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**Ernest Hemingway's Legacy to the Minimalist Movement: A Comparative Study of Selected Short Stories by Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason**

*A Doctoral Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of Doctorate Degree (ES Science) in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Civilisation*

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this doctoral thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

## **Dedication**

In the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful

This modest work is dedicated mostly to my wonderful and affectionate parents, Fatima and Abdelkader, whose unconditioned love, support, and encouragement have strengthened my will and ambition to realize my dreams.

To my dear sister and my beloved brothers, and their wives, for their unwavering encouragement and psychological support.

To the wonderful children of our house: Amira, Chouab, Abderrahmane, Ahmed Amine, Ghassane Dhaya Eddine, Iyad, Mouad, Tasnime, and Nour Sine.

To all my family members and adorable friends.

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## **Abstract**

The present research aims to prove Ernest Hemingway's influence on the minimalist styles of Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason, with respect to both techniques and themes. In so doing, it provides a strong argument as to Hemingway's contribution to the foundation of the Minimalist Movement. To prove such a contribution, the work compares twenty selected short stories using the theoretical framework put forward by Wolfgang Iser's Reception Theory. The major research question of this dissertation is: what are the aspects of Hemingway's style that are associated with his "Iceberg Theory" and adapted by Carver, Ford, and Mason in the selected stories to achieve Carver's, Ford's, and Mason's specific purposes? The research findings have met the research objectives by demonstrating that these minimalist writers adapt Hemingway's method of evoking emotional truth of a given sensation or lived experience to implied readers through their careful reliance on poetic language (imagery and repetition) and narrative techniques (implication, omission, and epiphany). My findings also show that these writers adapt the themes that are predominant in producing strong emotional effects and reveal much about the disillusionment of American society in the late twentieth century, including alienation and existential depression; masculinity and violence; marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication. The similarities between these writers are more important than the differences, however. In this respect, it becomes clear that Hemingway impacted the development of the Minimalist Movement. Attempting to reenergize literature's social and ideological missions and its capacity to impact its individuals and social institutions, this movement acquired a special position in the literary canon.

**Key Words:** Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, Bobbie Ann Mason, Hemingway's legacy, influence, the American Minimalist Movement, The short story genre, Wolfgang Iser's Reception Theory.

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# **General Introduction**

The emergence of the Minimalist Movement at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s was a significant turning point in American literature, namely in the short story genre. A new generation of writers that came of age sought to revive Ernest Hemingway's minimalist style. Opposed to postmodernist writers, minimalist writers attempted to breathe a new life into the social mission of literature and empower it to impact individuals and social institutions. In an interview with Michael Schumacher, Raymond Carver, who epitomizes this revival, emphasizes that minimalism was "the single most eventful literary phenomenon of [their] time."<sup>1</sup> Daniel Just maintains that, with this revival, a non-experimental form of realism emerged and has become known as "minimalism."<sup>2</sup> Minimalism drew much attention from critics and scholars, raising several questions in connection with its characteristics as a "new" style, in contrast with others; its appropriateness as a mode of expression in literary history; its origins in other arts and literary history; as well as the influence of its leading figures by the preceding writers such as Anton Chekhov and Ernest Hemingway, among others.

Although the term "minimalism" is used to denote American literature in the late 1970s, critics have suggested that some prominent writers were already familiar with minimalist techniques in different genres of literature. Nevertheless, the origin of "minimalism" is still a controversial issue. In fact, Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) is credited with having founded the minimalist style in American letters in his early collections, particularly *In Our Time* (1925) and *Men without Women* (1927). This doctoral research begins with the idea that Hemingway's minimalist style has been so influential. It provides a model for other writers who are not only concerned with the reflection of the "real world,"

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Schumacher, "After the Fire into the Fire: An Interview with Raymond Carver" (1987), in *Conversations with Raymond Carver (Literary Conversations Series)*, eds. Marshall Bruce Gentry and William L. Stull, (Mississippi: UP of Mississippi, 1990), 224.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Just, "Is Less More? 'A Reinvention of Realism in Raymond Carver's Minimalist Short Story,'" (Critical essay), in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 49.3 (Spring 2008): 303(15).

but rather are more interested in making readers re-experience its emotional impact so that they might experience it too through reading. The emphasis is therefore put on the recreation of the emotional experience of facts in readers through the use of specific techniques. When the reader registers this emotional experience into his or her world, it persists far longer and propels his or her choices and actions in life everyday. The research aims at establishing those stylistic and thematic aspects which show Hemingway's influence on selected short stories by these leading figures of the Minimalist Movement.

