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Hemingway and the Search for Meaning in Life

David M. Strain
Ouachita Baptist University

HEMINGWAY

AND

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING IN LIFE

David M. Strain

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Mrs. Betty McCommas
Dr. Johnny Wink
Mr. Lavell Cole
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It is difficult to define the precise nature of this study. Strictly speaking , it is not a literary study, for the questions which it asks and the topics which it addresses go beyond the traditional boundaries of literary criticism. Likewise, it is not a philosophical study, for it transcends that discipline as well. Neither is it an eclectic combination of the two. This paper is a part of a deeply personal self-examination which I have undergone over the last three years. As I have tried to determine the ways in which Hemingway characters find meaning in life, I have also had to come to grips with that question in my own life. The roots of this study lie deep within me, and its branches reach out in all directions.

The search for meaning in life is a very painful process through which all must pass if they are ever to distill anything solid, genuine and valid from their lives. Each of us sets out on this search in one way or another. When we awaken in the morning and demand of ourselves a justification for getting out of bed, we are searching for meaning in life. When we pause momentarily in the midst of our daily chaos and confusion to ask "Why?," then, too, we are questing after meaning. When we gaze painfully into the gray boredom of our lives, when we face the naked oblivion of the night and try to give some real significance to the sound and fury of our day, then our search is at its height.

Matthew Arnold, in his essay "Literature and Science," concluded that the reason literature, in its broadest sense, deserves a high place in modern education is that it helps man to relate his sense of knowledge and his sense of beauty to his sense of conduct--that literature helps man to live his life more fully and more richly. Grounding my work on this premise, I have chosen to examine the ways in which some of the characters of Ernest Hemingway's writings try to find meaning in life. Perhaps as much as any other twentieth century American author, Hemingway was concerned with the quest after meaning. His characters are involved in the same painful struggles which we face. The questions which they ask, the conflicts which they face, the behavior patterns which they act out--all these are strangely and perhaps disturbingly familiar to us. Hemingway does, indeed, know the heart and soul of modern man.

In analyzing the ways in which Hemingway treats the search for meaning in life, I have examined the major characters in five of his novels: Jake Barnes of The Sun Also Rises; Frederic Henry of A Farewell to Arms; Robert Jordan of For Whom the Bell Tolls; Santiago, the fisherman, of The Old Man and the Sea; and, finally, Harry Morgan of To Have and Have Not. In looking at each of these characters, I have tried very carefully to discern their values, their commitments, their codes of behavior, and their answers--however tentative--to the questions of life. This has meant doing more than analyzing plots, tracing themes, and examining character developments; it has meant trying to live life in the shoes of these characters. It has meant lying awake in a Paris

flat, crying, trying to make sense out of the absurdity of life. It has meant walking out into the oblivious rain after the deaths of my wife and newborn son. It has meant living an entire lifetime in three days in the Spanish mountains with a band of guerrilla fighters. It has meant catching an eighteen foot marlin and watching helplessly as sharks reduce it to a skeleton before my eyes. And it has meant lying with a bullet in my gut in a rented boat alongside the dead bodies of three Cuban revolutionaries in a hopeless attempt just to feed my wife and family.

Each of these five characters is searching after meaning in life. But before we can begin to consider the ways in which they are searching, we must first address the question of just what we mean by meaning in life. The answer to that question, of course, is as different as the individuals to whom it is addressed. What is meaningful and fulfilling for one person may be utterly pointless and insignificant to another. Yet in spite of the highly individual nature of this concept, there are some general comments which we can make about meaning and purpose which will help us toward a definition. First of all, meaning in life generally denotes some intrinsic value or force which integrates all other values and forces within an individual. This intrinsic value may have its base in the external world--in family, friends, love relationships--yet it is the external dimension acting upon that which is internal that generates this sustaining, integrating, enlivening force which animates our nature. For some the question of meaning and purpose is not a problem; for others it can become an

obsession. One fact is clear: no human being can long exist without at least some basic sense of purpose. It may be merely a hope that life will become meaningful in the future, it may be nothing more that a feeling of the dignity of living bravely in the face of absurdity, but if a person is to live in any sense other than the biological, he must feel in his soul that his life is significant in some way.

In considering the search for meaning in life in the five characters mentioned above, it is important to draw a distinction between those who have found this sense of meaning and purpose and those who are still searching. Most of Hemingway's characters are of the latter sort--seekers for a reason for being. They wander aimlessly around the world; they drink heavily; they seek after all forms of danger and excitement--bullfights, wars, big-game hunts--trying to mask their inner emptiness. These seekers belong to a sort of eternal "lost generation" which transcends time, space, and culture. Nevertheless, there are characters who do manage to find a purpose for their existence. Hemingway makes it clear that these individuals are rare indeed, and that the meaning which they find in their lives is fleeting, but it is meaning nonetheless. Finally, there are the Hemingway heroes--those men and women who accept the fact that life is absurd yet courageously refuse to let that destroy them--those who stand at the edge of the abyss, looking calmly over the edge into nothingness, yet refuse to be consumed by that nothingness. These individuals are the rarest of all, for they have meaning by sheer force of will. The universe may well be absurd, but that does not trouble them; their purpose in life is to live bravely in the face of the absurdity.

