

PRELUDE TO FAME: TRAUMA IN THE EARLY SHORT FICTION
OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY

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Chapter One: The Four Lenses

All good books are alike in that they are truer than if they had really happened and after you are finished reading one you will feel that all that happened to you and afterwards it all belongs to you; the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse and sorrow, the people and places and how the weather was. If you can get so you can give that to people, then you are a writer. Because that is the hardest thing of all to do. If, after that, you want to abandon your trade and get into politics, go ahead, but it is a sign that you are afraid to go on and do the other, because it is getting too hard and you have to do it alone and so you want to do something where you can have friends and well wishers, and be part of a company engaged in doing something worth doing instead of working all your life at something that will only be worth doing if you do it better than it has ever been done.¹

Ernest Hemingway set down these words in the middle of his 1934

Esquire essay on the art of writing one year after he published his final Nick Adams stories in *Winner Take Nothing*. Obviously he thought highly of his craft, and it could be argued (after the critical and commercial successes of *A Farewell to Arms*) that writing about the personal experiences and ordeals of men was worth doing for Hemingway. But what happens when those fictional narratives emerge from memories of experienced trauma? What are the implications of enduring a traumatic event and projecting it through the written word? And where is the line drawn between the personal trauma of an author and what manifests itself on the page? My purpose in this thesis is to investigate the post-traumatic psychological phenomenon of “working through” in the life and early literature of Ernest Hemingway.

While it is commonly acknowledged that the primal traumatic events of Hemingway’s time as an ambulance driver in Italy during World War I had a

profound influence on his works of fiction, there has been relatively little exploration of the notion that the “working through” which occurred in the recovery from his own personal trauma manifests a complex and interwoven relationship with the writing process. This is certainly not unknown territory for scholars; when Hemingway first embarked upon the earliest fiction writing of his professional career, biographical research indicates he was once again enduring a traumatic experience of sorts. Yet formal trauma theory has rarely been applied to the study of Hemingway’s most intensely autobiographical short fiction. It is my contention that the “working through” of Hemingway’s writing process demonstrated in his published and unpublished² Nick Adams stories was prompted by both his defining war-time trauma experience and his later, more private hardships.

Dominick LaCapra was the critic in the trauma theory school who coined the term “working through” to describe the process of traumatic recovery. In this thesis, I will adopt his theoretical terminology and also draw on the work of three other influential theorists: Sigmund Freud, Judith Herman, and Cathy Caruth. While these four intellects provide their own unique lenses through which I will examine Hemingway and his fiction, their work coalesces on the notion that the catastrophe of the traumatic experience is its un-deniability: we are often born into it, compelled to endure different versions of the same truth composed by the victimized psyche, and fight through its physical and emotional injuries with only a possibility of recovery. The background readings of LaCapra, Freud, Herman, and Caruth offered in this chapter, and the biographical and publication history of

Hemingway offered in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, will set the stage for my analysis (in Chapters Four and Five) of the trauma that emerges in the Nick Adams stories of the 1920s and early 1930s.

In his 2001 text, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, LaCapra sets out to provide a critical perspective on the problem of trauma—namely, the conflict between cultural and historical representations of trauma and the understanding of a traumatic event. At its most general, “working through is an articulatory practice: to the extent one works through trauma, one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or one’s people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future.”³ Hemingway’s articulatory practice involving the traumatic experience was his engagement with writing about a similarly traumatized protagonist, notably while going through the subtler trauma of the dissolution of his first marriage. I will argue in this thesis that through his writing about Nick, Hemingway was able to negotiate his recovery from his primal traumatic experience, to a point, by establishing his place in the literary community and by realizing his place in the modernist tradition.

In order to understand the lens through which I will analyze the intersections of Hemingway’s life and work, it is necessary to offer a general overview of the tradition of trauma theory in psychoanalytic studies. While the scope of trauma theory has become quite broad, I will focus primarily on the work of four essential critics in this school. I will return to LaCapra’s recovery process shortly, but most germane to any study of trauma criticism is an introduction to

the seminal work of Sigmund Freud, from which all trauma theory stems—either to corroborate or contradict Freud’s paradigm. I will also discuss the more clinical trauma theory of Judith Herman and the literary and historical trauma criticism of Cathy Caruth.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, first published in 1928, Sigmund Freud posits that the mind works to maintain a low level of excitement or, “stasis.” Freud postulated that low excitement or stability is pleasurable for the mind, while high excitement or instability is disagreeable. The mind pushes for stasis in order to strive for its own preservation. This concept, known as the pleasure principle, results in a tendency towards instinctual repetition and sameness in an individual’s life. In order to maintain low excitement of the mind, an individual will seek out experiences that are similar to ones previously found to be rewarding⁴. These events are easily understood by the individual and assimilated into the conscious mind, or ego.

At times, however, an individual may experience an event that cannot be understood in its entirety, perhaps due to a repression of the event by the ego, which operates under the pleasure principle. Ostensibly this lack of understanding or assimilation into the conscious mind arises because the event was not a pleasurable one. Since the conscious mind cannot remember the entire event, the id—the instinctual part of the mind—urges the individual to repeat the repressed material as contemporary experience (termed by Freud as transference neurosis⁵, for example: an individual may not repeat the experience in its entirety, but elements of the original event will transfer into the

contemporary one). An individual may encounter a compulsion to repeat an action, whether or not there is any opportunity for pleasure (i.e., stasis) to occur through the repetition, in order for the opportunity for understanding to arise.

