits that “Jake Barnes is Hemingway’s version of a ‘hollow man’, one deprived not of abstract spiritual truth, but of very common sensual truth” (66).

And while Jake enjoys the company of his companions, he among them most clearly perceives the shallowness of their adventures as his summary of yet one more evening together concludes: "It was like certain dinners that I remember from the war. There was much wine, an ignored tension, and a feeling of things coming that you could not prevent happening. Under the wine I lost the disgusted feeling and was happy. It seemed they were all such nice people" (216). He is also aware that their adventures will never lead to personal fulfillment: "You can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another. There's nothing to that" (51). Though Justin Mellette notes that: "Jake distinguishes himself from those around him by choosing to engage in activities of a more tranquil, salubrious nature...[that] ultimately lead to a more reflective state of mind" (63), this claim is partially but not entirely accurate. That Jake is aware that existential crises cannot be escaped through distraction, yet nonetheless participates in said adventures and debaucheries betrays an internal psychological repression of his own existential dilemma; Jake is still willing to drink and travel in order to escape a dissatisfying personal reality. He is far from, as Dömötör claims, "The 'code-hero' exemplified" (121). He is the one who proposes to leave Paris to fish the Irati river in remote Spain, the one who proposes the trip to Pamplona, and the one complicit in the violence surrounding Brett's affairs with different men. As will be explored later, it is his willing existential repression that leads him to continue to perpetuate this behavior as the novel progresses.

Jake's familiarity with the fiesta in Pamplona lends his character the impression of greater authenticity than that of his companions. He instructs the others as they witness the ancient rituals of the festival and the intricate rules of

bullfighting. In the following passage, Jake experiences the intensity of rituals and ceremonies passed on from generation to generation:

That afternoon was the big religious procession. San Fermin was transported from one church to another. In the procession were all the dignitaries, civil and religious. We could not see them because the crowd was too great. Ahead of the formal procession and behind it danced the *riau-riau* dancers. There was one mass of yellow shirts dancing up and down in the crowd. All we could see of the procession through the closely pressed people that crowded all the side streets and curbs were the great giants, cigar-store Indians, thirty feet high, Moors, a King and Queen, whirling and waltzing solemnly to the *riau-riau*. (227)

The traditions of the festival serve as a microcosm for the teachings in the book of Ecclesiastes. In the wake of the dancing and the processions which are performed as they have been for hundreds of years, the reader is left to ponder their own inevitable mortality and more broadly, generational mortality and the cyclical nature of human existence. Though the events Jake describes may seem chaotic in nature, the endless dancing, the large figures hoisted in the procession, the individual spectator's view being compromised as a result ("All we could see"), the cadence of Hemingway's writing reflects the cyclical ebb and flow explored in Ecclesiastes. In the above passage he employs his characteristic style of short sentences describing simply what is physically observed in such a way that the chaos of the procession becomes patterned and rhythmic. Something that is seemingly chaotic comes to possess a more ordered quality; what the narrator is witnessing is an inevitable and unstoppable movement, a procession that is not only fated to go exactly where it has always gone but one that will end with the same results. This juxtaposition between

chaos and order is reflective of the thematic interest throughout, the characters struggling through the chaos of the historical period and their own existential dilemmas contrasted with the cyclical inevitability expressed in the epigraph from Ecclesiastes and represented in the fiesta.

Didion scholar and biographer Katherine Usher Henderson argues that the dislocation experienced by Hemingway's generation was different in nature from that of Didion's generation. Hemingway's generation was lost because its faith in social, political and religious institutions had been shattered by the devastation of World War I. On the other hand, Didion's generation of American consumers had no faith to lose:

After World War I American novelists chronicled the impact of war and industrialization on a generation taught to respect the traditional institutions of religion, marriage, and democracy. The heroes of Hemingway and Fitzgerald cannot find their salvation in these institutions; they either develop a personal moral code, or they become part of what Gertrude Stein termed "the lost generation" (19).

In contrast, Henderson maintains:

The American novelist of the sixties and seventies is writing of a later generation, one that is "lost" in a different and deeper sense. The contemporary individual is unlikely to have a patriotic or religious heritage; he must live in a society whose materialistic and pleasure-seeking values lack the moral dimension provided by traditional institutions...The novelist who portrays such an individual inevitably stresses his loneliness, for the people around him in all likelihood do not even understand, much less support, his values...The isolation of the individual and the moral chaos of a competitive

society are the special province of the contemporary novelist. Maria Wyeth, the central character of Didion's *Play It as It Lays*, is the contemporary heroine *par excellence*. (19-20)

There is some weight to Henderson's claim that there were differences in the kind of alienation in the two time periods because of differences in relevant contemporary value systems or lack thereof. However, though she differentiates between the world that the author of the nineteen-twenties and the author of the nineteen-sixties must inhabit, the latter facing a world absent of civic, moral or religious codes, it appears that underpinning both time periods is the shared quality of alienation, in which meaning from traditionally guiding institutions is no longer operating for whatever reason. Further, it is reasonable to argue that what she describes as the "moral code" often collapses despite the best efforts of the characters, particularly in Hemingway's early work, in which can be found many examples of an abandonment of morality and coded behavior.

This alienation, what Henderson describes as "the isolation of the individual and the moral chaos of a competitive society" (20), are in fact forces that both generations experienced. Ironically, it is the disruption of guiding principles in these moments in history that link the novels in a profound way thematically, as will be examined below.

Further, Henderson notes of Didion that "She achieves order through smaller rituals, too – making curtains, polishing the silver, cooking dinner each night. In her own life, as in the lives of her fictional characters, these daily tasks serve the purposes that religious rituals once did; they help to ward off evil and to render everyday life intelligible" (17). We find in Didion's own writing in *The White Album* a penchant for habitual organization of the everyday, when she describes a list she

keeps of items to bring when travelling: “this was a list made by someone who prized control, yearned after momentum, someone determined to play her role as if she had a script, heard her cues, knew the narrative” (203). In Didion’s own life, as in the lives of her characters, the more mundane rituals of daily life allow the individual to cope with the existential threat of mortality and the grief of existence. It is interesting that these rituals, from Jake Barnes’ methodical fishing practices to Maria Wyeth’s daily consumption of a hard-boiled egg without salt act as the individual response to the larger social rituals, and by extension, the cyclical nature of existence that can be found in Ecclesiastes. Though the characters exist in chaotic states, their attempt to achieve momentary order on a personal level reflects the patterned flow that constitutes the inevitability of generational change and mortality.

Henderson goes on to discuss Didion’s morality, which is firm but open:

While not conventionally religious, she is a stern moralist for whom right and wrong are powerful realities...The basis of her morality is not an ideology, however, but a broad and compassionate humanism; she believes that social ideology leads to “the coarsening of moral imagination,” and affirms that her own writing is committed to “the exploration of moral distinctions and ambiguities.” (17)

An examination of *Play It as It Lays* reveals Didion’s form of “morality” to be similar in many ways to Hemingway’s, with Maria’s contemplation of the nature of morality being reminiscent of Jake Barnes’ own. In particular, there is a shared “compassionate humanism” and “exploration of moral distinctions and ambiguities” in both novels. Neither novel contains a character explicitly good nor evil, but rather completely ambiguous, and though this is not a quality unique to either writer, many of the characters bear similarities in how their positive or negative qualities are made

manifest. They are proficient at their work, but self-indulgent and lecherous in their behavior, like Carter and BZ, or Bill Gorton and Robert Cohn; they are aware on some level that their behavior is self-destructive, but continue to pursue it anyway, like Jake Barnes and Maria Wyeth.

Both Maria and Jake, despite moments of crisis and dread, have also embraced a philosophy in which they no longer seek much meaning, recognizing this as a largely fruitless endeavor. Consider the opening sentence of *Play It as It Lays*, in which Maria asks: “What makes Iago evil? I never ask” (3). As Henderson notes: “In the first-person statement that opens the novel Maria announces her refusal to seek reasons for anything, but she never understands that without reasoned insight she will not be able to control her life” (29). One is reminded of Jake Barnes rebuffing of Robert Cohn’s direct discussion of mortality near the start of *The Sun Also Rises*:

“Do you realize you’ve lived nearly half the time you have to live already?”

“Yes, every once in a while.”

“Do you know that in about thirty-five years more we’ll be dead?”

“What the hell, Robert,” I said. “What the hell.”

“I’m serious.”

“It’s one thing I don’t worry about,” I said. (9)

In both situations the reader is introduced to a character who appears initially to be disinclined to existential reflection, only to discover an internal chaos that is only silenced through repetitive, often self-destructive behavior, which when explored more deeply, betrays an underlying preoccupation with existential dread. Jake’s moments alone in the darkness in which he wrestles with internal demons are not dissimilar to Maria’s moments alone sleeping by the pool, in which she does the

same. Jake engages again and again with Brett, inherently destructive behavior given the nature of their relationship, while Maria does the same by driving the highway alone in her car, getting closer and closer to the desert where she knows her unfeeling husband, Carter, the source of much of her despair and the driving force in her decision to get a traumatizing abortion, is filming a movie. Both refuse to confront their personal crises, and resultingly, are doomed to be locked in a destructive cycle of behavior. "Part of Maria's technique for ensuring that she does not get the help she needs is to ask help only of people who can't or won't give it" (32), notes Henderson, an analysis which could be applied to Jake's character as well. But fundamentally, the two protagonists do not want to ask help for themselves; they practice existential repression.

It is also worth noting that Maria's name, as she clarifies for the reader at the start of the novel is pronounced "Mar-EYE-ah", and that the start of her last name is pronounced "Why". "Eye", is an allusion to the camera's "eye". As Wolff notes of Maria's name: "If Carter is the camera's eye – clicking neutrally and impartially open and closed...Maria keeps track of the human relationships" (486). More specifically, Maria keeps track of her relationships with other characters, struggling to gain meaning from them. Equally, it could also be interpreted to mean "I". This "I" in conjunction with "W(h)y" is indicative of the individual search for meaning that Maria struggles with throughout the novel. Leo Gurko has theorized that Jake Barnes' name has biblical qualities: "For those readers who enjoy quasi-cabalistic pursuits, the biblical character of all this might be suggested by his first name. The first, fourth, and fifth letters of Jacob spell Job, while the second and third letters might stand for After Christ. As a Catholic, he is a Job who appears after Christ" (57). The biblical figure, Job, that Gurko hypothesises Jake represents a modern-day version of, is

one whose story is deeply concerned with existential dread and the attempt to seek meaning within an indifferent universe.

Both characters also fantasize about a respite from this struggle, an imaginary scenario in which their existential struggle fades in the wake of peace and fulfillment. For Jake, this manifests itself in his fantasy of being with Brett, of which there are two illuminating examples in the novel. The first occurs near the beginning, while they are in Paris:

“Couldn’t we live together Brett? Could we just live together?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Couldn’t we go off in the country for a while?”

“It wouldn’t be any good. I’ll go if you like. But I couldn’t live quietly in the country. Not with my own true love.”

“I know.” (45)

Though Jake is aware of the impossibility of this fantasy he still persists with it on the following page, asking if he can travel with Brett to San Sebastian, a proposal which she promptly rejects. In this passage there appears some surety on Brett’s part as to the impossibility of this fantasy, but at the novel’s conclusion the situation is almost reversed, with Brett indulging in the fantasy, saying to Jake that “we could have had such a damn good time together” (198), to which he replies, “Yes...isn’t it pretty to think so?” (198). This indicates that both characters wish for the fulfillment of life together, but are aware that they will never achieve this, and that it is an impossible goal. Similarly, in *Play It as It Lays*, Maria imagines a life in an isolated beach house with her lover Les Goodwin and her institutionalized daughter, Kate:

Every night she named to herself what she must do: she must ask Les Goodwin to come keep her from peril. Calmed, she would fall asleep

pretending that even then she lay with him in a house by the sea...Every morning in that house she would make the bed with fresh sheets. Every day in that house she would cook while Kate did her lessons...Maria would light a kerosene lamp and they would eat the mussels and drink a bottle of cold white wine and after a while it would be time to lie down again, on the clean white sheets. In the story Maria told herself at three or four in the morning there were only three people and none of them had histories, only the man and the woman and the child...But by dawn she was always back in the house in Beverly hills, uneasy in the queer early light, plagued by her own and his own and Kate's manifold histories... there was never a house by the sea...Kate could do no lessons, and the mussels on any shore Maria knew were toxic. (144-5)

Maria's fantasy is much more elaborate than Jake's. She provides the reader with a precise location, the daily activities that constitute the fantasy, the names of those involved. However, despite her detailed description of what she desires, it seems that the aspect of the fantasy that most appeals to her is that "there were only three people and none of them had histories" (145). Maria desires not only a divorce from the total society, in which she can live secluded with those she loves, she wishes to live with them in a *tabula rasa*, in which she has eliminated the burdens of memory and past. In this Didion takes the fantasy that Hemingway describes and adds another layer of separation between the individual and their distance from the reality of existence. Much like Jake and Brett, however, this is sharply contrasted by an abrupt awareness of this reality, by an awareness of "manifold histories". The fantasy is an impossible one, and one that even, in its own way, is linked to mortality, indicative in the "toxic" mussels which in her fantasy Maria imagines all of them

eating. It is reasonable to imagine the fantasy itself, the total withdrawal not only from the surrounding world and the crises the individual must struggle with to inhabit it as a fantasy of death; as something to be looked forward to when one has escaped the existential burden of being. Due to the impossibility of Jake and Brett consummating their love, we might imagine their fantasy in a similar way. These are both methods that the respective protagonists use to escape the awareness of living with their issues, and by the nature of their impossibilities, become a method of coping with mortality and existential angst. Both protagonists are trapped in a cycle in which fantasy becomes a distraction from confronting reality, and so, ironically, both continue to perpetuate this angst by engaging in fantasy. Consider Maria's declaration late in the novel that once she gets Kate, she will "do some canning. Damson plums, apricot preserves. Sweet India relish and pickled peaches. Apple chutney. Summer squash succotash" (210). Maria, in her fantasizing of what she will do, invokes the image of food preservation and subsequently links it to her memories of her family and, by extension, childhood. The preservation of the fantasy, though an attempt to cope with reality by escaping from it, in fact "preserves" Maria's unhappy place within it, and the cycle continues. As the novel ends the reader is never certain that Maria will get Kate, or that she will even be released from the psychiatric institution in which she is confined and from which she addresses the reader at the novel's beginning. In fact, it becomes clear that things have come full circle for Maria in a certain way, in so far as Didion shows us that, at the end of the novel, she is where she started. This reinforces the idea that Maria's decline was inevitable. Hemingway leaves Jake and Brett in a similar position. The fantasy is a recurring means of escape from the reality that, ironically, perpetuates the negative aspects of the reality for the respective novels' protagonists.

One interpretation would be that the fantasies in which Jake and Brett and Maria engage are an obstacle to their awareness and acceptance of reality, but there is at least one alternative reading as reader response criticism would suggest. The strength of such criticism lies in recognizing that within the structure of the text different readers with different experiences and imaginative capabilities may arrive at different meanings; indeed the same reader will probably respond differently each time they encounter the text. This corresponds to the actual the experience of reading and rightly dismisses the claim that a text has a single, hidden meaning that is only discoverable by a reader with specialized knowledge in literary criticism. So, while it is possible to conclude that these characters are stalled by their unrealistic hopes and wishes, there is another nuanced interpretation that is also supported by the texts.

As discussed, themes from Ecclesiastes are evident in both novels. The epigraph in *The Sun Also Rises* raises the existential dilemma of the individual facing the passing of their generation; and indeed, the invocation in Ecclesiastes to relinquish the quest for meaning in life and to be content with the pleasures of the earth can itself be read as an invocation to distraction. The preacher in Ecclesiastes compares man to the beasts and warns man of the vanity of seeking answers to life's mysteries; inquiry and debate are not encouraged. To imagine a state of fulfillment in which what is desired is attained is to fantasize. A "life in the moment" cannot be sustained. It is overshadowed by the temporal reality that everything has a beginning and an ending. To ignore this reality is also to fantasize. In this sense, fantasy appears to be one natural response to existential dread.

Equally, it is possible to see the dreams or fantasies entertained by the characters as being a phase that leads to greater clarity of thought. It is valid to posit

that Jake and Brett's relationship changes and that the two change as characters in the time between their first cab ride in Paris to their final ride in Madrid. In the first scene, they express a desperate longing for each other. Jake fantasizes about going away with Brett. Over the course of the novel the fantasy of life together is tested against the reality of Jake's physical limitations and Brett's affairs, including one in which Jake is actually complicit. It is possible that Jake's final line "Isn't it pretty to think so?" illustrates an awareness on his part that a life with Brett is, in fact, a fantasy that is unattainable, a conclusion that he can only reach after the events of the novel have occurred.

Despite her confusion, Maria's fantasy of life by the sea with Les Goodwin and Kate is neither selfish nor self-destructive; she does not fantasize a life of fame or hedonism as do those that surround her. The fantasy serves as an opportunity for Maria to evaluate the elements of a stable domestic life. As she plays this out night after night and as she experiences Goodwin's reservations in real life, the fantasy is exposed and discarded. Arguably, Maria's imagined life of bliss by the sea serves the purpose of clarifying for Maria what is attainable and important and what is not. By the end of the novel, her fantasy is focused entirely on Kate.

This analysis reveals the different interpretations available from reading the same text. Moreover, as Iser notes, the pleasure of reading lies in the imaginative exercise of finding some degree of consistency in differing perspectives presented by the text - in this case between fantasy and reality.

## 2.2 Opening Chapters: A Story Within the Story

Close textual study suggests a strong resemblance between Hemingway's structure and style in *The Sun Also Rises* and the design of Didion's novel, *Play It as*

*It Lays*, with respect to how the novels open and how they unfold. Both novels begin with a narrated history of one or more of the primary characters which frames the action of the character to follow. Both novels progress with a film like quality, with scenes and images set in motion, establishing the pace for the novel and the direction of its characters.

Chapter one of *The Sun Also Rises* begins, notably, with a story set within the overarching narrative of the novel. The story is about the early life of Robert Cohn, a supporting character, and is told by Jake, the narrator and primary character. In the story, details of Robert Cohn's family background, his education, his first marriage and current romantic relationship are revealed. He comes from "one of the richest Jewish families in New York" and "went to Princeton" (4), where he was described as friendly but shy and sensitive about his Jewish heritage. He learned to box and became Princeton's middleweight champion.

Although Jake describes himself as Robert's "tennis friend" (5) it is obvious (and made more obvious as the novel progresses) that Jake has low regard for Robert: "I never met anyone of his class who remembers him" (4). With this introductory story, the narrator provides specific information about a character who has not yet appeared but without explaining the reason why he (Jake) dislikes and suspects Robert. We sense his unease, but we do not know why. This is an example of what Didion identified as a contributing power to Hemingway's writing, "offering as it does the illusion but not the fact of specificity" (4), and correspondingly, from the "the tension of withheld information" (5).

As the novel unfolds the source of the conflict between Jake and Robert becomes clear. As discussed, Jake and Brett are in love, but their love cannot be consummated. Brett has a brief affair with Robert and then wants no more of him,

but Robert remains an insistent suitor. For Jake, Robert becomes a living manifestation of his own inadequacy and of Brett's unfulfilled needs. This opening introduction to Robert Cohn encapsulates the limitation that Jake will bear throughout the novel. By extension, it is an early manifestation of the existential struggle Jake endures as the novel progresses, struggling to find meaning in the knowledge that he will never feel complete as a result of his injury. Jake's curt dismissal of Robert's existential dread provides an early example of what the reader will later discover is an unwillingness on his part to confront his own. Why Jake is so dismissive at the novel's start, so apparently sure of his own indifference to his own mortality, provides an early example of the existential concerns that will form a major theme in the novel. However, because of the curtness of Jake's remarks, the reader must make the connections revealed as Jake's character develops that will reveal this as a central theme in the novel.

Robert Cohn's presence in *The Sun Also Rises* illustrates the operation of Hemingway's "iceberg principle" and Wolfgang Iser's reader response theory. Both recognized that the text was actualized by engaging the reader to bridge the "gaps" or resolve the "indeterminacies" in the narrative. The author guides the reader towards the discovery of meaning by the nature of information given and withheld, but only the reader, through imaginative effort, can make the connections necessary to arrive at the ultimate meaning of the text. Cohn's literary significance arises not so much from what he says or does, but rather from what he allows Hemingway to reveal about Jake.

As noted, the novel opens with the narrator's damning precis of another character. The reader is given no prior explanation about who the narrator is or why Cohn's background is relevant. But it can be assumed that Cohn has done

something offensive to warrant a bitter assessment of his life before Jake knew him. They meet in Paris where Jake is dismissive of Cohn's existential concerns and takes pleasure in his romantic troubles. Cohn and Brett secretly have an affair. After this Jake witnesses and appears to relish Cohn's public humiliation over Brett's rejection of him. The tension builds to punches. Cohn breaks down in tears pleading for Jake's forgiveness. He sobs that Jake is his "only friend" (277). Jake, meanwhile, never ranks Cohen any higher than a "tennis friend" (44).

Aside from his interaction with Cohn, Jake is elevated above his companions in many ways. He is an informed and knowing participant in the events of the novel, savouring food and drink, valuing the solitude of fishing, moved by ritual of the fiesta and studied in the skill of bull fighting, so much so that he is recognized by locals as an aficionado. He is a loyal friend (to most). He is fair minded, discerning and self-disciplined in a way the others are not.

There is a fundamental gap between these qualities and his small minded treatment of Cohn throughout the novel. Cohn has a sexual relationship with Brett in which she is apparently a willing participant. He is not the only one. The fact that Jake is incapable of a sexual relationship has nothing to do with Cohn. And yet, Jake's resentment focuses on Cohn. What is the reader to make of Jake Barnes?

One interpretation might be that Cohn deserves Jake's scorn. He appears weak in his inability to defend himself when antagonized early in the novel by his then female companion, Frances, who humiliates him in public, much to Jake's astonishment: "I do not know how people could say such terrible things to Robert Cohn...His face was white. Why did he sit there? Why did he keep on taking it like that?" (40-2). He conducts himself on the basis of romantic notions acquired through reading novels as opposed to lessons learned through lived experience. In some

respects, he is self-serving, continuing to pursue Brett when his interest is no longer appreciated, even when she rebuffs him directly: "For god's sake, go off somewhere" (144). In contrast, Jake retains a level of dignity. The suffering of war and injury have forced him to exist within what is arguably a harsher reality than Cohn's. As a result, he is offended by Cohn and feels his contempt is justified. Iser's theory would allow for this possible interpretation if this is where the reader's experience and imagination leads. But there appears to be more to Hemingway's tortured use of Cohn. The novel's epigraph sets a theme of generational renewal contrasted with the limitations of any one life and cautions those who may become lost by failing to accept this reality; so that even the character with the greatest insight cannot escape the anxieties of existence. Jake literally cannot regenerate and he cannot help himself being envious and bitter towards one who can.

Similar to *The Sun Also Rises*, *Play It as It Lays* begins with chapters that preview the perspectives of three of the four primary characters. The fourth is apparently dead. In the only titled chapters in the novel, "Maria", "Helene", and "Carter", the named characters are speaking in conclusive terms about Maria.

Maria speaks emphatically and directly to the reader using a phrase similar to one frequently used by Didion herself in her essays: "I am telling you how it was" (5). She summarizes the facts of her life from childhood, to career, to marriage, to her own institutionalization. She makes clear her belief that her past has led nowhere, she has lost her optimism, she is incapable of planning and does not believe that there are reasons to explain her present state in life. She tries to avoid retrospection and "to live in the now" (10). She is passive and does not judge.

In contrast, Helene is critical and accusatory. She characterizes Maria as an ungrateful and selfish woman. She claims that Maria was responsible for BZ's death and "given half a chance would have killed Carter too" (10).

Carter also has a settled opinion of Maria's blame for their domestic problems. Carter, the director, says that he has replayed scenes from their marriage "as if for the camera" without finding "some order, a pattern" (14), without which he concludes that reconciliation with Maria is unlikely. Carter is unable to view their relationship outside of the context of a film.

Not unlike the effect of Jake's introduction of Robert Cohn, the opening chapters of *Play It as It Lays* leave the reader with a fundamental tension to resolve, in this case between characters who have developed reasons to explain experience (reasons that are alarming) and one who believes the search for reasons is pointless. The three titled chapters are followed by eighty-four numbered chapters in which Maria seeks connections with her past, her husband, her daughter, friends and lovers without comfort or relief. As will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, these chapters resemble the "flash cuts" Didion speaks of in "The White Album". The incidents from chapter to chapter are unrelated and the chapters themselves reach no resolution. As Didion notes in "The White Album" any possible meaning to experience depends on no more than how these disparate images happen to be assembled.

To use Iser's terminology, the chapters' flow of random experience is the "textual structure" (36) of the novel; with the reader's role being to occupy the shifting perspectives that are presented chapter by chapter through what characters have said and done. With each new perspective, previous perspectives are modified. For example, Maria's abortion is first discussed and arranged in a detached manner, but

is repeatedly revisited by Maria in distress. In the end, it is the reader who will perform “the structured act” (36) of synthesizing all of the perspectives to determine what meaning to give to Maria’s concluding statement: “I know what ‘nothing’ means, and keep on playing” (214). Does this represent progress towards self-awareness or deterioration?

Iser’s reader response theory fits well with Didion’s challenge for the reader to find the narrative in the disparate images emerging in contemporary America. Indeed, it could be argued that Didion is testing its limits in “The White Album” when she cautions that she is unable to find the narrative that would connect and explain the many troubling events and disturbing trends in American society. Maria suffers a similar fate, believing it is futile to look to her experience for reasons to explain the person she has become.

### 2.3 Film-like Structure

In *The Sun Also Rises*, the opportunity for characters to interact is provided by Hemingway’s fluid transition from scene to scene. Jake encounters his companions, by intent or by chance, in the cafés, restaurants and streets of Paris, San Sebastian and Pamplona. The scenes are brief, members of the expatriate cast enter and exit, the dialogue is direct. Chapter three provides an example of rapid scene changes. The chapter opens with Jake at a sidewalk table at the Café Napolitain, he picks up a prostitute who walks by, they leave and take a horse cab to a restaurant, their route through the streets of Paris is described in detail, they arrive at the restaurant where, unexpectedly, Jake meets a number of his friends, together they all leave the restaurant to dance at a bal musette, where others join the group, Jake and Brett leave the dance club and walk to another bar, they leave the bar and get in a cab

and give directions to Parc Montsouris, after which, the chapter ends. In other scenes, Jake and his companions are transported through the French and Spanish countryside by train and by bus with the sense of movement realized through observation of the changing landscape. The novel is constructed like a film, offering a succession of rapidly changing scenes. The effect is to create the impression of motion that underscores the transience of the characters' lives.

Hemingway achieves the same visual effect with the composition of many of his paragraphs describing landscape and crowd activity. The following paragraph is representative:

The covered seats of the bull-ring had been crowded with people sitting out of the rain watching the concourse of Basque and Navarrais dancers and singers, and afterward the Val Carlos dancers in their costumes danced down the street in the rain, the drums sounding hollow and damp, and the chiefs of the bands riding ahead on their big, heavy-footed horses, their costumes wet, the horses' coats wet in the rain. The crowd was in the cafés and the dancers came in, too, and sat, their tight-wound white legs under the tables, shaking the water from their belled caps, and spreading their red and purple jackets over the chairs to dry. It was raining hard outside. (136)

Two elements of style are at work here. This lengthy paragraph is composed of two long conjunctive sentences that showcase a sequence of images and then concludes with a short declarative sentence for emphasis. People are watching a procession from seats in a bull-ring sheltered from the rain falling on the passing procession of singers and dancers and musicians, each successive group in their distinct regional costumes and followed by their chiefs on horseback, also in their distinct costumes. The first sentence creates the intended feel of a parade with one

colorful group being followed by another. Professor Harry Levin described paragraphs like this one as Hemingway “carefully ordering visual impressions” with each phrase being “like a new frame in a strip of film” and like many others “might have been filmed by a camera and projected on the screen” (601).

The paragraph also demonstrates Hemingway’s careful and deliberate use of polysyndeton:

Hemingway puts his emphasis on nouns because, among parts of speech, they come closest to things. Stringing them along by means of conjunctions, he approximates the actual flow of experience...The rhetorical scheme is *polysyndeton* – a large name for the childishly simple habit of linking sentences together. (Levin, 600)

From the start of the paragraph, it is obvious that it is raining. Spectators are sitting out of the rain. And yet, the narrator observes that the dancers are dancing “in the rain” and that the horses’ coats are wet “in the rain” and the paragraph concludes after describing the procession taking shelter and wringing out their clothes with this final reminder: “It was raining hard outside” (136).

Repetition in this form has the obvious effect of emphasis. The reader feels saturation as the progress of one group after the other makes its way “in the rain” and then dancers take cover to wring out their costumes. Repetition also controls the pace of the procession slowing it to a march as the narrator distracts the reader from the action to note that rain is falling on the dancers and then on the horses. Levin notes of Hemingway’s use of repetition that: “As in the movies, the illusion of movement is produced by repeating the same shot with further modification every time. Whenever a new clause takes more than one step ahead, a subsequent clause repeats in order to catch up” (603).

The film industry provides a backdrop for Didion's novel. *Play It as It Lays* is populated by characters who manipulate images to attract the attention of the viewer. Maria's husband, a film director, says of Maria after her institutionalization that he had replayed scenes from their life together "as if for the camera, trying to find some order" (14) that would give meaning. Didion recognizes in *The White Album* that images in variable sequence have no inherent meaning "beyond their temporary arrangement" (13). Didion carefully structures *Play It as It Lays* to accompany Maria's struggle towards awareness.

Like Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises*, Didion has arranged her novel into a succession of short scenes. *Play It as It Lays* is composed of eighty-four chapters in two-hundred-fourteen pages. Roughly a quarter of the chapters are less than a page in length. Geography changes from Los Angeles to Las Vegas to the Nevada desert. Specific locations change from chapter to chapter: driving the freeway, at residences in Beverly Hills and at the beach, in restaurants, at the site of the abortion, in casinos and motels and many chapters consisting only of a phone call or a moment of reflection by Maria.

Characters come and go from scene to scene. Maria is often alone or left alone in many of these scenes, the reader, with Maria, searching for meaning in the disparate images presented. Chapters with their momentary conflicts and disappointments clip past relentlessly. For Maria, one unsatisfactory event or exchange after another contributes to the impression that she is moving towards an unsettling conclusion in her relations with her fellow characters and in her own life. As Michelle Loris notes, "The short, disconnected episodes indicate the stark and chaotic quality of her [Maria's] experience" (284). Even within the scenes, Maria has an awareness that her abrupt encounters with people around her have a film like

quality, describing, for example, the disclosure of a pregnancy to Carter as an “obligatory scene”, and wondering “just how long this scene would play” (50). In the end, this rush of events from past and present amounts to nothing of meaning for Maria.

Didion has written that “things happen in motion pictures. There is always a resolution, always a strong cause-effect dramatic line” (88). Ironically, Didion has chosen a chapter structure that runs like scenes from a film, but which reveal to Maria the opposite of a film’s expected outcome. This is because the individual frames that comprise Didion’s film often have little relationship to those that precede and follow them. The effect is disjointed and without cause-and-effect or resolution.