Jake Barnes

Jake Barnes is the most obvious seeker considered in this study. His life has no focus. His existence is little more than an endless round of empty days and emptier nights. He does not have the sort of personal values system which integrates and unifies the disparate elements of his life. Nor does he have the existential commitment to a code of conduct which would permit him to live at peace without such a value system. His life isboth boring and intolerable. He has worked out certain ways to help him cope temporarily with the meaninglessness of his life, yet it is always lurking nearby. Jake Barnes works, he drinks, he goes to parties, yet he never manages to make his life completely worth living. Reflecting on his life and the living of it, Jake Barnes says:

> I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it. Maybe if you found out how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about.[1]

Jake Barnes finds no meaning in female relationships. Sexually impotent from a wound he received as an aviator during World War I, Jake suffers from an even deeper emotional impotence. He feels, and he feels deeply, yet he seems incapable of expressing his deepest feelings to others. Jake's relationship with Brett Ashley seems to be the most nearly meaningful of any in the novel. In reality, however, this relationship is little more than a hollow shell. Jake and Brett need each other desperately. They long to be able to have a meaningful relationship with one another. Yet the sort of intimacy

which that kind of love relationship implies is impossible for them both physically and emotionally. They try to relate to one another, but they always wind up giving up in frustration. The tragedy of their relationship is poignantly depicted in the closing episode of The Sun Also Rises:

> Down-stairs we came out through the first-floor dining-room to the street. A waiter went for a taxi. It was hot and bright. Up the street was a little square with trees and grass where there were taxis parked. A taxi came up the street, the waiter hanging out at the side. I tipped him and told the driver where to drive, and got in beside Brett. The driver started up the street. I settled back. Brett moved close to me. We sat close to each other. I put my arm around her and she rested against me comfortably. It was very hot and bright, and the houses looked sharply white. We turned out onto the Gran Via.
>
> "Oh, Jake," Brett said, "we could have had such a damned good time together."
>
> Ahead was a mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic. He raised his baton. The car slowed suddenly pressing Brett against me.
>
> "Yes." I said. "Isn't it pretty to think so."[2]

Night is a horror for Jake Barnes. He says of night, "It is awfully easy to be hard-boiled about everything in the daytime, but at night it is another thing."[3] During the daytime, he can mask life's absurdity by staying active. At night, however, the facades are torn away, and he must face alone the hollow emptiness of his existence. He cannot sleep. The bitter spectre of his impotence haunts him. His relationship with Brett eats away at his heart. He questions the reason for his existence and finds no answers.

> I never used to realize it, I guess. I try and play it along and just not make trouble for people. Probably I never would have had any trouble if I hadn't run into Brett when they shipped me to England. I suppose she only wanted what she couldn't have. Well, people were that way. To hell with people. The Catholic Church had an awfully good way of handling all that. Good advice, anyway. Not to think about it. Oh, it was swell advice. Try and take it sometime. Try and take it.

> I lay awake thinking and my mind jumping around. Then I couldn't keep away from it, and I started to think about Brett and all the rest of it went away. I was thinking about Brett and my mind stopped jumping around and started to go in sort of smooth waves. Then all of a sudden I started to cry. Then after a while it was better and I lay in bed and listened to the heavy trams go by and way down the street, and then I went to sleep.[4]

Hemingway reveals Jake Barnes' inner emptiness through several important themes. He weaves these themes through the novel to illustrate Jake's search for meaning and the failure of that search. The most obvious of these themes is drinking. The characters in The Sun Also Rises consume massive quantities of alcohol. They drink because they are excited. They drink because they are bored. They drink to forget. When all else fails, they drink. Drinking is a means of escape for them--a way to avoid recognizing the pointlessness of their lives.

If ther is a glut of drinking in the novel, one must recognize that there is a conspicuous drouth of talking--or, more precisely, of communicating. The characters in The Sun Also Rises do not communicate with one another. To do so in any meaningful sense, they would have to lower their masks. The pain and risk involved in doing that are simplt too great. Early in the novel, Count Mippipopolus remarks to Brett:

> "You're always drinking, my dear. Why don't you just talk?"
> "I've talked too ruddy much. I've talked myself all out to Jake."
> "I should like to hear you really talk, my dear. When you talk to me you never finish your sentences at all."
> "Leave 'em for you to finish. Let anyone finish them as they like."
> "It is an interesting system." The count reached down and gave the bottles a twirl. "Still I would like to hear you talk some time."

Much of the dialogue in the novel reflects Brett's reluctance to talk

meaningfully. For the characters in this novel, conversation is not an avenue of communication; it is merely another device with which to pass the time. Brett's ringing comment, "Let's not talk. Talking's all bilge," captures the tragic isolation in which these individuals live their lives.

Although Brett and the others find little relief in talking, they seem to find a great deal of it in bathing. Throughout the latter sections of the book, baths and shaves are the orders of the day. On one level, bathing is just another device with which to kill time. Yet on a deeper, more symbolic level, the physical desire to bathe reflects a spiritual desire to be cleansed--to wash away life's clinging absurdity and to find underneath something of pure and genuine meaning. This need for cleansing lies deep in human nature. The idea of a second chance is one which we all welcome. In the face of waste and emptiness, the possibility of a new beginning may well be the only thing which keeps us going.

