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## ERNEST HEMINGWAY IS DISTRACTED BETWEEN THE TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUE AND HIS OWN METHOD OF SHORT STORY WRITING

**Dr. Mostafa Saber Abdel-Hamid Mowaad**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, College of Sciences and Arts

Qassim University, Saudi Arabia

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Mostafa Saber Abdel-  
Hamid Mowaad

### ABSTRACT

This paper aims at examining the dynamics of cohesion in some specific short stories of Ernest Hemingway. Cohesion is viewed here as a general concept relating to the unification of a literary work via the employment of a variety of devices that are at the writer's disposal. It is not merely a means but an end in itself. The presence of cohesion in a literary work is what enables its text to be viewed as an integral, active and lively entity.

This article tries to know the relation between Ernest Hemingway, and the traditional technique of short story writing. That 's, the method of short story writing in the past and Ernest Hemingway method and style of writing the short story. This paper paves the way logically for Hemingway's specific technical way of writing the short story through examining the traditional way in this respect. The present paper provides a background about Hemingway's contribution to the short-story tradition.

The present paper gives a general look to some short stories of Ernest Hemingway such as: *The Killers* , *Cat in The Rain* , *Hills Like White Elephants* , *A simple Enquiry* , *The Sea Change*, *On the Quai at Smyrna* , *The Revolutionist* , *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, *In Our Time* and *The Doctor and The Doctor's Wife*.

### Introduction

Critical interest in Hemingway's work dates back to the early 1920s, when he was beginning to be recognized as a popular author. Since then, a good number of books and dozens of articles have been written on his life and his work. So, after the passage of seven decades of writing, what could possibly be there to explore or simply add? In other words, what contribution could a paper such as the present one make to the enhancement and appreciation of Hemingway's literary achievement? The fact of the matter is that Hemingway, as one of the foremost writers of the twentieth century, will continue to be read and enjoyed. It is unlikely that

he will cease to be prominent or that critics will cease to write about his work. In the meantime, there has been a strong, growing movement to reassess his fictional world. This movement started in the early 1980s and has been gaining power ever since, aiming primarily at achieving two major goals. The first is to correct the many misconceptions about Hemingway, both as a writer and as a man, while the second is to present fresh ways of approaching his work from within as well as from without.

Generally, the present paper deals with technique as a means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him

to attend to it. Here technique becomes the only means a writer has to discover, explore, develop his subject, of conveying its meaning and finally, of evaluating it. Technique, in this sense, becomes anything which is not the lump of experience itself'. It therefore extends, to cover the contriving of the whole plot through the delineation of character, the portrayal of scene, the expression of point of view and the manipulation of narrative form. These technical elements- characterization, scenic portrayal, point of view and narrative form- are cohesive devices used to heighten the dramatic interest evoked by the work of art and, consequently, promote the artist's position.

The present paper is intended to explore and pursue some of such unifying or cohesive devices in many of Hemingway's short stories. These are described as dynamics basically because of the nature of their function in the stories. By unifying its components, the dynamics of cohesion give every story its existence as one organic entity, or more appropriately, as a living thing. Interconnecting its various ingredients, they, thus, make possible the exchange of energy and force within the same unit and, consequently, enliven and invigorate the story.

#### **Hemingway as the most prominent practitioner of the indirect form story**

Ernest Hemingway in his writing short stories is considered as the most prominent practitioner of the indirect form story. His version of this form is generally known as the "compressed form," of which he has been widely accredited. On the other hand, there were few writers who tried to develop such a form, but with no significant success. Hemingway is the "writer most clearly identified with the compressed technique." This form is characterized by "the slow revelation of the them." "The forward pressure that normally drives the reader to seek a resolution to the problem presented in the opening is replaced by the drive to find the problem, the thematic center"<sup>4</sup>In his short story *The Killers*, for example, it is not known exactly what Ole Andresen had done to make Al and Max intend to kill him. Likewise, in *Cat in The Rain*, *Hills Like White Elephants*, *A simple Enquiry* and *The Sea Change* the main problem, or the kernel of the

action, is vaguely hinted at without being fully revealed.