Hinchman describes the effect of chapter structure in conveying Maria’s distress:

Following the prologue are 84 brief, choppy chapters, many just a few sentences long, and the component sentences themselves tend to be extremely terse. Some pages contain considerably more blank space than text, reflecting the emptiness Maria feels and evoking the trouble interpreting experience...Few threads bind the chapters together, and even within chapters, links between episodes are conspicuously absent. (460)

The longest chapters are no more than a few pages, the shortest comprised of paragraphs that do not cover an entire page. Further, towards the end of the novel, the third-person narration begins to be interrupted by short, italicized paragraphs written in the first person: “Seven chapters entirely in italics punctuate the final quarter of the narrative proper; they are told from Maria’s point of view and seem to record her ruminations in the sanatorium” (Chabot, 54). Not only the short chapters themselves, but particularly these italicized ones, in which Maria’s internal narrative

provides a contrast to the overarching narrative, are reminiscent of Hemingway's vignettes in *In Our Time*. In fact, we might view Didion's technique as an inverse of Hemingway's: where Hemingway uses his short, italicized vignettes to interrupt the more personal stories with impersonal reports that reflect the chaos of the nineteen-twenties, Didion uses Maria's more personal reminiscences to interrupt the cold, impersonal, third-person narrative, to anchor the reader within the trajectory of her own life, her own personal "history". In both cases, the interruptions and the abruptness of the Hemingway vignettes and the Didion chapters, those which are notably short and those italicized, reflect the "trouble interpreting experience" that Hinchman describes, the difficulty with coming to terms with the difficulties presented by social realities and personal existential worry.

Further, it is reasonable to argue that this style reflects a thematic interest Didion pursues in the novel, that of Maria's abortion. Some of the chapters are so short, end so abruptly, that it is almost as though they were aborted. Often the chapters end with a failed communication, a plea for help that is unheard, an inquiry that is rebuffed, a plan abandoned. Relationships and opportunities are being aborted.<sup>27</sup> The vignettes in *In Our Time* are similar in that they end abruptly, often deliberately withholding information. In both cases, the reader is never presented with the text in its full form, something has been cut. This is, of course, the very conscious and deliberate style of omission at work. This is further reflected in the sentences used within the short paragraph-chapters as well, tight, sharp, contained units that seem to end prematurely. Consider Maria's final italicized chapter, the concluding chapter of the novel:

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<sup>27</sup> E.g. chapters 20, 21, 28, 38, 40, 55, 56.

*Carter called today, but I saw no point in talking to him. On the whole I talk to no one. I concentrate on the way light would strike filled Mason jars on a kitchen windowsill. I lie here in the sunlight, watch the hummingbird. This morning I threw the coins in the swimming pool, and they gleamed and turned in the water in such a way that I was almost moved to read them. I refrained. One thing in my defense, not that it matters: I know something Carter never knew, or Helene, or maybe you. I know what "nothing" means, and keep on playing.*

*Why, BZ would say.*

*Why not, I say. (214)*

The first paragraph is composed of short, concise sentences, describing simple actions and externally observed minutiae. There is an abrupt shift in content in the final two paragraphs, in which Maria hints enigmatically at what she "knows", and what she plans to do because of this. Speculation as to her meaning can be made, but the reader must confirm in their own mind what her meaning is; Didion deliberately omits the answer.

Similarly, in one of the *In Our Time* vignettes, Chapter VI, the reader finds a young, wounded Nick Adams describing the wreckage of the war-torn town around him: "*The sun shone on his face. The day was very hot...The pink wall of the house opposite had fallen out from the roof, and an iron bedstead hung twisted toward the street*" (105). Nick, like Maria, describes briefly his own present situation, then goes on to describe the physical world surrounding him, before briefly philosophizing to his dying companion Rinaldi: "*Nick turned his head carefully and looked at Rinaldi. 'Senta Rinaldi. Senta. You and me we've made a separate peace.'* Rinaldi lay still in the sun breathing with difficulty. '*Not patriots.*' Nick turned his head carefully away

*smiling sweatily. Rinaldi was a disappointing audience*" (105). Just as Maria imagines talking to BZ, whom the reader knows to be dead, Nick addresses Rinaldi, who given his labored breathing and the context within which the vignette is set, may soon be dead. Like Maria's, Nick's comments are enigmatic; it is for the reader to decide exactly what he means by "a separate peace" in this context, just as the reader must decide what Maria means by knowing what "nothing" means, yet planning to continue to keep "playing". The deliberate omission of information, heightened by its use in such short chapters or vignettes, works to limit information for the reader on both a physical and philosophical level. It appears from her own acknowledgment that Didion observed the power of withheld information from her study of Hemingway.<sup>28</sup> Didion learned from Hemingway the power of requiring the reader "to enact" (Price, 203) the story for themselves.

The abrupt style that encapsulates and reflects the abortion, and thereby the theme of mortality, can also be compared with the previously mentioned film-like quality that characterizes a great deal of the text. An example of this can be found, in the description of one of Carter's films, simply titled *Maria*:

The other picture, the first picture, the picture never distributed, was called *Maria*. Carter had simply followed Maria around New York and shot film. It was not until they moved to California and Carter began cutting the film together that she entirely realized what he was doing. The picture showed Maria doing a fashion sitting, Maria asleep on a couch at a party, Maria on the telephone arguing with the billing department at Bloomingdale's, Maria

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<sup>28</sup> Didion, Joan. "Last Words: Hemingway's Mysterious, Thrilling Style." *The New Yorker*, 26 Oct. 1998.

cleaning some marijuana with a kitchen strainer, Maria crying on the IRT. At the end she was thrown into negative and looked dead. (20)

The film, in which Carter documents Maria's mundane, day to day activities, before throwing her "into negative" in which she looks "dead" disturbs Maria because it too closely reflects the nature of her life: a series of meaningless, repetitive activities performed until death. That she was not aware of what Carter was doing until he begins to edit the film together represents her lack of realization, or denial of, how her life is being lived, and further, a denial of mortality. It is indicative of a life out of control, and to some extent, under the control of others. That the film itself is never "released" but circulated to the extent that it wins "a prize at a festival in Eastern Europe" (20), shows that, at least as a commercial project, it was aborted. Didion gives us a literal example within the text of the technique she is using throughout the novel. In the film, she is defined as a character by her husband's selection and ordering of images, not unlike the random quality of her actual life. Maria develops more in the novel than she does in Carter's film, but in many ways the film reflects the nature of her existence over the course of the novel. Finally, the film is also, based on the description, deliberately vague in its message, leaving the audience to interpret its meaning, a technique that Didion uses throughout the text.

#### 2.4 Narration: "Looking but Not Joining"

*The Sun Also Rises* is narrated in the subjective third person by Jake, who observes the characters and events that surround him with a large degree of detachment. Jake is representative of what Didion describes in Hemingway's writing as "a certain way of looking at the world, a way of not joining, a way of moving through but not attaching, a kind of romantic individualism" (8).

On some level, this detachment allows Jake to display a greater authenticity and a deeper appreciation of experience than his companions. In Pamplona, Montoya, a local innkeeper, recognizes Jake as an “aficionado” of bullfighting. Of Montoya, Jake says:

He smiled again. He always smiles as though bullfighting were a very special secret between the two of us; a rather shocking but really very deep secret that we knew about. He always smiled as though there were something lewd about the secret to outsiders but that it was something that we understood. It would not do to expose it to people who would not understand. (105)

There is a “secret” between the two, something that implies a relationship founded upon distance from one another, and it is this “secret” which unites them.

Detachment, ironically, becomes imbued with a quality of intimacy. Further, for Montoya, an aficionado can be forgiven, and so Jake observes that Montoya is even prepared to “forgive me all of my [unauthentic] friends” (106), who clearly do not maintain the same detachment as Jake.

It is through Jake that experience is most intensely perceived. Unlike the other characters, he is not simply searching for spectacle. His attention is studied while the others are simply distracted by the action. In the following scene, he sits with Brett watching Romero, her lover, fight the bulls:

Pedro Romero had the greatness. He loved bullfighting, and I think he loved the bulls, and I think he loved Brett...Never once did he look up. He made it stronger that way, and did it for himself, too, as well as for her. Because he did not look up to ask if it pleased he did it all for himself inside, and it strengthened him, and yet he did it for her, too. (305)

In this scene, Jake does not simply watch a bullfight. The repetition, qualification and emphasis in his speech signifies that he is measuring Romero's actions against the bull and with Brett. Jake is a participant in this bullfight and in their affair. Contrast this with Brett's reaction after watching a bullfight: "These bullfights are hell on one" (246).

In *Play It as It Lays* there are two narrators: a first person, principally Maria, and a third person narrator, also Maria. In combination, these voices expose Maria's intimate fears and beliefs and also allow for a cool and distanced telling of Maria's story. In an interview with *The Paris Review*, Didion explains the evolution of the two narrators:

I wanted to make it all first person, but it wasn't good enough to maintain at first. There were tricks I didn't know. So I began playing with a close third person, just to get something down. By a "close third" I mean not an omniscient third but a third very close to the mind of the character...The juxtaposition of first and third turned out to be very useful toward the ending, when I wanted to accelerate the whole thing. (11)

In his introduction to *Play It as It Lays*, "Something about Maria", David Thomson likens the combined force of the two narrators to the experience of "someone as clever as Joan Didion" (xv) watching a movie "and being unable to stop the camera's cool third-person distance, while being equally powerless to stop her own sighs – or is it crying? – creeping onto the open soundtrack" (xv-xvi).

As noted in the preceding section, most of the eighty-four chapters that comprise the novel are narrated in Didion's close third person. These chapters resemble scenes from a film. They are short. Many are self-contained encounters with acquaintances, former lovers and Carter, and others who attempt to control

Maria. Chapters end without reconciliation and without any unifying plot beyond charting Maria's continuing distress. As the novel draws to a close, the first person emerges with increasing frequency to declare Maria's independence and to assert her growing awareness of her condition. Although institutionalized at the end of the novel, Maria has progressed from victim seeking support from a disinterested mix of characters to a woman who has narrowed her focus, who needs no one, and who knows what she wants.

In both novels, the perspective reflects Didion's description of Hemingway's narration: "A certain way of looking at the world, a way of not joining" (8). Jake is distinguished from his expatriate companions by a more acute and private perception. Maria suspects and is repulsed by the characters populating the film world in Hollywood. She too exists at a distance. It is interesting, however, that the reliability of both narrators has been challenged for being too closely controlled by their authors.

In his journal article, "Hemingway's Style and Jake's Narration", Terence Doody submits that Jake remains a problem as a narrator because he is never: "located in space and time" and therefore never sufficiently distant from Hemingway "to substantiate his own agency as the narrator" (213). Doody points out that while Jake is a writer by profession, he never explains to anyone the occasion for his retrospective story, nor does he provide "any indication of his imaginative agency in producing the narrative" (220). Doody continues that "Jake is most convincing when he is least self-conscious; yet because he is so unselfish-conscious about the whole of his narrative, he is hard to accept as the authoritative source of the fiction his own voice delivers" (216). Doody concludes that it is Hemingway's need for the reader to

certify his own knowledge and experience that prevents Hemingway from giving Jake the authority “to make the novel Jake's fiction” (223).

As in *The Sun Also Rises*, there are questions about Didion’s handling of the narrator in her effort to communicate Maria’s overwhelming distress with the greatest immediacy. David Thomson, in his introduction to *Play It as It Lays*, observes that the first person voice of Maria posing the question: “What makes Iago evil?” (3) and her subsequent revelations that there are no answers to such questions, is both striking and unforgettable. Maria, by this stage, has been victimized by many of the people in her past and present. She claims to have no interest in the answer to the questions about Iago, nor does she have any interest in considering reasons for her losses. There are only “certain facts” (8), no explanations.

Thomson questions whether Maria’s victimization is consistent with the first-person narrator’s voice that increasingly takes over at the end of the novel. In light of first-person Maria's increasing tenacity, Thomson states: “What I am suggesting is that we hear briefly, Maria closer to the tough intelligence of her author, a woman who wouldn't take all the shit the other Maria uses for a shower” (xvi).

Both novels reflect this tension between a narrator who keeps their distance and an author who is quite close at hand in the telling of the story.

## 2.5 Imagery and Symbolism: The Bull and the Rattlesnake; The City and the Desert

Both Hemingway and Didion explore the imagery of animals associated with mortality. In *The Sun Also Rises*, this animal is the bull. The bull is the violent, dangerous creature, confronted by the bullfighter, who must subdue the animal or risk his own death. The bullfight is heavily regulated; strict rules, traditions and

techniques must all be respected. This intense order, when contrasted with the unpredictable, erratic behavior of the bull, reflects both Jake's internal struggles as well as the style which Hemingway uses. The seemingly often calm, measured Jake, who describes (for the most part) his surroundings and interactions in a concise, rhythmic manner represents the rules of the bullfight, the attempt to enforce order to temper the fear of death that is represented by the bull. As Michael Reynolds notes: "the dying bulls were transformed by the artist out of time into beauty itself... Ernest needed the bulls then to study his own death" (216). Hemingway described the bullfight not as a sport but as a tragedy, "a very great tragedy" (95), in which form and order prevail, not through resolution but by destruction and loss, not unlike Jake's self-disciplined repressing of his desire for life with Brett.

For Didion, this animal is the rattlesnake. The rattlesnake appears many times in *Play It as It Lays*, and is used at the novel's start by Maria as she attempts to explain her philosophical approach to understanding, or rejecting the struggle to understand life:

I never ask about snakes. Why should Shalimar attract kraits. Why should a coral snake need two glands of neurotoxic poison to survive while a king snake, so *similarly marked*, needs none. Where is the Darwinian logic there. You might ask that. I never would, not any more. (3)

Here, as is the case at other points in the novel, the rattlesnake is representative of the sudden, unexpected ways in which mortality can manifest itself. There is no explaining mortality for Maria, as "To look for 'reasons' is beside the point" (3). The snake, with its poison and its unpredictable nature, the rattlesnake hiding under the rock, is a testament to what Maria perceives as the randomness of existence, a surrender to an unorderable world and the abandonment of the quest for meaning:

“My father advised me that life itself was a crap game: it was one of the two lessons I learned as a child. The other was that overturning a rock was apt to reveal a rattlesnake” (200). Didion has used her chosen animal imagery to communicate a different existential reality: while the bulls are representative of uncontrollable mortality, the bullfight exists within an ordered system, whereas the snake attack is completely random, without invitation or willing participant. While Hemingway describes a contrived attempt at control over mortality, Didion begins her novel by dissuading the reader from the belief that there is any point in seeking such order, instead resigning to the inevitability of mortality.

There is, Henderson argues, a spiritual component to this image of the rattlesnake that is uniquely American:

The early American view of God’s special care of our country existed in tension with a sense of ever-present evil to be perpetually guarded against. The second lesson that Wyeth teaches his daughter, that anyone who overturns a rock is “apt to reveal a rattlesnake,” is a secularization the dark side of the American religious heritage, the Calvinistic sense of lurking evil. As the form assumed by Satan to seduce Eve, the snake is one of our oldest symbols of evil – and the rattlesnake is a peculiarly American snake. (21)

Though Henderson’s theorization about the symbolism of the snake within the context of the American religious tradition is not without merit, one wonders to what extent “good and evil” exist in a novel that, despite Didion’s professed sense of morality in her personal life, appears largely morally ambiguous. The significance of this uniquely American religious view is perhaps more analogous to the need to place the animal image within the realm of the traditional belief, much as Hemingway does with the bull and the rituals of bullfighting in *The Sun Also Rises*. In both

novels, the animal represents the human attempt to infuse the unpredictable and chaotic nature of mortality with the traditional belief system, thus underscoring the Ecclesiastical succession of generations. The former is subject to the endless tide of the latter.

Finally, despite the fact that Maria claims to “never ask” about snakes she proceeds to describe the biological features of and differences between several of them, suggesting that she is in fact knowledgeable about them. Though she may claim to “never ask”, she has invested some amount of time in learning about them. Similarly, Jake Barnes has invested time learning about the bulls in Pamplona, enough that he has been deemed an “aficionado” by inn-keeper and local, Montoya. This knowledge confirms that the two protagonists are certainly aware, to some extent, of the nature of the symbolism embodied by these animals within the context of the novels and have engaged with the existential dilemmas and internal struggles they represent.<sup>29</sup>

The image of the desert in *Play It as It Lays* provides an important insight into the themes of morality and timelessness in the text. The novel is considered by some to be a “Hollywood novel”, but in fact a great deal of it takes place in the Nevada desert. This is where Maria was born and raised, it is where she is heading when she drives the freeway, and where she ends up on the production site of one of Carter’s films, in which she is the only witness to BZ’s suicide. The connections here are fairly straightforward: Maria’s childhood home has been destroyed, it is now a nuclear testing site. Driving towards Carter, and his rebuffing of her, represents the further deterioration of what has already been a long dying relationship, and BZ’s

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<sup>29</sup> The use of the bull and the snake fulfills Ezra Pound’s direction that “the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object” because there is no abstraction in the way that “dulls the image” (Pound, Ezra “A Retrospective” and “A Few Don’ts”). The allusion to mortality is powerful because both the bull and the snake are agents of sudden death.

suicide is quite literally a rejection of life. The desert, then, is symbolic of death and mortality, a prevalent theme in the novel. Consider the description of the desert town Maria, Carter and the others stay in during the filming of Carter's new movie:

The town was on a dry river bed between Death Valley and the Nevada line. Carter and BZ and Helene and Susannah Wood and Harrison Porter and most of the crew did not think of it as a town at all, but Maria did: it was larger than Silver Wells. Besides the motel, which was built of cinder blocks and operated by the wife and the sheriff's deputy who patrolled several hundred empty square miles around the town, there were two gas stations, a store which sold fresh meat and vegetables one day a week...and the bar, which served only beer. The bar was called The Rattler Room. (187)

The town is a thing to be ignored by Maria's contemporaries, but for Maria, it is a reminder of her childhood. There is an implication that Maria is more familiar with death and its relationship to the desert, having grown up in it, and being from a town that is now a testing site for the ultimate weapon of destruction, the nuclear bomb. There are "several hundred empty square miles" and the store sells fresh food only "one day a week", while the bar, aptly named "The Rattler Room", serves only beer. The lack of choice and the limitations placed upon existence in the desert contrast sharply with the manifold choices presented by Los Angeles materialism and decadence; this is a place of scarcity, of emptiness. However, Sandra K. Hinchman comments on the vulnerability of life throughout the western landscape:

The desert near Death Valley, where Carter is filming on location, dispels the sorts of illusions that Hollywood and Las Vegas encourage. It underlines the fragility and temporality of Western cities, their critical dependence on water,

without which, they would die...All human projects seem vain and questionable in the desert's unremitting light. (468)

The desert is the permanent, eternal natural world; these qualities make clear the insignificance of "human projects" even on the scale of the city, often seen as an enduring presence. Didion evokes again the image of the rattler she has used throughout the novel as a symbol for unpredictable mortality in the desert setting, further solidifying it as evocative of death.

The passage also has religious qualities that confirm the desert is a symbol for mortality. There is a level of irony at work here. Elderly people travel to this part of the desert in search of "cures and the restorative powers of desolation" (187), and in an attempt to cheat death, have travelled to a place representative of death itself. The closed talc mine is called "The Queen of Sheba" (188), named after a figure in the Old Testament who brought bountiful gifts and has come to be representative of fertility. The elderly people will soon die, the town and by extension the desert could not be more void of bounty and fertility. The absence of youth further contributes to this, the paragraph ending with Maria seeing "no children" (188), despite the fact that there is supposed to be a school nearby, presumably serving the town.

Finally, that one of the "two cottonwoods in the dry riverbed" (188) is dead could be interpreted as a symbolic foreshadowing of BZ's death, which occurs shortly afterwards in the novel. Both trees once lived, presumably, but now their life support has disappeared, and one tree dies while the other lives, continuing to exist in an inhospitable environment. BZ has decided that his life is void of meaning and that he will no longer "play" and so takes his own life, while Maria remains alive, vowing to keep on "playing" in the final chapter of the novel. Though both struggle to

tolerate the world they inhabit and perceive life to be without meaning, only one elects death.

Death exists in the desert, then, as a symbol for the internal death Maria feels throughout the novel, a death of existential meaning and a spiritual death. Consider the story that she tells Carter while they are in the desert together:

“What do you think about it,” Maria asked Carter.

“About what.”

“What I just told you. About the man at the trailer camp who told his wife he was going out for a walk in order to talk to God.”

“I wasn’t listening, Maria. Just give me the punch line.”

“There isn’t any punch line, the highway patrol just found him dead, bitten by a rattlesnake.”

“I’ll say there isn’t any punch line.”

“Do you think he talked to God?”

Carter looked at her.

“I mean do you think God answered? Or don’t you?”

The heat struck. The air shimmered. An underground nuclear device detonated where Silver Wells had once been, and Maria got up before dawn to feel the blast. She felt nothing. (204)

Where Maria searches abstractly for existential meaning, Carter searches for the “the punch line”, or in his mind perhaps, the next scene in the film, something concrete that will explain the unfamiliar. The gulf between them widens even further in this moment, in which Maria becomes an abstract thinker and Carter a purely prosaic one, though ironically, he is the one regarded in Hollywood as the auteur. The man going out “to talk to God”, only to be killed by a rattlesnake, is

representative of the death throes of Maria's personal search for existential meaning. That he is bitten by a rattlesnake confirms the unpredictable nature of mortality and in Maria's mind, at the novel's conclusion, the pointlessness of searching for its meaning. This is confirmed by the end of the passage, in which the reader is transported directly back into the desert atmosphere, and in which Maria gets up to feel "an underground nuclear device detonate where Silver Wells had once been", but feels "nothing". The detonation of the bomb, the emptiness of the desert, Maria's inability to "feel" after her appeal to Carter, all of these contribute to the gathering spiritual death she is undergoing, and to her final conviction at novel's conclusion that there is no reason to ask questions or search for meaning. To keep "playing" is enough.

Hinchman argues that Maria's dysfunction arises from her singular perception of reality:

The breakdown in communication that these incidents disclose has certain epistemological repercussions. Our sense of reality is shored up by our expectation that the meanings we ascribe to events roughly dovetail with those of other people. Because Maria is isolated and cannot establish communications with anyone, she is thrown back on her own meager resources for distinguishing reality from subjective interpretation. (467)

In this example, one of several in the book, Maria has tried and failed to find meaning through communication with another (Carter). Her epistemological and existential concerns are dismissed, and she is "thrown back on her own" to try to come to terms with "reality". The desert setting, against which the temporality and fragility of human life is so clearly contrasted with the natural world appears at the

end of the novel in order to highlight the peak of Maria's struggle to come to terms with the transient nature of her life, and the lack of meaning found within it.

The desert as self-contained image, setting and thematic catalyst bears similarities to the city of Pamplona in *The Sun Also Rises*. Pamplona is not empty, and it is not dry and arid, but it is removed from the decadent urban society of Paris, or even Madrid. It is high in the mountains and the fiesta, a religious tradition that has been ongoing for hundreds of years, is representative of the existential struggle that Jake, like Maria in the desert, undergoes. Though he is closer to this setting than his peers, as Maria is closer to the desert than hers, though he is an aficionado of the bullfights and speaks the Spanish language, he is still ultimately an outsider, unable to participate in and grasp the significance of the fiesta in the same way that the locals can. Nor is he necessarily welcome. The innkeeper, Montoya, who originally recognizes Jake as an aficionado, shuns him towards the end of his stay in Pamplona for corrupting the young matador Romero by introducing him to Brett. In Jake's Paris, as in Maria's Los Angeles, there is an, albeit unsatisfactory, order to things on a physical level, a participation in more familiar daily life. There is work, there are acquaintances, there are familiar landmarks. Pamplona, like Didion's desert, is ancient and indifferent, it continues on in its constant, ritualized existence regardless of Jake and his companions, and the implication is made that, as with the generations in Ecclesiastes, it will continue this way as it always has. Pamplona exposes the outsider to a direct encounter with mortality and spirituality through religious celebration and the bullfights. As a result of the fiesta, Jake feels compelled to travel to San Sebastian alone, where he embarks on what could be considered an act of purification, diving in and out of the ocean repeatedly in multiple passages. As Mellette notes, "Swimming provides an opportunity for self-reflection, free from the

stresses and burdens of the festival" (70). Ultimately, however, he is like Maria trying and failing to feel something when the nuclear test in Silver Wells occurs: "Then I tried several dives. I dove deep once, swimming down to the bottom. I swam with my eyes open and it was green and dark. The raft made a dark shadow. I came out of the water beside the raft, pulled up, dove once more, holding it for length, and then swam ashore" (189). Jake's dives, particularly his attempt to dive deep, represent a psychological attempt, through his solitary act of purification, to find meaning, to garner an existential insight from his recent experiences at the fiesta in Pamplona. However, despite his efforts, everything is "dark", the water, the shadow of the raft, eventually leading Jake to try one more dive before abandoning his pursuit and swimming ashore. Shortly after, he abandons his trip to San Sebastian when he is summoned to Madrid by Brett. There, they have a brief exchange about God, as an aside to a discussion regarding Brett's failed affair with the bullfighter Romero:

"You know," Brett said, "he'd only been with two women before. He never cared about anything but bull-fighting."

"He's got plenty of time."

"I don't know. He thinks it was me. Not the show in general."

"Well, it was you."

"Yes. It was me."

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

"How can I help it?"

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

"I just talk around it. You know I feel damned good, Jake."

"You should."

"You know it makes one feel rather good deciding not to be a bitch."

“Yes.”

“It’s sort of what we have instead of God.”

“Some people have God,” I said. “Quite a lot.”

“He never worked very well with me.” (197)

In this exchange, Jake thinks abstractly and Brett concretely, much like in Maria’s exchange with Carter. Brett looks for a simple way to absolve herself of the guilt she feels, declaring that she will no longer be “a bitch”, while Jake warns her that she will “lose it” if she talks about it, “it” being the purity of the emotional experience she had with Romero. Brett determines that her concrete action of self-absolution is “what we have instead of God”, while Jake challenges her, saying that “some people have God”, implying that some people still perceive life in the abstract rather than the concrete. Just as Maria implores Carter to consider the existential ramifications of the man who goes into the desert to talk to God and is bitten by a rattlesnake, so Jake implores Brett to consider the philosophical nature of her choice in ending the affair. Like Maria with Carter, Jake fails in his effort to engage Brett. The outcomes for the two protagonists are similar.

Maria’s conviction that to “keep playing” is enough begins to reveal itself when in the penultimate chapter of the novel, as BZ begins his deliberate suicide by drug overdose, it is implied that he extends the invitation to Maria:

“Grain-and-a-half Seconal.”

“You want some?”

She looked at him. “No.”

“You’re still playing.” BZ did not take his eyes from hers. “Some day you’ll wake up and you just won’t feel like playing anymore.” (211-2)

Maria's refusal to join BZ in suicide is indicative of the fact that she will continue to keep "playing", while her willingness to let him continue with his overdose demonstrates her understanding that because no existential meaning can be derived from life, she will not hinder those who no longer wish to "play". To continue to play even though one feels this way is somewhat paradoxical, though in Maria's case, it can be argued that Kate is her motivation to continue to live, which in and of itself creates a paradox in her character insofar as she still feels she can derive meaning from something, something which appears to be a fantasy. Here there is another possible connection with *The Sun Also Rises*. As BZ lies dying, they both hear the sound of a bottle being smashed in the bar across the road as a result of an argument, which BZ comments upon: "Listen to that," he said. 'Try to think about having enough left to break a bottle over it.' 'It would be very pretty,' Maria said. 'Go to sleep'" (212). This exchange mirrors Brett and Jake's final exchange in *The Sun Also Rises*. BZ imagines what it must be like to still care enough about life to become emotional, to which Maria, who empathizes with his position replies "It would be very pretty". Both imagine being capable of an emotional experience that is now impossible for them. At the end of *The Sun Also Rises*, Brett comments that "we could have had such a damned good time together" (198), to which Jake replies, "Isn't it pretty to think so?" (198). Brett and Jake are also aware that they will never be able to fulfill an emotional experience. The use of the word "pretty" undercuts the severity of the existential and emotional consequences for the characters in both texts, a litotic technique that Didion, by virtue of using the same word, appears to have borrowed from Hemingway's novel. Though Didion's novel results in a physical death and Hemingway's does not, it can reasonably be argued that the true nature of the deaths in question is the same. It is the death of existential meaning, the

willingness of the narrators to continue to exist driven by denial in pursuit of an unfulfillable fantasy. Maria's believes that she will "save" Kate, and Jake remains devoted to Brett, whom he will continue to "save" in moments of crisis as he does at the end of the novel. Both continue to exist problematically, aware of the absence of meaning for them as individuals, with the knowledge that there is little point in continuing to exist, yet paradoxically driven by a fantasy that provides them a fictitious meaning. There is no clear conclusion, no complete transformation in character, but in both novels, greater revelation as to the nature of the complex existential confusion with which each narrator is burdened. Thus, the image of the desert in Didion's novel represents not only death itself, but also draws out several thematic concerns surrounding Maria's contemplations of mortality and directs the reader towards the nature of the character both at the novel's beginning and end.

A side-by-side comparison of *The Sun Also Rises* and *Play It as It Lays* reveals Didion at work with themes, structures and elements of style inspired by Hemingway's writing. Both authors are deeply concerned with the existential plight of the individual struggling in an apparently meaningless world. Both create characters who continue to operate in their inevitable, cyclical patterns. Stylistically both employ techniques of omission and incomplete dialogue to explore the detachment between the protagonist and the other characters within the respective novels. Both use symbolism drawn from the natural world to underscore the major thematic interests that are at play, namely the individual quest to confront mortality within a timeless universe. And finally, many of these same elements of style operate to engage the reader in filling gaps in the narrative and reconciling inconsistencies to experience the text and discover its meaning.



## Chapter Two

### **Richard Brautigan: *Trout Fishing in America***

#### 1.0 *Trout Fishing in America: Brautigan and Hemingway*

Richard Brautigan achieved success as an author in the nineteen-sixties and has since maintained a cult-like status in the American literary canon. Born in Tacoma, Washington, in 1935, Brautigan experienced “an impoverished childhood in the Pacific Northwest” (Hjortsberg, 21), one also characterized by paternal abandonment.

From a young age, Brautigan developed an interest in the work of Ernest Hemingway. In his biography of Brautigan, *Jubilee Hitchhiker* (2012), William Hjortsberg makes note of Hemingway’s impact on Brautigan’s formative years:

Like many other teenage boys who dreamed of becoming writers in the early 1950s, ‘Dick’s idol was Ernest Hemingway’ Peter Webster recalled, ‘Richard talked about [Hemingway] all the time.’ One of the earliest surviving Brautigan typescripts...dates from 1955 or before. “Somebody from Hemingway Land” is a two-hundred-word short story<sup>30</sup>...In “Argument,” an early poem from this same period, Brautigan wrote that he had met Hemingway in a dream and had a ‘terrible argument’ with the older writer because he ‘thought he was / a better writer / than I am.’ His family and friends didn’t remember the story or the poem but agreed Ernest Hemingway was Dick’s favourite writer. (61-2)

Brautigan left the Northwest for San Francisco where he was first published as a poet in the late 1950’s. The novels that are the subject of this thesis were both

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<sup>30</sup> The story features a character who admonishes another for “talking like somebody from Hemingway Land” (61).

completed in 1961, but published later in the decade. *A Confederate General from Big Sur* was published in 1964 and his most popular novel, *Trout Fishing in America*, in 1967.

The American poet, Billy Collins, a contemporary of Brautigan's in the literary scene in nineteen-sixties San Francisco describes him as "post-beatnik and pre-hippie" (116). Collins regrets that while *Trout Fishing in America* captured the excitement of cultural change and held "the promise of a new kind of radical literature" (120) it has come to be seen as an artifact of the era joining "the Grateful Dead, peace signs, Zap Comix and tie-dye shirts." (121). Brautigan's association with the social events of the nineteen-sixties has resulted in his dismissal by many critics. In her memoir about her father, Brautigan's daughter, Ianthe, writes that Brautigan was "not a favourite of either critics or academics...many critics never recognized him as anything other than a phenomenon" (viii).

The critic and academic, Christopher Gair, has done much to restore appreciation of Brautigan's literary accomplishments. Gair makes the important distinction between the subject matter of Brautigan's writing and the experimental merit of the writing itself. He notes that at the height of his popularity, Brautigan was regarded by critics "as either a writer locked into the countercultural zeitgeist or a literary descendent of Thoreau and Hemingway, at the vanguard of reimaginings of prose and poetry" (5-6). Gair argues that Brautigan properly belongs in the latter category: with a "literary genealogy" that includes Franklin, Thoreau, Hemingway, London and Pound.