Ultimately, it is the cleansing theme which gives us some reason to believe that Jake Barnes may be coming to grips with his life. In the final chapter of the novel, after he has parted company with Brett and the others, Jake Barnes goes to San Sebastian to rest and relax. While there, he examines his life and reflects upon his experiences, taking a long and peaceful swim in the Bay of Biscay. Jake emerges from this swim a slightly different man. He seems to enjoy a degree of peace and happiness which he has not yet known. Suddenly a telegram from Brett arrives, and his sense of calm and peace seems to shatter momentarily. However, when they meet again, it seems that Jake really is a different man. He has a degree of

control over his emotions which has not been evidenced before. Whether this control be fleeting of more permanent, it does indicate that Jake Barnes is on his way to learning to live without meaning in the grand tradition of Hemingway heroes. Indeed, he has not yet found out what life was all about, but he is well on his way to finding out how to live in it.

Frederic Henry

Unlike Jake Barnes, Frederic Henry, the hero of A Farewell to Arms, has found something meaningful around which to frame his life. His love for Catherine Barkley is, in a very real sense, his reason for living. This relationship sustains him through his service in the Italian ambulance corps during World War I, and it renews him while he is recovering from a shrapnel wound in a Milan hospital. Ultimately, this relationship becomes his whole life after he makes his famous "separate peace" during the disastrous retreat from Caporetto.

When we first encounter Frederic Henry, he closely resembles most Hemingway characters: he eats well, drinks heavily, works hard, sleeps, and makes love--all in an attempt to fill his life with substitutes for genuine meaning. Then he meets Catherine Barkley. Initially, this relationship means little more to him than any of his previous liasons with women:

> I knew I did not love Catherine Barkley nor had any idea of loving her. This was a game, like bridge, in which you said things instead of playing cards. Like bridge you had to pretend you were playing for money or for some stakes. Nobody had mentioned what the stakes were. It was all right with me.

But Catherine quickly recognizes this game and labels it as such. From this point on, they begin to relate to each other honestly, and out of their honesty comes real love.

Early in the novel, Frederic Henry talks to a priest serving with the ambulance corps about love:

"You understand but you do not love God."
"No."
"You do not love Him at all?" he asked.
"I am afraid of Him in the night sometimes."
"You should love Him."
"I don't love much."
"Yes," he said. "You do. What you tell me about in the nights. That is not love. That is only passion and lust. When you love you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve."
"I don't love."
"You will. I know you will. Then you will be happy."
"I'm happy. I've always been happy."
"It is another thing. You cannot know about it unless you have it."
"Well," I said. "If I ever get it I will tell you."

Near the novel's conclusion, Frederic Henry has a conversation with the aged Count Greffi which demonstrates the transformation of his values which his relationship with Catherine has effected:

"Poor boy. We none of us know about the soul. Are you croyant?
"At night."
Count Greffi smiled and turned the glass with his fingers. "I had expected to become more devout as I grow older but somehow I haven't," he said. "It is a great pity."
"Would you like to liver after death?" I asked and instantly felt a fool to mention death. But he did not mind the word.
"It would depend on the life. This life is very pleasant. I would like to live forever," he smiled. "I very nearly have."
We were sitting in the deep leather chairs, the champagne in the ice-bucket and our glasses on the table between us.
"If you ever live to be as old as I am you will find many things strange."
"You never seem old."
"It is the body that is old. Sometimes I am afraid I will break off a finger as one breaks a stick of chalk. And the spirit is no older and not much wiser."
"You are wise."
"No, that is the great fallacy; the wisdom of old men. They do not grow wise. They grow careful."
"Perhaps that is wisdom."
"It is a very unattractive wisdom. What do you value most?"
"Some one I love."
"With me it is the same. That is not wisdom. Do you value life?"
"Yes."
"So do I. Because it is all I have. And to give birthday parties," he laughed. "You are probably wiser than I am. You do not give birthday parties."
We both drank the wine.
"What do you think of the war really?" I asked.
"I think it is stupid."
"Who will win it?"
"Italy."

"Why?"
"They are a younger nation."
"Do younger nations always win wars?"
"They are apt to for a time."
"Then what happens?"
"They become older nations."
"You said you were not wise."
"Dear boy, that is not wisdom. That is cynicism."
"It sounds very wise to me."
"It's not particularly. I could quote you examples on the other side. But it is not bad. Have we finished the champagne?"
"Almost."
"Should we drink some more? Then I must dress."
"Perhaps we'd better not now."
"You are sure you don't want more?"
"Yes." He stood up.
"I hope you will be very fortunate and very happy and very, very healthy."
"Thank you. And I hope you will live forever."
"Thank you. I have. And if you ever become devout pray for me if I am dead. I am asking several of my friends to do that. I had expected to become devout myself but it has not come." I thought he smiled sadly but I could not tell. He was so old and his face was very wrinkled, so that a smile used so many lines that all gradations were lost.
"I might become very devout," I said. "Anyway, I will pray for you."
"I had always expected to become devout. All my family died very devout. But somehow it does not come."
"It's too early."
"Maybe it is too late." Perhaps I have outlived my religious feeling."
"My own only comes at night."
"Then too you are in love. Do not forget that is a religious feeling."
"You believe so?"
"Of course." He took a step toward the table. "You were very kind to play."
"It was a great pleasure."
"We will walk upstairs together."