The basic tool that Hemingway utilized in order to develop this "compressed form" was what he himself termed the "principle of the iceberg." Some critics, like Mandel and Dewberry, have called this method "the theory of omission." The reason why Hemingway employed that method was that he wanted to achieve terseness and compression in his work. In an interview conducted by Plimpton, Hemingway conceded these details regarding this method:

.....I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven eighths of it under water foreverly part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show. If a writer omits something because he does not know it then there is a hole in the story.<sup>2</sup>

The iceberg method certainly emphasizes the importance of exploring the meaning underlying a Hemingway text. The readers are required to be actively involved in the reading process, constantly looking for associations between form and content. In her *Reading Hemingway*, Miriam Mandel remarks that "a great deal of material underlies the deceptively accessible surface of Hemingway's prose and ..... this submerged material is essential to our understanding of the text."<sup>3</sup> Once, Hemingway admitted that what he basically aimed at omitting was what he thought the reader had known. The numerous examples of omission he has provided in "The Art of the Short Story," however, indicate that he used this method exclusively in the stories that are based on real-life events. The purpose was to disguise, or eliminate facts, real-life events or conclusions, as is clearly done in *Ten Indians*

#### **The iceberg method in writing short story**

The iceberg method, like any other approach, has its advantages and its disadvantages. As a technical device, it is directly related to the formal pattern of the short story. Its shortcomings are most remarkably noticeable in *On the Quai at Smyrna*, *The Revolutionist*, and *The Snows of*

*Kilimanjaro*. The actions of these stories are severely curtailed, and many major events and facts are left out. This appears to impede the development of both the action itself and the characters. Although this was the first technique that Hemingway had tried to open his literary career with, it was the last for him to master. It was the sole reason behind the failure of the *In Our Time* collection of 1924 .

That collocation consisted of eighteen extremely condensed "sketches," or "vignettes." Elizabeth Dewberry observes in her interesting essay, "Hemingway's Journalism and the Realistic Dilemma," that Hemingway's goal was to include "everything" in these paragraphs.<sup>4</sup> Publishers who saw them to be too vague for the reader to decode continuously rejected these sketches, which ranged from one to four paragraphs in length. Although Hemingway never returned to this form after *In Our Time* ( 1924 ), the last two decades have witnessed great interest in this form, as evidenced by the multiplicity of studies devoted to these "sketches." Wendalyn Teltow has devoted a whole book to the study of cohesion in these eighteen "sketches."<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, E.R.Hagemann has devoted an essay to defend their value and innovative form.<sup>6</sup> It was not until Hemingway knew exactly how much to leave out, and how well to balance this technique in relationship to other techniques in the story, that he was to use it masterfully.

The omissions which Hemingway practices "affect both the ending and the anticipation of direct movement toward a goal and thus alter the structure of the story as a whole"<sup>7</sup> The stories based on the iceberg method most often end without the conventional nineteenth-century closure.<sup>8</sup> This has continued to distinguish Hemingway's short-story form from that of the traditional one, which was characterized by "the various thematic, symbolic and dramatic aspects coming to a simultaneous close." According to Gerlach, "Hemingway's endings are not the goal toward which all the story is clearly directed. Many of his stories imply incompleteness"<sup>9</sup>

The compressed form, as described by Gerlach, deals with a "detached incident, single and sharp, as clear as a pistol-shot"<sup>10</sup>

[It]...highlights an incident small and slight in itself presenting it so that the reader must imagine a much larger context. The incident selected would be so deepened by implied extensions as to suggest both the past and the future, thus equaling the range of a story spanning a much longer time. The complexity and continuity.....was out of the story, not in it, and in this way the compressed form, in relying on the reader to reconstruct the implied story, depends, like the image form, on the reader's awareness of conventional narrative expectations for its full effect.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, Hemingway was not particularly interested only in the creation of major actions, he simply aimed at focusing on a small action to present it from multiply angles. By leaving out details that would otherwise clarify the action, he surrounded his plot with ambiguity. But the ambiguity does not merely result from multiple-meaning words, or complicated language forms in the story, but rather from the absence of details relating to the action and the characters. This means that this "complexity" and "continuity" exist outside the story. The advantage of this method " is that the writer can achieve...brevity and fullness; the disadvantages, that the form can become highly ambiguous, or the original intentions essentially unrecoverable"<sup>12</sup>