This repetition compulsion derives from a bit of wishful thinking inside the individual's mind. Because repression of the original (latent) event does not allow for remembrance, transfer of the experience through repetition will hopefully allow for a contemporary understanding of the latent event, which in turn will hopefully allow for a return to stasis. Thus, one might think about Hemingway's writing repeatedly about men injured in random, startling acts of violence in his fiction as manifestations of his own ego's drive to understand his injury at the front in Italy.

In Freud's schema for the psyche, consciousness acts as a protective shield against stimuli;⁶ meaning consciousness helps to propagate the pleasure principle by maintaining a low-level of excitement in the mind. Freud defines "traumatic" to mean: "any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield."⁷ In other words, a traumatic event is a breach in this barrier against stimuli or a rupture in consciousness. The mind has a system for mastering a particular amount of stimuli before it can break into consciousness by binding it for disposal. This system is called cathexis and the mind prepares for potential breaks in the barrier through small doses of anxiety (anxiety being a positive force that prepares our mind to handle the unexpected).⁸ Cathexis, it seems, only works on what one could consider to be a

small dose of stimuli: it handles the small stresses we encounter on a day-to-day basis and allows us to react in a normal fashion.

The traumatic neurosis is a consequence of an extensive breach in consciousness, caused by a lack of preparedness or anxiety. It is the effect a traumatic event, one that is beyond the bounds of cathexis, has on the mind and is found to be highly unpleasant in its instability by the ego. Thus the ego manifests the repetition compulsion to combat the way in which the traumatic neurosis opposes the pleasure principle—while it may seem perverse for an individual to repeat a primal trauma in transferred contemporary action, or more likely in dreams, the repetition of the experience actually strengthens the individual's opportunity for mastery over the event. Such repetitions “endeavor to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis.”⁹ This compulsion concept proffers an explanation for why victims of traumatic ordeals continue to be haunted by dreams of their experience – dreams offer the victim an opportunity to inhibit the extent of the breach the traumatic stimuli has on the mind. In the fourth chapter, I will take a close look at Hemingway's story “Now I Lay Me,” in which Nick is fearful of sleep for this very reason.

Freud observed, “It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces.”¹⁰ This instinct, then, is the basis for the pleasure principle – stasis and low excitement (life in the womb) are the earliest and most pleasurable state of things. To

Freud, this could be reduced to the statement that “the aim of all life is death,”¹¹ because to die would then be to restore the earlier stasis one had to abandon on account of the external disruptions of life. Even Herbert Marcuse, who offers an alternative to the pleasure principle in his work *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, supports this notion. He states, “The death instinct is destructiveness not for its own sake, but for the relief of tension.”¹² Mastery over the traumatic neurosis then, is a “component instinct whose function it is to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death, and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself.”¹³ Onset of the traumatic neurosis thrusts survival and latent comprehension to the governance of the mind; mastery over the traumatic neurosis restores the pleasure principle to the forefront of the ego and enables traumatized individuals to re-establish control over their own lives. Until one can recover from the traumatic neurosis, its far-reaching implications will govern the victim’s life.

Psychiatrist Judith Herman takes Freud’s theory and outlines the clinical implications of the traumatic experience on a victim in her 1997 work *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Herman’s work is essential in three ways to this project: first in her discussion of the nervous system’s physical response to trauma; secondly in her construction of assimilation of the traumatic experience in recovery; and finally through her description of the burden of bearing witness to the traumatic event. Herman’s research is grounded in victims of sexual and domestic abuse, political prisoners,

and captivity. Her findings, however, are applicable to a wider scope of traumatic events and literature.

Herman outlines three primary symptomatic categories of post-traumatic stress disorder: hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction. Each category represents a particular physical response of the nervous system to a traumatic event. Herman notes, "Hyperarousal reflects the persistent expectation of danger; intrusion reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment; constriction reflects the numbing response of surrender."¹⁴ This thesis will show that Hemingway and his protagonist, Nick Adams, display behaviors indicative of each of these three symptomatic groupings in daily life and on the printed page, respectively.

Hyperarousal, termed by Herman to be the "first cardinal symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder,"¹⁵ is the physical manifestation of the failure of Freud's "cathexis." As Herman says, "the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment. Physiological arousal continues unabated."¹⁶ A victim who presents symptoms of hyperarousal may have trouble sleeping, startles easily, and will always be on alert for danger. Herman notes that individuals demonstrating symptoms of hyperarousal are sensitive to repetition, "It also appears that traumatized people cannot 'tune out' repetitive stimuli that other people would find merely annoying; rather, they respond to each repetition as though it were a new, and dangerous, surprise."¹⁷ This observation falls in line with Freud's concepts of transference

and the repetition compulsion: the ego is pushing the victim to engage with the stimuli to hopefully gain some new insight into the original traumatic event.