Catherine Barkley has become Frederic Henry's religion; in fact, she has very nearly become his life. After his encounter with the battle police during the retreat from Caporetto and his subsequent flight for his life, Frederic Henry makes a separate peace with his enemies.

Anger was washed away in the river along with any obligation. Although that ceased when the carabiniere put his hands on my collar. I would like to have had the uniform off although I did not care much about the outward forms. I had taken off the stars, but that was for convenience. It was no point of honor. I was not against them. I was through. I wished them all the luck. There were the good ones, and the brave ones, and the calm ones,

> and the sensible ones, and they deserved it. But it was not my show any more and I wished this bloody train would get to Mestre and I would eat and stop thinking. I would have to stop.

This separate peace has profound implications for Frederic Henry's search for meaning in life. In breaking with the external world, as represented by the war, he isolates himself in a sort of psychological love grotto with Catherine Barkley. They spend the final third of the novel alone together--if not physically, then certainly emotionally.

> Often a man wished to be alone and a girl wishes to be alone too and if they love each other they are jealous of that in each other, but I can truly say we never felt that. We could feel alone when we were together, alone against the others.

However, as with the occupants of the original love grotto of medieval romance, the others were destined to win. Catherine's and Frederic's love for one another was doomed from the beginning, for, according to Hemingway's vision of life, nothing truly meaningful can long endure.

> If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry.

Hemingway articulates this foreshadowing of doom through the rain theme which pervades this novel. Someone once remarked that A Farewell to Arms is the wettest book in American literature. At almost every major point in its plot, during almost every crisis which Catherine and Frederic face, it is raining. Catherine reveals the significance of this rain symbolism in a conversation with Frederic while he is in the hospital in Milan:

> "Listen to it rain."
> "It's raining hard."
> "And you'll always love me, won't you?"
> "Yes."

"And the rain won't make any difference."
"No."
"That's good. Because I'm afraid of the rain."
"Why?" I was sleepy. Outside the rain was falling steadily.
"I don't know, darling. I've always been afraid of the rain."
"I like it."
"I like to walk in it. But it's very hard on loving."
"I'll love you always."
"I'll love you in the rain and in the snow and in the hail and--what else is there?"
"I don't know. I guess I"m sleepy."
"Go to sleep, darling, and I'll love you no matter how it is."
"You're not really afraid of the rain are you?"
"Not when I'm with you."
"Why are you afraid of it?"
"I don't know."
"Tell me."
"Don't make me."
"Tell me."
"No."
"Tell me."
"All right. I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it."
"No."
"And sometimes I see you dead in it."
"That's more likely."
"No, it's not, darling. Because I can keep you safe. I know I can. But nobody can help themselves."
"Please stop it. I don't want you to get Scotch and crazy tonight. We won't be together much longer."
"No, but I am Scotch and crazy. But I'll stop it. It's all nonsense."
"Yes it's all nonsense."
"It's all nonsense. It's only nonsense. I'm not afraid of the rain. I'm not afraid of the rain. Oh, oh, God, I wish I wasn't." She was crying. I comforted her and she stopped crying. But outside it kept on raining.

Ultimately, Frederic's cynical certainty of being killed and Catherine's fear of the rain come to a mutual fruition in Catherine's death during childbirth.

I sat down on the chair in front of a table where there were nurses' reports hung on clips at the side and looked out of the window. I could see nothing but the dark and the rain falling across the light from the window. So that was it. The baby was dead. That was why the doctor looked so tired. But why had they acted the way they did in the room with him? They supposed he would come around and start breathing probably. I had no religion but I knew he ought to have been baptized. But what if he never breathed

> at all. He hadn't. He had never been alive. Except in Catherine. I'd felt him kick there often enough. But I hadn't for a week. Maybe he was choked all the time. Poor little kid. I wished the hell I'd been choked like that. No I didn't. Still there would not be all this dying to go through. Now Catherine would die. That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you. Or they killed you gratuitously like Aymo. Or gave you the syphilis like Rinaldi. But they killed you in the end. You could count on that. Stay around and they would kill you.

Whether Frederic Henry finds a purpose for his life after Catherine's death is not resolved. The meaning which he had found in her had crumbled, ironically as a result of the very love which had created it. As he looks on her body in the novel's closing scene, she is nothing more to him than a statue--a shell of the woman who had given focus and direction to his life. Finally, in one of the most famous scenes in American literature, Frederic Henry leaves the hospital and walks back toward the hotel in the rain.