What is known as "the pictorial method" of scene portrayal is another important contribution Hemingway made to the short story tradition. This was the second technical device, after characterization, to be handled by Hemingway. He applied this method distinctively in *The Doctor and The Doctor's Wife* and *Cat in the Rain*. The pictorial method was largely a product of the influence of painting and photojournalism on his work. Hemingway had a special admiration for painters in particular, and frequently acknowledged their influence upon him. He once said : "I learn as much from painters about how to write as from writers."<sup>13</sup> His favorite was the nineteenth-century French landscape painter Paul Cezanne ( 1839- 1906 ), whom he took as his model.<sup>14</sup> The fundamental

characteristic that made Cezanne's work unique was the focus on coherence. As Edmund B. Feldman remarks, coherence in art refers to the various parts of the picture when, they have "an independent existence but appear to have become what they are through harmonious adjustment to the requirements of each."<sup>15</sup> This is how Feldman, in his *Variety of Visual Experience*, describes the coherence method as practiced by Cezanne:

All the parts were so adjusted to one another in Color, shape, and size that they functioned organically; individual parts possessed their own character, but they were interdependent so far as aesthetic effect is concerned.

If any visual organization is so carefully adjusted and harmonized that change in one of its parts ruins its effectiveness, we tend to respond to it as if we are in the presence of a living organism.<sup>16</sup>

This is exactly what Hemingway intend to evoke in his writing, to emphasize the minor components or details of the scene as well as the image of that scene as the whole. This representational method enabled Hemingway to achieve his goal of using words to make a scene in the manner of Cezanne. This is how he expresses his admiration of Cezanne's method, using Nick Adams to act on his behalf:

He [Nick] wanted to write like Cezanne painted. Cezanne started with all the tricks. Then he broke. The whole thing down and build the real thing...He, Nick, wanted to write about country so it would be there like Cezanne had done it in painting. You had to do it from inside yourself. There wasn't any trick. Nobody had ever written about country like that.<sup>17</sup>

A typical Hemingway scene following this method begins either from a focal point from which it spreads out to include other details, or from a wider scope from which it gradually begins to get narrower and narrower until it falls on a target point of focus. This can best be seen in *Cat in the Rain* where the initial scene starts from within and spreads out, with its scope gradually becoming more

and more comprehensive until the observer is able to see all the parts in relationship to the scene as a whole. This scene begins by presenting all the details of the square near the hotel, but then the scope widens until it shows the square in one panoramic view. Afterwards, the scope begins to narrow again until it focuses on the "cat.....crouched under one of the dripping green tables."<sup>18</sup> such a method of scene presentation makes the cat appear as an integral part of the scene, like the weather, or like an individual being with an identity of its own.

The method also enabled Hemingway to invigorate his stories and give depth to their plots. In 1933 Hemingway wrote to Mrs. Paul Pfeiffer: "I am trying to make, before I get through, a picture of the whole world- or as much of it as I have seen. Boiling it down always, rather than spreading it out thin."<sup>19</sup>

But Cezanne was not the only artist to influence the development of Hemingway's pictorial method. There are a few other artists who exercised the same influence. These were Gustave Flaubert, Ezra Pound, Bernard Berensen, the art critic of Renaissance painting. Combining their techniques with his own, Hemingway developed what Valerie Shaw has described as unique "visual method," an "objective technique which presents but does not analyze."<sup>20</sup> Here Hemingway sets the reader in the middle of the scene, and leaves him to figure out for himself the motives behind the action with minimal or no guidance from him as an author.