Intrusion is Herman's second category of symptoms; it is the peculiar beast of traumatic memory:

Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts. It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma. The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep. Small, seemingly insignificant reminders can also evoke these memories, which often return with all the vividness and emotional force of the original event.¹⁸

Intrusion interrupts the victim's life. The memory seems to lack a verbal narrative and context, and instead has a frozen—almost wordless—quality. These memories may also manifest through nightmares of dangerous or adaptive reenactments and involuntary action. Herman suggests that there is a neural and endocrine basis for the persistency of intrusion. Research indicates, “that when high levels of adrenaline and other stress hormones are circulating, memory traces are deeply imprinted.”¹⁹ Intrusion does offer an opportunity for mastery by the potential to gain understanding of the event through repetition (yet by the same token may be re-traumatizing), but I think it offers support for the impetus to tell the story of trauma. When the odd, wordless memories intrude and interrupt the victim, one is compelled to attempt to articulate the experience in a linear narrative to gain understanding further down the line or through listener (or reader) insight.

Constriction, Herman's third group of symptoms, reflects the frozen quality of intrusion. Alterations of consciousness and feelings of numbness are cornerstones of this symptomatic set. Herman notes,

Sometimes situations of inescapable danger may evoke not only terror and rage but also, paradoxically, a state of detached calm, in which terror, rage, and pain dissolve. Events continue to register in awareness, but it is as though these events have been disconnected from their ordinary meanings. Perceptions may be numbed or distorted, with partial anesthesia or the loss of particular sensations. Time sense may be altered, often with a sense of slow motion, and the experience may lose its quality of ordinary reality... These perceptual changes combine with a feeling of indifference, emotional detachment, and profound passivity in which the person relinquishes all initiative and struggle. This altered state of consciousness might be regarded as one of nature's small mercies, a protection against unbearable pain.²⁰

While this trance-like state may be a reprieve for the victim, it also prevents them from planning for future events. They do not feel the proper level of anxiety Freud deems necessary to prepare for breaches in the consciousness. Moreover, victims attempt to replicate this feeling through "avoidance tactics" of sorts. For example, heavy drinking or drug use opens the door to constriction and enables the victim to avoid the intrusive memory of the event and numbs the pain. Perhaps Hemingway's image as a globe-trotting, wine-swilling playboy is actually indicative of constriction rather than American machismo. As Herman indicates, the blessing of constriction seems to be outweighed by the detrimental effect it can have on the victim's quality of life.²¹

While someone in the throes of the traumatic neuroses may not be able to articulate the traumatic event in Herman's paradigm, telling the story of the trauma is a key part of the traumatic recovery. Herman states, "In the second

stage of recovery, the survivor tells the story of the trauma. She tells it completely, in depth and in detail. This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story."²² Telling the story is empowering for the victim, and as LaCapra posits, opens up the potential for a future unfettered by consistent traumatic neuroses symptoms. Indeed, one of the worst parts of the traumatic event is the way in which it alienates an individual from others. Herman writes, "Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others."²³ Telling the story of trauma, then, opens up the opportunity to restore these bonds and to identify a place within a community. This commonality and negotiation of place is the indicator of traumatic recovery in Herman's schema. In this project, the way Hemingway establishes himself in the community of writers and amongst his family is a marker for his recovery process.

The traumatic narrative plays a significant role in Cathy Caruth's 1996 text, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. In this seminal work, Caruth bases her anatomy of trauma on Tancred Tasso's epic poem "Jerusalem Liberated." She articulates the term "trauma" to be a wound inflicted on the mind. As in Tasso's poem, the wound of trauma has a voice, which is released when trauma occurs. This voice, however, is plagued by a dual impulse: both the will to deny and the will to proclaim the trauma that haunts victims. Caruth writes, "If traumatic experience, as Freud indicates suggestively,

is an experience that is not fully assimilated as it occurs [latency], then these texts, each in its turn, ask what it means to transmit and to theorize around a crisis that is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness."²⁴ The story must be told in order to be understood (demanding our witness), but in the same vein, casting the trauma in a narrative can cause further pain to the survivor (defying our witness). Telling the story opens both the door for mastery²⁵ and a re-traumatizing ordeal, which may implicate even more victims in those who listen (the listeners are potential victims of the same traumatic experience by hearing the force of the narrative of the event). Thus, survivors may maintain a sort of fidelity, a faithful silence, to their respective traumas to protect both themselves and those around them.

One of Caruth's main aims in her project is to situate trauma as a historical reference. She writes,

I would propose that it is here, in the equally widespread and bewildering encounter with trauma – both in its occurrence and in the attempt to understand it – that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference). Through the notion of trauma, I will argue, we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not.²⁶

Recall that in Freud's definition of the traumatic neurosis, one of the key frustrations in consciousness is the failure of the mind to assimilate what occurred. There is a necessary latency period to discern the full impact of the trauma; it is only fully evident and understood in another place or time.

Hemingway's writing certainly engages with the idea of latency and reference in its timing and its content.