Robert Jordan

Robert Jordan's search for meaning is different from those of Jake Barnes and Frederic Henry in several respects. Hemingway introduces his hero of For Whom the Bell Tolls as a cold, hard mercenary soldier, fighting for the loyalists in the Spanish Civil War. When we first encounter him, making his way behind fascist lines, Robert Jordan strikes us as a man of strict commitment to duty and discipline. As we discover more about him, we find that he is a dedicated communist whose political ideals have led him away from a professorship in Spanish at the University of Montana and into the mountains of the Spanish Sierra de Gredos to fight for Marxism with a guerrilla band. It is this cold, single-minded dedication which makes Robert Jordan a somewhat chilling character. Reflecting upon his mission to explode a fascist-held bridge, Robert Jordan gives us a taste of this resolute commitment to a cause:

> Neither you or this old man is anything. You are instruments to do your duty. These are necessary orders that are no fault of yours and there is a bridge and that bridge can be the point on which the future of the human race can turn. As it can turn on everything that happens in this war. You have only one thing to do and you must do it.

It soon becomes evident, however, that Robert Jordan is merely playing a role. As Hemingway slowly reveals more about his character, we find that Robert Jordan's commitment to the Loyalist cause stems more from a desire to find meaning in his own life than from any ideological commitment to communism. Marxist doctrine is little more than a pseudo-religious creed to which he has temporarily committed

himself. The religious nature of this commitment unfolds in several ways. Pilar, the wife of guerrilla leader Pablo and herself a major character in the novel, notes this: "Thou art very religious about thy politics." Even Robert Jordan himself seems to recognize the religious nature of his commitment:

> At one time he had thought that Gaylord's had been bad for him. It was the opposite of the puritanical, religious communism of Velazquez 63, the Madrid palace that had been turned into the International Brigade headquarters in the capital. At Velazquez 63 it was like being a member of a religious order--and Gaylord's was a long way away from the feeling you had at the headquarters of the Fifth Regiment before it had been broken up into the brigades of the new army.
>
> At either of those places you felt that you were taking part in a crusade. That was the only word for it although it was a word that had been so worn and so abused that it no longer gave its true meaning. You felt, in spite of all bureaucracy and inefficiency and party strife something that was like the feeling you expected to have and did not have when you made your first communion. It was a feeling of consecration to a duty toward all of the oppressed of the world which would be as difficult and embarrassing to speak about as religious experience and yet it was as authentic a the feeling you had when you heard Bach, or stood in Chartres Cathederal or the Cathedral at León and saw the light coming through the great windows; or when you saw Mantegna and Greco and Brueghel in the Prado. It gave you a part in something that you could believe in wholly and completely and in which you felt an absolute brotherhood with the others who were engaged in it. It was something that you had never known before but that you had experienced now and you gave such importance to it and the reasons for it that your own death seemed of complete unimportance; only a thing to be avoided because it would interfere with the performance of your duty. But the best thing was that there was something you could do about this feeling and the necessity too. You could fight.
>
> SO you fought, he thought. And in the fighting soon there was no purity of feeling for those who survived the fighting and were good at it. Not after the first six months.

Ironically, Robert Jordan's zealous dedication to communism is ultimately nothing more than the same sort of religious opiate which Marx condemned. It is an external code of behavior and belief through which he can forget the essential meaninglessness of his life.

Although For Whom the Bell Tolls is Hemingway's longest novel, all its action takes place in less than three days. Three years earlier, in a short story entitled "The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber," Hemingway first explored the notion of living one's entire life in a very short period of time. For Francis Macomber, it was a matter of hours after shooting a lion; for Robert Jordan, it is the three days he spends in the Sierra de Gredos. This idea becomes a major theme in the novel. The message is clear: while among this "chicken crut" band of guerrillas, Robert Jordan finds genuine meaning in life. Although this meaningful life is relatively short, the important thing is that he has found it at all--a rare feat in Hemingway's world.

> Maybe that is my life and instead of it being threescore years and ten it is forty-eight hours or just threescore hours and ten or twelve rather. Twenty-four hours in a day would be threescore and twelve for the three full days.
>
> I suppose it is possible to live as full a life in seventy hours as in seventy years; granted that your life has been full up to the time that the seventy hours start and that you have reached a certain age.

> What a business. You go along your whole life and they seem as though they mean something and they always end up not meaning anythingn. There was never any of what this is. You think that is one thing that you will never have. And then, on a lousy snow like this, co-ordinating two chicken crut guerrilla bands to help you blow a bridge under impossible conditions, to abort a counter-offensive that will probably already be started, you run into a girl like this Maria. Sure. That is what you would do. You ran into her rather late, that was all.

> You ask for the impossible. You ask for the ruday impossible. So if you love this girl as much as you say you do, you had better love her very hard and make up in intensity what the relation will lack in duration and in continuity.

Maria is the catalyst for a transformation in Robert Jordan. It is she who initiates a process which eventually dissolves the revolutionary facade behind which he is hiding. Talking with a Soviet officer in the Spanish army before he leaves on his mission, Robert Jordan says emphatically, "No. There is no time for girls." He has never found

genuine significance in female relationships. For him, sexual intercourse has never been more than a physical act. All that changes violently when Maria steps into his life. Discussing this with Pilar, Robert Jordan reveals this change:

> "And women?"
> "I like them very much, but I have not given them much importance."
> "You do not care for them?"
> "Yes. But I have not found one that moved me as they say they should move you."
> "I think you lie."
> "Maybe a little."
> "But you care for Maria."
> "Yes. Suddenly and very much."