The discussion over the origin of the minimalist style and its popularity in America prompts the discussion in this research. My research shows that this minimalist style is not really "new," but rather originates in Hemingway's minimalist style. Indeed, the distinctiveness of the realist minimalist style prompted some editors to consider it a "new fiction" after its emergence at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. For instance, Bill Buford, an editor of the British journal *Granta*, began his introduction to a special issue in 1983 with the following remark: "a new fiction seems to be emerging from America, and it is a fiction of a peculiar...kind. It is not only unlike anything currently written in Britain, it is also unlike what American fiction is usually understood to be."<sup>3</sup> Two years later, Kim A. Herzinger, an editor of the *Mississippi Review*, began his introduction to a special issue with a very similar statement: "I imagined that there was a new kind of fiction being produced out there—the evidence was in the tone and texture of books recently published by major American literary publishers."<sup>4</sup> My research is an attempt to provide both a literary history and cultural genealogy of what looks like a new movement. It mainly provides a strong argument about the origin of this minimalist style in American literary history and explains the minimalist writers' aspiration to revive the realist short story in

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<sup>3</sup> Bill Buford, ed., "Dirty Realism," *Editorial, Granta 8: The Magazine of New Writing from America* (New York, 1 March, 1989): 4.

<sup>4</sup> Herzinger Kim A, "Introduction: On the New Fiction," *Mississippi Review* 14, no. 1/2 (1985): 7, (Accessed August 2, 2009), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20115378>.

Hemingway's tradition at that specific period. Thus, the importance of this research lies in its emphasis on this minimalist style, most appropriate to the depiction of American social reality and individual existential sufferings during the "dark side of Ronald Reagan's America,"<sup>5</sup> as Carver once put it.

Despite the fact that Ernest Hemingway is not considered by authors and critics as a "minimalist" writer, the emergence of the styles of Carver and his contemporaries drew attention to the impact of Hemingway's style on the works of the minimalist writers. Hemingway started his career as a writer with a style that he founded on the "Theory of Omission." Unlike many writers who attempted to reshape and simplify the fictional style to counter the problem of "used up words" after the First World War, he "struck boldest and deepest."<sup>6</sup> His writing is distinct because he adopts a dispassionate presentation. Nevertheless, he manipulates different interrelated stylistic and narrative techniques, as well as themes, to elicit a particular emotion in readers. In fact, this method is a cardinal point in his aesthetics. In a 1958 interview with George Plimpton, he restated his "Iceberg Theory" and explained the basics of its tenets by saying: "I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show. If a writer omits something because he does not know it, then there is a hole in the story."<sup>7</sup> There is always a description of actions and objects that can be the "tip of the iceberg," while character emotions are the submerged part. Instead of just describing events, Hemingway withdraws the expected portrayals in order to recreate in the reader the experience of living the event itself. Philip John Greaney maintains that Hemingway's method is based on his

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<sup>5</sup> Kirk Nessel, *The Stories of Raymond Carver: A Critical Study*, (Athens: Ohio UP, 1995), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Gerald, "Facing Eternity Alone: Ernest Hemingway, Man and Writer, is a Study in Contradictions," *World and I* 14.11(Nov.1999): 254.

<sup>7</sup> George Plimpton, "An Interview with Ernest Hemingway", in *Hemingway and His Critics: An International Anthology*, ed. Carlos Baker, (New York: Hill & Wang, 1961), 235.

belief that truth resides primarily in emotional authenticity. To put it otherwise, Greaney clarifies that Hemingway's truth is primarily related to the recreation of the emotional experience of facts in his readers, and this 'truth' is considered valuable only in the terms created in his fiction.<sup>8</sup>

Like his contemporaries of 'the Lost Generation' writers, Hemingway adopted an existentialist philosophy to depict the disillusionment of American society after the First World War (1914-1918). His early collections, *In Our Time* (1925) and *Men without Women* (1927), reflect the influence of Martin Heidegger's philosophy of a "being" and Friedrich Nietzsche's notions of "nihilism" and "nothingness." Hemingway's "Iceberg Theory" and his thematic concerns, as will be unravelled subsequently in the chapters of this work, set up the basic tenets of the American minimalist style that emerged during postmodernism.