This thesis will consider Brautigan's use of elements of style evident in the writing of Hemingway. As John Tanner notes, there is "a strong flavour of the early Hemingway in much of the work...Throughout Brautigan's life, however surreal his

literary excursions, his basic unit of expression remained the simple, declarative sentence associated with Hemingway” (18). The textual strategies include plain language, declarative sentences, evocative images, purposeful omissions, and conjunctive sentences composed of disparate observations. All of these elements of style require the reader to make the connections necessary to make sense of the text. In Hemingway’s analysis, the truth is known through experience and these elements of style drive the reader to rely on their own reservoir of experience and their imagination to colour the scene, give effect to the images, sort through the characters’ differing perspectives and fill in the gaps to arrive at a meaning from the author’s text.

As discussed, the thesis will also consider the creative relationship between author and reader. Iser’s reader response criticism asserts that a literary “work” is virtual in character (Iser, 21). The author lays down a network of “response inviting structures” for the reader to move through and actualize during the reading process (34). These structures include the diverse perspectives of reality revealed by the characters, the flow of the plot and the narrator (35). The reader’s role is to fit these perspectives into a recognizable pattern (35). Hemingway and Brautigan heighten the reader’s challenge by omitting descriptive and explanatory information and, in Brautigan’s case, through use of surreal imagery and deliberate subversion of narrative direction.

*Trout Fishing in America* sets out on a familiar quest in American literature for physical and ethical redemption in the boundless American wilderness. But the degradation of the natural environment in the interests of American capitalism turns the narrator’s quest into “a series of disappointments” (Tanner, 409). The metaphor of trout fishing in America is fitting. It is a form of exploitation. “The people with three

cornered hats fishing in the dawn” (3) observed by Trout Fishing in America in the chapter “Knock on Wood (Part One)” were the start of an entitlement to take what was wanted from the natural landscape in the belief it was limitless. The same deception has continued in the present.

*Trout Fishing in America* can be described as a fractured series of stories, essays, observations and vignettes. It is both an exploration of American identity and a surreal homage to American literature. As William L. Stull notes:

Despite its crystal-clear surface, placid babble, and meandering course, Richard Brautigan’s *Trout Fishing in America* (1967) offers the critical angler some tricky crosscurrents, deep holes, and big fish. Through the cool waters of Brautigan’s book flow the main currents of American thought – individualism, progress, love, death and escape. Like Hemingway’s Big Two-Hearted River...Brautigan’s trout streams carry the flotsam and jetsam of American dreams, the hopes and fears of innocents, explorers and vagrants. During the 1970s, scholars steadily revealed the book to be a Sargasso Sea of American literature, filled with direct and indirect references to classic and contemporary writers. As Neil Schmitz observes, “To fish for trout, Brautigan knows, is to cast a lure like Thoreau (up into the pale) and handle the strike like Hemingway. (68-9)

Brautigan’s novel is composed of forty-seven chapters that are disconnected fragments of experience in trout fishing and unrelated events. In this section, *Trout Fishing in America* will be compared with elements of style, structure, themes and symbolism in Hemingway’s early works. A primary objective will be to demonstrate how Brautigan has applied and experimented with Hemingway’s elements of style to engage his readers.

### 1.1 Brautigan's Adaptation of Elements of Hemingway's Style

Brautigan is indebted to many of his American predecessors, but Hemingway's impact is profoundly noticeable on a stylistic level. Most obviously, we see the connection in Brautigan's use of a minimalist style comprised of short, declarative sentences often separated into short paragraphs:

As a child when did I first hear about trout fishing in America? From whom? I guess it was a stepfather of mine.

Summer of 1942.

The old drunk told me about trout fishing. When he could talk, he had a way of describing trout as if they were a precious and intelligent metal. (3)

Brautigan employs a similar technique as Hemingway, linking images to emotions absent direct explanation. In this brief excerpt from the chapter "Knock on Wood (Part One)" found near the start of the novel, we can infer an attempt to establish meaning, a rough age for the narrator, and a sense of resentment for a negligent paternal figure in just fifty-six words. Not only does Brautigan use economy of words, he also constructs the remainder of this chapter largely out of short, separate, sentence-length paragraphs, creating a prose even sparser than Hemingway's. For Brautigan, the short, declarative sentence has the power to stand on its own as a paragraph, in place of the paragraph composed of multiple short declarative sentences.

The similarity in style is obvious here, and as will be demonstrated, throughout the novel. However, what separates Brautigan from Hemingway is his engagement with the surreal, hyperbolic, and borderline absurd. Consider the rest of the chapter "Knock on Wood (Part One)":

Silver is not a good adjective to describe what I felt when he told me about trout fishing.

I'd like to get it right.

Maybe trout steel. Steel made from trout. The clear, snow-filled river acting as foundry and heat.

Imagine Pittsburgh.

A steel that comes from trout, used to make buildings, trains and tunnels.

The Andrew Carnegie of Trout!

The Reply of Trout Fishing in America:

I remember with particular amusement, people with three-cornered hats fishing in the dawn. (3)

Here we see a departure from sensical explanation. Though Brautigan's narrator is trying to explain or clear up what is described as a misconception, he confuses the reader further by suggesting that "Silver" may, in the right circumstances, be a legitimate "adjective" with which to describe human emotion. The cold river becomes a hot "foundry" making steel from trout, and the reader is directed to "Imagine Pittsburgh", where steel is constructed in the conventional manner and try to grasp whatever this bizarre manufacturing process may be.

Robert Christgau explains the subtlety with which Brautigan's wild, surrealistic images are rendered:

Brautigan's reputation is based on a surrealism notable for its grace, its matter-of-fact flow; his narrative technique is so conversational and pellucid that preternatural details and crazy coincidences don't even ripple the surface...But his best work – especially *A Confederate General from Big Sur*,

but also *Trout Fishing in America*, and the more memorable stories – is realistic much of the time, as remarkable for its content as for its form. (245) Indeed, it is the tightness of his prose, much like Hemingway's, that gives Brautigan such stylistic power. As Christgau observes, his ability to balance the absurd with the "matter-of-fact flow", as can be observed in the example from "Knock on Wood (Part One)", creates a synthesis of the traditional minimalism adapted from Hemingway and a more experimental minimalist style unique to Brautigan.

Brautigan's purpose in doing this is not dissimilar from Hemingway's distancing of imagery from emotion. In fact, in cultivating elements of the surreal in his writing, in his use of seemingly nonsensical imagery ("steel trout") juxtaposed with realist imagery ("Pittsburgh"), the reader is thrust into a literary conundrum in which they are presented with something reasonable, written in a direct style, only for Brautigan to subvert this expectation through surrealist description, metaphor and simile. This disrupts the connection between direct explanation two-fold: not only is Brautigan employing Hemingway's technique of distancing and withholding explicit emotional information, he is further confounding the reader's efforts to understand by introducing a layer of surrealism. Like Hemingway, he is attempting to invent "a whole new thing truer than anything true and alive" (Hemingway, 61).

However, as is the case in much of Brautigan's work, although the jump from sensical to nonsensical in the excerpt from "Knock on Wood (Part One)" may appear sudden and jarring, an explicable progression can be observed. The trout described as being precious by the stepfather as they are a useful and accessible foodstuff, precious being linked to the precious metal silver, and then trout and steel, two very separate things that share the quality of great value and utility. Further, it is not unreasonable to imagine the body of a trout being pulled out of the water as both

silver and steel coloured. The endless streams filled with trout in America then come to represent both the plenty of the country and the power of its industrial force when the comparison with steel is made. "A steel that comes from trout, used to make buildings, trains and tunnels" (3) creates an image of the two juxtaposed Americas: the vast, untamed, wild America and the dynamo that is American industrial might. As Josephine Hendin notes, "Brautigan is the prophet of cities built out of ice rather than fire, of an America whose emblem would be no war-god eagle, but an elusive cold fish" (7). The reader must make the connection between the fecund trout stream and the fecundity of American industry, while also considering the relationship between natural and industrial America, America of past and present. Whether this is purely a means of contrasting the two, or Brautigan's lament for a pastoral America left behind in the wake of industry, as Hendin seems to suggest, is left for the reader to decide. Out of what appears to be a sudden dive from sense into nonsense we see that Brautigan is in fact being less haphazard with his use of imagery than might appear to be the case on a cursory reading.

Brautigan subverts reader expectation one final time at the very end of "Knock on Wood (Part One)" when he describes "Trout Fishing in America" as a conscious entity rather than simply as the title of his book, who replies to the narrator: I remember with particular amusement, people with three-cornered hats fishing in the dawn" (3). Now it is unclear exactly what "Trout Fishing in America" is. Is it still the title, the book itself performing a refrain of some sort? Is it, because of the reference to "people with three-cornered hats" some unknown, sentient repository of American history? Or perhaps some sort of collective voice for America itself? As will become clear through further analysis, the identity of "Trout Fishing in America" is intended to be any one or all of these things collectively. It is used variously as the name of a

person, a place, a corpse, a hotel, a joke, etc. However, what is clear is that Brautigan has performed a tightrope walk in a very short passage of text. The reader begins with the sensical, is plunged into the nonsensical, pulled back into what appears to be the realm of the reasonable, and then thrust back out of it again. It is this remarkable back and forth that categorizes much of Brautigan's use of the surreal and a major contributing factor to its effectiveness in his writing. Guy Davenport states that "Brautigan is not a surrealist, nor yet a fantasist. I would place him among the philosophers, for his central perception is that the world makes very little sense to a man with a plain mind" (159). An aspect of this analysis is correct: it is certainly true that Brautigan is not employing surrealism purely for its own sake, but rather using it as a means through which to craft a unique style and one that allows him to pose deeper questions than might be apparent upon a superficial reading.

Further, Brautigan also uses in this section, as he does elsewhere, a technique employed by Hemingway, the use of deliberate non-sequitur. John Tanner has commented on Brautigan's "love of the non-sequitur" (16), and an example of this can be found above, in the concluding sentence: "The Reply of Trout Fishing in America: I remember with particular amusement, people with three-cornered hats fishing in the dawn" (3). This sentence does not contribute to the narrator's effort to describe the qualities of trout, it is random and unexpected. As Nadine Gordimer notes of Hemingway's use of the technique:

Then there is the power of the deliberate non sequitur. "And we went up into the town to the Plaza, and those were the last people who were shot in the village." This is a quote from a novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but I would say it was learned from the *way of telling* Hemingway taught himself with the

stories...A short story succeeds, if it does, as a series or play of echoes...Beginning with the conjunction, the echoes in Hemingway's non sequitur sound back and forth through everything that has happened in the novel: the blessed, banal continuity – and the horror – that life goes on with violence as something that can be measured in acceptance. (89)

Where Hemingway presents the reader with a non sequitur which Gordimer describes as a catalyst for an echo that runs through the text and reveals a truth about humanity, Brautigan uses the non sequitur to a more absurd and more expansive degree, shifting the reader suddenly between the thoughts of the narrator, time and place, and American history and culture, all in a few sentences. Here we see the influence of Hemingway's style directed towards serving a different purpose. While Hemingway uses the non sequitur to comment upon "how people are", Brautigan uses the same tool to explore the personal, cultural and historical interactions that will create the backdrop for his novel. It is an attempt to use the same technique but towards broader literary implications.

Brautigan has done several things of significance in "Knock on Wood: Part One", the single, short, third page of *Trout Fishing in America*. He has employed Hemingway's minimalist technique in the construction of short, declarative sentences; he has created a depth of character by describing a relationship between the narrator and the stepfather in the Hemingway style of withholding direct emotional information, and he has used what appears to be nonsensical, surrealist metaphor to provide a profound insight into the ambivalent nature of American society and has offered one possible meaning of "Trout Fishing in America".

Brautigan frequently uses the short, declarative sentence and plain language to set up an unexpected and explosive metaphor foreign to Hemingway's style. For

example, in the chapter “The Teddy Roosevelt Chingader” he describes the streets in the town of Stanley as “white and dry” (60). He might stop there if he was imitating Hemingway, but Brautigan then changes course with a complex metaphor that confounds the reader. The streets are “white and dry like a collision at a high rate of speed between a cemetery and a truck loaded with sacks of flour” (60). At first glance the glut of information seems to defeat the purpose of simple prose which is aimed at engaging the reader to imagine the scene. There is a compound image of death: a burnt-out landscape, reference to a cemetery and a terrible traffic collision. Far from fixing the visual setting, Brautigan’s simile opens new territory and challenges the reader to make sense of the image of this fantastic collision. Brautigan’s image is also distinctive in not relying on passive adjectives, but rather a violent event to guide the reader’s experience of the arid lifelessness of Stanley, Idaho. The sentence achieves the effect that Pound attributes to successful images: “a sense of sudden liberation...freedom from time limits and space limits” (4).

In summary, Brautigan employs many techniques characteristic of Hemingway’s style: most extensively, the declarative sentence, simple diction, edgy dialogue and run on conjunction sentences that lay out observations without priority. All of these elements engage the reader in the author’s experience by requiring imagination to complete potential meanings. However, while Brautigan’s writing shares many stylistic techniques with Hemingway’s, it also adapts Hemingway’s style to its own distinctive purposes.

## 1.2 Hemingway Personified: “The Last Time I Saw Trout Fishing in America”

Not only are elements of Hemingway's style evident throughout *Trout Fishing in America*, indeed, the author is explicitly referred to in the chapter "The Last Time I Saw Trout Fishing in America":

The last time we met was in July on the Big Wood River, ten miles away from Ketchum. It was just after Hemingway had killed himself there, but I didn't know about his death at the time. I didn't know about it until I got back to San Francisco weeks after the thing happened and picked up a copy of Life magazine. There was a photograph of Hemingway on the cover.

"I wonder what Hemingway's up to," I said to myself. I looked inside the magazine and turned the pages to his death. Trout Fishing in America forgot to tell me about it. I'm certain he knew. It must have slipped his mind. (89)

In this chapter, the narrator goes on to have a conversation with Trout Fishing in America while fishing for trout on the Big Wood River in Idaho, near Ketchum, where Hemingway had committed suicide in 1961. The narrator is ignorant of Hemingway's recent suicide at the time of the events in the chapter. He discusses Lewis and Clark, a Deanna Durbin movie he saw in Great Falls, Montana, and his daily morning routine as a child there.

The character, Trout Fishing in America, has the quality of a spirit. It is all knowing and timeless. It appears without explanation, seemingly summoned by the narrator's casting of a fishing line. It is assumed to know of Hemingway's death; it knew Lewis and Clark; it even has knowledge of the individual qualities of the fish in the river: "I know that fish who just struck. You'll never catch him" (90). As William L. Stull notes:

*Trout Fishing in America* is a haunted book, filled with graves and ghosts of America's past. Hemingway's long shadow falls across nearly every page,

symbolizing a lost literary promise that parallels the lost grandeur of virgin forests and clear streams... Brautigan explicitly links the passing of the American genius loci with the suicide of the country's foremost writer. (72)

Stull's interpretation of "Trout Fishing in America" in its various forms as America's "genius loci" recognizes a powerful connection between Brautigan's book and Hemingway. If the manifestations of "Trout Fishing in America" represent in combination the all-pervading spirit of America's culture, history and natural environment, it appears highly significant for Brautigan to link through the story's title the disappearance of America's genius loci with the narrator's visit to this fishing grounds at a time when, and in the place where, unknown to the narrator, Hemingway ended his life. The connection made by Brautigan and noted by Stull symbolizes the unseen and terminal degradation of American society.

The accuracy of this interpretation is reinforced by the ensuing conversation that the narrator has with Trout Fishing in America, this time in human form. Again, what at surface level appears nonsensical is revealed to be serious and profound commentary. The narrator, spinning-rod in hand, heads to the Big Wood River with his infant child where he encounters Trout Fishing in America:

I was casting a Super-Duper out into the river and letting it swing down with the current and then on the water up close to the shore. It fluttered there slowly and Trout Fishing in America watched the baby while we talked.

I remember that he gave her some colored rocks to play with. She liked him and climbed up onto his lap and she started putting the rocks in his shirt pocket. (89)

The narrator's motions and the river itself remind us of Hemingway's description of fishing in the Nick Adams story, "Big Two-Hearted River": "Holding the rod in his

right hand he let out line against the pull of the grasshopper in the current. He stripped off line from the reel with his left hand and let it run free. He could see the hopper in the little waves of the current. It went out of sight" (Hemingway, 175). In both there are similar physical motions associated with releasing a fishing line, as well as an ensuing submission to the current, and by extension, the force of nature: Brautigan's narrator lets his line "swing down with current" and Nick Adams lets his "run free".

The image of the child in this chapter takes on a special significance when we consider that the narrator has entrusted her to the care of Trout Fishing in America. There is a tranquility to the images described; the narrator fishing, the child playing with the "genius loci". If Trout Fishing in America can be imagined as a representation of Hemingway or of his voice, we see a relationship being described, in which a child likes and admires a figure offering care, a paternal figure. Brautigan has declared his admiration for Hemingway's writing and is aware that his predecessor has become a paternal figure (Papa Hemingway) in American literature.

Equally, we might imagine the child as being symbolic of Brautigan's own writing and of his efforts to establish himself within the American literary canon. If Hemingway has come to represent a powerful, overarching force for Brautigan, we can imagine Brautigan's writing as the infant being "watched", a nascent entity not yet fully developed to the level of Trout Fishing in America's incarnation as Hemingway. The fact that the infant likes and is entertained by Trout Fishing in America represents the enjoyment and entertainment felt in a connection with Hemingway's literature.

Brautigan's narrator and Trout Fishing in America discuss what Great Falls, Montana reminds them of; for the narrator it is a Deanna Durbin movie that he

watched seven times one winter, for Trout Fishing in America it is “Indians and fur traders...Lewis and Clark” (Brautigan, 89). The disconnect between American tradition and history and more modern American pop culture entertainment is exposed in the conversation between the narrator and Trout Fishing in America:

“I remember Lewis and Clark, but I don’t remember ever seeing a Deanna Durbin movie in Great Falls.”

“I know what you mean,” I said. “The other people in Great Falls did not share my enthusiasm for Deanna Durbin. The theater was always empty. There was a darkness to that theater different from any other theater I’ve been in since. I don’t know what it was.”

“What was the name of the movie?” Trout Fishing in America said.

“I don’t know, I said.” (89-90)

The juxtaposition between what is remembered (“I don’t remember”) and what is desired (“I know what you mean...other people...did not share my enthusiasm”), is illustrated in this exchange, with the narrator deliberately conflating the two.

However, as the exchange continues it becomes clear that what is really being explored is the difference between the transient and the permanent, the memorable and unmemorable. Even the narrator, who associates Great Falls, Montana with the Deanna Durbin movie cannot remember what it was about. The viewing of the movie itself seems to invoke a sense of dread, the theater “always empty” and possessed of an inexplicable “darkness...different from any other theater”. The narrator is “relieved”, after wandering down to the Missouri River after one the viewings of the movie, that “the Missouri River had not changed and begun to look like Deanna Durbin” (Brautigan, 90).

If the movie is intended to represent unmemorable, mass produced pop culture entertainment meant for consumption, we can interpret the feeling of dread in the movie theatre as a rejection of this form of entertainment, and the relief at finding the Missouri as the antidote to this dread. The Missouri is eternal, a fixture in the American past. It is revealing that the narrator is revealing his story out loud to Trout Fishing in America, "Trout Fishing in America" acting as the "genius loci", representative more specifically of Hemingway and more generally of a lost American history and culture.

It is worth noting here another parallel between this chapter and Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River". Both explore a shared theme of memory, and of the desire to forget. In Brautigan's chapter the explicit forgetfulness surrounding the movie unlocks the broader desire on the part of the narrator to forget the obligations of his daily life. The narrator leaves San Francisco, and then his wife behind to go down to the Big Wood River to fish, just as Nick Adams sojourns into the Michigan woods to fish Big Two-Hearted River, both doing so in order to experience a reprieve in the natural world. Brautigan's narrator paradoxically recalls a film he cannot remember well before launching into a description of an average morning in his childhood in Great Falls, Montana. Both the recitation ("I recited") and the account of the unremembered movie read as a confession; the narrator apparently wishing to recount unpleasant memories in order to exorcise them from his consciousness. Words such as "dark" and "deadly" are used in the narrator's description of these memories, underscoring their unpleasantness. His describing them to Trout Fishing in America is a literal representation of his desire to exorcise his consciousness in the natural world by going fishing. Similarly, Nick Adams remembers what seem to be inconsequential events while he fishes the Big Two-Hearted River, but which take

on significance when considered within the context of the story and his reasons for escaping into the Michigan woods. Specifically, towards the end of Part I of the story, he remembers an old acquaintance, Hopkins. It is never fully explained who Hopkins is, or what the exact nature of his relationship with Nick is. Just as the memory of not remembering something inconsequential (a Deanna Durbin film) provokes in Brautigan's narrator a remembrance of childhood troubles, an inability to remember details of a meaningless argument over coffee making prompts in Nick the remembrance of a relationship, progressing to a confrontation with the act of thinking and remembering itself, something which Nick resists, reassuring himself that he can "choke it". There is also a quality of recitation in the Hemingway passage, as there is in Brautigan; a list of things that were planned but never came to fruition. The memory culminates in disappointment and finality: "all felt bad. It broke up the trip. They never saw Hopkins again" (168). That Hopkins is never seen again illustrates the transient nature of the friendship, and even hints at an underlying awareness of mortality. It is entirely possible that Hopkins is simply one of many transient friendships, but it is also possible that he is dead. He recalls arguing with Hopkins about how to make coffee. He then follows Hopkins' coffee making process and describes the finished coffee as "a triumph for Hopkins...It should be straight Hopkins all the way. Hop deserved that" (168). It is as though Nick is eulogizing Hopkins, toasting him farewell. That Nick reassures himself that he can "choke" his mind after he finishes thinking about Hopkins suggests that there may be more information withheld from the reader about Hopkins' fate that Nick is unwilling to contemplate due to its unpleasantness. In Brautigan's chapter and Hemingway's short story both characters engage with the natural world through fishing in an attempt to distance themselves from reality, and both unintentionally fumble through

forgetfulness to remember a difficult part of their lives from which they are struggling to gain respite.

Further, both Brautigan's narrator and Nick Adams attempt to actively repress memory, emotion and self-reflection. Nick has a capacity to "choke" his thought process, and towards the end of the story it becomes clear that his apprehension about the darker part of the swamp is a physical manifestation of inner fear: "Nick did not want to go in there now...In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure. Nick did not want it. He did not want to go down the stream any further today" (180). In this passage the swamp represents Nick's consciousness and his memory. It is dark, "tragic" territory that Nick refuses to enter. He refuses to engage with it, and instead decides at the end of the story that "There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp" (180). Perhaps he will one day engage with his memories and come to terms with them, but today is not that day.

Similarly, the memory of the narrator in Brautigan's chapter is represented by the "dark" movie theater in which he sees the Deanna Durbin film: "The theater was always empty. There was a darkness to that theater different to any other theater I've been in since" (90). The fact that he cannot remember the name of the movie he viewed seven times suggests a willful act of repression. That he compares the movie to *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1920), a famous psychological horror film, colours the act of remembrance with a quality of fear. Just as Nick abandons the swamp, so too does Brautigan's narrator eventually abandon the movie theater, instead wandering down to the Missouri River, where he is "relieved". What the narrator is doing in the present, fishing and interacting with Trout Fishing in America, appears to be an attempt to replicate this relief, an attempt to escape the pain of memory and consciousness. Like Nick, the narrator is not always successful, an attempt at

repression results in the surfacing of memory that disrupts the peace both are struggling to attain. Further, Brautigan's narrator interrupts a remembrance of childhood later in the chapter, stating that "Fortunately it stopped one day without my having to do anything serious like grow up" (91). The memory ends abruptly, the narrator "choking" it off as Nick does, and it ends with an admission that the narrator never had to "grow up", never had to engage in the experiences and self-reflection that accompany the transition from adolescence into maturity. There is not only the attempt to repress memory, but also an active dismissal of the process of self-reflection.

The character Trout Fishing in America's seemingly omniscient connection to nature strengthens the quality of timelessness in Brautigan's chapter. As the narrator tries unsuccessfully to land a fish, Trout Fishing in America comments: "I know that fish who just struck. You'll never catch him...go ahead and try for him. He'll hit a couple times more, but you won't catch him. He's not a particularly smart fish. Just lucky. Sometimes that's all you need" (90). Trout Fishing in America embodies not only American history and culture, but the American natural landscape itself. The fact that this connection manifests itself in the act of fishing, and in language reminiscent of Hemingway's, suggests that Hemingway is, for Brautigan, so embodied in the fabric of American culture that he inhabits a place in the physical geography of America itself as an eternal presence, similar to the Missouri River. Though this chapter begins with an explanation of his recent passing, Hemingway, as elevated by Brautigan, achieves an immortality.

In this chapter, there is an echo of Hemingway's reference to Ecclesiastes in the epigraph to *The Sun Also Rises*, which will be discussed later in this thesis: "One generation passeth away, and another generation commeth; but the earth abideth

forever" (1.7-8). Three generations are represented, the oldest figure embodying Hemingway who has recently died by suicide. His spirit transcends mortality to become one with the earth: the river and the wilderness.

Brautigan then shifts the course of the narrative for the remainder of the chapter: "I cast out again and continued talking about Great Falls. Then in correct order, I recited the twelve least important things ever said about Great Falls, Montana" (90-1). The first eleven "things" are not described, only the least important thing, which ends up being a description of an average morning for the narrator as a child in Great Falls:

It would still be dark outside and the yellow wallpaper in the hotel room would be running back off the light bulb. I'd put my clothes on and go down to the restaurant where my stepfather cooked all night.

I'd have breakfast, hot cakes, eggs and whatnot. Then he'd make my lunch for me and it would always be the same thing: a piece of pie and a stone-cold pork sandwich. Afterwards I'd walk to school. I mean the three of us, the Holy Trinity: me, a piece of pie, and a stone-cold pork sandwich. This went on for months. (91)

Consider this description of food in relation to the one given in Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River: Part I":

Nick put the frying pan on the grill over the flames. He was hungrier. The beans and spaghetti warmed...They began to bubble, making little bubbles that rose with difficulty to the surface. There was a good smell. Nick got out a bottle of tomato catchup and cut four slices of bread...He ate the plateful before he remembered the bread. Nick finished the second plateful with the bread, mopping the shiny plate. He had not eaten since a cup of coffee and a

ham sandwich in the station restaurant at St. Ignace. It had been a very fine experience. He had been that hungry before, but had not been able to satisfy it. (168)

In Brautigan's description, food is merely sustenance, a part of a routine. There is no anticipation of it as there is in Hemingway's description, no satisfaction from eating it. Brautigan's narrator's food is "stone-cold", Nick Adam's food is "hot" and has "a good smell". There is an evocation of religious imagery in both passages, in Brautigan's of the Holy Trinity, in Hemingway's of St. Ignace, the patron saint of Catholic soldiers.<sup>31</sup> The former is cynical, the latter representative of the last moment of satiety. These comparisons of the nature of the food in both passages take on greater depth of meaning when we consider what they truly represent. There is an undercurrent of despair in the narrator's description of his mundane morning routine. The recollection is the absolute least important thing about his hometown. It is "dark outside", the hotel room is run down, lunch, much like the day itself is "always...the same thing...stone-cold". The final sentence, "This went on for months" (91), suggests a feeling of endlessness surrounding this dreary routine. There is a cynicism in the comparison between the narrator and his routine lunch and the Holy Trinity. And then, suddenly the routine ends: "Fortunately it stopped one day without my having to do anything serious like grow up. We packed our stuff and left town on a bus. That was Great Falls, Montana. You say the Missouri River is still there?" (91). Without the narrator having to do anything, the situation changes and the routine ends. What is significant is the narrator's persistence in reliving the routine, and also adapting to the sudden change of leaving Great Falls and ending it.

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<sup>31</sup> It is worth noting that Nick's journey from Seney to Big Two-Hearted River is similar in many ways to a soldier's march: he is forced to cover a great deal of (often challenging and sometimes burnt out) terrain, carrying on his back everything he will need to survive; food, equipment, tools for shelter, etc.

In the passage from “Big Two-Hearted River”, there is also a sense of routine and experience that generates comfort as opposed to the coldness experienced by Brautigan’s narrator. Nick knows that the food is too hot, he has “been that hungry before”, but the “hot” food, the fact that it can “satisfy”, the camping location being “good” and in existing in contrast to the dark swamp alter the connotations of the experience. Ultimately the story recounts Nick’s methodical fishing methods and ends with him, like Brautigan’s narrator, suddenly leaving a dark place. The food exists as a symbol for the routine action, the lived experience, but in Brautigan’s case it is cold and unsatisfying while in Hemingway’s case the opposite is true.

The significance of Hemingway to Brautigan becomes more evident towards the end of the chapter, when Trout Fishing in America responds to the narrator’s description of his dreary childhood existence with the recounting of a day of the Lewis and Clark expedition:

I remember the day Lewis discovered the falls. They left their camp at sunrise and a few hours later they came upon a beautiful plain and on the plain were more buffalo than they had ever seen before in one place.

They kept on going until they heard the faraway sound of a waterfall and saw a distant column of spray rising and disappearing. They followed the sound as it got louder and louder. After a while...they were at the great falls of the Missouri River.

A nice thing happened that afternoon, they went fishing below the falls and caught half a dozen trout, good ones, too, from sixteen to twenty-three inches long.

That was June 13, 1805. (91)

In this description of Great Falls, the reader is presented with a wonderful, almost mystical America of plenty, as opposed to the dreary, isolated one of the narrator's childhood. There is "a beautiful plain", fecund buffalo, the "tremendous" power of the waterfall and later in the day "a nice thing" happens when Lewis and Clark catch an abundance of trout in the river, the final event standing in stark contrast to the narrator's present, in which he is unable to catch any trout at all.

It becomes clear that the entire chapter, the back and forth between the narrator and Trout Fishing in America, is a play between the light and darkness represented by two versions of America. There is the America of the narrator's youth, the near present, which is characterized by its darkness, by its excess consumption of pop-culture entertainment, by a hopelessness represented in the inability to catch any trout from the river. Then there is the America of the past: mystical, bountiful, untamed. The infant daughter exists between these two versions of the past and present America; the future that she will inhabit is yet to be determined. Brautigan's intention appears to be two-fold: through a conversation with the genius loci, Trout Fishing in America, to comment upon the uncertainty he feels regarding the America of the nineteen-sixties, and to eulogize the recently deceased Hemingway, elevating him to the status of legend within American literary and cultural history.

### 1.3 Trout Fishing in America: An Alternate Explanation

Reader response criticism provides for different interpretations as individual readers discover distinct connections in the text based on their interest, attention, memory and imaginative capability. Iser points out that the same is true of the same reader's subsequent readings of a text: different meanings may be actualized as the

reader recognizes different connections. There are a number of possible reasons: the reader may have overlooked information in the first reading or failed to grasp its significance. Also, in the second reading, the reader has the advantage of having experienced the text as a whole which will cause reconsideration of events and characters that were new and undeveloped in the first pass. Iser observes that the reader only enjoys a text and regards it as real to the extent there is the chance to participate in the discovery of its meaning (108). It is this expectation of continuing discovery that encourages subsequent reading. Meaning evolves as perspectives of character and plot combine in different ways upon re-reading. *Trout Fishing in America* is a good example of this phenomenon.