For the first time in his life, Robert Jordan has experienced genuine love. His relationship with Maria has brought an integrating force to his life that he had never before thought possible.

> Don't ever kid yourself about loving some one. It is just that most people are never lucky enough to have it. You never had it before and now you have it. What you have with Maria, whether it lasts just through today and a part of tomorrow, or whether it lasts for a long life is the most important thing that can happen to a human being. There will always be people who say it does not exist because they cannot have it. But I tell you it is true and that you have it and that you are lucky even if you die tomorrow.

Robert Jordan's transformation is not complete and immediate, however. He continues to struggle between the cold, disciplined life which he had formerly led and the new life he has found since coming to the Gredos. This struggle can be seen in terms of a conflict between two different roles, Robert Jordan the Thinker and Robert Jordan the Man of Action. No matter how he has changed, Robert Jordan still has a mission to accomplish. If he is to explode the bridge successfully and escape with the guerrillas, he must draw upon all the resources of the Man of Action. "My mind is in suspension until we win this war," he says at one point in the novel. The cold, sober

demands of the Man of Action are in direct conflict with the soft, tender feelings of the Thinker. Throughout the latter portion of the novel, Robert Jordan chides himself with expressions like, "Don't think," "Turn the thinking off now," "Now stop thinking that sort of thing," "If you keep on thinking like that you'll be dead." The Thinker has not yet gotten the upper hand in Robert Jordan's mind, though, as the following passage clearly indicates. Soon after having made love to Maria in one of the most beautiful scenes of the novel, Robert Jordan awakes to find a fascist cavalryman riding through the forest. Suddenly, Robert Jordan returns to his role as Man of Action. As he coldly and dispassionately shoots the soldier, we realize that, even as she lies beside him, Maria no longer has a place in his life.

> "Say that you love me."
> "No. Not now."
> "Not love me now?"
> "Déjamos. Get thee back. One does not do that and love all at the same moment."
>
> As he knelt to put on his rope-soled shoes, Robert Jordan could feel Maria against his knees, dressing herself under the robe. She had no place in his life now.

Although Robert Jordan's sense of duty remains strong, the ends to which it is directed--or, rather, the reason that it is directed toward those ends--alters radically. Initially an idealist, Robert Jordan soon admits to himself that he is not fighting for a revolutionary political cause.

> What were his politics then? He had none now, he told himself. But do not tell any one else that, he thought. Don't ever admit that. And what are you going to do afterwards? I am going back and earn my living teaching Spanish as before, and I am going to write a true book. I'll bet, he said. I'll bet that will be easy.

Ultimately, his new-found pragmatism turns into something which is almost romantic. As he lives, works, and fights with that band of guerrillas,

he begins to love them. In them he finds meaning in life--a reason for existence. From them he has learned more about living than he had in all the rest of his life.

> He knew he himself was nothing, and he knew death was nothing. He knew that truly, as truly as he knew anything. In the last few days he had learned that he himself, with another person, could be everything. But inside himself he knew that this was the exception.
>
> How little we know of what there is to know. I wish that I were going to live a long time instead of going to die today because I have learned much about life in these four days; more, I think, than in all the other time.
>
> I have been all my life in these hills since I have been here. Anselmo is my oldest friend. I know him better than I know Charles, than I know Chub, than I know Guy, than I know Mike, and I know them well. Agustin, with his vile mouth, is my brother, and I never had a brother. Maria is my true love and my wife. I never had a true love. She is also my sister, and I never had a sister. I hate to leave a thing that is so good.

The romantic element in Robert Jordan is not often noted. Wounded in the escape from the bridge, he lies beside the road waiting for a fascist patrol, hoping to strike one last blow for the causes in which he now believes. In these last moments, the thinker and the Man of Action are united. The old zeal and discipline of the latter is evident:

> And if you wait and hold them up even a little while or just get the officer that may make all the difference. One thing well done can make--

Yet the new-found sense of purpose of the former is with him also:

> I have fought for what I believed in for a year now. If we win here we will win everywhere. The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for and I hate very much to leave it. And you had a lot of luck, he told himself, to have had such a good life. You've had just as good a life as grandfather's though not as long. You've had as good a life as any one because of these last days. You do not want to complain when you have been so lucky. I wish there was some way to pass on what I've learned, though. Christ, I was learning fast there at the end.

Robert Jordan's final gesture of killing the fascist patrol leader is much more than merely an existential shaking of the fist in the face of nothingness. Robert Jordan no longer believes in nothingness. In his three days in ten Gredos, he has found a very real and genuine something, and it is in service to that something that he sacrifices his life.

Santiago

The Old Man and the Sea is a novel far different from any which Hemingway had previously written. The plot is uncomplicated, the characters are few. The action takes place almost exclusively in a small boat on the open sea. Even the style is unusually simple. Everything about the novel suggests that its message is swimming somewhere deep below the surface, waiting for the reader to catch hold of it. For the purposes of this study, The Old Man and the Sea will be read as an allegory of man's struggle for meaning in life. Santiago's fight to catch and land a marlin powerfully symbolizes the struggles which we each face in finding meaning and purpose. Santiago thus becomes a sort of modern-day Everyman, facing, incidentally, the same eternal confrontation as his medieval namesake.