A large portion of Caruth's text is dedicated towards this problem of reference. How can we situate our history within this new framework of a non-linear reference? For Caruth, the traumatic experience is characterized by a fall. The moment of impact, then, provides our first opportunity for reference, albeit a non-linear one, because in the philosophical system Caruth reads into Kant, Kleist, and de Man, "falling... is only a means of rising."²⁷ Thus, going through the traumatic event and subsequent neuroses opens up an opportunity to gain understanding and incites the drive towards stasis. It is only language and narrative of this experience that provides any reference at all.

Herman's clinical descriptions of post-traumatic behavior and Caruth's philosophical and theoretical text speak to the practice of "working through" as outlined by LaCapra. What Caruth may call latency and Herman terms part of intrusion and constriction are clarified in LaCapra's conjecture that "trauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self."²⁸ Working through, as defined at the outset of this chapter, offers the opportunity—through its inherent articulatory practice—to engage the past trauma with the current life and reinvest in future possibility. It meets Caruth's goal of assimilation of the event into consciousness and history and Herman's goal of mastery through establishment in the community. Hemingway just goes about this very personal journey through the very public sphere of his writing.

Indeed, several critics in the late 1990's contend that trauma itself is nothing without the story of it. In *World's of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* Kalí Tal writes, "Traumatic events are written and re-written until they become codified and narrative form gradually replaces content as the focus of attention."²⁹ The narrative of trauma is a cultural construct. It is a "performative trope" in addition to a clinical syndrome because, as Kirby Farrell notes in *Post-Traumatic Culture: Inquiry and Interpretation in the Nineties*, "the injury entails interpretation of the injury."³⁰ The way we tell the story of our trauma is a cultural practice and should be given a degree of importance equal to the traumatic event and neuroses themselves.

It is essential to note, however, the inherent difficulty of the process of working through. LaCapra states,

Trauma brings about a dissociation of affect and representation. One disorientingly feels what one cannot represent; one numbingly represents what one cannot feel. Working through trauma involves the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation.³¹

He recognizes that the trauma may never be fully mastered through the means we have of working through our experience. Hemingway's compulsion to write and re-write the stories about Nick Adams will reveal how difficult this raw representation of the traumatic experience was for the author.

It is through this lens of traumatic experience, subsequent neuroses, and potential recovery outlined so clearly by these four pillars of trauma theory that I will look at Hemingway's fiction. The next chapter of this thesis will offer a small

glimpse into the biographical details of Hemingway's life, with special attention to his primal trauma (his injury at the Italian front during the First World War) and the secondary trauma of the dissolution of his marriage to Hadley. The third chapter offers a look into the implications of Hemingway's chronologies of composition, publication, and the reissuing of the Nick Adams short fiction and how those timelines interact with his personal experience.

The fourth and fifth chapters delve more deeply into the fiction on a critical level in both its content and with respect to his personal chronology to examine the scope of Hemingway's recovery, or lack thereof. I will look closely at three stories that occur during Nick's time at war in Chapter Four to consider how Hemingway is able to write about violence and its immediate implications. In Chapter Five, I will examine the final Nick Adams story Hemingway chose to publish, "Fathers and Sons," a story about Nick back at the home front that reverberates with the pain of unraveling familial relationships and personal loss Hemingway encountered in the late 1920's and early 1930's. The intersections of Hemingway's life and his treatment of the traumatic experience in Nick Adams' life provide a map of the inception of the traumatic neuroses, its branches of clinical and emotional manifestations, and the head-on march towards recovery Hemingway embarks upon through the written page.

¹ Hemingway, Ernest. "Old Newsmen Writes: A Letter from Cuba." *Esquire*. Dec. 1934. Rpt. in *Byline Ernest Hemingway: Selected Articles and Dispatches of Four Decades*. Ed. William White. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967. 184-5.

² Hemingway only supported the publication of 15 of his Nick Adams stories – those that appeared in the 1925 *In Our Time*, 1927's *Men Without Women*, and 1933's *Winner Take Nothing*. In 1972, Philip Young edited a compilation that included eight additional Nick stories ("Three Shots," "The Indians Moved Away," "The Last Good Country," "Crossing the Mississippi," "Night Before Landing," "Summer People," "Wedding Day," and "On Writing"), which had been discovered in various stages of development in the author's unpublished papers. While the

stories became available for popular consumption in Young's edition of *The Nick Adams Stories* for the purposes of this thesis I will continue to denote them as unpublished.

³ La Capra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. 21-2.

⁴ Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1961. 2.

⁵ Recall LaCapra's terming trauma one of a number of transference experiences—Freud's level of contribution to trauma study cannot be overestimated.

⁶ Freud, 21.

⁷ Freud, 23.

⁸ Freud, 24.

⁹ Freud, 26.

¹⁰ Freud, 30.

¹¹ Freud, 32.

¹² Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955.

¹³ Freud, 33.

¹⁴ Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 1997. 35.

¹⁵ Herman, 35.

¹⁶ Herman, 35.

¹⁷ Herman, 36.

¹⁸ Herman, 37.

¹⁹ Herman, 39.

²⁰ Herman, 42-3.

²¹ Herman, 47.

²² Herman, 175.

²³ Herman, 214.

²⁴ Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. 5.

²⁵ Recovery in this schema.

²⁶ Caruth, 11.