Another factor, which is said to have enabled Hemingway to develop this method, was photojournalism. Like the majority of prominent short-story writers, Hemingway was deeply influenced by photojournalism which was introduced during World War 1. Emphasizing the "intimate involvement of fiction and the photograph," Philip Stevick says

[It was ].... A depolarization, in which the fiction seems to come from an involved and caring teller but from a machine; a different sense of eye, focus, vision, and fixity of detail; and a different rhythm, movement, transition, what the film maker calls cutting a montage, all three of these tendencies being among the most frequently noted

characteristics of the short fiction of the century.<sup>21</sup>

The major difference between a Cezanne portrait and a photograph lay in objectivity. On the one hand, a portrait- designed or structured- is based on the perception and intentions of its artist. On the other hand, a photograph is not made, but copied from real life. No matter how well the photographer can utilize his strategies to produce special effects, his efforts does not amount to the reproduction of scene. What Hemingway did was to use a real- life scene, as a photographer does, and highlight, as an artist does, the relationship between its minor components of the story. By highlighting these relationships in an objective manner, the scene appears to be presented through the eyes of a detached observer, or a machine, i.e., a camera.

#### **Hemingway wanted to cause the reader to imagine**

In his fiction, Hemingway wanted to "cause the reader to imagine a scene so effortlessly that it would have the subjective impact of an actual experience".<sup>22</sup> "What he went for," as H.E. Bates' s says "was that direct pictorial contact between eye and object, [and] between object and reader."<sup>23</sup> Hemingway aimed at enabling the reader to visualize the scene as well as have the impression that it was taking place at the moment. Jackson J. Benson maintains that "Hemingway's settings are either literally stages or reminiscent of a stage by being spotlighted, raised or segregated for the audience's view."<sup>24</sup>

As soon as Hemingway's short stories appeared, his contemporary writers ( Pound, Stein, Ford, and Joyce) identified him as "a different kind of young writer."<sup>25</sup> His writing was seen as "objective, vital, astringent, brittle, concretely visual, austere, filled with hard bits of truth, presentational, personal, [and] unconventional."<sup>26</sup> Thus, he began to be known as "a writer of unconventional fiction". Edmund Wilson intelligently epitomized the secret of Hemingway's fiction by saying that it was "strikingly original".<sup>27</sup>

Bates argued that for a century before Hemingway "the short story had been in constant danger of collapsing," because of "a colossal

convention of fancy mechanisms in the matter of dialogue": writers would underline the "intonation," "flavor," "emotions" or "meaning" of their characters.<sup>28</sup> Stevick, on the other hand, explained how Hemingway, in his apparently plot less stories, "expanded the horizons of the short story...to get far beyond what Poe and his followers thought was the main purpose to aim for and achieve one single effect."<sup>29</sup> Hemingway enabled the short story to go farther and "deeper than any other American writer of his day".<sup>30</sup>

From the beginning, Hemingway was careful not to convey meaning directly. One way of objectifying his style and dissociating himself from his work was the manner of conveying narrative point of view. Although the majority of his short stories are narrated in the second person, there are many that are narrated in the first person. Hemingway once wrote that writing in the first person may convince the reader that the events really happened to the author. Conversely, writing in the second person makes the reader identify with the character and "believe that the things happened to him too," which makes the story part of the reader's memory.<sup>31</sup> The fact that all the stories based on events experienced by Hemingway, especially the Nick Adams stories, are narrated in the second person emphasizes three things: the transformation of these personal experiences into universal ones to which the average reader could relate, the creation of narrators and characters with which the reader can easily identify, and the objectification of the stories and the narrative views they embody.

In a frequently quoted passage from a letter to his father, Hemingway revealed one of the secrets of his writing: "You see I'm trying in all my stories to get the feeling of the actual life across-not to just depict life-or criticize it- but to actually make it alive."<sup>32</sup> Hemingway believed good writing was true writing. The element of truth applies to both real –life inspired stories and purely fictional ones. If the story is made up by the writer, "it will be true in proportion to the amount of knowledge of life that he has and how conscientious he is; so that when he makes something up it is as it would truly be."<sup>33</sup>

Some other characteristics of Hemingway's structure are pointed out as "a distinctive use of irony as a narrative technique, and a common development of a climax which would conclude in an act of self-discovery or self-realization."<sup>34</sup> From his work as a journalist for the *Toronto Star*, Hemingway also learned how to use "dialogue, character development, complex and inventive point of view, and dramatic scene...."<sup>35</sup>

In spite of being known as a revolutionary writer, Hemingway did not do away completely with traditional practices. After developing his own technique, he was able to incorporate selective aspects of the traditional nineteenth-century form into his own. The result, as the *Spanish Civil War Stories* demonstrate, was the creation of yet newer forms.