Santiago's life is his fishing. Stripped bare of superficiality and falsehood, he is simple enough to find meaning in the sheer act of living--of being in harmony with the world around him. For Santiago, fishing is more than an occupation, it is "that which I was born for." His life and his work are inseparable. That explains why, although he is old and unlucky--he has not caught a fish in eighty-four days--his eyes are still "confident and undefeated." To admit defeat is to die, and Santiago is far from ready for that.

On the eighty-fifth day, Santiago sets out once again with his usual hope and confidence. "Only I have no luck any more," he reflects. "But who knows? Maybe today. Every day is a new day. It is better to be

lucky. But I would rather be exact. Then when luck comes you are ready." On this eighty-fifth day, Santiago fishes farther out to sea than usual, beyond the area in which others fish. His voyage becomes an epic journey--a journey into the realms of which the gods are jealous. In this Prometnean realm, Santiago hooks a truly epic fish. "There has never been such a fish" remarks one of the natives upon seeing its skeleton later. So begins the fight which for Hemingway symbolized man's struggle for meaning. Santiago grapples with the fish courageously. "'Fish,' he said softly, aloud, "I'll stay with you until I am dead.'" He fights on bravely through pain, thirst, and hunger, for this struggle involves more than catching a fish--it is the purpose for his existence.

> ...I will show him what a man can do and what a man endures.
> "I told the boy I was a strange old man," he said. "Now is when I must prove it."
> The thousand times that he had proved it meant nothing. Now he was proving it again. Each time was a new time and he never thought about the past when he was doing it.

Weary, near delirium at times, he continues to fight on:

> It was on the third turn that he saw the fish first....
> The old man was sweating now but from something besides the sun. On each placid turn the fish made he was gaining line and he was sure that in two turns more he would have a chance to get the harpoon in....
> "Be calm and strong, old man," he said....
> "Fish," the old man said. "Fish, you are going to have to die anyway. Do you have to kill me too?"...
> You are killing me, fish, the old man thought. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother. Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who....
> Twice more it was the same on the turns.
> I do not know, the old man thought. He had been on the point of feeling himself go each time. I do not know. But I will try once more.
> He tried it once more and he felt himself going when he turned the fish. The fish righted himself and swam off again slowly with the great tail weaving in the air.
> I'll try it again, the old man promised, although his hands wer mushy now and he could see well only in flashes.
> He tried it again and it was the same. So he thought, and he felt himself going before he started; I will try it once again.

Finally, after this monumental contest, Santiago lands his fish and seems to have won the victory. Within an hour, however, the first shark hits:

> The old man's head was clear and good now and he was full of resolution but he had little hope. It was too good to last, he thought. He took one look at the great fish as he watched the shark close in. It might as well have been a dream, he thought. I cannot keep him from hitting me but maybe I can get him. Dentuso, he thought. Bad luck to your mother.

Realizing the hopelessness of his situation, he nevertheless continues to fight the sharks "without hope but with resolution and complete malignancy."

> Now they have beaten me, he thought. I am too old to club sharks to death. But I will try it as long as I have the oars and the short club and the tiller....
> "Fight them," he said. "I'll fight them until I die."

Although the fish's flesh is entirely eaten away by the sharks, Santiago refuses to admit defeat. He asks himself what beat him, to which he responds triumphantly, "Nothing. I went out too far."

"Man is not made for defeat," Santiago says, in a line reminiscent of Faulkner's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." As he walks back to his hut after returning to port, Santiago undergoes a symbolic crucifixion of defeat, yet he is resurrected in quiet triumph the following morning as he dreams of the lions. Santiago is a character who has found meaning in life. Although his existence has little of what we would consider purposeful according to our standards, his life has an abundance of that integrative force which gives him peace of heart, mind, and soul. Santiago proves that, although life can withhold extrinsic values--luck, fame, success--it has no power to deny the intrinsic value of meaning in life to those who, like Santiago, ask for nothing more than to live it.

Harry Morgan

Like The Old Man and the Sea, To Have and Have Not is different from most other Hemingway novels in several aspects. First of all, To Have and Have Not is Hemingway's only novel set in America. Published during the radical 1930s, it is Hemingway's contribution to the so-called "literature of social relevance" which had its heyday during that period. Finally, it is an extraordinarily bad novel. Crafted from several previously published short stories, To Have and Have Not is woefully inferior to The Sun Also Rises or A Farewell To Arms. Its plot creaks, jumps, and often loses itself altogether. With but a few exceptions, its characters are the same stereotypes found in other radical fiction of the period. Even the celebrated contrast between the "haves" living on yachts in Key West harbor and the "have nots" of Freddy's bar is pretentious and unconvincing.

The one redeeming feature of To Have and Have Not is that it introduces the strongest, most appealing character, for my money, in the entire Hemingway canon: Harry Morgan.