²⁷ Caruth, 82.

²⁸ LaCapra, 41.

²⁹ Tal, Kalí. *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literature of Trauma*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 6.

³⁰ Farrell, Kirby. *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. 7.

³¹ LaCapra, 42. Note how well LaCapra works within the framework of Freud and Caruth's psychological and Herman's clinical delineations of the traumatic experience. He plays with the nervous system responses to trauma and the issues of reference and mastery in a true culmination of discourse in this school.

Chapter Two: A Glimpse of Papa

Forget your personal tragedy. We are all bitched from the start and you especially have to be hurt like hell before you can write seriously. But when you get the damned hurt use it—don't cheat with it. Be as faithful to it as a scientist—but don't think anything is of any importance because it happens to you or anyone belonging to you.

In 1934, Ernest Hemingway wrote the above words in a letter to his friend, F. Scott Fitzgerald.¹ His admonition keeps his own life experiences in perspective with regards to critical interpretation of his work: while he reveres the traumatic experience and its potential to be mined for literary purposes, he neglects to address the notion of recovery. In fact, the above epigraph reveals an aversion to recovery from the traumatic experience; Hemingway goads writers to remain devoted to the experience and commemorate it with the written word. In order to analyze the traumatic experiences and recoveries in Hemingway's fiction and his rise to the pinnacle of American modernism, it is necessary to situate Hemingway's own traumatic experiences within a framework of his life and work. The aim of this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive biography of Hemingway², but rather to construct a context of survival, situation, and support for the manner in which he worked through his personal traumas by way of the narrative conventions of fiction. While it would be a nearly insurmountable task to argue that Hemingway fully assimilated his traumatic experience to make a complete traumatic recovery³, it can be demonstrated that he was able to work through the ordeal of his primal trauma experienced during his service in World War I through the fiction he wrote while he was going through his first divorce—in particular, the earliest Nick Adams stories.

Born July 21, 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois, the second of five children, Ernest Hemingway gained a taste for adventure and the outdoors while spending his summers at the family's home, Windemere Cottage, on Walloon Lake in Michigan.⁴ Upon graduation from Oak Park High School, Hemingway began a job working as a reporter for the *Kansas City Star* in the fall of 1917. Though he thoroughly enjoyed his work at the newspaper, the events of World War I appealed to his desire for adventure. He wanted, more than anything, to go to war. His sister Marcelline⁵ points out that,

Underlying all Ernest's pleasures in his new experiences and his work on the paper was his great, compelling desire to get into the war. He had tried to enlist in all the services, he wrote me. He told me that the Army, the Navy, and the Marine Corps had all turned him down, not for being underage since he was past eighteen, but because he could not pass the physicals due to his bad eye.⁶

Hemingway himself noted, "I'll make it to Europe some way in spite of this optic. I can't let a show like this go on without getting into it."⁷ Not to be deterred from his puerile desire to be a part of the action abroad, Hemingway discovered an opportunity to join the American Red Cross Ambulance Corps in Italy when he interviewed a group of Italian officers for the *Star* in early 1918.⁸ The Red Cross accepted volunteers who were unable to fulfill the physical requirements for their country's own armed services into their corps. He immediately signed up, and was assigned to Ambulance Unit Four in Italy.⁹

The childish innocence that colored Hemingway's desire to go to war is illustrated by a particular comment he made some 24 years after his return home. He stated in 1942, "I was an awful dope when I went to the last war... I can remember just thinking that we were the home team and the Austrians were

the visiting team.”¹⁰ Upon his arrival on the continent, Hemingway continued to treat war as a game, site-seeing in Paris by running after the sound of exploding shells, in hopes of finding a “fresh crater or two,”¹¹ with his friend Ted Brumback, who had joined up with Hemingway. After serving for a little while at the base for Ambulance Unit Four in Schio, Hemingway became frustrated with the lack of action in his sector: “I’m fed up,’ he told Brumback one day late in June. ‘There’s nothing here but scenery and too damn much of that. I’m going to get out of this ambulance section and see if I can’t find out where the war is.’”¹² The Red Cross maintained several canteens for troops at the front, and accepted Hemingway as a volunteer to man one such canteen along the Piave front in Fossalta.¹³

It is important to recall that the adventure Hemingway so desired to experience by being a part of the action of this war was born out of a childish desire to be a part of the conflict and the mystique of battle he imagined for himself while waiting to join up and while he was well behind the front lines in Schio. The area along the Piave River where the Red Cross Canteens were located was a scene of pivotal activity in the Austro-Hungarian attempt to end their stalemate in Italy. According to an official French observer of the attack, Henri Kervarec, the Battle of the Piave River was the final Austro-Hungarian attack on the Italian front. It proved, however, “to be a disastrous failure and virtually heralded the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian army.”¹⁴ Needless to say, Hemingway’s arrival at Piave put him right in the middle of a critical point of action in a war that he had idealized but not necessarily understood as a soldier in combat.