There is one obvious meaning of "Trout Fishing in America". America is a fallen culture that has lost its moral and intellectual compass. Contemporary society is crass and harsh; Tony Tanner observes that "The narrator's quest for Trout Fishing in America is a series of disappointments" (409). Tanner cites the narrator of *Trout Fishing in America's* first fishing trip as a child when a beautiful waterfall seen from a distance turns out to be a staircase, (Brautigan, 5) the narrator's discovery of an angler's diary recording only the fish that got away (Brautigan, 84) and his visit to the Cleveland Wrecking Yard to buy the fragment of a trout stream (Brautigan, 102). And yet, the narrator's reaction to the Cleveland Wrecking Yard is not disappointment; quite the opposite. He is fascinated by the ingenuity of marketing natural wonders and is keen to buy.

Chapter by chapter, Brautigan's characters are confronted by a society that is overrun with commercialism, and by a degraded natural environment; but the characters themselves are not grim or defeated. From the narrator, to Trout Fishing in America Shorty, to the Hemingway incarnation of Trout Fishing in America they

display humour about their circumstances and resilience. Tony Tanner describes Brautigan's criticism of America, despite all the degradation of its people and places, as "gentle" (410). This may be the reality of the American myth. Brautigan appears to be saying that this is the way it always was. People came to America in poverty and in many cases fleeing oppression, to pursue the dream of a better life and to be left in peace. The Cleveland Wrecking Yard chapter illustrates this duality. On the one hand, the Yard represents the obvious exploitation of America's bounty, on the other, it represents the drive to meet the needs of ordinary people.

This interpretation is consistent with the analysis of popular fiction by Erin A. Smith in *Hard-Boiled* referenced in the introduction to this thesis. Smith explains the attraction of working-class people to action oriented detective fiction. These readers, Smith argues, were entertained by action and dialogue familiar to them in their lives at work and in their communities and didn't care if literary conventions were offended (82-3). Popular fiction met a need and was fulfilling. At the least, there is ambivalence in Brautigan's vision of American culture.

#### 1.4 Disruption by Design: The Effect of *In Our Time* on Brautigan's Composition

Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America* has the outward appearance of a novel. It has a cover, an index of chapters and embarks upon an investigation of its titular theme in many different forms. Yet, in all other ways it defies many of the conventions that might be expected of a novel. As Robert Kern notes of Brautigan's novels:

Insofar as his prose books can be considered novels, they are a re-invention of the novel, a project carried out in seeming ignorance of the history of literature... This is especially true of *Trout Fishing in America*, which often

gives the impression of being invented or created ex nihilo, in a kind of isolation from the entire world, past and present, of literary method and discourse. (6)

Though Brautigan's rejection of conventional novelistic structure in *Trout Fishing in America* is clear, and though it may give off the "impression" of detachment from literary predecessors as Kern claims, it is reasonable to postulate that the novel's unconventional structure is, at least to some extent, indebted to Hemingway's *In Our Time*. Though Brautigan's novel appears more disjointed, both texts reject a purely conventional, overarching structure. *Trout Fishing in America* is comprised of a series of very short chapters and vignettes, giving the book a fractured quality. Billy Collins notes that it displays a "disregard for novelistic conventions such as narrative plausibility, dramatic tension, chronology, character development" (120). It is also a book, Collins notes, in which:

Brautigan destabilizes any conventional idea of a book as he begins to create a world where things seem unwilling to stay in their customary places. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the extravagant comparison – surprising metaphors and off-the-wall similes – that pepper every chapter...Brautigan's tropes run the gamut from the outré to sheer nonsense yet some of them are imaginative bull's-eyes. Readers are left to sort them out for themselves. (117-8)

Brautigan disrupts the typical reader experience in this book by denying the reader both a conventional structure and a conventional use of simile and metaphor. The disruption arising from the overall structure manifests itself in the ways Collins describes, underscored by the short chapters that end suddenly and refuse to develop chronologically, self-contained units within the whole, transferring the reader

from familiar to unfamiliar territory, from past to present, without warning. This resembles the arrangement of the short stories in *In Our Time* in which each story is followed by an unrelated report on a traumatic event, such as war, execution, refugees and bullfighting. Though this structure is, compared to that of *Trout Fishing in America*, more coherent, it achieves a similar end. The short story cycle that comprises *In Our Time* is disrupted, the reader, like Brautigan's reader, is continually dislocated thematically and chronologically. The stories themselves follow no logical sequence. The collection begins with Nick Adams as a child and then an adolescent in several stories near the start of the book, and then suddenly a young man, wounded in combat, seemingly dying, in the Chapter VI vignette. The reader is transported from the woods in Michigan in a series of stories to the war in Europe in the vignettes, from American gangsters committing crimes to bullfighting in Spain. Seven of the fifteen stories have nothing to do with Nick Adams. Moreover, the vignettes which Hemingway said would go "bang!" between the stories appear to be intended to disrupt. They cover incidents of violence, war, bullfighting, crime and in themselves follow no apparent order. Similarly, Brautigan transports the reader from the narrator's childhood to adulthood and parenthood, from the city to the country without any transition. Brautigan, like Hemingway, is making leaps in chronology to disrupt conventional flow, much like Hemingway is, in order to disrupt narrative and encourage the reader to create connections between these seemingly disparate contents or concede that they may in fact be random and without any connection. This could be seen as an example of an interpretation considered in reader response criticism: allowing the reader to follow the structured acts in the text to fill the gaps and find meaning.

On a stylistic level, Brautigan reflects this disruption in what Collins describes as his “extravagant comparison”: “Eventually the seasons would take care of their wooden names like a sleepy short-order cook cracking eggs next to a railroad station” (21); “The creek was made narrow by little green trees that grew too close together. The creek looked like 12,845 telephone booths in a row with high Victorian ceilings and all the doors taken off and all the backs of the booths knocked out” (55). In examples like these, two of many that can be found throughout the book, Brautigan uses simile and metaphor that are surreal but sufficiently hold their form to enable the imaginative reader to make the connections necessary to make sense of Brautigan’s images. In the first example, the weathering of wooden grave markers is compared to the routine action of a short order cook, the connection in the simile existing between the unceasing effect of the repetitive, routine action. The second example, the metaphor of “12,845 telephone booths” and “high Victorian ceilings” illustrates the unknowable vastness of the woods surrounding the creek that the narrator is fishing. In both cases, the reader is required to find meaning out of what appears initially to be nonsense. This technique is similar in nature to that which Hemingway learned from Ezra Pound, the linking of experience and emotion with a deliberate quality of dislocation: “I was searching for the unnoticed things that made emotions” (58). Like Hemingway, Brautigan describes without emotional carriage, thus drawing the reader in as he compels them to make the connection themselves. Brautigan’s employment of surrealism in the use of this technique is an adaptation that requires the reader to take further initiative, as they must now not only link the experience and the imagery to the emotion, they must decode the nature of the imagery itself in order to enact the connection Brautigan has intended.

### 1.5 Engaging the Reader with Humour and Irony

Brautigan's surrealist writing is often infused with humour and irony. The metaphors become so bizarre, that in trying to understand them, the reaction is initially to laugh at that which appears to be absurd. The disjointed, often brash dialogue in many of the chapters in *Trout Fishing in America* is also humorous. One such example can be found near the start of the chapter "Sea, Sea Rider":

The owner of the bookstore came up to me, and put his arm on my shoulder and said, "Would you like to get laid?" His voice was very kind.

"No," I said.

"You're wrong," he said, and then without saying anything else, he went out in front of the bookstore, and stopped a pair of total strangers, a man and a woman. (23)

In exchanges like these the humour is found in the subversion of expectations in how characters communicate and what is being communicated: the contrast between the crass proposition of sex and the "very kind" voice that offers it; the subsequent refusal and the assertion by the other party that this rejection is "wrong". Further, the bookstore owner's taking immediate action to correct what he sees as a "wrong" by soliciting the woman on the street to have sex with the narrator, coupled with narrator's hiding in the bathroom while the woman, her male companion, and the bookstore owner wait for him, all contribute to a humorous communication breakdown.

This use of bizarre metaphor and subverted dialogue for the purpose of humour can also be observed in Hemingway's early work. A good example of this can be found in chapter twelve of *The Sun Also Rises*, when Jake rises early to prepare for a fishing trip with Bill and observes that "The stream was clear and

shallow but it did not look trouty” (Hemingway, 90). The use of “trouty” as an adjective makes sense to the reader because there is some context for what Jake is doing, but it is still an unusual way to describe the stream. It seems like an adjective that Brautigan might invent. The humour in the chapter is more apparent in the exchanges between Jake and Bill:

“What’s all this irony and pity?”

“What? Don’t you know about Irony and Pity?”

“No. Who got it up?”

“Everybody. They’re mad about it in New York. It’s just like the Fratellinis used to be.”

The girl came in with the coffee and buttered toast. Or, rather, it was bread toasted and buttered. (91)

In this exchange we find a direct engagement with “Irony and Pity”, an explicit foreshadowing of the tone Hemingway intends the conversation between Bill and Jake to take. The implication that “irony” is a recent invention that has become a fad in New York is in itself an ironical way to discuss irony as a concept. Further, the two separate descriptions of the bread and buttered toast that are in reality identical lends the exchange a quality of absurdity that foreshadows a sentence Brautigan might construct. As the conversation between the two characters continues, more similarities become apparent:

“Good. Coffee is good for you. It’s the caffeine in it. Caffeine, we are here.

Caffeine puts a man on her horse and a woman in his grave. You know what’s the trouble with you?...You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see? You hang around cafes.”

“It sounds like a swell life,” I said. “When do I work?”

“You don’t work. One group claims women support you. Another group claims you’re impotent.”

“No,” I said. “I just had an accident.” (92-3)

Bill begins by addressing “caffeine” as though it is an entity, and then goes on to deliberately subvert the metaphor he employs to describe its effect by confusing the genders and places of the “man” and “woman”. He then changes the topic completely in order to diagnose Jake, telling him that being an “expatriate” has “ruined” him. This is similar to the bookstore owner in Brautigan, who diagnoses the narrator’s condition and proposes a solution without the narrator’s consultation or consent. In Jake’s case, the humour emerges from his gentle questioning and contradiction of Bill’s assertions; “It sounds like a swell life...When do I work?”, followed by “No...I just had an accident” (92-3). Jake’s cordiality undercuts Bill’s mocking diagnosis of his problems in order to achieve a humorous effect, and his joking about the war-time injury to his genitalia, deeming that which is gravely serious and profoundly life-changing as simply “an accident”, shows that he is capable transforming personal tragedy into a source of levity. Both Brautigan’s narrator and Jake Barnes are working towards a similar end; avoidance of the other party’s diagnosis of their problems, and an attempt to avoid the proposed solution.

Irony is used effectively by Hemingway to expose characters’ false assumptions. As William Dow notes: “Hemingway’s irony unites subjects in their ignorance, or in their knowledge, and in so doing prepares the way for a recognition of the primacy of intersubjectivity over all individual subjects” (180). This “primacy of intersubjectivity” can be noted in both Jake and Bill’s exchange and in the exchange between Brautigan’s narrator and the bookstore owner. In both situations, each individual party asserts their opinion with conviction that they possess an awareness

of the other party's inner thoughts, only to be met with a disconnect that produces a humorous result.

In both of these excerpts, the dialogue has a deadpan quality. There is a sense of deliberate understatement. In both exchanges, there is a simple "No" uttered by both Brautigan's narrator and Jake Barnes in response to a proposition from another party regarding personal matters. This deadpan quality of dialogue emerges effectively in the above excerpts as a result of their mutual use of the minimalist technique. Deliberate understatement is reinforced by sparse dialogue.

At the end of the Brautigan chapter, the bookstore owner explains the narrator's reluctant sexual encounter to him as a mythical experience: "I'll tell you what happened up there... You fought in the Spanish Civil War. You were a young communist from Cleveland, Ohio. She was a painter... You both fell very much in love" (24-5). The imagery of the Spanish Civil War, the young communist from Cleveland, and the dead anarchist remind us of Hemingway's writing about the Spanish Civil War and more broadly, civil unrest in Europe. The naivete of the young communist in "The Revolutionist" of *In Our Time*, reminds us of Brautigan's narrator's own sexual naivete. The Spanish Civil War reminds us of Hemingway's famous novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), and the bookstore owner's mythologized description of the relationship between the narrator and the woman he sleeps with is akin to Robert Jordan's, the novel's protagonist, relationship with the young teenager Maria:

"When the rurales saw you, they left town. Tough as they were, they did not want to have anything to do with you. The rurales left... You became the most powerful man in town. You were seduced by a thirteen-year-old girl, and you

and she lived together in an adobe hut, and practically all you did was make love.” (25)

The imagining by the bookstore owner of Brautigan’s narrator as an intimidating, masculine presence is similar in many ways to Hemingway’s development of Robert Jordan’s character, especially within the context of his relationship with Maria: masculine, fearless and a source of fear for those who challenge him.

Irony and humour of a similar nature can also be found near the start of *The Sun Also Rises* in Jake’s descriptions of Robert Cohn and, in particular, the influence of W.H. Hudson’s book *The Purple Land* on Cohn’s expectations: “For a man to take it at thirty-four as a guidebook to what life holds is about as safe as it would be for a man of the same age to enter Wall Street direct from a French convent, equipped with a complete set of the more practical Alger books” (8). Cohn has developed a naïve and fictitious view of the nature of romance later in life. Jake’s belief that this is attributable to the reading and rereading of Hudson’s novel is in itself humorous, the implication being that a grown man should be possessed of sufficient life experience to avoid making such a mistake. The comparison he provides, that doing so is tantamount to “a man of the same age to enter Wall Street direct from a French convent, equipped with a set of the more practical Alger books”, is hyperbolic and humorous, even nearing the absurd; a metaphor foreshadowing Brautigan and one possessed of the deadpan quality both writers employ. That Cohn might be so naïve as to believe that Horatio Alger novels, in which downtrodden lower-class characters miraculously achieve financial success with joyous results, could serve as guidebooks to effective financial practice creates a gulf between Jake’s cynicism and Cohn’s naïve optimism, the contrast between which creates a humorous interaction between the two characters.

This same contrast can be seen in the first chapter of Brautigan's own novel, "The Cover for Trout Fishing in America". In this chapter, the cover of the novel, showing Brautigan and Michaela Blake-Grand, in Washington Square Park in San Francisco, in front of a statue of Benjamin Franklin, is discussed.



Original Cover for *Trout Fishing in America*, photograph by Erik Weber (1967)

Seib notes of the cover that: "The most obvious objects in the photograph are Brautigan, looking like an unemployed Buffalo hunter, and his lady companion – but nowhere are they mentioned in the description. Their 'cover' is obviously successful" (64). Brautigan and his companion are under "cover" themselves and redirecting attention to the statue of Benjamin Franklin in the town square. Another gulf is created between optimistic American idealism, here represented by the statue of founding father Benjamin Franklin, and the "poor" who come out around five o'clock for free sandwiches: "It's sandwich time for the poor...A friend of mine unwrapped his sandwich one afternoon and looked inside to find just a leaf of spinach. That was all" (2).

These people, like Brautigan and his friend, are under "cover"; insignificant in comparison to the stature of Franklin, though they exist in the contemporary America and he in an America of the past. The American idealism represented by the statue

of the founding father, a symbol of the promise of hope and prosperity, is thrown into sharp contrast with the poor collecting their sandwiches, some finding themselves disappointed with the measly offering with which they are presented. The humour becomes clear in the conclusion of the chapter: “Was it Kafka who learned about America by reading the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin...Kafka who said, ‘I like the Americans because they are healthy and optimistic’” (2). Kafka’s purported analysis of Americans as healthy and optimistic is in sharp contrast to the situation the narrator presents to the reader, the “poor” coming to a park to receive an unsubstantial meal (“looked inside to find just a leaf of spinach”). Benjamin Franklin becomes the image that links Kafka’s analysis to the present day, Kafka learning about America by reading his autobiography, and Franklin’s statue watching over the poor, representative of an idealized version of an American past that has long since faded into memory. David L. Vanderwerken notes that Brautigan:

...obviously alludes to America’s Founding Fathers and to the nexus of ideals, values, and beliefs associated with them or projected upon them. As so many American writers have done, Brautigan imagines our mythical past with the inward eye of the imagination, assuming that an age of innocence, hopefulness, and harmony existed during the nation’s dawning, with everything downhill since then. (36)

Brautigan is aware of this idealized version of American history, but to suggest, as Vanderwerken does, that he subscribes to it completely and without reservation is debateable. More accurately, it can be argued that Brautigan uses the contrast between the poor and the statue of Benjamin Franklin to symbolize such a misconception: that there has ever been an age of “innocence, hopefulness, and harmony”. Similarly, Jake is skeptical of Cohn’s idealized version of romance. Just

as Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises* has developed a naïve, fictitious view of romance from reading *The Purple Land* too many times, so too is there a naivety implied by Brautigan's use of Kafka's analysis, an analysis that is often misapplied to America, often by Americans themselves. The poor clamouring for badly made sandwiches in a park because they are "hungry" does not paint a compelling picture of American optimism, just as Cohn's desire for travel to South America is not viewed in the romantic way by Jake that Cohn intends. The humour, in both Hemingway and Brautigan, exists in exposing this naivety by examination under a more cynical lens, by exposing the fiction that certain images ("amorous adventures of a perfect English gentleman", or "Benjamin Franklin") represent in reality. The disparity between what is naively imagined and what exists in reality clash in such a way as to create a humorous outcome in both.

#### 1.6 A Common Focus on Characters on the Margin of Society

Many of Brautigan's characters are dispossessed and alienated from contemporary American society. These characters serve to demonstrate how far America has strayed from its ideals, the ease with which people are discarded and the consequences. Kenneth Seib, in his analysis of *Trout Fishing in America*, notes that:

...most of all, there are the winos, the poor and the disaffiliated. The poor who wait for sandwich time at the church near Washington Square only to find a leaf of spinach in their bread; the bums who pick cherries for Rebel Smith wait like vultures for her to discard half-smoked cigarettes; the winos and impoverished artists talk of opening up a flea circus or committing themselves to an insane asylum for the winter. (67)

The same is true in Hemingway's fiction. More often than not, his stories, particularly of the nineteen-twenties, are populated with similarly "disaffiliated" characters. For example, in "The Battler", the mentally unstable former professional boxer Ad Francis, once famous and rich, wanders homeless, dependent upon the care he receives from his companion, Bugs. Recent war veteran Krebs in "Soldier's Home" disengages from the world as completely as he can, disenfranchised by his experiences in World War I. And in numerous other stories, such as "Out of Season", "Cat in the Rain", and "Hills Like White Elephants", American expatriates in Europe fail in their romantic relationships and slip into lives marked by apathy and alcohol abuse. All of these characters, in both Hemingway's and Brautigan's work, represent a large swathe of the American population that Seib describes as a "dissection...of the American Dream. The implication is that...the America of today concerns itself with everything but people" (67).

This American disenfranchisement manifests itself in similar ways in the works of both authors. In the chapter from *Trout Fishing in America*, "The Kool-Aid Wino", the narrator describes a childhood friend who "became a Kool-Aid wino as the result of a rupture. He was a member of a very large and poor German family...Everyone worked except my friend who couldn't because he was ruptured. There was no money for an operation...So he stayed home and became a Kool-Aid wino" (8). This Kool-Aid wino relies on the narrator to bring him a nickel so that he can afford the Kool-Aid he consumes copious amounts of. Brautigan's Kool-Aid wino is a metaphor for the alcoholism that comes with the despair; the Kool-Aid wino is injured, unable to live a normal life and work like the rest of his family can, and turns instead to substance abuse, relying (at least partially), on financial aid from others. Though Kool-Aid is obviously not an intoxicant, but rather an absurd substitute, the

pattern of behaviour mirrors an alcoholic's: methodical, deliberate, ongoing: "To him the making of Kool-Aid was a romance and a ceremony. It had to be performed in an exact manner and with dignity...He screwed the caps on tightly and was now ready for a day's drinking" (9-10).

Despair, disenfranchisement and excessive alcohol consumption remind us of Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*. He, too, has suffered an injury that cannot be fixed, and so a normal life is denied him. The many instances of substance abuse over the course of the novel illustrate a desire on Jake's part to escape the despair he feels: "There was much wine, an ignored tension, and a feeling of things coming that you could not prevent happening. Under the wine I lost the disgusted feeling and was happy. It seemed they were all such nice people" (117). The "disgusted feeling" Jake describes is likely in reference to the resentment and jealousy he feels about Brett's sleeping with Cohn and his own inability to have a relationship with Brett because of the injury he has sustained during the war. This war time experience is evoked in the passage to connect the injury, the despair, and the ensuing overindulgence in alcohol together to explain in a few sentences Jake's psychological condition, and the reasons for his regular excess alcohol consumption. It is only by drinking regularly that he can feel "happy" and view his peers as "nice people".

Alcohol is a means of escape for the psychologically damaged in both Hemingway and Brautigan as well. In the chapter "A Walden Pond For Winos" the narrator describes drinking regularly in the park with two failed artists who are considering voluntarily entering a lunatic asylum: "The three of us huddled in the park, talking. They were both broken-down artists from New Orleans...They were either going to open up a flea circus or commit themselves to an insane asylum. So

they talked about it while they drank wine” (17). The autumn and the coming winter symbolize a coldness in the life of the narrator and his friends, which results in the desire to drink. They elude figures of authority (the police) and find the “safest place” for their drinking is “the park across from the church” (17), an open space close to a building symbolic of spiritual refuge. The narrator also eludes his personal responsibilities by leaving his pregnant wife alone at home so that he may drink with his artist friends. The insane asylum the “broken-down artists” consider entering acts as a parallel for the temporary comfort provided by the alcohol they consume during their discussion: it is a refuge away from the cold of the winter, where basic needs are met and the reality and responsibility of daily life is suspended. Since neither artist is actually mentally ill, there is no real reason for them to go there except to avoid responsibility, the same goal they achieve by drinking in the park. They conclude that: “Ah, yes, there was a future in the insane asylum. No winter spent there could be a total loss” (18). It is obvious however, that there is really no future there, as none is articulated by the narrator or his artist friends. Instead, the only thing that they can call to mind are the temporary pleasures they will experience having their needs met during the cold winter: “They talked about how warm it would be in the insane asylum, with television, clean sheets on soft beds, hamburger gravy over mashed potatoes, a locked razor and lovely young student nurses” (18). There is no future or solution to the problems of the broken-down artists or the narrator, only a temporary comfort found through another strategy of avoidance similar in nature to drinking port wine in the park.

There are many shared components between this Brautigan chapter and Hemingway’s short story “Mr. and Mrs. Elliot”. In both, alcohol is used as a means of escape, “broken-down” artist friends are present, and the escapism provided by

travel to Europe and the renting of a chateau serve a similar function to the insane asylum. Like Brautigan's narrator, Mr. Elliot uses alcohol as a way to distance himself from his wife, in this case because of an unsatisfactory marriage marked by sexual and reproductive failure. Throughout the story the couple struggle to conceive a child: "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot tried very hard to have a baby. They tried as often as Mrs. Elliot could stand it...they wanted a baby more than anything else in the world" (123-5). Their inability to do so causes the marriage to deteriorate, and though it is never explained whether or not there is some sort of sexual deficiency causing the problem, it is implied that the hasty marriage between the naïve Mr. Elliot, who condemns sexual intimacy before marriage and Mrs. Elliot who is seemingly enamoured of his chastity was ill-conceived, chastity and an outdated sexual morality being confused by the two for love. Teodóra Dömötör reasonably hypothesizes that Mrs. Elliot is in fact homosexual, and that: "The two parties in this relationship do not actually belong together" (124); that their relationship "signifies only a socially prescribed and required union, not one that is based on mutual desire" (124). Regardless of the reasons for the failure of the relationship, it continues to disintegrate. At the end of the story:

Elliot had taken to drinking white wine and lived apart in his own room...Mrs. Elliot and the girlfriend now slept together in the big, medieval bed. They had many a good cry together. In the evening they all sat at dinner together in the garden under a plane tree and the hot evening wind blew and Elliot drank white wine and Mrs. Elliot and the girlfriend made conversation and they were all quite happy. (125)

Like the narrator of Brautigan's chapter who leaves his pregnant wife at home to drink port wine with his broken-down artist friends, Mr. Elliot moves into his own

room in the chateau, and lives “apart” from his wife and drinks white wine. He abandons the responsibility of marriage after the disappointment of failing to have a baby, and instead drinks, writes poetry and leaves his wife to the care of her friend. The conclusion of the story, in which it is stated that Elliot drinks white wine with dinner while his wife and her friend talk and they are “all quite happy” confirms the distance that Elliot has put between himself and any responsibility he has to his wife, and how he uses alcohol to maintain this distance. The two talk while he sits and drinks; he may as well not be there. The flippant sentence that ends the story resembles Brautigan’s ending to the chapter in which the narrator states that there is a future in the insane asylum. Just as there is, in reality no future in the insane asylum, no solution, the characters are not “all quite happy” at the conclusion of “Mr. and Mrs. Elliot”, in fact the opposite is implied: Mr. Elliot is described as drinking white wine and living apart.

Mr. and Mrs. Elliot attract a collection of indolent artists much like the “broken down” artists with whom Brautigan’s narrator associates:

Elliot had a number of friends by now all of whom admired his poetry...In a short time the friends began to drift back to Paris. Touraine had not turned out the way it looked when it started. Soon all the friends had gone off with a rich young and unmarried poet to a seaside resort near Trouville. There they were all very happy. (125)

These “friends”, like Brautigan’s broken-down artists, are aimless and pursue whatever new opportunity arises that allows them to avoid taking responsibility for themselves. They belong to the “lost generation” of Hemingway’s epigraph to *The Sun Also Rises*; they are members of a generation passing away as referenced in the epigraph from Ecclesiastes. They do not appear to do anything beyond follow

around those people with whom they can stay to places where they can be comfortable. They are similar to Brautigan's artists contemplating the asylum not because they are mentally ill but because it provides temporary comfort. This is a disengagement from society, and in both cases from American society: the Elliots leave America to travel aimlessly around Europe and the broken-down artists seem to prefer divorcing themselves from society by entering the insane asylum rather than pursuing their, albeit slightly absurd, business idea of opening a flea-circus. In both cases, characters disenfranchised from American society desire to and find ways to keep its realities at a distance both physically, through literal travel away from it or through institutionalization, and psychologically through alcohol abuse.

Seib asserts that the greatest example of this American "disaffiliation" in *Trout Fishing in America* can be found in the character Trout Fishing in America Shorty:

Nowhere is the distance between trout-fishing allurements and human neglect more evident than in Trout Fishing in America Shorty, a legless one-man riot who appears throughout the novel "staggering around in a magnificent chrome-plated steel wheelchair" (45). Shorty is in many ways the quintessential American. He is a rugged individualist; he is cheerful and energetic, a kind of nether-world Rotarian; he is a Whitman-like, boisterous democrat – he is, by God, as good as any man – and he drinks in public view "just like he was Winston Churchill." (67)

Though Trout Fishing in American Shorty is emblematic of some "American qualities", it is a stretch to say, as Seib does, that he is "the quintessential American" or "a rugged individualist...cheerful and energetic." In reality, Shorty represents a darker sort of Americanness – he is a cantankerous, racist drunkard who has been let down by the America in which he exists and has become: "the cold turning of the

earth" (Brautigan, 45). He is not conventionally useful and thus America has no use for him; he has no future and is left behind. When the narrator imagines shipping him to Nelson Algren (a novelist who explored the underbelly of American life) from San Francisco to Chicago in a packing crate, he travels across his native land "puking and cursing...wondering what it was all about...shouting 'Where in the hell am I? I can't see to open this bottle! Who turned out the lights? Fuck this motel! I have to take a piss! Where's my key?'" (46-7). His imagined journey across America makes him physically ill and irritable and leaves him confused and quite literally in the dark. It becomes a microcosm for his lived experience in America and for the alienation that is of interest to Brautigan.

There are elements of Trout Fishing in America Shorty's experience that appear to resemble the experience of the young, disenfranchised World War I veteran Harold Krebs, in Hemingway's "Soldier's Home". Krebs is not a drunk, nor is he as gregarious a presence, but he has also been neglected and forgotten: "By the time Krebs returned to his home town in Oklahoma the greeting of heroes was over. He came back much too late...People seemed to think it was rather ridiculous for Krebs to be getting back so late, years after the war was over" (111). Despite having suffered for his country fighting in the First World War, Krebs' lateness in returning to America makes him not the object of celebration, but rather that of ridicule and suspicion. As with Trout Fishing in America Shorty, many of his townsfolk ignore him at best or view him negatively at worst: "Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it. His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities" (111).

Krebs ends up seeking refuge in a total disengagement from conventional daily life, and the obligations it entails. Just as Trout Fishing in America Shorty's way

to escape is through alcohol abuse, Krebs' employs detachment to achieve the same end:

During this time, it was late summer, he was sleeping late in bed, getting up to walk down town to the library to get a book, eating lunch at home, reading on the front porch until he became bored and then walking down through the town to spend the hottest hours of the day in the cool dark of the pool room. He loved to play pool...He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences ever again. He wanted to live alone without consequences. (112-3)

Krebs' pattern of behaviour, his desire to live "without consequences", is the result of psychological detachment and repression. His experiences in the First World War, compounded by the inability to speak meaningfully about them with any of the people he fought for, lead him to develop a meaningless routine that allows him to exist on the periphery of society. Like Trout Fishing in America Shorty, he is usually alone, he does not have any obligations, he exists in his state of detachment observing the world around him, a world that holds no future for him. Just as Trout Fishing in America Shorty is imagined left in the darkness of the packing crate when he is shipped across America, Krebs seeks out the darkness of the pool room in his hometown. Though Krebs' pool hall visits are voluntary, he shares with Shorty darkness and isolation: a symbolic representation of the confusion and despair both characters feel existing in their respective Americas: "He did not want to leave Germany. He did not want to come home. Still he had come home" (113). On a behavioural level this confusion and despair manifest themselves for Trout Fishing in America Shorty as cantankerousness and for Krebs as resentment: "Krebs felt embarrassed and resentful as always" (115).

In both Brautigan's chapter and Hemingway's story participating members of society consider intervention to force the two disaffiliated characters out of their routines of disengagement. In Brautigan's chapter, the narrator and others imagine shipping Trout Fishing in America Shorty across the country to writer Nelson Algren in a packing crate, and in "Soldier's Home", Krebs' mother and father imagine him settling down with a job and a wife and becoming "a real credit to the community" (115). Both authors illustrate that a total escape, a total disengagement from America is impossible: even if the country has left the character behind, conventions will be imposed. Trout Fishing in America Shorty is never actually shipped in a packing crate to Nelson Algren, but it is suggested by the narrator that: "They probably swept him up one morning and put him in jail to punish him, the evil fart, or they put him in a nut house to dry him out a little" (47). For Krebs, a pressure is placed upon to re-enter a society he has no interest in just as he feels things are going "smoothly": "He had felt sorry for his mother and she had made him lie. He would go to Kansas City and get a job and she would feel all right about it...He had wanted his life to go smoothly...Well, that was all over now, anyway" (116). For Krebs, as Ruben De Baedemaker notes, this society is not only distasteful, but is constructed upon falsehoods: "The problem, then, is not in Krebs, but in his hometown...the town is built on lies, on game-playing rituals: the courtship game, the success game...Thus his dilemma: conform, lie, and assimilate, or stay aloof, try to maintain some shred of integrity, and suffer loneliness" (163). In both cases, we see the paradoxical nature of the disaffiliated in America: they are rejected or forgotten (or both) by the society, and as they struggle to navigate their own disengagement, they are punished for it by forced re-entry into a system has let them down and that is now foreign and distasteful to them.

An interesting parallel can be drawn between Krebs' little sister and the infant daughter of the narrator who steals Trout Fishing in America Shorty's sausages. Both represent an untainted future that has been denied Krebs and Shorty. The gulf between Trout Fishing in America Shorty and the infant daughter can be seen at the end of the chapter: "Trout Fishing in America Shorty stared after her as if the space between them were a river growing larger and larger." As Seib notes, "The space between them is the gulf between possibility and failure, the orgiastic future and the impotent present. The child still has the opportunity of achieving success...For Shorty...His life has come to a stop" (67). The difference between them, her potential for a future and his lack thereof, is made very clear through the image of the growing river, and it is worth noting that here Brautigan uses the image of the river not for the pleasure of fishing, but rather as a force of separation. The force of separation or "river" in "Soldier's Home" is found in the "flow" of conversation between Krebs and his little sister at the breakfast table when she describes with enthusiasm to Krebs her upcoming baseball game and her affection for him:

"Do you love me?"