Unlike the other characters which we have examined, Harry Morgan does not have the luxury of thinking about the absurdity of life--he is far too busy just trying to keep on living it. He cannot make a separate peace with the world because the enemy is always too close at his heels. He is cheated, cursed, shot at, and maimed: he lies, steals, and kills in return. He never quite comes out on top in his struggles in life, but he never loses his sense of the importance of the fight,

Some critics have tried to portray Harry Morgan as a radical leftist agitator. To do so, in my opinion, is to grossly misread his character. Although Hemingway may have been consciously attempting propagandistic fiction when writing To Have And Have Not, he was too much an artist to permit its main character to be nothing more than a cardboard puppet for socialism. "I ain't no radical," Harry says of himself. "I'm sore. I been sore a long time." And he has good reason to be sore. Yet his rage and frustration stem not from the exploitation of the masses, but from the exploitation of his own family. Harry Morgan is the only major Hemingway character with a family, and that family is the source of his sense of purpose in life. Home is important to Harry Morgan. "That night I was sitting in the living room smoking a cigar and drinking a whiskey and water and listening to Gracie Allen on the radio. The girls had gone to the show and sitting there I felt sleepy and I felt good." His three girls are important to him. His wife, Marie, is especially important to him.

Harry Morgan's relationship with Marie is one of the most touching and beautiful love stories which Hemingway ever wrote. Unlike Catherine Barkley and Frederic Henry, Harry and Marie do not isolate themselves in a self-made love grotto. They live out their love in a very real and very harsh world. Their lives, too, are often harsh and hard, but the tenacity with which they cling to each other in the face of all their pain and adversity is what makes their love so very beautiful.

> Lying still in the bed he felt her lips on his face and searching for him and then her hand on him and he rolled over against her close.
>
> "Do you want to?"
>
> "Yes. Now."
>
> "I was asleep. Do you remember when we'd do it asleep?"
>
> "Listen, do you mind the arm? Don't it make you feel funny?"

"You're silly. I like it. Any that's you I like. Put it across there. Put it along there. Go on. I like it, true."

"It's like a flipper on a loggerhead."

You ain't no loggerhead. Do you really think they do it three days? Coot for three days?"

"Sure. Listen, be quiet. We'll wake the girls."

"They don't know what I got. They'll never know what I've got. Ah, Harry. That's it. Ah, you honey."

"Wait."

"I don't want no wait. Come on. That's it. That's where. Listen, did you ever do it with a nigger wench?"

"Sure."

"What's it like?"

"Like nurse shark."

"You're funny Harry. I wish you did'nt have to go. I wish you didn't ever have to go. Who's the best you ever did it with?"

"You lie. You always lie to me. There. There. There."

"No. You're the best."

"I'm old"

"You'll never be old."

"I've had that thing."

"That don't make no difference when a woman's any good."

"Go ahead. Go ahead now. Put the stump there. Hold it there. Hold it. Hold it now. Hold it."

"We're making too much noise."

"We're whispering."

"I go to get out before it's daylight."

"You go to sleep. I'll get you up. When you come back we'll have a time. We'll go to a hotel up in Miami like we used to. Just like we used to. Some place where they never seen either of us. Why could'nt we go to New Orleans?"

Maybe," Harry said. "Listen Marie, I got to go to sleep now."

"We'll go to New Orleans?"

"Why not? Only I got to go to sleep."

"Go to sleep. You're my big honey. Go on to sleep. I'll wake you. Don't you worry."

He went to sleep with the stump of his arm out wide on the pillow, and she lay for a long time looking at him. She could see his face in the street light through the window. I'm lucky, she was thinking. Those girls. They don't know what they'll get. I know what I've got and what I've had. I've been a lucky woman. Him saying like a loggerhead. I'm glad it was a arm and not a leg. Why'd he have to lose that arm? It's funny though, I don't mind it. Anything about him I don't mind. I've been a lucky woman. There ain't no other men like that. People ain't never tried them don't know. I've had plenty of them. I've been lucky to have him. Do you suppose those turtles feel like we do? Do you suppose all that time they feel like that? Or do you suppose it hurts the she? I think of the damndest things. Look at him, asleep like a baby. I better stay awake so as to call him. Christ, I could do that all night if a man was built that way. I'd like to do it and never sleep. Never, never, no, never. Well, think of that, will you.

> Me at my age. I ain't old. He said I was still good. Forty-five ain't old. I'm two years older than him. Look at him sleep. Look at him asleep there like a kid.

Harry Morgan is like a man with a terminal illness. He is running an impossible race, and he knows it, yet he keeps right on running, against all odds, right up to the very moment when he collapses. He risks his life smuggling rum into the country. He sees men gunned down in cold blood before his eyes. He loses his boat, and thus his livelihood, at the whim of a government official; he loses his arm at the whim of fate. Finally, he loses his life in an absurd scheme to smuggle three Cuban revolutionaries who have just robbed a bank out of the country--all so that he could feed his family.

Harry Morgan knew the answer to Jake Barnes' question of what was life all about. His life was never easy, yet it was also never empty. The meaning which he found in life was not the triumph of crossing the finish line; rather in the dignity of just running the race. Lying on his boat with a bullet in his stomach, Harry Morgan whispers his unforgettable last words: "One man alone ain't got. No man alone ain't got. No man alone now." He stopped. "No matter how a man alone ain't got no bloody fucking chance."

He shut his eyes. It had taken him a long time to get it out and it had taken all his life to learn it.

Harry Morgan could be destroyed, but he could not be defeated.