It is true that he spoke against the traditional short-story form when he described it as "dead,"<sup>36</sup> but he did not do away with it entirely. At the very beginning of his career, he meant to completely break away from the traditional form as he tried to write the vignettes, or the very short sketches. These sketches, which he called "chapters" ranged from one laconic paragraph to a maximum of four. They were also characterized by concrete visual imagery, extreme brevity, lack of plot, and extreme ambiguity. Although these vignettes showed a great deal of inventiveness, several publishers rejected them. When they eventually appeared in Paris, 1924, only a few thousand copies were sold. The 1924 *In Our Time* which consisted of eighteen sketches, was not particularly a success for Hemingway, who came to realize that breaking away from tradition had to be done both gradually and carefully.

Determining to secure a foothold for himself in the literary world, Hemingway went back to the traditional short-story form. The result was the production of the 1925 *In Our Time*. Many critics regarded this collection as experimental and imitative of the works of other authors, especially Steins, Pound, Anderson and Joyce. Reynolds, for example, described the collection as "experimental fiction of the first order."<sup>37</sup> Such a view, however,

does not seem to do justice to Hemingway's talent. It is true that many of these stories adhered to the tradition, but it is true that at least two or three of them were classified as literary masterpieces. Warren Bennet, for example, considers *Cat in the Rain* as "one of Hemingway's best stories."<sup>38</sup>

Presumably, Hemingway wanted to test both readers and critics by casting most of the stories in this Collection, more or less, in the traditional form, including in the meantime a few stories with innovative techniques. These combined a few traits of Hemingway's own new compressed form. Thus, *In Our Time* was received as a very successful endeavor, and helped establish Hemingway as a writer.

Having become recognized by readers and critics, and having known what stories sold best, Hemingway became more adventurous in his second collection *Men Without Women*. This collection was received as one of the most acclaimed works of Hemingway's. Critics, however disagreed about the nature of the form used in the stories of the collection. Virginia Woolf maintained that they were fashioned after the traditional French short-story form practiced by Merimee and Maupassant.<sup>39</sup> Other critics have viewed them as completely novel in style and form, maintaining that they were cast in a brand new form, which Hemingway invented. Percy Hutchinson comments on *Men Without Women*, only to emphasize that its author (Hemingway) "shows himself master in a new manner in the short-story form. His method is not that of Kipling, of Maupassant, of Conrad. His style is his own."<sup>40</sup> These stories had different forms and could not be said to follow one standardized form, whether adopted or invented.

Although Hemingway's innovative form, as employed in *Men Without Women*, was received fairly well by most critics, such as Hutchinson, Parker, Wilson and Rosene, not all the stories that followed *Men Without Women* were as successful. It seemed ironical that after perfecting his own techniques in *Men Without Women*, Hemingway could not achieve the same level of mastery in the collection that followed, *Winner Take Nothing*. Most contemporary critics were disappointed at the

collection. Some did not see the stories amounting to the stature that Hemingway had already acquired.<sup>41</sup> Others viewed them as a testimony to Hemingway's declining talent<sup>42</sup>. Matthew Martin emphatically sums up the reception of this collection as "In fact, the reviews were the worst Hemingway had received in his relatively brief career."<sup>43</sup> There are two main factors that may have led to this negative reception of *Winner Take Nothing*. First, after the publication of *Men Without Women*, Hemingway focused heavily on the novel, writing no stories between 1927 to 1932. Second, many of his stories were quite daring and contained abrasive material that was regarded as highly objectionable by those critics who attacked them.