"Uh, huh."

"Will you love me always?"

"Sure."

"Will you come watch me play indoor?"

"Maybe."

"Aw, Hare, you don't love me. If you loved me, you'd want to come over and watch me play indoor." (114-5)

The exchange between Krebs and his little sister is marked by the disparity between the enthusiasm of her questions and the non-committal nature of his replies. She

inhabits a bright world of love and excitement, trying to draw out of Krebs both an admission of his love for her and a promise that he will come and watch her play at the baseball game she is looking forward to. Krebs, on the other hand, inhabits one that is cold and empty, in which no excitement or commitment about love or the future can or will be made. His sister, like the infant daughter in *Trout Fishing in America*, is still in a position where a future in American society is possible, where the future, more broadly, is bright. Krebs, like Trout Fishing in America Shorty, has no future in this world, of which he becomes increasingly aware as the story progresses.

It is clear through these analyses that for the many disaffiliated characters in the work of the two respective authors, Sieb's analysis of the central metaphor of *Trout Fishing in America* rings true: "The central metaphor of the novel, trout-fishing, implies through its associations the abundance, the richness, the good life that is every American's supposed birthright and the achievement of every American's dream... Trout Fishing in America is a fraud, at best a chronicle of loss, frustration and despair" (68). Hemingway's interest in disenfranchised characters, pressured to conform in America or electing to flee from it through travel and excess appears to be shared by Brautigan's own interest in the disenfranchised in America. For both, this disaffiliation forms a central thematic interest and is crucial in the development of some of the most compelling characters in their respective works.

### 1.7 Fishing for America's Consciousness

Another similarity with Hemingway is found in Brautigan's manifold descriptions of the natural world, particularly in descriptions of rivers, streams and creeks in which fishing is done. Though Brautigan's descriptions are often surreal in

nature, they are at times remarkably literal, and read as if they were drawn from a Hemingway short story or novel: “Then there was a long field that came sloping down off a hill. The field was covered with green grass and bushes. On top of the hill there was a grove of tall, dark trees. At a distance I saw a waterfall come pouring down off the hill. It was long and white and I could almost feel its cold spray” (4). The simple description of the area surrounding the trout creek the narrator is approaching resembles Hemingway descriptions of similar locations: “The road came out from the shadow of the woods into the hot sun. Ahead was a river-valley. Beyond the river was a steep hill. There was a field of buckwheat on the hill. We saw a white house under some trees on the hillside. It was very hot and we stopped under some trees besides a dam that crossed the river” (95). In both passages the characters are approaching the creek or river, and the surrounding area is described in minimal detail. Images are described very simply: a “hill”, a “field”, “trees”. Adjectives are used sparingly if at all and when they are used they are deliberately vague: “green” grass, “hot” sun.

The passage from Brautigan has a quality of anticipation: “It was long and white and I could almost feel its cold spray” (4). Hemingway achieves a similar effect in the following excerpt from “Big Two-Hearted River: Part I”:

It had been a long time since Nick had looked into a 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 down the stream with the current, unresisting, to his post under the bridge where he tightened facing up into the current. (164)

In this passage there are two short sentences, and then one long sentence marked with numerous commas, reflecting both the anticipation and excitement Nick feels at seeing the “satisfactory” trout in the stream as well as the rhythm of the stream itself. As Brautigan’s narrator’s and Nick’s anticipation both increase, so does the flow of the river and the flow of the writing as well.

This anticipation is made more explicit in subsequent sequences of both Brautigan’s chapter and Hemingway’s story. “The next day I would go trout fishing for the first time” (4), remarks Brautigan’s narrator. “I would get up early and eat my breakfast and go. I had heard that it was better to go trout fishing early in the morning. The trout were better for it. They had something extra in the morning. I went home to prepare for trout fishing in America” (4). Brautigan uses this more explicit anticipation as the effective introduction for his book. The narrator has documented his approach to the river, discovered where he will be going trout fishing, and now waits with anticipation for his engagement with trout fishing itself, through which we the reader will be introduced to the various meanings of “trout fishing in America”.

Similarly, Nick Adams waits with explicit excitement before the actual act of trout fishing in “Big Two-Hearted River: Part II”: “Nick was excited. He was excited by the early morning and the river. He was really too hurried to eat breakfast, but he knew he must. He built a little fire and put on the coffee pot” (173). Part I of the story is Nick’s introduction to the river and the surrounding environs of the Big Two-Hearted River, part II is an entrance into and a deeper physical and psychological engagement with that world, much like Brautigan’s narrator’s entrance into the world of trout fishing in America.

Similar to Hemingway's approach in the "Big Two-Hearted River" stories, Brautigan has also chosen to split what is ostensibly the introduction to his novel in two: "Knock On Wood (Part I)", in which the narrator reminisces about the first time he ever head "about trout fishing in America", and "Knock On Wood (Part Two)" in which the narrator embarks upon, like Nick Adams in "Big Two-Hearted River: Part II", a deeper physical and psychological engagement with the world that Brautigan has now introduced to the reader.

The act of fishing in the writing of Hemingway and Brautigan is metaphorical for this engagement; it is representative of profound psychological and social struggle. Fishing provides characters with opportunity to physically engage with nature. At times the character is temporarily released from anxieties as through the practice of fishing they become one with the river; at times the character is faced with profound physical and psychological struggle. That which begins positively more often than not takes a negative turn:

Tom Martin Creek was a small creek with cold, clear water...I liked the feel and motion of it.

But the creek turned out to be a real son-of-a-bitch. I had to fight it all the God-damn way: brush, poison oak and hardly any good places to fish...Sometimes it was so bad that it just left me standing there, not knowing which way to jump. (19)

In this chapter of *Trout Fishing in America*, "Tom Martin Creek", the experience of fishing begins positively. The opening description of Tom Martin Creek is evocative of Hemingway's descriptions of fishing spots, as is the description of fishing itself. However, even after successfully catching a "good-looking" trout, the narrator suddenly reveals his surroundings as hostile: "the creek was very small and poured

out of a steep, brushy canyon filled with poison oak” and almost immediately after explains that the creek is a “real son-of-a-bitch” that he “had to fight...all the Goddamned way” with “hardly any good places to fish”. At the very end of the chapter, the narrator reveals that “After that first trout I was alone in there. But I didn’t know it until later” (19). The hostile environs and the sudden confusion and frustration reveal the fishing expedition at Tom Martin Creek to be representative of a deeper psychological issue with which the narrator is struggling. The struggle is with loneliness and existential dread which the narrator reveals at the end of the story. He sets out in high anticipation, unaware of the coming struggle, but the creek and harsh terrain expose his loneliness and the struggle ensues. Another dimension of the wilderness is revealed. It is easy to get lost or to lose oneself.

A similar psychological event occurs towards the end of “Big Two-Hearted River Part I” when Nick decides he does not want to fish the swamp. The joy of the fishing trip is threatened by fear of a breakdown. As Leo Gurko notes: “In “Big Two-Hearted River” the movement, to be sure, is toward life, yet the reader is tensely aware throughout that one false step on Nick’s part and he will slide all the way back to the unnamed psychic nightmare he is struggling away from” (176). His fishing, like the narrator’s in Brautigan’s chapter, has had relative success up until this point: “Nick fought him against the current, letting him thump in the water against the spring of the rod. He shifted the rod to his left hand, worked the trout upstream, holding his weight, fighting on the rod, and then let him down into the net” (179). In both instances, the respective characters “fight” the fish and win, succeeding on the physical level. However, the psychological despair that they are feeling emerges shortly after this superficial victory. For Nick the despair is embodied by a swamp he sees ahead:

Nick did not want to go there now...In the swamp the banks were bare, the big cedars came together overhead, the sun did not come through, except in patches...In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure. Nick did not want it.

He did not want to go down the stream any further today. (179-80)

The swamp is impenetrable and dark, it is claustrophobic and restricts movement. Nick's efforts to avoid thinking earlier in the story, "He felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking" (164), indicate that he is unwilling or unable to confront the psychological despair that is plaguing him, perhaps unable even to recognize it in such a way as to be able to understand it. It is possible that like Brautigan's narrator he "won't know it until later"; aware of its presence, but not knowing how to confront it, reassuring himself as the story ends that he will find a way to in the future: "There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp" (180). Whether or not he will is left to the reader to decide, just as in Brautigan's story we are left wondering, despite the narrator's claim of knowing he was alone later, he has managed to do anything to solve this underlying problem. It becomes clear in this example, as in others, how the minimalist style of omission in the writing of both authors manifests itself thematically in their exploration of the psychological nature of fishing and its implications.

### 1.8 Trout, Trout Fishing and Fertility

The image of the fish in Hemingway and Brautigan is also very closely tied to romantic, often sexual relationships between characters. In *Trout Fishing in America*, this connection is explored in the greatest detail in the chapter "Worsewick", in which the narrator has intercourse with his female companion in a trout creek. What should

be a romantic, sensual encounter, however, is reduced to a more base sexual exchange, underscored by Brautigan's use of language and metaphor. The narrator establishes this immediately by pronouncing the site of the sexual act, Worsewick Hot Springs, to be "nothing fancy. Somebody put some boards across the creek. That was it" (43), a pronouncement he soon after repeats: "As I said, Worsewick was nothing fancy, not like the places where the swells go. There were no buildings around. We saw an old shoe lying in a tub" (43). The place in which the sexual encounter will occur is a dreary, empty space. It is not in any way special, and others who have been there before have littered there. This is symbolic of what will be revealed as an unsatisfactory sexual and romantic relationship between the narrator and his female companion. By implying that others have been there before and left their refuse behind ("an old shoe"), Brautigan is suggesting more broadly that most of these relationships are unfulfilling, similar to one another in nature, constantly repeated, drab and boring like Worsewick Hot Springs itself; like "an old shoe". Given that the "Hot Spring" is really just "some boards across the creek", it is reasonable to conclude that Brautigan also sees these relationships as being misrepresented by others; the setting presented as being more luxurious and the encounters more enjoyable than they really are.

Further descriptions of Worsewick Hot Springs do not make it appear any more desirable:

The hot springs came down off a hill and where they flowed there was a bright orange scum through the sagebrush...[we] took off our clothes...and the deerflies had at us until we got into the water...There was a green slime growing around the edges of the tub and there were dozens of dead fish floating in our bath. (43)

The imagery in this passage is rife with dirt, decay and death. First there is “scum” on the water that confirms that the hot springs are far from pure and clean, second there are the deerflies that attack the narrator and his female companion, predators that suck human blood reminiscent of the flies that would surround a dead carcass left untended, and finally there are the explicitly dead fish themselves, floating in the tub. The hot spring is a place of death and decay, reflective of the decay already present in the narrator’s own romantic relationship with his female companion. The dead fish confirm death of this relationship, at least its sexual component. Fish are, in this novel, and more widely, often seen as symbols of fecundity, with their ability to spawn in great numbers and populate vast waterways. The dead fish in the hot spring foreshadow the disappointing sexual encounter that soon occurs between the narrator and his female companion; the opposite of a fecund, sexual relationship:

After a while she said ‘I don’t have my diaphragm with me and besides it wouldn’t work in the water, anyway. I think it’s a good idea if you don’t come inside me. What do you think?’ I thought this over and said all right. I didn’t want any more kids for a long time. The green slime and dead fish were all about our bodies. (44)

The narrator’s female companion does not want to have any more children, nor does the narrator himself. Nor does their sexual encounter, if it is being done exclusively for pleasure, seem to bring any pleasure. It is almost more akin to a physical labour than an erotic experience:

Worsewick was nothing fancy.

My sperm came out into the water, unaccustomed to the light, and instantly it became a misty, stringy kind of thing and swirled out like a falling star, and I

saw a dead fish come forward and float into my sperm, bending it in the middle. His eyes were still like iron. (44)

The narrator repeats his refrain about Worsewick, underscoring that the sexual encounter he is the midst of is “nothing fancy”, of no great importance. If hot springs are traditionally meant to be physically pleasurable, we can infer that this sexual encounter was not. It is simply a routine exchange between a couple in whose relationship the passion has evaporated. The sperm that is ejaculated into the water and that becomes a “misty, stringy kind of thing” reduces one component of human erotic experience and conception to an insignificant piece of refuse, much like the old shoe found near the beginning of the chapter. In the chapter, the narrator mentions the scum in the hot spring multiple times, and the similarity between the words “scum” and “come”; and the fact that the narrator’s come ends up inhabiting the same water as the scum. That which is traditionally meant to represent fecundity, like the image of the fish, comes to represent instead decay and death, like the dead fish in the hot spring, the narrator’s sperm even floating into a dead fish as the chapter ends. A sexual encounter surrounded by death imagery and the bland nature of the entire experience of the place, Worsewick (nothing fancy), after which the chapter is titled, illustrate the connection between the image of fish and the breakdown of a romantic relationship in Brautigan’s novel.

Similarly, in Hemingway’s short story “Out of Season”, fish and fishing are representative of the dissolution of a romantic relationship. In this story, the absence of fish and the inability to fish them acts as a metaphor for emptiness of the romantic relationship. As the story begins, there is already a distance between the young man and his partner. He speaks to Peduzzi, their guide, alone, outside of the hotel, while his wife waits inside, and when the three begin their journey to the river, she keeps a

distance between herself and her husband and Peduzzi: "Peduzzi saw the wife...start out to follow them down the road, carrying the fishing rods, unjointed, one in each hand. Peduzzi didn't like her to be way back there" (135). Despite Peduzzi's encouragement that she join them, "The wife stayed behind, following rather sullenly" (135). The fact that the wife is carrying the unjointed fishing rods is significant; it is clear from the outset that she has little if any interest in the fishing expedition, and yet she is burdened with the transportation of the requisite equipment. The fact that her husband does not assist her in carrying the rods illustrates the lack of cooperation between the two that will be revealed more explicitly later on in the story.

Peduzzi soon reveals to the young couple that fishing in the town is "forbidden". If fish represent, as they do in Brautigan's chapter, fecundity, it becomes clear that the "forbidden" fishing is a metaphor for the dissolution of the sexual relationship between the young man and his wife, and more broadly the dissolution of their relationship. This is further reinforced by the wife leaving before the aborted fishing trip even begins, and the fact that no fish are ever seen or caught in the story: "Go on back Tiny...we aren't going to have any fun, anyway" (138). The wife leaving her husband and Peduzzi is the most obvious indication given in the story that their romantic relationship is in peril. Immediately after her departure, we learn that Peduzzi and the young man cannot fish anyway, because they have no lead for the fishing lines: "'We can't fish then,' said the young gentleman, and unjointed the rod, reeling the line back through the guides" (138). The wife's departure and the fact that there can be no fishing, that a fish is never even seen in the story, further underscores the lack of fecundity in the relationship, revealing it as barren and empty; without life.

The fishing trip is also twice aborted, once when the wife departs and Peduzzi and the young gentleman discover that there is no lead to fish with, and again prematurely by the young gentleman when, after tentatively planning another trip with Peduzzi the next morning he states: "I may not be going...very probably not" (139). This cancellation of plans, first hesitantly and then after some deliberation, provides greater insight into the nature of the relationship between the young gentleman and his wife. Just as they cannot fish, cannot get near the image in the story that represents fecundity, so perhaps they cannot achieve this in a romantic or sexual context. Similarly, Brautigan's narrator and his female companion begin a sexual encounter associated with procreation, and then seek to avoid reproduction. This abortive experience and the association with fish and fishing in both Hemingway and Brautigan becomes symbolic of a decaying romantic and sexual relationship between two characters.

Finally, the descriptions of the dismal natural environment in the respective fishing locations in both stories are symbolic of this decay. The narrator in Brautigan's chapter is in a dirty, scummy pool of water surrounded by dead fish. In Hemingway's story, there is an absence of fish altogether, and the river where the trout fishing is meant to be "good" is described as "brown and muddy. Off on the right there was a dump heap" (137), and later as "discolored by the melting snow" (138). This is not the bright, bountiful stream full of trout that characterizes Hemingway's fishing stories, this is a stream that represents death and decay. It is worth noting also that the word "muddy" is used earlier in the story to describe the Marsala that Peduzzi insists the young gentleman buy at the Concordia, which the young gentleman's wife refuses to drink, and is later largely consumed by Peduzzi. The use of the same adjective to describe the beverage that contributes to Peduzzi's

depressed, alcoholic state of existence to describe the trout stream illustrates a connection between Peduzzi's self-destruction and the destruction of the romantic relationship in the story symbolized by the "muddy", empty stream. In both Brautigan's chapter and Hemingway's story the imagery of degradation in a place typically associated with fish and fishing betrays the death of the relationships in question.

### 1.9 The Effect of Loss of Status on Hemingway and Brautigan Characters

Another chapter of *Trout Fishing in America* in which a similarity with Hemingway's work can be observed is in "The Surgeon". In this chapter, Brautigan's narrator is fishing with a surgeon who bemoans the idea of American health care becoming a public service, feeling irritated and humiliated at the way he claims he is taken advantage of by patients. Many connections are apparent between this chapter and the Hemingway short story "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife".

The connection with Hemingway is immediately noticeable in the opening paragraph of Brautigan's chapter: "I watched my day begin on Little Redfish Lake as clearly as the first light of dawn or the first ray of the sunrise, though the dawn and the sunrise had long since passed and it was now late in the morning" (Brautigan, 71). Here, as in other passages, Brautigan adopts Hemingway's succinct description of setting, but with none of his own characteristic surrealism. This is a direct description that closely resembles Hemingway's style. As the chapter continues, it becomes clear that the same can be said of much of the dialogue between the narrator and the surgeon:

The surgeon said that he had spent twenty-five years becoming a doctor. His studies had been interrupted by the Depression and two wars. He told me that he would give up the practice of medicine if it became socialized in America. "I've never turned away a patient in my life, and I've never known another doctor who has. Last year I wrote off six thousand dollars worth of bad debts," he said. (71)

This is another example of dialogue and description without the surrealism associated with Brautigan, but rather with the directness characteristic of Hemingway. Brautigan uses this section of the chapter to make several comments about the state of recent American history, with his reference to the depression and two wars. We can likely assume that one of the wars is World War II, and if we are working chronologically, the second perhaps the Korean War. There is an irony in the doctor's study of medicine, a pursuit through which one is trained to heal and save lives, was interrupted twice by events in which life is taken on a massive scale. The interruption of the Depression, though not a war, presents a similar irony, as it too resulted in widespread human suffering through economic mismanagement rather than outright aggression. Even having had his studies interrupted in such a way, the surgeon's reference to patients who cannot pay his fees as "bad debts" suggests that, despite becoming a physician and living through the Depression and two wars, he sees value in the saving of a life only insofar as there can be some monetary compensation. Perhaps as important as the money, however, is the surgeon's resentment at having his time wasted by patients who take advantage of their insurance coverage: "I worked three years ago for a union in Southern Utah that had a health plan...I would not care to practice medicine under such conditions. The patients think they own you and your time. They think you're their own personal

garbage can” (71-2). What is perhaps more important to the surgeon than monetary compensation is that he feels his time is being wasted, that on some level, he is not being treated with the respect and dignity he deserves, and that the services he provides are not being taken seriously.

The surgeon goes on to say that he wants to find a state where there is good hunting and fishing, because he is disappointed with the hunting and fishing in Idaho: “I’d heard so much about Idaho hunting and fishing. I’ve been very disappointed. I’ve given up my practice, sold my home in Twin, and now I’m looking for a new place to settle down” (72). The location in which the surgeon is disappointed is Idaho, the state in which Hemingway committed suicide. The surgeon believes that he will find the contentment he seeks through hunting and fishing if he continues to travel to other states: “Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington...I’m studying them all...I’ve got enough money to travel around for six months, looking for a place to settle down where the hunting and fishing is good” (72). This doomed belief that changing one’s location will bring happiness is reminiscent of Jake’s pronouncement to Robert Cohn early on in *The Sun Also Rises*: “Listen, Robert, going to another country doesn’t make any difference. I’ve tried all that. You can’t get away from yourself by moving from one place to another. There’s nothing to that” (9-10). The real issue for the surgeon is not his geographical location, but rather his dissatisfaction with his profession, and by extension, a sense of personal insecurity and inadequacy he feels at his perceived humiliation at the hands of some of his patients.

Similarly, in Hemingway’s “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife”, the doctor, Nick Adams’ father, is humiliated by a man whose partner he saved through his medical services. The doctor asks Dick Boulton to cut up some logs that have washed

ashore on his property as compensation, and is subsequently humiliated and emasculated by Boulton when the latter first suggests that the doctor is stealing, and soon after implies that he will best the doctor in a fight if he continues to challenge him:

“Listen, Doc.”

“If you call me Doc once again, I’ll knock your eye teeth down your throat.”

“Oh, no, you won’t Doc.”

Dick Boulton looked at the doctor. Dick was a big man. He knew how big a man he was. He liked to get into fights. He was happy...Then he turned away and walked up the hill to the cottage. (74)

Dick and the men with him depart shortly after, leaving the job unfinished and the doctor angry and humiliated. We soon find out that, like Brautigan’s surgeon, the doctor was promised compensation for a medical service already rendered: “Dick owes me a lot of money for pulling his squaw through pneumonia and I guess he wanted a row so he wouldn’t have to take it out in work” (75). Like Brautigan’s surgeon, the doctor’s assumed position of authority is challenged. He is not compensated for his time, and he is left in an undignified position, disenfranchised from his profession, and more broadly with his situation in life. The reader is given a hint at his dissatisfaction with his profession when the doctor enters the cottage: “In the cottage the doctor, sitting on the bed in his room, saw a pile of medical journals on the floor by the bureau. They were still in their wrappers unopened. It irritated him” (75). The fact that the wrapped medical journals are on the floor and that the sight of them causes irritation implies that the doctor’s interest in his profession has dwindled. He has no interest in even opening the journals, let alone reading them, and the sight of them is a source of irritation, suggesting that he is not only bored of,

but frustrated with his profession. This frustration is no doubt compounded by what appears to be a strained relationship with his wife; it is implied that the two sleep in different rooms, that she is hypersensitive to light and sound, and when he explains the situation with Dick Boulton to her he is met with doubt rather than empathy:

“Dear, I don’t think, I really don’t think that any one would really do a thing like that.”

“No?” the doctor said.

“No. I can’t really believe that any one would do a thing of that sort intentionally.” (75)

This dislocated communication, characteristic of both Hemingway and Brautigan, compounds the doctor’s frustration and confusion to the point where he sees no other option but to remove himself to another physical setting, much like the surgeon in Brautigan’s chapter moving from state to state while simultaneously stating “I don’t understand this country” (72). Both the Brautigan chapter and the Hemingway short story end in an attempt to find a place of refuge from professional and personal frustration and humiliation. Hemingway’s doctor attempts to do this with his son, Nick Adams, who tells him: “I know where there’s black squirrels, Daddy,” and to which the doctor replies, “All right...Let’s go there” (76). The doctor is trying to escape through a vicarious engagement with Nick’s innocent interest in the natural world. A reminder of the joy that can be found in nature is a welcome, though untenable, distraction from the frustration he feels and will have to face when he returns to the cottage. Similarly, the surgeon in Brautigan’s story attempts an escape: “I talked to the surgeon a little while longer and said good-bye. We were leaving in the afternoon for Lake Josephus, located at the edge of the Idaho Wilderness, and he was leaving for America, often only a place in the mind” (72). This description of America as “only

a place in the mind” transforms the concept of America into a psychological state rather than a physical country. This is further reinforced by the juxtaposition between a very specific location, “Lake Josephus located at the edge of the Idaho Wilderness” (72) and the much more general, ambiguous “America”, vast both geographically and conceptually. This ambiguity surrounding “America”, and its elevation from the physical to cerebral sphere parallel the surgeon’s confusion about America (“I don’t understand this country”) and his need to escape from the realities of professional frustrations by moving from place to place. In both Brautigan and Hemingway it is implied that this attempt to escape humiliation and professional frustration are doomed to fail, a change in geographical or physical location meaning little when the conflict for the character is profoundly psychological. And in both cases, each writer has taken a figure traditionally associated with healing and physical well-being and shown them to exist in opposition to these two things; two doctors who are broken from within, humiliated and frustrated and unable to heal themselves.

#### 1.10 The Beginning of the Cycle: Apprehension of Mortality by Young Characters in Hemingway and Brautigan’s Fiction

Several interesting parallels can be drawn between the youthful, naïve conception of mortality in sections of *Trout Fishing in America* and in Hemingway’s short story “Indian Camp”. In Brautigan’s work, one chapter in particular calls the reader’s attention to this issue, “The Pudding Master of Stanley Basin”. The chapter details the attempts by different parties to catch minnows at Stanley Basin, Idaho. Brautigan explores the connection between youth and mortality, as can be seen immediately in the opening to the chapter: “Tree, snow and rock beginnings, the mountain in back of the lake promised us eternity, but the lake itself was filled with

thousands of silly minnows, swimming close to the shore and busy putting in hours of Mack Sennett time” (64). Brautigan takes the awesome and eternal and contrasts it with the miniscule and fragile life, first describing the elemental natural world that “promised us eternity”, before immediately describing “silly” minnows and referencing the director and producer of comedic, slapstick films, Mack Sennett,<sup>32</sup> creating the characteristic disconnect between image and emotional implication. Brautigan’s narrator then describes the minnows in greater detail: “Swimming close to shore, like children, they believed in their own immortality” (64).

In both the imagery and the exploration of youthful immortality, there is a clear similarity to the conclusion of Hemingway’s short story “Indian Camp”:

They were seated in the boat, Nick in the stern, his father rowing. The sun was coming up over the hills. A bass jumped, making a circle in the water.

Nick trailed his hand in the water. It felt warm in the sharp chill of the morning.

In the early morning on the lake sitting on the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die. (70)

Here there is the same parallel between the eternal, natural world and the miniscule and transient. The permanence of the hills, the sun and the water contrast with the youthful naivety of Nick Adams and his own insignificance. Nick, a child, like Brautigan’s minnows, also believes in his “own immortality”. There is certainty that comes from innocence and inexperience. As Hemingway scholar Harry Levin notes,

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<sup>32</sup> In *The Act of Reading*, Wolfgang Iser notes that a literary text has no corresponding external reality. The author relies on recognizable social or historical norms to construct an extra textual reality or “repertoire” to enable communication with the reader and also to control the reader’s interpretation. Brautigan relies on a panorama of American figures from history, pop culture, crime and the arts. In addition to Mack Sennett, Benjamin Franklin, Lewis and Clark, Adlai Stevenson, Franz Kafka, Ed Sullivan, Chubby Checker, Deanna Durbin, John Dillinger, Caryl Chessman, Ernest Hemingway, Maria Callas and many others are named. These famous people mix with ordinary Americans in unusual circumstances. This aspect of Brautigan’s repertoire conveys a sense of the tumultuous nature of American culture from high to low and of its transience. By using this curious cast Brautigan shows that there is no settled referent for American society. Its possibilities are too numerous and, varied and at times irrational.

“A child can dismiss the relevance of death to himself because he is not yet painfully involved. He is a wide-eyed onlooker and not a sufferer” (607). There is also the image of the bass jumping. As has been submitted, the fish is often used in by Brautigan and Hemingway as a symbol of fecundity. In this case, the bass and the minnows reflect the inevitably cyclical nature of existence; the fish spawn quickly and in vast numbers, before dying themselves. They serve as a contrast to the youthful belief in immortality possessed by Brautigan’s “children” and Nick Adams, who will both succumb to this inevitable cycle of mortality.

In Brautigan’s chapter, the narrator goes on to describe the many efforts different characters at Stanley Basin make to catch the minnows, all with little success, with the exception of his female companion:

The woman who travelled with me discovered the best way to catch the minnows. She used a large pan that had in its bottom the dregs of a distant vanilla pudding. She put the pan in the shallow water along the shore and instantly, hundreds of minnows gathered around. Then, mesmerized by the vanilla pudding, they swam like a children’s crusade into the pan. She caught twenty fish with one dip. She put the pan full of fish on the shore and the baby played with the fish for an hour. (65)

The description of the fish as a “children’s crusade”, the baby’s interest in them, and the failure of the younger, less experienced characters to catch the minnows all contribute to the parallel Brautigan is creating between youthful naivety and inevitable mortality. This contrast is also reinforced through the parallel between the lake and the “hours of human effort”. The naïve children make efforts to control and contain something that cannot be controlled. Their efforts, like the minnows themselves, come to be “silly”, yielding an insignificant catch of a single minnow. The

baby's interest in the fish is also explicitly connected to mortality: "We watched the baby to make sure she was just leaning on them a little. We didn't want her to kill any of them because she was too young" (65). Youth is distanced from mortality; Brautigan's narrator fearful of the psychological damage that could occur if the young child kills a minnow, exposing themselves to something typically absent from a child's experience of life. In "Indian Camp", Nick's father tries to maintain a similar distance between Nick and a similar exposition, at first instructing his brother to remove Nick physically from the shanty in which the Indian husband has committed suicide, "Take Nick out of the shanty, George" (69), and later, trying, in a guarded fashion, to explain the situation to Nick:

"Why did he kill himself, Daddy?"

"I don't know, Nick. He couldn't stand things, I guess."

"Is dying hard, Daddy?"

"No, I think it's pretty easy, Nick. It all depends." (70)

Nick's father wishes to maintain the distance between youth and the contemplation of mortality that inevitably comes with aging, just as Brautigan's narrator does. The infant in Brautigan eventually grows tired of playing with the minnows: "She caught one of the fish with her hand and looked at it for a while. We took the fish out of her hand and put it back into the pan. After a while she was putting the fish back by herself. Then she grew tired of this" (65). Similarly, after his conversation with his father, Nick sits in the boat and trails his hand in the water, confident of his own immortality. In both examples, youth has been exposed to mortality, but distance between the youthful illusion of one's immortality and the inevitable realization of approaching death that occurs with age is maintained. In both cases, the placement of the events in an eternal, natural world, with imagery of fish, water, hills and

mountains, creates a contrast between the immortal natural world and mortal human one.

### 1.11 The Significance of Random Violence

The most explicitly violent chapter in *Trout Fishing in America* is “Room 208, Hotel Trout Fishing in America”, in which the narrator, inside “Hotel Trout Fishing in America”, a “cheap hotel”, listens to a friend describe the relationship between a pimp and a woman that he turns into a prostitute, and the violence that ensues when a man named Art steals her away from the pimp:

So Art went out and got a .32 pistol, and the next time the pimp broke in, Art pulled the gun out from underneath the covers and jammed it into the pimp’s mouth and said, ‘You’ll be out of luck the next time you come through that door, Jack.’ This broke the pimp up. He never went back. The pimp certainly lost a good thing.

The pistol’s right there beside the bed, just in case the pimp has an attack of amnesia and wants to have his shoes shined in a funeral parlour. (67)

The violent action taken by both the pimp and Art, the use of weapons, and the use of a belittling nickname, “Jack”, are all reminiscent of the actions taken by the two gangsters, Max and Al, in Hemingway’s short story “The Killers”:

“Talk to me bright boy,” Max said. “What do you think’s going to happen?”

George did not say anything.

“I’ll tell you,” Max said. “We’re going to kill a Swede.” (218)

And later in the exchange:

“That was nice, bright boy,” Max said. “You’re a regular little gentleman.”