The event that I will refer to in subsequent chapters as Hemingway's primal trauma or traumatic injury occurred less than ten days after he arrived at the Piave front. On July 8, 1918, Hemingway was hit by a trench mortar shell while he was distributing mail, chocolate, and tobacco as a bicycle rider for the Red Cross Rolling Canteen Service.¹⁵ The Hemingways learned of their son's injury in a letter Ted Brumback wrote from the hospital in Milan. In his missive, Brumback outlined the circumstances of the trench mortar hit and described the true extent of Hemingway's wounds:

Although some two hundred pieces of shell were lodged in him, none of them are above the hip joint. Only a few of these pieces were large enough to cut deep, the most serious of these being two in the knee and two in the right foot. The doctor says there will be no trouble about these wounds healing and that Ernest will regain entire use of both legs.¹⁶

At the conclusion of Brumback's letter, Hemingway added a postscript reassuring the family that he was all right.

It was not until late September of 1918 that Hemingway wrote about the event himself. According to Hemingway, it was "the longest letter [he had] ever written to anyone and it says the least."¹⁷ The experiential lapse between his injury and his account aligns itself with Caruth's theoretical model of latency in the traumatic experience. Furthermore, his long letter, which is a masterpiece of avoidance, supports Herman's trauma dialectic and Caruth's will to deny/will to proclaim duality of traumatic recovery. In his letter, Hemingway began by offering a commentary on his wartime experience to date: "You know they say there isn't anything funny about this war, and there isn't. I wouldn't say this was hell... but there have been about eight times when I would have welcomed hell,

just on a chance that it couldn't come up to the phase of war I was experiencing."¹⁸ He proceeded to describe the pain he felt in the immediate aftermath of the explosion and his external sensations on his trek to the hospital and during his recovery there.

With the exception of his opening revelation that "there isn't anything funny about this war," Hemingway does not offer any acknowledgement of his emotional and psychological state in the remainder of the letter. One can suppose that Hemingway is aware of this deficit, and calls his family's attention to this lack when he concludes that it "says the least." From a literary vantage point, however, what Hemingway does not say provides the basis for his ethos of fiction for the majority of his career as a writer. In his later work, Hemingway noted, "If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them."¹⁹ Most critics agree that this Hemingway modus operandi, termed the "Iceberg Principle," manifests itself in all of his work. What is missing here, what the writer does not know, is how he can understand what happened at Piave and assimilate it into the psyche. Time and space, however, allow Hemingway to understand what his personal war experience meant to him and provides him with the tools to write eloquently, if sparingly, of it in his later fiction. What is least understood by critics, however, is the way that his process of assimilation begins in the fiction he writes during his next life crisis—the peacetime dissolution of his first marriage.

The more predictable psychological consequence surfaced years before Hemingway could begin to approach his primal trauma through his fiction. Upon his return to Oak Park in January of 1918, Marcelline makes note of how greatly the war experience had changed her brother: “But Ernest wasn’t the same old friend and playmate I had known. Though much less than a year had passed since he had gone to Europe—and only a year and a half since we graduated from high school together—a lifetime of new experiences... had crowded into Ernest’s life.”²⁰ Marcelline emphasizes the fact that Hemingway consistently focused his energies in an outward fashion after returning stateside. He would dress up in his fine Italian uniform and walk around Oak Park, greeting old friends and well-wishers. Shortly after his return, he began to speak about what the war was generally like to various organizations around town.²¹ Yet, she indicates “in between these extrovert activities, Ernie had quiet, almost depressed intervals when he retired to his room away from the well-wishers and curiosity seekers.”²² It is during one of those quieter times that Marcelline remembers her brother turning to alcohol for comfort—what Herman would describe as a symptomatic behavior of constriction in the process of traumatic recovery.

Hemingway began his authorial career in earnest after he learned Agnes von Kurowsky, the nurse with whom he fell in love while recovering at the hospital in Milan would not be coming to America to marry Hemingway, but would instead marry the Italian Major she became enamored with after Hemingway returned stateside.²³ Though initially deeply hurt, Hemingway soon rationalized

his way out of his heartbreak: while he pitied Agnes, he was ready to move on.²⁴ After a summer of living on the edge in Petoskey during 1920, Hemingway moved to the Chicago apartment of his friend Kenley (Y.K.) Smith in hopes of finding a job.²⁵ Smith's sister Katy had also invited a friend to stay in Chicago, Hadley Richardson. Hadley stayed for three weeks, and at the conclusion of her visit, she struck up a correspondence with Hemingway whom she had met and gotten along with well during her time in the city.²⁶ The correspondence evolved into a courtship, and Hemingway and Hadley were eventually married on September 3, 1921.²⁷

The couple moved to Paris in December 1921 with plans to stay as long as they could on Hadley's trust fund and any payment Hemingway could receive for feature pieces commissioned by the *Toronto Star*.²⁸ As Baker points out, however, this uncertain lifestyle opened up broader possibilities: "For the first time since the winter in Petoskey, he was free to write as he chose. He was determined to begin afresh with brand-new standards of truth and simplicity. 'All you have to do is write one true sentence,' he told himself."²⁹ Though he submitted an average of two articles per week to the *Toronto Star*,³⁰ Hemingway's true focus remained on writing "the truest sentence that you know."³¹ A sentence, Baker points out, which "must deal with something he knew from personal experience."³² While it is clear Hemingway's experiences at the Italian front provided him with a physical manifestation of "hurting like hell," the emotional and psychological traumas he would endure in Paris would prime

him to “write seriously,” and possibly give him more appropriate fodder for the truest sentences that he could write.