Frustrated at the unfavorable criticism *Winner Take Nothing* received, Hemingway was determined to regain his status as a short-story writer. The four stories written between 1936 and 1938 stood as evidence that his skill was still intact. They showed him to be at the acme of his career. Some critics have argued that these stories were fashioned after the traditional nineteenth-century form. Gerlach, for example, was of the opinion that "In many of the later stories, he [Hemingway] returned .....to more conventional structure and closure devices." Gerlach specifically identified *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*, and *The Capital of the World* as belonging to the traditional form.<sup>44</sup> Considering the stories in this light does not do justice, since they don't consistently adhere to the traditional form emphasized by Gerlach. *Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*, for example, according to him, was technically flawed basically because it was neither open-ended nor terminally ended. However, the most remarkable aspect that these stories shared with the traditional form was having a plot. Hemingway employs a new form that combined his own new technique with selective traditional short-story features.

One of these traditional features that Hemingway used in one form or another in many of *The First Forty-Nine Short Stories* was the surprise ending. Yet, the question as to why his stories that have surprise endings have remained ever rich and yield more meaning and pleasure with subsequent

readings is not difficult to answer. The fact is that Hemingway was able to apply a few traditional features and his own. In *Old Man at the Bridge*, for example, Hemingway primarily focuses on the pictorial representation of the scene as an objective means of portraying the old man's situation. In the meantime he has intertwined this method, which exacerbates the tension in the story, with a surprise ending. Unlike the traditional form, however, this ending occurs casually, unexpectedly and ironically. In the meantime, the story ends immediately after revealing that the man is no longer facing an immediate threat to his life. It is not known, however, how far ground troops are from the bridge, whether the animals are saved or not, or how the old man is going to be saved.

All in all, Hemingway stories, whether early, middle or late, whether apprentice or mature, whether traditional or innovative, reveal at least one thing. This was the interest in experimenting with ways of establishing cohesion among them, whether individually or collectively. That is why there is a constant search for dynamics of cohesion, which crystallized at last in four: Characterization, Scene portrayal, Point of View and Narrative Structure. These should also be in mind to be searched in details in other new papers.

### Conclusion

The above study has focused on Ernest Hemingway's view of the traditional way of short story writing. The study provides a background in which the Hemingway stories are placed in the right context-the modern short-fiction scene. The question now to be asked is "where does all this lead us? What does it make of Hemingway's stories?" Surely, we have come, by now, to have some second thoughts about Hemingway the storyteller as well as about his place on the map of world literature, particularly in the sphere of short fiction. Hemingway the short-story writer is not as simple as he may appear to be, even though he sounds traditionally straightforward. True it is that he observed the conventional structure of the short story that was prevalent early in the century but, by employing technical devices and by experimenting with modes of telling, he improved on his fellow-

writers and introduced what could be regarded as revolutionary artistic forms. That is why his stories, with all their apparent ease, direct narrative style and recurrent settings are sometimes hard for the reader to figure out or make full understanding of their meanings, which are normally buried under thick layers of significance.

One needs to delve deep into the infrastructure of a Hemingway tale to come to grips with its various connotations. Whether considered individually or collectively, Hemingway's stories, certainly, do not convey their full significance on the first reading. The reader has to read the text over and over before he or she gets into its secret beauty. This has been the main effort of the study-to unravel the sources of pleasure hidden in Hemingway's narrative architecture. Indeed, Hemingway shows himself a master craftsman in the art of the short story, to borrow the titular words of Hutchinson's famous works.

Traditionally, short-story writers tried to unify their texts by delineating a clearly developed structure: a beginning, a middle, a climax and a denouement, using the same characters-protagonists, antagonists and narrators, and the same themes and/or settings. These were more or less the standard tools for establishing cohesion, at least until the early 1920s. From that time onwards, the literary world began to witness the emergence of several artistic and literary trends that enabled authors to explore additional- not to say alternative- devices of achieving cohesion by either experimenting with novel media or re- molding the traditional ones. For example, the "Imagist Movement," of which Hemingway was a follower at the beginning of his career, enabled its prominent expatriates, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot, to invent and apply fresh methods of rendering their works cohesive. The distinctive hallmarks of the literary products of that movement were juxtaposed ideas where the past was intermixed with the present and the language was markedly incoherent. The cohesive technique most widely used by the Imagists was the creation of strong visual images, which were meant to increase the reader's cognitive involvement in the written

text. On the other hand, Hemingway followed his own method in short story writing.

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