“He knew I’d blow his head off,” Al said from the kitchen. (218)

Hemingway's story foreshadows Brautigan's, the threats, the use of weapons, the name calling, in this case "bright boy" instead of "Jack", and the willingness to use violence on the part of the perpetrators. Art's ramming the gun down the pimp's throat and Al's assertion that he'd have murdered George without hesitation for any misstep illustrate not just a willingness, but even an enthusiasm for violence. Art telling the pimp that "You'll be out of luck the next time" reminds us of Al and Max's casual decision not to murder Nick, Sam and George, and their ominous farewell as they leave the lunch-room, one carrying a shotgun under his jacket: "So long, bright boy...You got a lot of luck.' 'That's the truth...You ought to play the races, bright boy'" (219). The casual assignation of "luck" to sparing someone an unnecessary death reduces the value of human life in both the chapter and the short story, illustrating the casual, often enthusiastic penchant for violence in American society. Both Hemingway and Brautigan are clearly interested in the dehumanization that is inherently entrenched in this approach to violence, in the diminishment of the value of human life when it is left to the whim ("luck") of the aggressor.

It is also worth noting the locations of both of these stories. Hemingway's takes place in the ubiquitous American diner or "lunch-room" and Brautigan's in a hotel named "Hotel Trout Fishing in America". In both cases, the violence occurs, ironically, in an institution that is part of the hospitality industry. But more widely, both the hotel room and the lunch counter are representative of the larger American society, implying that this violence is ubiquitous and inescapable. Brautigan's hotel is a "cheap hotel...very old and rundown...the lobby is filled with the smell of Lysol" (66), while Hemingway's diner is a disappointment, Max and Al complaining that they cannot get the food they want even though it is on the menu:

"I'll have a roast pork tenderloin with applesauce and mashed potatoes," the first man said.

"It isn't ready yet."

"What the hell do you put it on the card for?"

"That's the dinner," George explained. "You can get that at six o'clock."

George looked at the clock on the wall behind the counter.

"It's five o'clock."

"The clock says twenty minutes past five," the second man said.

"It's twenty minutes fast."

"Oh, to hell with the clock," the first man said. "What have you got to eat?"

(215)

Both the rundown hotel and the mismanaged lunch counter with the broken clock behind the counter represent a decay within an institution that are ubiquitously American. This decay, in turn, runs parallel to the decay that the ensuing violence in both Brautigan's chapter and Hemingway's story have wrought upon American society, and by extension, the value of an American life.

The value becomes purely monetary at the end of Brautigan's chapter, when the narrator discovers that 208 is not the number of the room in the hotel where the action takes place, but instead the room number of the bail office: "I went down to the Hall of Justice to bail my friend out, and discovered that 208 is the room number of the bail office. It was very simple. I paid ten dollars for my friend's life and found the original meaning of 208" (70). Similarly, at the end of Hemingway's story, it is reasonable to hypothesize that Max and Al's intended victim, Ole Anderson, is being targeted for in some way upsetting the mob, presumably costing them money: "He must have got mixed up somehow in Chicago" (222). In both cases, human life is

reduced to currency, either being equivalent to, or worth exterminating for, a certain amount.

As an aside, Brautigan's narrator comments upon the nature of a sentence spoken in the chapter: "I'll open the door.' A simple declarative sentence" (68). Together with the mention of Hemingway in "The Last Time I Saw Trout Fishing in America", this appears to be a second explicit reference made to Hemingway. Hemingway notes: "If I started to write elaborately, or like someone introducing or presenting something, I found that I could cut that scrollwork or ornament out and throw it away and start with the first true simple declarative sentence I had written" (Hemingway, 12). Brautigan references Hemingway's description of a "true" sentence verbatim, the type of sentence Hemingway claims to have worked at to achieve simplicity and directness in his writing.

Also interesting is the description that immediately follows: "He undid about a hundred locks, bolts and chains and anchors and steel spikes and canes filled with acid, and then the door opened like the classroom of a great university and everything was in its proper place: the gun beside the bed and a small bottle of brandy beside an attractive Negro woman" (Brautigan, 68). The imagery evokes the overcoming of an obstacle and a resulting enlightenment. "Locks, bolts and chains" are broken through, and a "door" opens "like the classroom of a great university", suggesting that something has been learned, some new awareness aroused. That "everything is in its proper place" implies a harmony and balance. This can be interpreted as Brautigan's view of the importance of mastering elements of Hemingway's style. In this case the conjunctive sentence that allowed him to overcome difficulty writing, informed his writing style, and allowed him to complete works that achieved the balance necessary for the writing to be clear and effective:

in other words, to write a “true” sentence. This interpretation garners even greater significance considering that it occurs within *Hotel Trout Fishing in America*, a sordid, violent space: the “simple declarative sentence” provides an order for Brautigan within the chaos of writing, within the struggle to express oneself through the written word.

### 1.12 Skepticism of Political Ideology

One of the most obvious pieces of political commentary in *Trout Fishing in America* can be found in the chapter “Witness for Trout Fishing in America Peace”, in which the narrator describes a large protest carried out in San Francisco by young, American communists. Brautigan begins by distancing the narrator, and by extension the reader, from these communists: “In San Francisco around Easter time last year, they had a trout fishing in America peace parade. They had thousands of red stickers printed and they pasted them on their small foreign cars, and on means of national communication like telephone poles” (98). Stylistically, we see this separation underscored by the repeated use of the word “they” to describe the communist protests, the effect of which is heightened by the underlining of the repeated word. The underlining and repetition of the word also serves as a means to distance the narrator and the reader from the political ideology “they” represent. Metaphorically, it is expressed through the description of their cars as “foreign”, and by their placing of stickers on “means of national communication like telephone poles” suggesting a disregard for that which is owned and operated by the American government. By creating this distance stylistically and metaphorically, Brautigan’s narrator cultivates a skepticism towards this political movement, which he goes on to describe as “college and high-school-trained Communists...all following the

Communist world conquest line: the Gandhian nonviolence Trojan horse...young, hard-core brainwashed members of the Communist conspiracy” (98). Despite being hailed by many as a countercultural writer, the chapter reveals skepticism about ideological movements in the nineteen-sixties. Kirby Olson notes that “Brautigan’s politics always lay just beneath the surface. He sympathized with the little guy and the oppressed, but was a conservative at heart” (5). Clearly Brautigan is not unwaveringly sympathetic to the communists he describes, satirizing them as he does. It is more accurate to say that he views this “college and high-school-trained” youth and their political motivations with skepticism, a quality he shares with Didion and Hemingway. As explored in the previous Didion chapter, she and Hemingway shared a healthy skepticism of political and social movements, and though both may have tried, to some extent, to understand the motivations of those behind said movements, both were also ultimately wary of them. One is reminded of Michael Reynolds’ comment on Hemingway’s reportage from the Genoa Conference: “the real problem was political extremes: the far left and the far right” (42). Hemingway is not entirely sympathetic to either group, and like Brautigan or Didion, is skeptical of both. This is expressed in the early reportage analyzed in greater detail in the previous chapter and also in his early fiction, in both the description of the naïve young Hungarian communist whose inexperience and political affiliation land him in a Swiss jail cell in “The Revolutionist”, and of the arrogant, rude fascist in “Che Ti Dice La Patria”, who extorts the narrator and his travelling companion for fifty lire. In both stories, adherence to a political ideology betrays a weakness, in one case naivety, in the other case meanness. The fact that these are political ideologies at opposite ends of the spectrum suggests that Hemingway viewed either extreme as suspect. The same wariness of ideological extremism is evident in Hemingway’s reporting in

the nineteen-twenties in which he derides the activities of communists and fascists in Italy and mocks Mussolini and Russian communist party leaders.

In summary, while Brautigan is often regarded as a figure of the nineteen-sixties counterculture, his stories reveal a skepticism about the effectiveness of social or political movements in achieving real change. Didion concedes that she could not believe that going to a barricade “would affect man’s fate in the slightest” (208). So too, Brautigan’s narrator in the chapter “Sandbox Minus John Dillinger Equals What?” observes that “a beatnik” loitering in Washington Square Park who has just eat a bag of apple turnovers engaged in “a more valid protest than picketing missile bases” (87).

The critic John Tanner argues that counterculture excesses are as much a target for Brautigan as the capitalist wasting of America. Tanner notes that while *A Confederate General from Big Sur* was critically received as a beat novel, it is, in fact “A parody of that scene” (43). Tanner compares Lee Mellon to Dean Moriarty from *On the Road* (1957) and concludes that “Lee is reprising Dean’s counter-cultural hero as farce” (44).

It is clear that Brautigan drew inspiration from Hemingway’s early work in the writing of *Trout Fishing in America*. Thematically and stylistically there are many similarities. Explicit references to Hemingway confirm Brautigan’s attention to his writing. Brautigan has created a novel that, though experimental and unique in its own right, has adopted elements of Hemingway’s style.

## **Chapter Two, Part Two**

## ***A Confederate General from Big Sur***

### 2.0 Expatriates and the Cycle of Ecclesiastes

Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and Brautigan's *A Confederate General from Big Sur* both chronicle the journey of two groups of "expatriates", in the sense of characters leaving their place of origin in the search of new cultural and emotional experiences. In Hemingway's novel, American Jake Barnes travels from Paris to Spain with American and British friends and love interest Lady Brett Ashley to the Fiesta in Pamplona, while in Brautigan's novel, Jesse and Lee Mellon meet in San Francisco and travel to remote cabins in Big Sur. Analysis illustrates that there are several thematic similarities that inform the structure of the two novels as well as the character development throughout. The connection between the book of Ecclesiastes in both novels and the cyclical pattern of existence it describes, as well as hedonism and escapism all provide critical links between both texts.

*A Confederate General from Big Sur* and *The Sun Also Rises* are novels in the shadow of wartime experience. In Hemingway's, the war in question is the First World War, the nineteen-twenties the tumultuous decade following its conclusion. In Brautigan's novel, the war is the American Civil War, evoked in both the title and in the character of Lee Mellon, who claims to be the descendent of Confederate General Augustus Mellon, implying a feeling of disharmony and collapse and indicating that Brautigan views his own postwar era as unstable and his generation living through a similar social disunity. Of *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, Locklin and Stetler note that:

This is the novel of a generation, The Sixties, which many would consider equally as "lost" or even more so than that of The Twenties. It details the sort

of good and bad times of a social clique that one finds in the Hemingway book [*The Sun Also Rises*]. Both groups are expatriates, although in the more recent novel the locale and expatriation is the “Confederate State” of Big Sur. Still, like the Hemingway group and unlike the protagonists of *Easy Rider*, the Brautigan characters are trying to escape from America”. (72)

Both novels chronicle the journeys and excesses of these expatriates. The expatriate character provides both authors with the opportunity to explore alienation and the capacity to adapt successfully or fall into degeneracy. “Often regarded as the archetypal novel of American expatriates” (Mellette, 63), the characters that populate Hemingway’s novel really are expatriates in the literal sense of the word, leaving America and the United Kingdom for France and Spain, but as Locklin and Stetler note, Brautigan’s characters are expatriates in spirit, despite the fact that they do not leave America at all. Following the trope of the Westward expansion and exploration deeply engrained in the American literary tradition, Brautigan’s characters seek a respite from American society by moving as far west as they can, to Big Sur, “The shores of the Western World” (92), where they divorce themselves totally from society, living as self-sufficiently as possible, but turning, like Hemingway’s characters, to hedonistic pursuits whenever they please. In both novels there is a migration; the characters begin in a city, Hemingway’s in Paris and Brautigan’s in San Francisco and travel to a more remote location. The act of travel becomes a physical manifestation of the desire to escape the psychological difficulties the characters encounter as a result of their alienation. Locklin and Stetler go on to state that:

There is the striking parallel of the physical impotence of Jake Barnes with the concluding psychological impotence of Jesse. In both works the “fiesta” ends

in an existential hangover. The drugs and whiskey of the Brautigan novel correspond to the obsessive wine-drinking of the Hemingway novel. (72)

In both novels the characters, to a large extent, end where they began. Despite their best efforts, a disengagement from society in the way they have sought proves impossible, and the journey of the characters becomes cyclical in nature, mirroring the Ecclesiastes quote from which the title of Hemingway's novel and which also serves as the epigraph:

One generation passeth away, and another generation commeth; but the earth abideth forever...The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose...The wind goeth towards the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits...All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place the rivers come, thither they return again (1. 7-8)

The use of this quote from the Old Testament, which describes the eternal, cyclical nature of the world and the transience of human life acts a parallel to the cyclical pursuits of Hemingway's characters, the irony being that they themselves create these loops of behaviour within the finite span of their own existence. Jake's relationship with Brett is a good example of this. Near the start of the novel, after Brett rejects his advances in a taxi, the two bemoan their predicament, that their love cannot be consummated because of Jake's war wound:

"And there's not a damn thing we could do," I said.

"I don't know," she said. "I don't want to go through that hell again."

"We'd better keep away from each other."

"But, darling, I have to see you. It isn't all that you know."

“No, but it always gets to be.” (22)

That it “isn’t all that” yet “it always gets to be” implies that this is not the first time the two characters have found themselves in this situation and had this discussion. This problem cannot be overcome, yet both keep returning to each other, perpetuating an unending cycle. The novel’s final lines return the two characters to the position they began in, sitting in a taxi, confronted by the same hopeless reality.

It can be inferred that, as creatures of the earth, Hemingway sees the individual human being as existing in repetition in the way the eternal cycle described in Ecclesiastes does, whether the individual chooses to or not. The novel’s title, its epigraph and beginning, and the arc of the relationship between its two primary characters all work to reflect this.

There is an explicit connection between Hemingway’s reference to Ecclesiastes and Brautigan’s *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, Jesse, the narrator, reading Ecclesiastes in the chapter entitled “The Rivets in Ecclesiastes”: “I was, of course, reading Ecclesiastes at night in a very old Bible that had heavy pages. At first I read it over and over again every night, and then I read it once every night, and then I began reading just a few verses every night, and now I was just looking at the punctuation marks” (61-2). Jesse’s reading the book every night reflects this repetition, his breaking down of the book an attempt at deconstructing and reformulating that which cannot be controlled or made sense of: “Actually I was counting them, a chapter every night. I was putting the number of punctuation marks down in a notebook, in neat columns. I called the notebook ‘The Punctuation Marks in Ecclesiastes.’ I thought it was a nice title. I was doing it as a kind of study in engineering” (62). Jesse goes on to record the exact number of different punctuation marks in the different chapters of Ecclesiastes, a task which he claims gives him

“pleasure” but sheds no light on the content or meaning of the book itself.

Brautigan’s protagonist reads and rereads Ecclesiastes, yet is unable to understand its significance, treating it as a mathematical problem to be broken down and solved as opposed to a philosophical contemplation of eternity and mortality.

In Brautigan’s novel, as in Hemingway’s, there is an inability on the part of the characters to fully acknowledge the cycles in which they are trapped (or “lost”, as in a “lost generation”) and to break free of them. In the final chapter of the novel, “To A Pomegranate Ending, Then 186,000 Endings Per Second”, Brautigan offers the reader five different endings, all of which begin with the sentence “A seagull flew over us” (140-2), but contain different outcomes. In the first ending the characters search for a lost pomegranate, in the second ending Jesse observes Lee Mellon and his lover Elizabeth and concludes that “Nothing had changed. They were exactly the same” (141), in the third ending the presence of the seagull is simply observed, in the fourth ending Jesse watches Lee Mellon, Roy Earle, a passing insurance agent, and Elizabeth hurl Roy Earle’s money into the Pacific Ocean, and in the fifth ending Jesse observes the seagull and touches it with his hands. Each “ending” except for the final ending begins with the same sentence, indicating that they are all, to some degree, the same. The final, unnumbered ending of the novel rapidly increases the pace of the text: “Then there are more and more endings: the sixth, the 53<sup>rd</sup>, the 131<sup>st</sup>, the 9,435<sup>th</sup> ending, endings going faster and faster, more and more endings, faster and faster until this book is having 186,000 endings per second” (142). This final ending, offering so many endings so quickly, but describing none of them, suggests that whatever the ending is, it is random, irrelevant, and beyond human control. The fact that these “endings” are occurring at the speed of “186,000 endings per second” renders them indiscernible. The last sentence that ends with “this book

is having 186,000 endings per second” warns the reader that they are about to be cast out of Brautigan’s fictional world. By alerting the reader directly that the book is over, Brautigan not only leaves it to the reader to determine an ending, but also implies that the efficacy of a traditional ending is useless within the context of his novel, insofar as none of these endings produce profoundly different results for the characters. Their journey as expatriates away from society to Big Sur has not resulted in any significant development, perhaps most accurately illustrated by Jesse’s pronouncement that “Nothing has changed” in the second ending. As with Hemingway’s expatriates in *The Sun Also Rises*, these characters remain where they started, and so Brautigan purposely does not specify how the novel does or should conclude.<sup>33</sup> All of this echoes the teachings of Ecclesiastes which profess that man lives in shadow and cannot know the meaning of existence. Both novels also explore themes from Ecclesiastes in their structural design. Both begin with a presentation of facts that has no explained purpose. In *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, it is data about the background and fate of participants in the Civil War. In *The Sun Also Rises*, it is biographical detail about the early life of Robert Cohn, a secondary character in the novel. One set of information relates to a defining event in American history. The other relates a personal history of a privilege, elitism and antisemitism in America. The introductory facts, however, come to expose the unexceptional and transient experience of human life, even lives elevated by history or social station.

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<sup>33</sup> Iser considers a similar effect in the context of everyday reality in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. The reader is challenged by a flood of allusions and “an abrupt alteration between dialogue, direct and indirect speech, authorial report, first person narrative and interior monologue.” The reader is compelled into a process of imaginative selection not unlike trying to keep pace with Brautigan’s endings. Iser observes that the great indeterminacy of the text sends the reader off on a quest for meaning which may end in the realization that the reader’s “projected meanings can never cover all the possibilities in the text” (27).

## 2.1 Opening Chapters: Engagement Through Omission

In order to better understand the implications of the contrast between character and philosophy in the two novels, it is important to consider the structure of both. Both start with descriptions of lives reduced by time, on the verge of being forgotten, reflecting the cycle proclaimed in Ecclesiastes. Both also start with descriptions of mundane events, and with evocations of America. In *The Sun Also Rises* it is Jake's biographical sketch of Robert Cohn in the first chapter that was discussed earlier in this thesis.

Brautigan begins his novel in a similar way, with a recitation of information expressed without any enthusiasm or empathy. Brautigan takes this a step further by making lists with figures, his first two prologue "chapters", "Attrition's Old Sweet Song" and "I Mean, What Do You Do Besides Being A Confederate General?" forming charts:

The records exhibit that 425 individuals received appointment by the President to one of the four grades of general, of whom 299 were in grade at the end of the war. The attrition is accounted for as follows:

Killed in action or died of wounds	77
Resigned	19
Died by accident or from natural causes	15
Appointments cancelled	5
Declined appointment	3
Killed in 'personal encounters'	2
Assassinated	1

Committed suicide	1
Dropped	1
Retired by reason of wounds	1
Reverted to rank of colonel	1
	—
Total	126 (3)

And the following chapter consists only of a chart showing the peace time occupations of these same confederate generals with no text as preamble. Brautigan does not explain the relevance of this data, he simply presents the reader with a transcription. However, he has chosen to begin his novel with a pure recitation of information related to the horrific experience of the Civil War, but banal in nature, demystifying history. With this approach in the novel, Brautigan reveals the ordinariness of a critical event in American history and exposes Lee Mellon's tales of his predecessor as a façade. But, at the same time, the hard facts provide no compelling justification for the participation of those behind the statistics in war. Similarly, Jake's opening disdain for Robert Cohn, who attended an elite university where he was a boxing champion, begins a critical assessment that goes on throughout the novel to explore the passing of a life torn between the high expectations of postwar America and reality. As with Hemingway's introduction, Brautigan's prologue and subsequent first chapter root the reader firmly in American culture and history. Brautigan reminds us of the American Civil War and the scale of the Confederate forces with his charts, and then goes on to introduce a confused interpretation of American geography in the novel's titular first chapter:

When I first heard about Big Sur I didn't know that it was a member of the Confederate States of America. I had always thought that Georgia, Arkansas,

Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina and Texas were the confederacy, and I let it go at that. I had no idea that Big Sur was also a member. (7)

Listing the names of the Confederate States, Brautigan forces the reader to again contemplate the scale of the Civil War, and by placing Big Sur, a location on the Pacific coast, in juxtaposition to the other confederate states, to consider the enormous scale of continental America, from its southernmost tip in the east to one of its westernmost points. Brautigan also contrasts the eternal nature of the American landscape (Big Sur) with the transience of human conflict (The Civil War), reminding the reader of the passage from Ecclesiastes that opens the Hemingway novel:

Big Sur the twelfth member of the Confederate States of America? Frankly, it's hard to believe that those lonely stark mountains and clifflike beaches of California were rebels...

The Pacific Ocean along there, that million-year-old skid row for abalone and kelp, sending representatives back to the Confederate Congress in Richmond, Virginia? (7)

It is less the distance between Big Sur and the rest of the Confederacy that makes the narrator so skeptical of its involvement in the Civil War, and more the sharp contrast between a landscape that embodies the eternal elements and the transient nature of human conflict. The "stark", "thousand" or "million" year old mountains and ocean may as well exist in another world, so divorced are they in the eyes of Brautigan's narrator from the affairs of human beings, even those as historically significant as the American Civil War. This presents an interesting connection both to the Ecclesiastes passage and to the Hemingway novel. Brautigan's opening chapter

clearly echoes the message of Ecclesiastes, that the world is eternal, the affairs of men temporary, yet also cyclical in their nature.

For Hemingway, the Robert Cohn chapter was not his first choice. In Appendix III of the Hemingway Library Edition of *The Sun Also Rises*, we learn that the novel originally began with a description of Lady Brett Ashley:

This is a novel about a lady. Her name is Lady Ashley and when the story begins she is living in Paris and it is Spring. That should be a good setting for a romantic but highly moral story. As everyone knows, Paris a very romantic place. Spring in Paris is a very happy and romantic time. Autumn in Paris, although very beautiful, might give a note of sadness or melancholy that we shall try to keep out of this story. (273)

Though it is impossible to know for certain why Hemingway ultimately decided to replace the original opening chapters, there is evidence suggesting that this was done at the behest of friend and fellow writer F. Scott Fitzgerald. However, what is of greatest importance is how ineffective the original beginning was in comparison to the one that was finally used, insofar as it does not connect in the same meaningful way to the Ecclesiastes epigraph, which will form one of the central themes in the novel. Instead, in these discarded chapters, Hemingway does many of the things he tries to avoid doing in much of his published writing; he informs the reader that Paris is a “romantic” place (albeit ironically), that “sadness or melancholy” will be left out of the story. He then proceeds to provide a great deal of detail about Brett, about her life and past relationships, things that are only hinted at later on in the published novel. At the start of the second abandoned chapter, Jake Barnes reveals himself as narrator, and describes some of the qualities that he believes constitute good writing:

I did not want to tell this story in the first person but I find that I must. I wanted to stay well outside of the story so that I would not be touched by it in any way, and handle all of the people in it with that irony and pity that are so essential to good writing. I even thought I might be amused by all the things that are going to happen to Lady Brett Ashley and Mr. Robert Cohn and Michael Campbell Esq., and Mr. Jake Barnes. But I made the unfortunate mistake, for a writer, of first having been Mr. Jake Barnes. So it is not going to be splendid and cool and detached after all. "What a pity!" as Brett used to say. (276)

It can be hypothesized that Hemingway concluded that he had already given the reader far too much information in the opening paragraph about Lady Brett Ashley, and in doing so, had betrayed his own minimalist style, but here he compounds this mistake, telling the reader, in uncharacteristic fashion, how Jake wanted to write the story, how he wanted to feel about it, and how the story will not be "splendid and cool and detached after all", which is precisely the tenor of the published novel and that which defines Hemingway's narrative style. It is only by withholding this information that he is able to give the novel a successful introduction. Consider what the reader is left with: the Ecclesiastes epigraph and the description of Robert Cohn, a succinct list of unimpressive experiences and qualities in the eyes of the narrator. The reader is left to make the connection between this brief description and the meaning it will have in relation to the epigraph as the novel progresses, but Hemingway does not direct emotion as he did in his original introduction. He simply presents information, as Brautigan does, and engages the reader to draw their own conclusions and make the connections among character, place and theme. A natural tension emerges in

both novels as the reader anticipates the discovery of connections between disparate facts.

Interestingly, we are introduced to both of these main characters through descriptions of their engagement with violence. In Hemingway it is immediately established that Robert Cohn learned to box to fend off his insecurity, and he uses this skill to knock down Jake and Mike later in the novel (271-3). Brautigan's Lee Mellon has a tendency towards violence as it suits his purposes, as illustrated by his assault of a "rich queer" who picked him up hitchhiking and proposed oral sex: "After you,' Lee Mellon said, and they walked back into the trees, the rich queer leading the way. Lee Mellon picked up a rock and bashed the rich queer in the head with it" (12). Lee Mellon resorts to a shocking act of violence to enrich himself. Presumably, he confesses this to Jesse without reservation, as there is no way Jesse would know otherwise. Although Mellon is very different from Cohn, both see violence as a legitimate action, albeit for different purposes. Both will also use violence again later in the two novels for the same ends as they used it in the beginning, Cohn beating up Jake in a fit of jealousy and insecurity over Brett's sexual promiscuity, Mellon threatening to kill two travellers if they do not give him money and supplies.

## 2.2 The City: Paris, San Francisco and the Cyclical Experience of Daily Life

In both Hemingway's and Brautigan's novels the characters are found first in an urban setting, Paris and San Francisco respectively, before leaving for the country and expected restoration: in Hemingway's novel the Irati River, Pamplona and San Sebastian and in Brautigan's novel Big Sur. The experience and rhythm of the city in both novels recalls the cyclical existence of humankind in Ecclesiastes and its insignificance.

As William Hjortsberg notes, “Hemingway and Fitzgerald had Paris in the twenties; this time around, Frisco in the fifties was the place to be” (127). Brautigan’s time in San Francisco in the fifties and sixties influenced his writing, just as Hemingway’s time in Paris did. In the two novels, before leaving on their respective journeys, both Jesse and Jake Barnes meet with their compatriot(s) in an urban setting, for Jesse this is San Francisco, for Jake, Paris. Both characters travel around their respective cities, naming landmarks and streets explicitly and describing interaction with other characters, both major and minor. This is the foundation for the journey that occurs in both novels, a setting that is briefly traversed and described in order to establish both protagonist-narrators’ detachment within society and provide momentum for movement. In these descriptions and interactions, both Jesse and Jake relate the minutiae of human interaction on a personal and impersonal level, describing both in such a way that they become cyclical in nature, much like the journey of the two protagonists themselves.

Brautigan’s Jesse describes first meeting Lee Mellon twice: “When I met the young raider for the first time, he had been on a four-day drunk with his confiscated funds. He bought a bottle of whiskey and we went into an alley to drink it. Things are done like that in San Francisco” (13). At the start of the following chapter, Jesse describes this meeting a second time:

The first time I met Lee Mellon the night went away with every totem drop of the whiskey. When dawn came we were down on the Embarcadero and it was raining. Seagulls started it all, that gray screeching, almost like banners, running with the light. There was a ship going someplace. It was a Norwegian ship (15).

Significantly, Jesse has recounted his first encounter with Lee Mellon twice, evoking the sense of repetition that is central to both novels. At both introductions, Jesse recalls consuming a great deal of alcohol with Lee Mellon, something that also occurs in Jake Barnes' interactions with different characters he meets in Paris. In the description of the second meeting, Jesse describes a specific San Francisco landmark, the Embarcadero, where ships sail in and out of the harbour. He then briefly imagines the ship sailing back to Norway. The image is one of endless repetition, ships sailing back and forth endlessly, across a vast ocean. A quality of timelessness related to this image is evoked as Jesse and Lee Mellon contemplate the seagulls flying above the harbour: "One could think of seagulls. It's really a very simple thing to do...seagulls: "past, present and future passing almost like drums to the sky" (15). The seagulls, even more so than the ships, exist in an eternal, endless cycle of movement; a representation of the timelessness of the natural world. Jesse's observations compel the reader to consider the insignificance of both himself and Lee, of individual human lives in comparison to first the cyclical behaviour of man that has existed for centuries; trade between nations via the sea, and then more intensely in comparison to the endless movements of the natural world. As the chapter continues, Jesse and Lee Mellon continue to traverse San Francisco, Jesse naming many specific locations:

...we walked on the Embarcadero...It was an old Italian wine shop on Powell Street...We left with the muscatel and went up to the Ina Coolbrith Park on Vallejo Street...We drank the four pounds of muscatel in the Ina Coolbrith Park, looking down Vallejo Street to San Francisco Bay and how the sunny morning was upon it and a barge of railroad cars going across to Marin County. (18-9)

The explicit reference to real locations in the city further contrasts the permanent with the transient, but in this case, also the stationary with the moving. Jesse and Lee Mellon's compulsion to move around the city foreshadows their need to journey to Big Sur, ultimately abandoning the urban in favour of the wild. Their constant consumption of alcohol as they travel around San Francisco betrays their dissatisfaction with an urban landscape and society which they will try, and ultimately fail, to escape as the novel progresses.

Similarly, in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes traverses Paris, describing numerous locations, and often, in so doing, chronicling the cyclical behaviours and seeming minutiae that characterizes human life. This novel also starts with a meeting, though this is a meeting between two characters who have already met before, Jake and Robert Cohn. Interestingly, two meetings between them are described by Jake before he interacts with any of the other characters, just as two meetings (albeit two descriptions of the same one) occur between Jesse and Lee Mellon before either interact with any of the other characters in Brautigan's novel. In chapter one, during their first meeting, Cohn kicks Jake under the table to try and prevent him from embarrassing his girlfriend, Frances. In the second meeting, in chapter two, Cohn begs Jake to travel with him to South America because he is miserable, an offer which Jake declines: "Listen, Robert, going to another country doesn't make any difference. I've tried all that. You can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another. There's nothing to that" (10). Interestingly, Jake condemns as fruitless the exact action that he and the other characters will engage in as the novel progresses, trying to escape their misery, confusion and frustration by "moving from one place to another". Jake's two interactions with Cohn, described one after the other, create the sense of repetition

similar to that created by Brautigan in describing the same meeting between Jesse and Lee Mellon twice, this repetition betraying the inescapable, cyclical nature of the character's movements which Jake has ironically condemned in his exchange with Cohn.

Chapter three begins with a description of the repetitive minutiae of daily life in Paris, one of several that Jake will provide throughout Book One of the novel, which is set entirely in the French capital. We witness the passing lives of individuals engaged in enduring patterns of urban activity:

It was a warm spring night and I sat at a table on the terrace of the Napolitain after Robert had gone, watching it get dark and the electric signs come on, and the red and green stop-and-go traffic-signal, and the crowd going by, and the horse-cabs clippety-clopping along at the edge of the solid taxi traffic, and the *poules* going by, singly and in pairs, looking for the evening meal. I watched a good-looking girl walk past the table and watched her go up the street and lost sight of her, and watched another, and then saw the first one coming back again. She went by once more and I caught her eye, and she came over and sat down at the table. The waiter came up. (12)

The city moves in an endless current, Hemingway's imagery and sentence structure reflecting this. There is a rhythm he employs in the first sentence to mimic the endless flow of the Paris evening. In the "stop-and-go...crowd going by...clippety-cloppety...the *poules* going by": there are two descriptions of movement, accentuated through hyphen use, separated by two repetitions of "going by". A description of gradual, moving people and traffic is interspersed with the repetition of the phrase "going by", implying that the movement itself is constant, a recurring pattern rendering Jake a stationary observer.