For three years, Hemingway worked to compile enough true sentences to gather together a book. The result of his efforts was the April 1924 publication of 170 copies of *in our time* by Three Mountains Press in Europe. Boni & Liveright offered to publish the collection, and in October 1925, 1,400 copies of Hemingway’s first book under American copyright reached the public.³³ It is notable that Hemingway was urged by Liveright to change out a few stories, which were too “inaccrochable” or “dirty” for American readers, i.e. “Up in Michigan.”³⁴ The reaction of his parents to their son’s first book is indicative of its potential reception: “They had ordered ten copies of the Three Mountains Press limited edition of *in our time*, then reportedly mailed the ‘filth’ back to the publisher.”³⁵ Marcelline notes that her parents were “shocked and horrified at some of the contents,”³⁶ which hit too close to home and caused a temporary estrangement between Hemingway in Europe and his parents in Oak Park.

While Hemingway was hard at work on the stories for *In Our Time* and later, the text of *The Sun Also Rises*, he and Hadley maintained a full social calendar throughout Europe. In March 1925, while at a party with Hadley, Harold Loeb and Kitty Cannell introduced the Hemingways to two American sisters: Pauline and Jinny Pfeiffer.³⁷ Though he claimed to prefer Jinny’s company, Hadley and Pauline became fast friends, and Pauline soon accompanied the Hemingway’s to social events around Paris and the surrounding country.³⁸ Pauline spent Christmas of 1925 with the couple and Bumby (who was born in

October 1923) in Austria, and began spending more frequent time alone with Ernest in the spring of 1926.³⁹ Their time together was not all play, however; employed by *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*, Pauline helped Hemingway negotiate the publishing process. As Leff indicates in his text *Hemingway and His Conspirators*, “Hadley would soon detect that his interest was not in publishing alone. The attraction to Pauline was not hard to fathom... She was a playful kitten with an assurance born of knowledge and privilege... He loved Pauline because he loved Pauline, but... her confidence and smart-set connections may have been part of what he loved.”⁴⁰

Though Hemingway was bold in the subjects and style of his writing, Leff and Baker both point out that he respected certain “Oak Park taboos”⁴¹ in his private life, and adultery happened to be one of those very taboos. On August 12, 1926, Hemingway and Hadley took up separate Paris homes. During the separation, decreed by Hadley, “Ernest had said perfectly calmly and not bluffingly and during one of the good times that unless he could resolve the matter of Hadley and Pauline, he ‘would kill [him]self because that would mean it wasn’t going to clear up.’”⁴² Evidently, he overcame his fear of another Oak Park taboo—or the taboo of suicide was worse than the taboo of divorce—and Hemingway filed for divorce four months later. The next month, he met up with Pauline in Cherbourg, and the divorce was final on April 14, 1927. Ever a man of action, Hemingway married Pauline in Paris May 10, 1927.⁴³ His parents were not invited to either the Catholic or the civil ceremony: “Ernest knew they frowned on divorce, so he planned to convey the news of the marriage later.”⁴⁴

Throughout the affair and subsequent divorce and second marriage, Hemingway returned to the character of Nick Adams—the character he had created as the principle thread of continuity for *In Our Time*. The anxiety of disappointing his own moral standards with which he grew up, the dissolution of his marriage to Hadley, the breaking apart his family, and of jumping headfirst into a new marriage was a traumatic experience for Ernest. While it lacked the physicality of the visible wounds and lacerations of his primal trauma at Piave, the dissolution of Hemingway's marriage proved to be a highly emotional and pivotal experience in his career. This was the experience that gave him the necessary maturity and perspective on his primal trauma to begin his recovery process. After all, if Hemingway could endure the Piave front, he could endure a breach of Oak Park social mores. He began writing more stories about the hero who closely resembled him, Nick, indicating that writing about this character was a mechanism he could use to cope with and escape from this secondary traumatic experience while writing overtly about his primal trauma. In October of 1927, Scribner's published *Men Without Women*, which contained five more Nick stories.⁴⁵ It would appear that life was looking up and seemingly in order for Hemingway at this juncture.

At personal peace, Hemingway began work on the novel that would firmly establish his place in American fiction: *A Farewell to Arms*. While at work on the text of his second novel, Hemingway traveled to America to meet Pauline's family. His second son, Patrick was born in June 1928. By that time, he had nearly 400 pages of the novel complete, and he had begun a careful

reconciliation with his parents.⁴⁶ On December 6, 1928, however, any semblance of peace was temporarily shattered. Hemingway's father shot himself after his battle with diabetes indicated he might lose his foot.^{47, 48} In September 1929, Scribner's published *A Farewell to Arms*, and Hemingway no longer had to worry about his acceptance as a serious American author and literary personality. It would seem that working through his traumatic experiences by writing the Nick stories enabled him to create his first masterpiece. He returned to Nick one last time after his father's death, and with the October 1933 publication of *Winner Take Nothing* (which contains three Nick stories), all 15 Nick Adams stories Hemingway wished to have published during his lifetime were in print.