More broadly, in the context of the Ecclesiastes quote, this suggests a commentary on the endless movement of life leaving the individual behind; everything continuing on regardless of their behaviour, a reminder of individual impermanence and mortality. Interestingly, this linguistic rhythm is balanced by the imagery in the sentence which immediately follows, in which Jake watches the “good-looking girl”, loses sight of her, watches another one, and then catches sight of the first one again. Here, the imagery follows the same pattern of the word choices in the preceding sentences, one following the other and the repetition of the original again. The image of the two “good-looking girls” is sequenced in such a way as to make them reflective as images of the pattern that Hemingway is developing, one emerging, another taking its place, the same one emerging again in a continuous cycle. This is similar to Brautigan’s use of the seagull in the aforementioned chapter: “Seagulls started it all... ‘Just seagulls’ he said, and pointed at a seagull, but I couldn’t tell which one it was for there were many... Yes, one could think of seagulls... seagulls past, present and future” (15). Here is another use of stylistic repetition, in this case the repetition of the word “seagull”, to expose an underlying theme of cyclical repetition. One seagull takes the other’s place *ad infinitum*, just as one “good-looking girl” takes another’s, the implication being that surroundings represent the endless cycle of existence that inevitably leaves the individual within the realm of the transient and mortal.

Just as Jesse names many specific locations as he moves through San Francisco, so does Jake as he does the same in Paris:

The taxi went up the hill, passed the lighted square, then on into the dark, still climbing, then levelled out onto a dark street behind St. Etienne du Mont, went smoothly down the asphalt, passed the trees and the standing bus at the

Place de la Contrescarpe, then turned onto the cobbles of the Rue

Mouffetard...I saw her face in the lights from the open shops, then it was dark,

then I saw her face clearly as we came out on the Avenue des Gobelins. (21)

Jake, like Jesse, mentions many streets in the city by name. Both also comment on their respective city's major waterway, in Jesse's case San Francisco Bay, in Jake's case, the Seine: "Crossing the Seine, I saw a string of barges being towed down the current, riding high, the bargemen at the sweeps as they came towards the bridge. The river looked nice. It was always pleasant crossing bridges in Paris" (24). Both writers make explicit reference to real streets and waterways for two reasons. Firstly, the explicit reference to a real place ingratiate the reader to a location, whether familiar or not. The cities become more accessible, the narrators in both novels describing these places as though they are commonplace, as if they are locations with which the reader is already familiar, or through which they can be easily guided. An effect of universality is achieved, and these two cities become any city in the world. Secondly, the references to specific streets and waterways serve the same purpose, to suggest an endless flow and ebb; in the case of streets this is the flow of human traffic, in the case of the ocean or river, the endless flow of the water, and by extension the natural world. Once again, the individual is secondary to a larger, more powerful flow. The fact that these specific locales have been rendered familiar makes this movement through the streetscape of Paris and San Francisco a vivid experience for the reader, creating a moment in space and time that they can inhabit alongside Jesse and Jake, by extension experiencing the individual mortal within the context of an eternal cycle that the movement and descriptions work to parallel.

### 2.3 A Common Interest in the Revealing Effect of Peripheral Characters

Hemingway in his short stories frequently brings into focus a character who is eccentric or alienated. For example, Ad Francis, the broken-down prizefighter in “The Battler”; the grieving Italian major in “In Another Country”; and Ole, the hopeless intended murder victim in “The Killers”. Brautigan does the same in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*. These characters on the margin of society serve not only a brief purpose (or lack thereof) in plot, but they also reflect both writers’ interest in the anonymous way in which life can be lived, reflecting the theme in Ecclesiastes of individuals with their generations, passing away.

After Jesse befriends Lee Mellon, he finds him a room in the same boarding house he lives in on Leavenworth Street in San Francisco. Jesse’s residence, suggests, according to Terrence Malley: “his imprisonment in loneliness” (104). Malley’s implication seems to be that Jesse’s descriptions of the other residents in the boarding house illustrate that, despite living in a building with other people, he has no real meaningful connection with any of them, rather just a collection of observations about their activities and behaviour. Malley goes on to say that: “Jesse makes it clear that his feelings towards the lonely losers come from a sense of identification rather than from pity” (105).

This is a reasonable hypothesis, but it can also be asserted that Jesse’s description of these characters is Brautigan’s device through which to explore on a more intimate, character-based level the cyclical, seemingly meaningless patterns of human life. It is worth noting that the chapter is structured in numbered sections from 1 to 6, and is quite succinctly and appropriately titled “Headquarters”. The “headquarters” are both Jesse’s physical location in the boarding house, as well as his mind, and by extension, conscious perception of others. If we consider the

characters individually, none of them appear to be remarkable or particularly interesting in the conventional sense, and this is precisely the point: these characters are representative of mundane, ordinary human life, which to Brautigan, constitutes the general experience of all human life.

The first character introduced is the landlord, a Chinese dentist, who although “nice” (an adjective commonly used by Hemingway) is indifferent to the condition of the building. The Chinese dentist is not interested in fixing the broken skylight, nor does he have the tools to do so in his empty “tool room”. He is not “moved” by the damage that has been done to the skylight and that continues to be done to the floor. The natural world cannot be contained, and the Chinese dentist has no interest in trying to exert this kind of control: whether he fixes the skylight or not is irrelevant; it will leak again eventually, and the same problem will occur again. The Chinese dentist also wears two costumes: his business suit when he is, presumably, practicing dentistry, and his blue overalls when he is a landlord collecting rent. Both imply a repetition of identical behaviours, ordered in the Chinese dentist’s mind through the use of different uniforms; the cyclical collection of rent and the “thousands of teeth” (23) he pulled to get the place. We see the paradox in the Chinese dentist’s actions that is common to many other characters: while there is a cynical, almost nihilistic awareness of the meaninglessness of action, there is a compulsion to order daily life into routine.

Jesse then goes on to describe his fellow tenants: an old Spanish music teacher who, returning from a vacation in Spain, “died on the gangplank, just a few feet from America” (25), a Montgomery Street secretary who yearns to be an actress and dies while Jesse is a tenant, a man who greets everyone and makes an elaborate thanksgiving meal in the community kitchen, after which he stops greeting

anyone, an old woman who reminds him of a cartoon character, “the Heap” (26), who was once a wealthy heiress and who now subsists on celery root, a middle aged woman who watches everyone in the community kitchen who eventually moves, and the three young women who replace her, one of whom is pretty and the other two ugly.

To each of these characters is dedicated one of the numbered sections, with the exception of the middle-aged woman and the younger women, who share the final one. Though Jesse goes into greater detail when describing some of these tenants, notably the old Spanish music teacher and the elderly woman who reminds him of “The Heap”, all share in common mundane and idiosyncratic behaviour. The Spanish music teacher, who lives in the room below Jesse’s, claims to have something akin to telepathic powers, claiming that even while he is vacationing in Spain, Jesse must take care to stay quiet: “my feet must continue their paths of silence. He said he had ways of knowing, even when he wasn’t there” (25). Though he dies in an unusual location, the cause of his death is unremarkable, and he is quickly forgotten: “They took the old man’s things away and the room was empty” (25). The man who makes the turkey dinner “always said hello in the morning and good evening at night” (26) before he makes his elaborate meal, and then for no apparent reasons stops “saying hello in the morning and good evening at night” (26). “The Heap”, Jesse discovers, survives on only celery root, which Jesse states is impossible, and often wonders what will become of her possessions when she is dead, though given her diet, she should be dead already.

These characters are both completely ordinary and simultaneously strange and idiosyncratic. They appear in their own numbered sections, as if they are being listed, much like the Confederate generals are at the start of the novel. Through this,

their lives are reduced to the mundane; they are a list of odd characters in a boarding house who are of no real consequence. However, in exploring, however briefly, the unique character traits and histories that they possess, Brautigan contrasts the ordinary with the unusual, suggesting that this dichotomy exists in every human life. Much like the characters that will be examined in Book One of *The Sun Also Rises*, these characters serve no real purpose in terms of forwarding plot, nor do they advance Jesse or Lee Mellon's character development. They exist solely to expose this dichotomy between the ordinary and the unusual, and in so doing to underscore the idea that superficially unremarkable individuals are actually unique, their actions often beyond explanation. The attention of the narrator lifts them from anonymity. They are otherwise unnoticed members of their passing generation.

Brautigan connects this to themes explored in the book of Ecclesiastes by exposing several of these characters to mortality, or disappearance equivalent to mortality: the Spanish music teacher dies on the gang-plank, the man who makes the turkey never appears in the kitchen again, the secretary who wishes to be an actor dies, "The Heap" contemplates her approaching death and the middle-aged woman who watches other tenants using the community kitchen moves away. The characters do not all explicitly die, but their disappearance reflects the thematic interest in the transience of human life that is central to both novels. The chapter ends with Jesse in the communal kitchen surrounded by bus drivers who were inexplicably the preferred romantic interests of the three young women:

It was pretty funny because there were so many bus drivers hanging around, paying court in their uniforms, that the place looked like a car barn.

Sometimes I would have to cook a meal with four or five bus drivers sitting at

the kitchen table, watching me fry a hamburger. One of them absent-mindedly clicking his transfer punch. (30)

Brautigan creates an image of an individual surrounded by several other individuals who, to the former, all appear the same, for good reason: they are all wearing the same uniform. This is a physical representation of the sameness of the human beings to whom Jesse devoted the previous sections of the chapter; to the individual observer, without greater knowledge of their histories, they would all appear the same, and even with this knowledge, still largely might. It is also notable that one of the bus drivers is “absent-mindedly clicking his transfer punch” (30), since a transfer is the literal embodiment of permission to change course or move on elsewhere on a bus journey. The bus driver clicking it “absent-mindedly” underscores the ordinariness of the journey of human life; regardless of what form it takes or path it follows, it is fundamentally the same for everyone and will ultimately end in the same way.

As Jake Barnes sojourns around Paris, he is exposed to similar peripheral characters. Georgette, the prostitute, Mr. and Mrs. Braddocks, rising novelist Robert Prentiss, Harvey Stone, the concierge, the Greek painter Zizi, and the charismatic Count Mippipopolous. As with Brautigan’s characters none of these characters in *The Sun Also Rises* have any lasting role or influence on the plot or on the development of the main characters. They are briefly illuminated but disappear into obscurity as the narrator’s attention moves on. Arguably they represent the intricate and unknowable nature of human existence of which the narrator of *Ecclesiastes* speaks. Characters appearing and vanishing without explanation as the narrative continues, just as every individual and the generation to which they belong live briefly without understanding and then pass away.

## 2.4 Flashbacks, Vignettes and Generational Issues

As discussed, the Ecclesiastes passage in Hemingway's epigraph begins with: "*One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever*" (4). These words immediately follow the novel's first epigraph, the quotation: "You are all a lost generation" (29), allegedly uttered to Hemingway by Gertrude Stein, and recorded in *A Moveable Feast* (1964). These two quotations one after another reinforce what will be a central theme in the novel, the impermanence of the achievements of any given generation and the transience of one's own. This is a theme that is also central to Brautigan's novel, embodied in the character of Lee Mellon, who first describes with great pride his grandfather's connection with the American Civil War, and is devastated when evidence is presented that this piece of family history may in fact be a fiction: "Yeah, we Mellons have always been very proud of General Augustus Mellon. There's a statue of him some place, but we don't know where it is" (17). When Jesse takes Lee Mellon to the public library to examine the veracity of his claims regarding his grandfather's being a war hero, the truth is revealed: "But in the center of the lines there was no General Augustus Mellon. There had obviously been a retreat during the night. Lee Mellon was crushed. 'It can't be,' Lee Mellon said. 'It just can't be'" (21). By separating Lee Mellon from what he believed to be his true family history, Brautigan uncouples the connection between past generations and present generations on a tangible level. The disconnect between present and past reveals Lee's attachment to the heroism of an ancestor as unfounded and absurd. That Brautigan has given this character the name Lee, a name strongly associated with the Confederate states due to the fame of General Robert E. Lee, further contributes to this disruption, as in the context of

the novel, it is representative of an attempt to carry the past into the present. However, because of the revelation surrounding Lee Mellon's family history, the attempt is a failure. No literal connection between Lee Mellon and Civil War heroism can be found.

In Brautigan's America, the present often fails to live up to its past. Benjamin Franklin, Lewis and Clark, Ernest Hemingway and the pastoral bounty of the land are disappearing or gone. In Augustus Mellon, Brautigan raises the prospect that the past is often an imagined state. As Locklin and Stetler note:

In what sense is Lee Mellon a Confederate General? In that sense in which "confederate" equates with "counterfeit?" Probably. He is gradually reduced in stature throughout the novel, just as is his ancestor, Augustus Mellon, in a series of flashbacks very reminiscent of the interchapters of *In Our Time*.

Augustus Mellon turns out to have been no general at all, but merely a goof-off soldier, a sort of character out of *Catch-22*...Augustus Mellon plays dead on the battlefield. He steals the boots of a dead, decapitated soldier. (74)

These "flashbacks" form the ending of every chapter in the novel with the exception of the penultimate and final chapters from "The Wilderness Alligator Haiku" chapter onwards. Locklin and Stetler characterize Augustus Mellon correctly; he is a frightened, low-ranking, largely useless soldier who steals and struggles to evade battle:

*'Where's private Augustus Mellon?' the captain said.*

*'I don't know where he is. He was here just a minute ago,' the sergeant answered. He had a long yellow mustache.*

*'He's always here just a minute ago. He's never here now.'* (101)

“Where’s Augustus Mellon?” becomes a refrain repeated in several of the following “flashbacks”. This question asks where Augustus Mellon is literally; he is unreliable and willing to abandon his compatriots to save himself, the opposite of the brave general Lee Mellon believes him to have been. It also asks where he is more broadly, within the context of the narrative. Lee Mellon and Jesse search for his records in the library to no avail; where is this noble ancestor, the representation of a perceived glory in the past generation of a family? His absence reveals that Augustus, the supposed embodiment of “courage” within said generation, is nowhere to be found. He is absent physically in his own time, just as the experiences of the past generation are absent from the current one. One might go so far as to speculate as to whether or not the character of Augustus Mellon is even real within the context of the novel, and if he is not, how this creates even greater disconnect between past and present generations. Though the flashbacks appear to be chronicling something that may have actually occurred, they conclude with the arrival at the Battle of the Wilderness of the “8<sup>th</sup> Big Sur Volunteer Heavy Root Eaters” (9), the fictitious Confederate regiment that Jesse imagines at the start of the novel. This encounter suggests that the entire story of Augustus Mellon told in the flashbacks could be a work of fantasy, and that nothing the narrator chronicles may have actually occurred. Such a reading further deepens the gulf between the present and past generation, as it indicates that facts accepted as historically correct may be entirely fictional.

The passages within the flashbacks that reveal the truth and timelessness of war’s terror are those less concerned with the character of Augustus Mellon, than with the carnage of war: “*A fragment off a cannon ball shattered the branch of a tree...A horse lay smouldering in the brush...A boy of sixteen, uniform torn awry...lay dead next to an old man of fifty-nine...complete, closed, dead*” (106-11).

These descriptions of the literal destruction work in parallel with images of physical and psychological panic. Far from deeds of heroism, Augustus Mellon reacts as one would expect to the terror of war: "*Private Augustus Mellon thirty-seven-year-old former slave trader in residence at a famous Southern university ran for his life...Fear gripped every stitch of his clothing and would have gripped his boots if he'd had a pair*" (117). Augustus finds himself surrounded by wanton death and destruction, completely afraid and in physical discomfort, running "barefoot", while around him things are "shattered" or "smoldering" (117). It is clear that Mellon's own sense of self is also being "shattered" in the process; as he runs he discovers that he is "searching for himself". There is an implicit irony in this: Mellon, is revealed to have been involved in the slave trade. Someone who controlled the lives of others so completely is now experiencing an inability to master both his circumstances and his own sense of identity. It becomes clear shortly after that this is not an experience unique to his character: "*He dove forward onto the ground and pretended that he was dead...The Union soldiers were so scared that they did not see him*" (121). Brautigan is confirming that regardless of conflict or the side on which individuals find themselves, the shared sentiment is one of overwhelming fear. The heroism that may be associated in American history with the Civil War is deflated. The disturbing ease with which human life is expended is evident in the sentence in which Augustus "pretended that he was dead, though it would not have made any difference if he had been dead and pretended to be alive" (121). Though this describes the indifference of the Union soldiers to Augustus Mellon's fate, that they "did not see him" suggests that they have seen so many dead bodies that another is unremarkable and that their fear is so distracting that he will go unnoticed. It also implies that it truly would

be inconsequential whether Augustus Mellon lived or died, the scale of the slaughter reaching such an extreme that a single human life is meaningless within its context.

Augustus goes on to steal the boots off the feet of a dead Union captain, and in the final flashback finds himself in the midst of the battle from which he was running, and in which the narrator's fictitious Big Sur troops join with Robert E. Lee's forces:

*Augustus Mellon stumbled into a clearing that had a de luxe muscle building course of artillery at one end of it, and then a furious assault by Texas troops, Hood's old boys against the Union army, and General Robert E. Lee tried to get into it, but those Texans wouldn't allow it...the 8<sup>th</sup> Big Sur Volunteer Heavy Root Eaters began dancing in a circle, the general and his horse in the middle, while all around them waged the American Civil War, the last good time this country ever had. (132)*

The image in this passage is one of chaos; the focus shifted suddenly from Augustus to the battle, to Robert E. Lee and the Big Sur Volunteer Heavy Root Eaters, back to Augustus Mellon and his new boots, back to the Root Eaters and finally to the entire Civil War itself. That Brautigan refers to the American Civil War as "the last good time this country ever had" (132) further reinforces the disconnect between generations, the impossibility of understanding the experiences of the past from the vantage point of the present. In this case, the absurdity lies in the conflation between the American Civil War, patriotism and a constructive national experience. To champion, as Lee Mellon does, an event of such destruction, representative of such deeply seeded internal strife, and to find pride in an ancestor who he believes fought for the Confederacy reveals Lee Mellon to be representative of a trend of misplaced patriotism in American culture; and by extension makes his character symbolic of the

separation of the generations that is described as inherent and inevitable in the book of Ecclesiastes.

The Augustus Mellon flashbacks have the effect of shocking the reader with the grim reality of a distant, now glorified war. Terrence Malley, like Lochlin and Stetler, notes a similarity between the flashbacks in *A Confederate General from Big Sur* and the vignettes in *In Our Time*: “These vignettes are terse and mostly pretty grim; some of them are curiously reminiscent of the inter-chapters in Hemingway’s *In Our Time*...In fact, Brautigan shows a versatility he’s not generally given credit for in catching some of the flavor of actual chronicles of the Battle of the Wilderness” (Malley, 101-2). Neither Malley, nor Lochlin and Stetler provide any further analysis, leaving us to wonder which Hemingway “inter-chapters” these may be, but many of these “inter-chapters” involve scenes of war and the misery of refugees in which death is an immediate and fearful reality, like the graphic scenes of American Civil War carnage in Brautigan’s flashbacks. On a purely stylistic level, Brautigan’s flashbacks, like Hemingway’s vignettes, are concise and italicized. Malley’s comment that the flashbacks in *A Confederate General from Big Sur* suggest that a familiarity on Brautigan’s part with historical details of the battle lend credence to the flashbacks. Hemingway, having experienced firsthand some of the battles of the First World War, and having reported in newspaper articles about different conflicts in Europe following this War, including the Greco-Turkish War, would have been even more familiar with the scenes he describes. Both writers were informed either through experience or research and strove to depict as accurately as possible and in a similar style the scenes of carnage.

The following excerpt from the Chapter II vignette in *In Our Time* describes a wartime evacuation:

*The carts were jammed for thirty miles along the Karagatch road. Water buffalo and cattle were hauling carts through the mud. No end and no beginning... There was a woman having a kid with a young girl holding a blanket over her and crying. Scared sick looking at it. It remained all through the evacuation. (71)*

In this we see a similarity in the description of the nature of conflict, especially as revealed in the sentence “No end and no beginning” (71), which can be read as both a description of the vast convoy as well as the cyclical nature of conflict itself. The convoy is representative of the endless human suffering caused by war. Hemingway was vocal in his denouncement of further American involvement in conflicts abroad<sup>34</sup> which suggests that his view of war is condemnatory rather than celebratory. Just as Brautigan’s Augustus finds himself in a landscape that is “shattered” and “smouldering”, soaking his bare feet in a river as he tries to flee, so are the Greek refugees soaked in the rain trying to flee conflict, surrounded by a wasteland of mud, “jammed” and “stuck”, “herded” like animals, unable to escape their fate. There is the explicit mention of fear in the penultimate sentence of Hemingway’s passage: “Scared sick looking at it” (71). The sentence serves a two-fold purpose, as it could be referring to the young girl of the previous sentence, holding the blanket over the woman who is giving birth, or to the unnamed narrator who is observing everything going on. This double perspective contributes to a sensory overload, the overwhelming chaos culminating in a sense of anxiety, urgency and incomprehensibility. The final flashback in Brautigan’s text is similar, Augustus Mellon’s accidental arrival at the battle of the Wilderness, the chaos of the battle

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<sup>34</sup> In “A Paris Letter”, a 1934 article published in *Esquire*, Hemingway states: “All right. Europe has always had its wars. But we can keep out of this next one. And the only way to keep out of it is not to go into it: not for any reason. There will be plenty of good reasons. *But we must keep out of it...we, as a country, have no business in it and we must keep out*” (158).

itself and the arrival of the Confederate “troops” from Big Sur, the rapidly shifting focus between these events in this short passage contributing to an overarching feeling of chaos.

Both authors achieve this chaotic urgency by shifting focus between many different startling things occurring simultaneously; Brautigan’s single sentence paragraph divided into smaller units separated by frequent commas, paralleling the whirlwind quality of the battle, and Hemingway’s paragraph separated into terse sentences that mirror the lurching stop and start of the convoy. Brautigan rushes the reader through a single sentence, but it is one divided into twelve short phrases by commas, whereas Hemingway injects full stops that forces the reader to stop and start, but when read together build, like Brautigan’s paragraph, to an anxious crescendo. Both writers have used simple, short units of language to heighten the sense of anxiety and chaos about the conflicts they are describing. The words “scared sick” could equally apply to the fear shared by Augustus Mellon and the Union troops he encounters. It is clear that both writers understand that neither the battlefield nor the areas affected by it are places of glory, but rather places in which fear, chaos and suffering run rampant.

The following excerpt from the Chapter VI vignette in *In Our Time* also bears a striking resemblance to the flashbacks in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*:

*Nick sat against the wall of the church where they had dragged him to be clear of the machine-gun fire in the street. Both legs stuck out awkwardly. He had been hit in the spine. His face was sweaty and dirty. The sun shone on his face. The day was very hot. (105)*

This is the only war related vignette in which there is a central character, and one who also appears in multiple short stories in *In Our Time*. In the same way that

Augustus Mellon's character connects the flashback narrative to the primary narrative in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, Nick Adams' connects the vignettes more concretely to the stories that comprise *In Our Time*, as he is the protagonist in many of the stories in the collection. The vignette itself has a more detailed, story-like quality than many of the other vignettes in the collection: Nick, recently injured in the midst of battle is introduced, weather and surroundings are clearly established, an injured comrade, Rinaldi, is identified; Nick addresses an unresponsive Rinaldi and contemplates the present ("it was going well") and the future ("stretchers would be along anytime now") and briefly philosophizes on their shared situation (105). Among the inter-chapters this one closely resembles the detail that characterizes Brautigan's series of flashbacks; there is a more coherent, self-contained narrative possessed of beginning, middle and end, in which commentary on character situation and theme are present. Both Nick Adams and Augustus Mellon experience physical discomfort, Nick wounded from gunfire, "sweaty and dirty" in the sun, Mellon barefoot and running for his life through a spring. Both bear witness to the destruction of war, Nick observing the collapsed house, Augustus Mellon a cannon ball shattering the branch of a tree that crashes into the water of a spring. Both witness death firsthand, Nick seeing the "Two Austrian dead" and the "other dead" up the street, Augustus Mellon the dead "boy of sixteen...dead next to an old man of fifty-nine...dead" (111), "two dead soldiers lying next to each other" (117), and the "Union Captain lying headless among the flowers" (128). This firsthand engagement with death leads both characters to a moment in which they sense the imminence of their own mortality, something that becomes a tangible reality for them. For Nick, this is illustrated by his enigmatic statement to Rinaldi that they have both "made a separate peace" (105). Just as he has observed

the other dead, Nick also observes Rinaldi, who appears to be in the process of dying, placing him in close quarters not only with death itself, but with the process of dying. Nick's statement suggests that the seriously wounded Nick and the even more grievously wounded Rinaldi are now disconnected from the battle. Should they die, which appears entirely possible within the context of the vignette, they will have made a "separate peace" with the physical world, their wounding or death removing them from their surroundings, removing them from the battle in which they find themselves. Nick engages with his mortality in order to provide himself with comfort in the knowledge that this divorce from the violence of his present situation will provide him with a tranquility that is unattainable in his current physical state. Alongside this is an implied acceptance of mortality, a realization that whether the stretcher bearers arrive or not, should his death occur, he has made "peace" with it.

Similarly, Augustus Mellon is forced to contemplate his mortality when he pretends to be dead: "Of course Augustus Mellon did not know this, lying there as he was, eyes pretending to be closed forever, breath silenced for all time...After the Union soldiers had fled in panic, Augustus Mellon waited a while before trying out life again" (121-6). Though not wounded like Nick, Augustus Mellon finds himself in a position in which a combat death appears inevitable and is similarly forced into a momentary contemplation and acceptance of his own mortality. In pretending to be dead, he forces himself to imagine his own "separate peace", in which his consciousness is divorced from the physical, mortal plane. That he waits "a while before trying out life again" after the Union soldiers have fled confirms that in the meantime, he has been trying out death, becoming intimate with the notion of his own mortality through imagination as Nick Adams does. The insertion of named and familiar character, the emphasis on physical discomfort and the destruction of

combat, and the forced engagement with the mortality of others as well as one's own are elements shared by both Hemingway's vignette and Brautigan's flashbacks.

In terms of the scale of conflicts explicitly mentioned by both authors, there are also similarities. Augustus Mellon's flashback is told during the Battle of the Wilderness, the fifth most costly battle in the American Civil War by casualty rate. The first vignette in *In Our Time* references the First Battle of Champagne, one of the costliest battles of the First World War:

*Everybody was drunk. The whole battery was drunk going along the road in the dark. We were going to the Champagne...We went along the road all night in the dark and the adjutant kept riding up alongside my kitchen and saying, "You must put it out. It is dangerous. It will be observed." We were fifty kilometers from the front but the adjutant worried about the fire in my kitchen.*

(65)

It is implied that adjutant has been close to the front lines at Champagne, that he is familiar with the scale of the conflict, hence his being the sole member of the group to express concern over the fire being spotted. That everyone is drunk suggests a desire for detachment from reality; perhaps other members of the group are aware of what awaits them at Champagne and prefer intoxication over contemplation of this grim reality. Similarly, there is detachment from reality for Augustus Mellon after he steals the boots off the dead Union captain's body: "Private Augustus Mellon left the captain even more deficient, even more unable to cope with reality" (128). Though Brautigan keeps this sentence deliberately vague, leaving the reader to decide whether it is the Union captain or Augustus Mellon who is left "more deficient", it is reasonable to hypothesize that it is the traumatized Mellon who is now less equipped to face reality, as the Union captain is dead. Shortly after this Augustus Mellon finds

himself approaching the battle, which is intensifying in its fury: "Private Augustus Mellon was up and moving. All around him were the sounds of war as if placed under a magnifying glass. Then in the midst of the great rifle fusillade, he heard the unlimbering of artillery like new muscles being used in the Wilderness" (130). Chaos is released in Brautigan's diction: sounds are "placed under a magnifying glass" (130), the machinery of war is given an organic, muscular quality: "he heard the unlimbering of artillery like new muscles being used in the Wilderness" (130). Augustus Mellon then finds himself in the midst of the battle itself in the final flashback, in which the chaos reaches its crescendo and the Big Sur "troops" arrive. In the context of Mellon's struggle to maintain his grasp on reality, it could be hypothesized that the sights and "sounds of war" that have kept him "up and moving" in constant fear, lead him to finally lose this precarious grasp, and that the "8<sup>th</sup> Big Sur Volunteer Heavy Root Eaters...dancing in a circle...the general and his horse in the middle" (132), are the resulting hallucinatory effects. In both Hemingway and Brautigan, an actual battle of incomprehensible scale causes characters to run from or be overwhelmed by reality, the implication being that a single human mind is incapable of processing the destruction of war on this scale.

Brautigan and Hemingway also share a similarity in the irony and dark humour with which they explore the role of war in society. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes imagines a discussion about the First World War with the prostitute Georgette: "We would probably have gone on and discussed the war and agreed that it was in reality a calamity for civilization, and perhaps would have been better avoided. I was bored enough" (14). This blithe dismissal of arguably the most devastating event of the then nascent twentieth century, and the idea that one must be "bored" to find oneself discussing it, reveals a cynicism and disinterest in human

affairs that forms a nihilistic undercurrent in the novel. There is another inherent connection here to the book of Ecclesiastes, the implication on Jake's part being that human activity is largely irrelevant, regardless of the scale upon which it occurs.

There is also an element of dark humour here: the juxtaposition of the impersonal description of the war ("a calamity for civilization") and the personal "I was bored enough" comment that follows. A serious and tragic event that has caused irreparable damage is minimized by an expression of personal indifference.

Brautigan's description of the American Civil War, which forms the conclusion of Augustus Mellon's flashbacks, achieves a similar effect: "all around them raged the American Civil War, the last good time this country ever had" (132). The idea that the historical event in American history of greatest domestic war time carnage, in which the country came closest to collapse, was "the last good time" America "ever had" is dismissive of the incredible destruction and division caused by the conflict. As with Hemingway's passage, there is a certain dark humour and irony at work here. This summation of the American Civil War follows a passage in which Brautigan attempts to capture its chaotic nature, imbuing the conflict with a perversely orgiastic, party-like quality, completely at odds with the suffering Augustus Mellon has witnessed and endured. As the Battle of the Wilderness reaches its crescendo, and the reader anticipates the violence and bloodshed that are about to ensue, they are falsely assured that this was America's "last good time"; an enjoyable adventure for those involved. Like the Hemingway passage, there is also cynicism here, Brautigan questioning the "patriotism" of those, like Lee Mellon, who venerate past conflicts, the nature of which they do not truly understand. The gap between generations is again widened; the actions of the previous generations becoming meaningless to those of the present who do not understand their true nature.

## 2.5 “Enjoy Good in His Labour”: Living Well and Hedonism

In the hard reality of Ecclesiastes’ teachings, humans live without understanding and will die as animals do. One satisfaction allowed by Ecclesiastes is enjoying the fruits of one’s labours. Both Hemingway and Brautigan explore this instruction, distinguishing the knowing enjoyment of those who have earned their reward from the excess of those who only seek escape.

The original title of *The Sun Also Rises*, “Fiesta”, sometimes still included in editions of the novel, published as *Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises*, is also deeply connected to the idea of cyclical behaviour and the cyclical nature of existence. The “Fiesta” in Pamplona has occurred annually for centuries. It is implied that Jake has been before; he is familiar with Montoya, the innkeeper, and has an advanced knowledge of the Bullfights and of the nature of the Fiesta itself. Jake’s regular participation, along with others who regularly attend the Fiesta, is an example of an individual engaging in a cyclical event that predates and will continue on without them.

In addition to this, the reader is directed to contemplate the true purpose of attendance by Jake and his friends. Jake attends out of interest in the bullfights, of which he is knowledgeable. He observes the rituals of the Fiesta, but demonstrates no particular insight into their meaning. He expresses regret about his lapsed Catholicism. Those who accompany him have no genuine interest in either the bullfights or the ritual of the Fiesta. Hemingway, however, was deeply interested in religious tradition, specifically Catholic tradition. As Michael Reynolds notes, for Hemingway, “the ritual, ceremony and mystery of the Catholic Church were a strong attraction...Hemingway was deeply drawn to all things medieval, which is to say all

things ancient and Catholic" (346). And so the religious rituals at the Fiesta are described in the novel in some detail. As the novel progresses, however, it becomes increasingly apparent that the Fiesta acts for Jake and his friends (and perhaps many of the others in attendance) as a form of release; release through overindulgence in alcohol and excessive celebration. In the book of Ecclesiastes, when faced with the problem of how to create meaning in the life of the individual, the preacher states that: "*There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God*" (2. 24). The idea postulated is that the pleasures of eating and drinking, certain physical fulfillments, are an acceptable source from which to derive meaning, purpose and enjoyment from life. If everyone is left behind in the wake of the cyclical nature of eternity, pleasure must be derived from some of the physical pleasures. However, there is nothing in Ecclesiastes that suggests that these pleasures should be enjoyed in excess, or that they should be afforded those who do not "labour" for them. The characters in *The Sun Also Rises* both consume to excess, and some, for example Brett and Mike, do nothing to labour for these pleasures, receiving financial support from wealthy family members. Nor do Jake's companions attempt to cultivate any real appreciation for the things they consume or the rituals they observe.

The Fiesta itself is where this hedonistic, over-indulgence occurs most blatantly, the characters drinking to excess, arguing, even engaging in a physical altercation that parallels the violence in the bullring. Much like the bulls, these characters have little control over themselves, and rather than finding a cathartic release through participation in the Fiesta, they veer instead towards self-destruction, ultimately finding themselves where they began, whether they are

conscious of it or not. Consider Jake and Bill's conversation near the Fiesta's conclusion:

"You wouldn't believe it. It's like a beautiful nightmare."

"Sure, I said. "I'd believe anything. Including nightmares."

"What's the matter? Feel low?"

"Low as hell."

"Have another absinthe. Here, waiter! Another absinthe for this *senor*." (178)

The description of the Fiesta as a "beautiful nightmare" and Jake's admission that he believes in nightmares and feels "low as hell" all contribute to the sense of existential dread and darkness surrounding the characters. The cycle of self-destructive behavior is clear in this short excerpt of dialogue: experience is characterized positively on the surface, but with further analysis its actual, darker nature is revealed, and in an effort to combat the depression that ensues, consumption of alcohol resumes. This is a microcosm for the cyclical patterns the characters find themselves in throughout the novel; from which they are unable to escape. Even after what appears to be a brief reprieve in San Sebastian, when Jake meets with Brett at the end of the novel, both still engage in the same over-indulgence, Brett drinking martinis until she stops shaking, Jake eating and drinking copious amounts: "We had roast young suckling pig and drank *rioja alta*. Brett did not eat much. She never ate much. I ate very big meal and drank three bottles of *rioja alta*" (Hemingway, 197). Shortly after, Jake orders more wine and Brett implores him not to get drunk: "Don't get drunk, Jake," she said. "You don't have to" (198). Again, the threshold between moderate enjoyment of physical pleasure is crossed, and Jake, however he may rationalize, seeks out intoxication to combat his suffering. Brett, who has been drinking martinis and wine, is perhaps already at this stage. That she

shakes without alcohol implies an even greater dependency than Jake's. Brett also engages in sexual promiscuity recurrently, another physical escape. When Jake arrives in Madrid and discovers that her brief relationship with the young bullfighter Romero has collapsed, she remarks to him that "He's wiped out that damned Cohn" (195). There is an implication that another failed relationship helps to dissolve the memory and pain of the one that preceded it, and that, just as Brett must consume alcohol regularly to stop her trembling, she must pursue these relationships to keep the memories of the past at bay. The novel then ends with Jake and Brett in the taxi-cab, this time in Madrid rather than Paris, but ostensibly in the same position in which they began: miserable.

Similarly, in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, drugs and alcohol are consumed to excess; physical pleasures that are not the product of "labour" are enjoyed. Much like in *The Sun Also Rises*, Jesse's travels around San Francisco with Lee Mellon are marked by their drunkenness. Later in the novel, after they have left San Francisco, they use stolen money to get drunk, in Lee Mellon's case, perhaps the drunkest he gets in the novel:

Eight hours later I was sitting in a small bar in Monterey with a young girl. She had a glass of red wine in front of her and I had a martini in front of me. Sometimes it just happens that way. There's no telling the future and little understanding of what's gone on before. Lee Mellon was passed out underneath the saloon. I had hosed vomit off him and covered him with large pieces of cardboard so the police wouldn't find him. (76)

Jesse displays indifference to the situation in which he finds himself, admitting that there is ultimately little, if anything, one can do to make sense of the past or anticipate the future. However, in the next paragraph, he states that "I was

pretending very hard that I was a human being and by doing so, I allowed myself to come on with the girl" (76). This statement suggests that Jesse is in fact confused and alienated rather than indifferent, using alcohol to feel more comfortable in the presence of others and in particular in the presence of the young woman. This becomes even more apparent in another paragraph that follows: "I held a sip of the cold martini in my mouth until the temperature of the drink was the same temperature as my body. The good old 98.6 fahrenheit – our only link with reality. That is if you want to consider a mouth full of martini as having anything to do with reality" (76). Jesse is aware that alcohol is a means through which to escape reality. He combats his feelings of alienation by consuming alcohol, and even when he is about to engage in intercourse with the young woman from the bar, imagines Lee Mellon passed out; the embodiment of over-indulgence: "I had a cinematographic impression, about a dozen frames of Lee Mellon lying covered with cardboard underneath the saloon" (78). Such an imagining at this precise moment connects the two physical pleasures, alcohol and sex, in such a way that they appear inseparable in Jesse's mind. That Lee Mellon has consumed so much that he has "passed out" implies that the purpose of both activities is a total escape, a release from the past and future which Jesse initially appeared to contemplate with such stoical detachment.

This is further reinforced in the following chapter, when Jesse awakens in the girl's (Elaine's) apartment. One of the first things Jesse observes is "the Manolete bullfight poster you see again and again upon the wall of the young ladies. How well they like that poster and how well it likes them" (79). It is telling that Brautigan evokes the image of the bullfighter and the bullfight immediately following a chapter focused on drinking and sexual intercourse, activities that feature strongly and

interconnect in the Fiesta section of *The Sun Also Rises*. The description of the bullfight poster as being like a relationship between “young ladies” and the poster itself parallels Brett’s sexual liaison with Romero. When Elaine awakens, Jesse states that “Sexual satisfaction had puzzled her face” (79). That she appears “puzzled” by sexual satisfaction suggests that, as with Brett, though the sexual act might bring temporary physical satisfaction and release, like alcohol, its results can also sometimes lead to further internal confusion. Jesse describes himself as “pleased” after the sexual encounter, but then immediately begins to fixate on the image of the drunken Lee Mellon again: “I’ve got to get Lee Mellon out from underneath that saloon...I don’t want the police to get him. He wouldn’t like that. Hates jail...The police will get Lee Mellon,’ I repeated” (80). Jesse’s obsession with the possibility that Lee Mellon may be arrested suggests a vicarious fear of entrapment. It is telling that this sudden fear emerges after consumption of alcohol and sex with a stranger. This pattern of behaviour may represent the “jail” in question; equally one can imagine that the “jail” is the fear that comes with reintroduction into daily existence absent intoxication. The two are not mutually exclusive, and in this interpretation, the shift from apparently indifferent while inebriated (“Sometimes it just happens that way”) to paranoid when sober (“The police will get Lee Mellon”) suggest that the latter may be the natural state for Jesse, the former the result of escapism through intoxication. Though Jesse’s paranoia does abate, it is only after Elaine, Jesse’s lover, agrees to go with him to get Lee Mellon, once the subject of his fixation can be addressed. He then remarks “This life, how strange it is” (80), and recalls the event that led to his and Lee Mellon obtaining the money necessary for them to drink, the robbery of the young boys: “Last night those two boys were crawling in front of Lee Mellon’s empty rifle, little realizing as

they begged for their imaginary lives that they were going to finance all of this: I with a girl to the bed, Lee Mellon under a saloon covered with cardboard” (80). This comment about the strangeness of life, followed by the description of the boys’ lives as “imaginary” indicates that Jesse has difficulty viewing human life as a reality in the conventional sense, that perhaps he acknowledges its transient nature as a construct within a larger, eternal cycle. However, that he concludes this same sentence by remarking upon his successful sexual conquest and Lee Mellon’s intoxication suggests that these pursuits are necessary for him to exist within this larger cycle, that, like Hemingway’s characters, he is repressing an existential dread he is evading through physical excess.

Lee Mellon, recovered by Jesse and Elaine at the end of the chapter, is quite literally where he started. He has not moved since passing out:

We found Lee Mellon right where I left him, cardboard still intact...Lee Mellon slowly sat up. The cardboard fell away from him. He was unpacked. The world could now see him. The end product of American spirit, pride and the old know-how.

‘What happened?’ he said.

‘*Spiritus frumenti,*’ Elaine said. (80-1)

The hungover and disoriented Lee Mellon becomes a metaphor for disintegrating American values. Conventional values of self-discipline, self-respect and competence are revealed to be lost; a hungover man covered in cardboard struggling to rise from underneath a saloon their physical embodiment. Lee Mellon’s query, “What happened?” can be read more broadly as a question about these values themselves; how have they resulted in this outcome, in Lee Mellon becoming their physical embodiment? Elaine’s answer, the Latin for “spirit of the corn”

(whiskey), answers Lee Mellon's question literally, but leaves room for a figurative interpretation. It can be hypothesized that these values are no longer of any use to the American individual struggling in Brautigan's present reality, that they are outdated and that their application has always, perhaps, been a romantic fiction. Prevailing cultural guidelines rendered meaningless; the individual (Lee Mellon) seeks respite in intoxication. As is clear from the earlier sections in the book, for Lee Mellon this is a patterned behaviour, one in which he engages regularly: when he meets Jesse, they get drunk on whiskey and mescal, when Jesse contemplates coming to Big Sur Lee Mellon instructs him to bring whiskey. It is also worth noting that Elaine speaks these words in Latin, giving the experience a false dignity and a quality of timelessness. Brautigan is suggesting that this has always been the condition of humankind; that those who cannot cope with the realities of existence and morality have always resorted to these self-destructive cycles. Hemingway chose the title and epigraph from an ancient text to express this thematic interest. Similarly, Brautigan employs an ancient language to underscore the transience of a single human life and its place in an eternal cycle.

As John Tanner notes, "the notion of escape through pastoral idyll is...one of America's most enduring literary themes" (45), providing Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* as an example of this. Tanner goes on to state that in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, "nature heals no wounds. In moving from the city to a shack at Big Sur, Jesse and Lee have merely exchanged one kind of slum for another. Jesse feels worse than ever and Lee simply carries on imagining his existence as he did in San Francisco" (45). This is not completely dissimilar from the fate of the characters in Hemingway's novel; their departure from Paris and trip through Spain to the Fiesta do not leave them feeling any better, but rather, as aforementioned, "Low as hell" (178).

Jake is no happier, and continues at the end of the novel to persist in his fantasy of “imagining” a life with Brett. The ending does not suggest that the characters have reached the point where they are prepared to leave one another.

The characters in *A Confederate General from Big Sur* find themselves at the novel's conclusion, like the characters in *The Sun Also Rises*, in a similar place as where they started. Like Jake and Brett in Madrid, Jesse, Lee Mellon, Elaine, Elizabeth and Roy Earle also return to intoxication as the novel draws to a close: “The Pacific Ocean rolled to its inevitable course: our bodies at the edge with Lee Mellon rolling dope...We smoked five or six chunks of dope and then the ocean began to come in on us in a different manner: I mean, slow and light itself” (137). The rolling of the Pacific Ocean is mirrored by the rolling of the dope, creating a juxtaposition between the eternal and the temporary. Further, the change in the perception of the ocean's movements as a result of the smoking of the marijuana illustrates the altered perception of the former resulting from the intoxicating effect of the latter, the desirability of which is explained in Jesse's next statement: “The last week's activities had been a little too much for me, I think. A little bit too much of life had been thrown at me, and I couldn't put it all together” (137). Like Jake at the close of the Fiesta, Jesse finds himself exhausted by the tumultuous excess of his recent experiences. Jake seeks respite in the tranquility of San Sebastian, until he is summoned by Brett to Madrid: “I wished I had gone up to Paris with Bill, except that Paris would have meant more fiesta-ing. I was through with fiestas for a while” (187), while Jesse seeks the same by contemplating the endless roll of the Pacific Ocean. Symbolically, both Jake and Jesse seek purification through an engagement with the eternal presence of the ocean, and both fail in this pursuit, sharing an experience of

physical and psychological impotence. Consider the passage in which Jake swims in the ocean and rests briefly on a raft:

Although the tide was going out, there were a few small rollers. They came in like undulations in the water, gathered weight of water, and then broke smoothly on the warm sand. I waded out. The water was cold. As a roller came I dove, swam out under water, and came to the surface with all the chill gone...A boy and girl were at the other end. The girl had undone the top strap of her bathing-suit and was browning her back. The boy lay face downward on the raft and talked to her. She laughed at things he said, and turned her brown back in the sun. (189)

Here is another description of “the inevitable course” of the ocean’s movements. Jake is at first cold, but after his dive, discovers “the chill gone”; he has engaged with the ocean, is becoming more aware of its nature. However, this experience is promptly disrupted by his observation of the young boy and girl on the raft. The image of her with bathing-suit partially undone, relaxing with the boy who is making her laugh, is one of an apparent romantic partnership. Jake’s repeated dives back into the ocean after his observance of the couple are his attempt at reengagement with the eternal nature of the ocean; an attempt to free his consciousness from contemplation of his own existential dilemma, his inability to engage in a romantic partnership with Brett because of his impotence. He swims deep, struggling to distance himself further from the raft, but the raft casts a “dark shadow” nonetheless. Eventually, Jake gives in and swims back to the beach, summoned by Brett again at the novel’s conclusion. He is left both physically and psychologically impotent, unable to consummate a romantic relationship and unable to free himself from his cyclical, self-perpetuated and largely self-destructive behaviour.

Similarly, at the end of *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, Jesse is pulled away from an engagement with the ocean and its timelessness by an experience with physical impotence. Though he does not attempt to purify himself by going into the ocean like Jake, his contemplation of it implies an engagement with the same eternal quality it possesses:

She was beautiful and seagulls flew over the ocean, fastened by harp strings to its surface, Bach and Mozart broke on the foam. We sat there. Four people poleaxed by dope.

Elizabeth was beautiful and the wind got in her hair and lifted up the hem of her white dress and the Confederate banner was curling in its red hair. Elaine sat there alone.

Then she came over to me and said, 'Let's take a walk.'

'All right,' I said. That was my voice, wasn't it? Yes, it was. We walked down a ways, maybe fifty years, and Elaine suddenly put her arms about me and kissed me very hard on the mouth and she put her hand between my legs.

(138)

Brautigan creates a tranquil setting that will subsequently be disrupted, just as Hemingway does. In this passage, the reader imagines Jesse and his compatriots lazily watching the ocean's movements, and the landscape that surrounds it. The equivocation of the ocean's movements to classical music adds to this sense of tranquility, as does Jesse's repeated use of the word "beautiful", which though used in reference to Elizabeth, can be conflated with the scene he is describing as a whole. The description of the red sash Elizabeth wears as a "Confederate banner" provides a stark contrast to the violence of the Confederate and Civil War imagery explored in the recently concluded flashbacks. Jesse's inability to recognize his own

voice is possibly attributable to the marijuana he has smoked, but on another level, represents a change in perception from temporal to eternal. Hence time losing meaning for him when he describes his walk with Elaine down the beach as being “maybe fifty years” long. Like Jake engaging with the eternal through his initial dive into the ocean, becoming acclimatized to its temperature, Jesse is beginning to grasp the transience of human life, the eternal nature of the natural world. He is now superseding his sense of self and time. However, just as Jake’s engagement is disrupted by the boy and girl on the raft, so is Jesse’s by Elaine’s efforts to initiate sexual intercourse. As soon as sexual contact is initiated by Elaine, Jesse returns to his own consciousness, away from his engagement with the natural world and the resulting suspension of self and time. Things begin “slipping” (138) as he reverts back entirely to his corporeal form. Though Elaine continues to try to stimulate him sexually, his impotence persists:

I didn’t have an erection.

I didn’t feel any desire.

I couldn’t get an erection. Maybe it would come later. Strange, maybe she could help me out with it. I didn’t feel very good.

After a while it was apparent to everybody: Elaine the sky, Elaine the Pacific Ocean, Elaine the sand, Elaine the sun, Elaine, Elaine, Elaine. (139-40)

Despite Elaine’s efforts, she is unable to sexually stimulate Jesse. This physical impotence reflects a more subtle, psychological and existential impotence. Like Jake, Jesse approaches a connection with the expansiveness of eternity, only to discover that he is unable to immerse himself within it completely when he is drawn by romantic interest back into his corporeal frame. In the first two lines, it is made clear that not only is he physically impotent (“I didn’t have an erection”), but also that

he is suffering from psychological anhedonia, in which he cannot “feel any desire”. This might be read as sexual desire, but could just as reasonably be interpreted more broadly as desire itself, desire for anything, something reinforced by his subsequent pronouncement that he does not “feel very good”. The conflation of Elaine with the natural world, with the sky, Pacific Ocean, and the sun further highlights Jesse’s existential confusion as he struggles to separate the immediate physical desires from the natural and eternal. The passage concludes in similar fashion to Hemingway’s novel, the two characters holding on to each other, offering hollow reassurances. Jesse’s admission that he has “forgotten about how Elaine could be” (140) suggests that, like Jake, who repeats a cycle of longing for, loving, resenting and forgiving Brett, Jesse too is doomed to a similar, cyclical pattern of behaviour with Elaine, one which will also be characterized by escapism through substance abuse (“dope”) and a pursuit of a sexual relationship for temporary relief from a larger, existential crisis that will never be fully addressed.

## 2.6 The End of the Cycle: Alternative Endings in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*

Brautigan eschews conventional novelistic structure in his conclusion to *A Confederate General from Big Sur* by offering the reader multiple endings. These alternate endings have been considered earlier in the chapter, but it is important to revisit these variations in relation to Jesse’s impotence and the existential issues they represent for him as a character, for again, in these endings we see the conflict between a recognition of mortal transience when met by eternal forces. We also witness Brautigan’s consideration of the randomness of existence: Jesse and the other characters could meet a limitless number of outcomes. In the first ending, as

they search for Roy Earle's pomegranate, Jesse remarks that "after all this was the destiny of our lives. A long time ago this was our future, looking now for a lost pomegranate in Big Sur" (141). Jesse's recognition of a deterministic universe, in which he and others fulfill a preordained destiny implies an awareness of the meaninglessness of struggling against the currents of time and place, an acceptance of "fate".

However, there is a cynicism present as well, another recognition on Jesse's part that his journey, his series of experiences with Lee Mellon have led him to such an inconsequential conclusion, searching for a "lost" pomegranate that was purchased for "a dime" by Roy Earle, himself a chance encounter. Jesse's awareness that they were pursuing the "destiny of our lives...our future", dissolves into the reality that their destiny is actually a future involving a search for a lost pomegranate. Equally cynical, while observing Lee Mellon and Elizabeth, Jesse remarks that "Nothing has changed. They were exactly the same. They looked like photographs in an old album. They didn't say anything and we sat down beside them. That's where you've seen us before" (141). Jesse sees no evolution in Lee Mellon's or Elizabeth's characters, nor, for that matter, in his or Elaine's, as is implied by their sitting next to them, the "them" transforming to "us". This outright admission that "Nothing has changed" and that they are all "exactly the same", further parallels Jesse's impotence, his inability to fully understand the nature of human life as transient and cyclical. In the third ending, Jesse reengages with the natural world as he describes the flight of a seagull, again with Brautigan's mixed sensory images: "The seagull flew over us, its voice running with the light, its voice passing historically through songs of gentle colour. We closed our ears and the bird's shadow was in our ears" (142). Brautigan makes it clear to the reader that Jesse is still struggling to

understand his individual mortal presence within the natural, eternal world. The seagull is symbolic of this larger, timeless world, in which the audible and the visual (“voice running with light”) intersect with the temporal (“voice passing historically through songs of gentle colour”). In this ending, Jesse appears to have regained a connection with the eternal forces to overcome his psychological impotence. In the fourth ending all of the characters join Roy Earle in tossing his money into the Pacific Ocean: “‘All this money ever did was bring me here,’ Roy Earle volunteered as the hundred dollar bills fluttered like birds onto the sea. ‘You can have it,’ he said, addressing the waves. ‘Take it on home with you.’ And they did” (142). This is Brautigan’s commentary on materialism, a dismissal of the importance of money and the fulfillment it falsely promises, which would suggest a further awareness on the part of the characters that acquiring and consuming is ultimately meaningless. However, this reengagement with the eternal and disavowal of the transient and material is challenged again in the fifth and penultimate ending, in which Jesse reaches up and tries to touch a seagull flying overhead: “I reached up and ran my hand along his beautiful soft white feathers, feeling the arch and rhythm of his flight. He slipped off my fingers away into the sky” (142). That the seagull slips off of Jesse’s “fingers and away into the sky” suggests that ultimately, there has been no reconciliation of the individual’s existential crises through understanding and acceptance of one’s place within the eternal cycle of nature. Brautigan creates a teeter-totter-like effect through these multiple endings; Jesse becoming aware, becoming impotent, becoming aware again, and so on, leaving the reader with no clear resolution as to whether or not any psychological progress on his part has actually been made in understanding the relationship between his mortal consciousness and the natural world.

It does appear clear that Brautigan intends for the reader to see this struggle as part of the inevitable cycle of behavior in which the individual ultimately sees their life as transient within an impersonal, eternal cycle. There is only repetition, and it is perhaps this which for both Brautigan and Hemingway provides the greatest insight into the nature of human consciousness insofar as the contemplation of mortality and the eternal are concerned. This becomes clear with the final, alternative ending of *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, 186,000 Endings Per Second: "Then there are more and more endings: the sixth, the 53<sup>rd</sup>, the 131<sup>st</sup>, the 9,435<sup>th</sup> ending, endings going faster and faster, more and more endings, faster and faster until this book is having 186,000 endings per second" (142). This final "ending" is the only one that Brautigan does not start with the same refrain ("A seagull flew over us") and the only one titled differently from the others ("A Second Ending", "A Third Ending", etc). The ending is imbued with a metatextual quality in which the reader is informed by Brautigan that there are so many endings moving so quickly that they are incomprehensible due the speed at which they are occurring.

These rapid and seemingly endless "endings" underscore the urgency of the existential issue that Brautigan, like Hemingway, has been exploring throughout the course of the book. The speed at which endings emerge heightens a sense of anxiety already made manifest through Brautigan's defiance of conventional structure at the conclusion of the novel. The reader is left with a dizzying sensation, and an ultimately inconclusive ending: the same conclusion which Jesse meets in his existential struggle. An actual ending may well be irrelevant as far as Brautigan concerned, what is of importance is the philosophical problem that he has explored throughout the novel and the visceral and psychological ramifications surrounding the individual's struggle to find their place in a natural and eternal cycle in which they

will be extinguished. Jesse's impotence is shared with the reader through a metatextual ending which forces them to experience his anxiety, his philosophical and psychological struggle.

As discussed in this chapter, Brautigan worked with many of the stylistic and thematic elements that can be found in Hemingway's fiction. Brautigan spoke of his esteem for Hemingway (Hjortsberg, 61-2) and it is evident in the personification of Trout Fishing in America, a character closely associated with Hemingway that is elevated by Brautigan to the status of a protective "genius loci".

Many of these common features are used by Brautigan for the same purpose as Hemingway: to put the reader to work in the belief that truth can only be known through experience. Wolfgang Iser's theory of reader response is consistent: only when the reader is given a chance to participate in the formulation of a literary text will they regard it as real. "Indeterminacy" in the text is the fundamental precondition to the reader's imaginative participation (Iser, 9).

Both Hemingway and Brautigan challenge the reader to imagine what they see and feel through a range of techniques. Both writers limit description, withhold critical information and rely on the evocative image (e.g. a discarded baseball glove; industrial steel made from trout); all designed to guide the reader to their own perception of the novel's meaning.

While these elements of style associated with Hemingway's writing are employed by Brautigan, he is not an imitator. At times, he appears to be using the plain diction and declarative sentence in parody: "The creek was made narrow by little green trees that grew too close together. The creek was like 12, 845 telephone booths in a row" (55). Nor do his novels follow the conventions of a Hemingway novel. For example, there is no discernable plot in *Trout Fishing in America*.

Although many chapters deal with fishing, many do not and in any case each chapter deals with an independent event unrelated to the next. As John Tanner argues, the book is “a collage composed of fragments” (74). With the exception of the narrator and Trout Fishing in America Shorty, characters are confined to their chapters. There is little development. The use of “Trout Fishing in America” to denote different things and people militates against a clear theme beyond the loss of natural America to commercial forces. And unlike Hemingway, Brautigan uses wild metaphors and unexpected punchlines to stimulate participation by startling and at times bewildering the reader. A trout stream becomes a row of telephone boxes, a trout stream runs through the departments of a department store, a trout stream is cut up, stacked and ready for sale. A bookstore owner who has revealed an intimacy has eyes “like the shoelaces of a harpsichord” (26). A rat sings like Deanna Durbin. An outhouse complains abusively about its fate. These images distinguish Brautigan’s fiction. Unlike Hemingway, Brautigan often aims to deliberately lead the reader “up a creek” to discover a new perspective.

## Conclusion

It has been the objective of this thesis to further the understanding of the effect that Hemingway's writing style had on the work of Joan Didion and Richard Brautigan. In particular, how Hemingway's style of minimalism and omission, designed to elicit a response from the reader, to push the reader into partly being the creator of meaning, was adapted and experimented with by Didion and Brautigan.

Ernest Hemingway emerged in the nineteen-twenties as a major figure in the modernist literary movement. This thesis has examined elements of his style apparent in his early short stories and first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. In these works, we see the effort to simplify language and sentence structure. This effort reflected a change in the established role of the author from one who delivered the details of scene and explained character motivations to the author whose role was to spark the reader's imaginative involvement in the story. Reynolds Price conjures up a message from Hemingway to his readers informing them of his expectations: "you must enact the story for yourself...Notice the chances I've left for you: no noun or verb has been coloured by me. I require your senses" (203).

And so, in Hemingway's prose, plain and simple words such as "hot" and "nice" call on the reader to rely on their own sensory resources. Similarly, an image like a cat in the pouring rain can evoke in the reader the chill and disconnect in the relationship between human characters in a story: "The cat was trying to make herself so compact that she would not be dripped on... 'I wanted it so much,' she said... 'It isn't any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain'. George was reading again" (129-30). These and other elements of style considered in this thesis are all aimed to take hold of the reader's imagination.

In this regard, Hemingway's texts represent a clear example of the application of principles of Wolfgang Iser's reader response criticism; primarily that neither the author nor the reader-critic solely determined meaning. Rather, the text sets a general direction and requires the reader to apply their own experience and imagination to fill in gaps, settle "indeterminacies" and resolve conflicts. It is the reader who actualizes the text, meaning that interpretation is not a fixed thing; but nor is it purely arbitrary. In Iser's analysis, the structure of the text and references to literary, historical and social conventions set the range of reasonable outcomes.

Hemingway engages his readers in just this way. His stories deliberately limit critical information requiring reader input to fill in the gaps and make connections. At the same time, Hemingway's "repertoire" of recognizable images and social conventions (the baseball glove tossed aside, a punch drunk prize fighter, the slow moving routine of a diner in "The Killers"), all work to create a fictional reality in which possible outcomes are evident. So too, the structuring of perspectives related to a particular character or event shape the reader's response. An example of this has been discussed regarding the question of whether Jake Barnes lives in keeping with the epigraph of *The Sun Also Rises*.

This epigraph, the passage from the book of Ecclesiastes, also provides a point of thematic interest that has been explored in this thesis. Hemingway, Didion and Brautigan consider, in the respective works analyzed, existential questions surrounding the inevitable passage of time from one generation to the next, and issues of alienation, isolation and the moral dilemmas that such questions propose. They do not direct the reader towards a clear resolution; rather, the conclusion must be made by the reader. The approach to this theme, requiring the reader's

judgement, matches the prose style of minimalism and omission, requiring the reader's imagination.

Clearly, Hemingway's work itself was the product of many variables and experiences. His style was refined through the guidance and the examples of many of his contemporaries: Pound, Stein, Anderson to name a few. Many of his modernist peers employed similar techniques in their writing. F. Scott Fitzgerald and Dashiell Hammett are examples. Nonetheless, Hemingway's evolved a distinctive prose style, one that has proved instructive for subsequent generations of writers. As Didion writes of Hemingway's contribution: "this was a writer who in his time made the English language new, changed the rhythms of the way both his own generation and the next few generations would speak and write and think" (8).

A literary style of engagement is appropriate to the task of awakening the reader to new and troubling realities. Hemingway's "lost generation", Didion's "atomized" society and Brautigan's "wrecking yard" where America's bounty is for sale by the foot reflect different social concerns, but they have in common the theme of disruption.

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that Didion and Brautigan relied on many of the same elements of style as did Hemingway to engage the reader. Similar attention is devoted to the use of plain language, evocative images, the omission of information and a narrator who reports but does not join, leaving the text open for the reader to enact the story. Further, there is adaptation of Hemingway's elements of style. Didion opens her essay "The White Album" with the words "we tell ourselves stories in order to live" (185), and then goes on to reveal her suspicion that there is no narrative to explain her own mental illness or distressing events in American society. Her novel *Play It as It Lays* confronts the reality that there may be no reason

for catastrophic events in one's personal life or in the outside world. In other words, there may be no story to enact. She sets the challenge for the reader. Often her stories build towards a shocking image, a "flash cut" of a child abandoned on a freeway, or a child on LSD, and then abruptly leave the reader to rationalize the event or accept that it has no meaning.

Similarly, Brautigan's use of surreal imagery and his subversion of literary convention dislodges the reader from accepted understandings of American history and culture. Telephone booths in a trout stream, the naming of various people, places and things as "Trout Fishing in America", the alternative endings in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, all illustrate Brautigan's distinctive style of engaging the reader to work through his extraordinary images.

An underlying purpose of this thesis has been to cast further light on Didion and Brautigan who, in my view, have not received the critical attention their writing deserves. It is difficult to know why this is so, but the topical nature of the subjects of their writing appears to have limited their reach. This appears to be true for Brautigan even more so than Didion, although for both this perception is changing.

In 2013, Didion was presented with the National Medal for the Humanities by President Obama who observed: "Somebody like Joan Didion, who rightly has earned distinction as one of the most celebrated American writers of her generation. I'm surprised she hasn't gotten this award...decades into her career she remains one of our sharpest and most respected observers of American politics and culture" (2).

As discussed, Brautigan's place in American literature appears to be shifting from relegation as a counter cultural figure of the nineteen-sixties to a writer in the line of Twain, Thoreau and Whitman.

It is my hope that the analysis in this thesis will add to this momentum in the appreciation of the work of both writers.

Finally, this thesis has concentrated on the early works of the three authors. Though Didion and Brautigan, like Hemingway, would go on to write and publish in the decades following their initial successes, consideration of the relationship between the foundational, early bodies of work is of most fundamental importance in understanding how they developed subsequently as authors. And while all three would go on to write successful, well-received novels, there is an argument to be made that their definitive texts were the result of their earlier efforts, in Hemingway's case *In Our Time*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *Men Without Women* and *A Farewell to Arms*, in Didion's *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* and *Play It as It Lays*, and in Brautigan's *A Confederate General from Big Sur* and *Trout Fishing in America*. These texts are foundational within their respective bodies of work and are the texts in which they established their unique style and many of their ongoing thematic interests. As Hemingway's active writing career passed on into American literary history in 1961, his contribution to the school of modernist American prose would be the subject of experimentation and adaptation by Didion, Brautigan and other members of a new generation of American minimalist writers with their own unique contributions to make.

Together in these short stories, essays and novels, Hemingway, Didion and Brautigan reveal their aim of engaging the reader's imagination to experience a reality "truer than anything alive".

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