In the next chapter, I will set up the chronologies of publication, the narrative order of Nick's life, and the chronology of Hemingway's composition of the Nick Adams stories in order to set up the path through Hemingway's recovery from both his primal and secondary traumatic experiences. Detailing Nick's avoidance of his traumatic experience in the earliest of these stories opened up Hemingway's ability to write directly and in a sustained fashion about his trauma for the first time in his career. Rather than talking around traumatic injury in his second novel, Hemingway begins to take the advice he dispensed in his 1934 letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald. Instead of "cheating" with Frederic Henry's wound in *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway remains faithful, graphically so, in his narrative description of the explosion of the trench mortar shell that damages Frederic Henry's leg. As we will see in Chapter Three, Hemingway embarked on his

narrative treatment of Nick's life and time in war in a distinctively different manner.

¹ From Hemingway, Ernest. *Selected Letters*. 408. Rpt. in Hemingway, Ernest. *Ernest Hemingway on Writing*. Ed. Larry W. Phillips. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984. 20.

² Hemingway's stature not only as an author, but also as an American icon, has secured him ample space on bookshelves both through his own work and through the scores of biographies and criticism his life and work have inspired. Considered one of the most comprehensive looks (and the one with the most overriding tones of machismo male chauvinism) inside the life of Ernest Hemingway, Carlos Baker's nearly 700-page biography, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*, first published in 1969, is an excellent place to begin a study of Hemingway's life.

³ After all, Hemingway continued to demonstrate a pattern of behavior throughout his life indicative of one suffering from the traumatic neurosis as defined by Freud and Herman: multiple marriages, excessive drinking, reckless behavior, and—ultimately—suicide.

⁴ Baker, Carlos. *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969. 10

⁵ Hemingway's older sister, Marcelline, kept a record of fifty years of her correspondence with Ernest. Her text, *At the Hemingways*, is an excellent source of primary material about Ernest's childhood and family experiences. It is a particularly notable source since Grace Hall Hemingway was set on "twinning" her oldest two children for years. Going beyond encouraging them to spend all their time together, she went to great lengths to dress them alike – in popular girl's clothing of the time. One may infer that perhaps this invested Hemingway with such strong desires to overtly prove his manhood later on in life.

⁶ Hemingway, Marcelline. *At the Hemingways: With Fifty Years of Correspondence Between Ernest and Marcelline Hemingway*. Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1998. 156.

⁷ Baker, 36.

⁸ Marcelline Hemingway, 157.

⁹ Marcelline Hemingway, 157.

¹⁰ Baker, 38.

¹¹ Baker, 40.

¹² Baker, 42.

¹³ Baker, 43.

¹⁴ Duffy, Michael. "Primary Documents: Henri Kervarec on the Battle of the Piave River, 15-22 June 1918." 2004. *Source Records of the Great War, Vol. VI*, ed. Charles F. Horne, *National Alumni 1923*. Rpt. in *FirstWorldWar.com: The War to End All Wars* <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/piave_kervarec.htm>. 21 May 2008.

¹⁵ Marcelline Hemingway, 161.

¹⁶ Marcelline Hemingway, 161.

¹⁷ Marcelline Hemingway, 169.

¹⁸ Marcelline Hemingway, 165-6.

¹⁹ From Hemingway, Ernest. *Death in the Afternoon*. 192. Rpt. in *Ernest Hemingway on Writing*. 77.

²⁰ Marcelline Hemingway, 178.

²¹ Marcelline Hemingway, 179.

²² Marcelline Hemingway, 183.

²³ Marcelline Hemingway, 188.

²⁴ Baker, 61.

²⁵ Baker, 74.

²⁶ Baker, 76.

²⁷ Baker, 80.

²⁸ Marcelline Hemingway, 212.

²⁹ Baker, 84.

³⁰ Baker, 88.

³¹ Baker, 84.

³² Baker, 84.

³³ Leff, Leonard J. *Hemingway and His Conspirators: Hollywood, Scribners, and the Making of American Celebrity Culture*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1997. 22.

³⁴ The content of this story, which overtly depicts two of the Hemingway's family friends in a situation of less than savory morality, is further discussed in the following chapter.

³⁵ Leff, 17.

³⁶ Marcelline Hemingway, 219.

³⁷ Leff, 18.

³⁸ Leff, 23.

³⁹ *Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Education Center*. Arkansas State University. 6 Oct. 2007 <<http://hemingway.astate.edu/timeline.html>>.

⁴⁰ Leff, 33.

⁴¹ Leff, 26.

⁴² Leff, 93.

⁴³ *Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Education Center*.

⁴⁴ Leff, 68.

⁴⁵ Leff, 66.

⁴⁶ *Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Education Center*.

⁴⁷ Marcelline Hemingway, 231.

⁴⁸ It is interesting that Marcelline, like her brother, chooses only to focus on the physical manifestations of the Doctor's diabetes rather than his very real mental illness. While other critics such as Leff, Tetlow, Baker, et al focus on Clarence (Ed) Hemingway's paranoia and depression, Marcelline only makes mention of his diabetes.