The presumed return to realism and the conventions of modernism were driven by different historical and socio-economic reasons. American society experienced changes in almost all fields in the 1970s and 1980s. John Karaagac notes that the American people's lives were affected by historical events, such as the Cuban missiles Crisis in 1962, the assassinations of John Kennedy in 1963, his brother Robert Kennedy in 1968, and Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, the lingering effects of the Vietnam War (1955–1975), and the Watergate scandal—all of which heightened people's fear of the possible misuses of power by the political establishment. By the time Ronald Reagan entered the White House, the USA was suffering from an economic and military decline. Jimmy Carter's policies, such as his energy policy, and his budgetary policies to control inflation, led to low levels of economic growth, high levels of inflation, and the defeat in the Vietnam War. During his two terms as president, Reagan reduced the power of the federal government to allow American businesses to compete and increase the quality and quantity of goods for mass-

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<sup>8</sup> Philip John Greaney, "Less is More: American Short Story Minimalism in Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver and Frederick Barthelme," (Doctoral thesis, Open University: September, 2005), 51–53.

consumption. Under his leadership, he provided help for the poor by increasing assistance programs for low-income Americans and tried to improve the quality of education by calling for a variety of remedies at different levels. Although the economy recovered from a severe recession, the rich became richer while the lives of most Americans, especially the working-class and lower-middle-class, did not improve, as Ronald Reagan failed to reform spending and monetary policies.<sup>9</sup>

In his article, “Minimalism,” George Hovis points out that the effects these changes had on American working-class people, in particular, provided the impetus for the emergence of the Minimalist Movement. In contrast to their precursors and for the first time in American history, minimalist writers constituted a new generation of writers, most of whom hail from the lower and middle-lower classes.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Bailey writes that notable figures such as Alice Adams, Frederick Barthelme, Ann Beattie, Raymond Carver, Bret Easton Ellis, Amy Hempel, Bobbie Ann Mason, Chuck Palahniuk, and Richard Ford were regarded as minimalists whose works were worth studying.<sup>11</sup> These writers felt it their duty to portray the sufferings and pains of the “submerged population.” The works of Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason are considered the best representatives of minimalist fiction.

In an interview with Robert Pope and Lisa McElhinny, Carver recognized his admiration for Hemingway’s works by saying: “Hemingway is an author whose work I admire greatly.”<sup>12</sup> Besides, in an interview with Sexton, Carver affirmed that Hemingway’s “Theory of Omission” and his dictum of leaving things out influenced him, by saying: “This

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<sup>9</sup> John Karaagac, *Between Promise and Policy: Ronald Reagan and Conservative Reformism*, (Lanham: Lexington, 2001), 143.

<sup>10</sup> Hovis, “Minimalism,” in *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, ed. Joseph M. Flora et al., (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2002), 493.

<sup>11</sup> Bailey, “Mining for Meaning,” 12.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Pope, and Lisa McElhinny, “Raymond Carver Speaking (1982),” in *Conversations With Raymond Carver (Literary Conversations Series)*, eds. Marshall Bruce Gentry and William L. Stull, (Mississippi: UP of Mississippi, 1990), 17.



goes back to Hemingway...it is all right to leave things out as long as you know what you're leaving out...I left out unnecessary movements. I was interested in having stories that worked invisibly."<sup>13</sup> In his book, *No Heroic, Please*, Carver suggests that in a short story or a poem, language is an act of communication between the writer and the reader and that "the need is always to translate one's thoughts and deepest concerns into language which casts these thoughts and concerns into a form...in the hope that a reader might understand and experience those same feelings and concerns."<sup>14</sup> The adaptation of a realist minimalist style was triggered by the minimalists' great desire to achieve maximum effects on readers. Like Hemingway, the minimalist writers were influenced by the philosophy of existentialism, especially that of Jean-Paul Sartre in portraying the submerged population's feelings of meaninglessness, nihilism, and nothingness during the Reagan-era.

With the emergence of literary minimalism, some critics and scholars turned their attention to showing the evolution of the minimalist short story. For example, in her book, *Minimalism and the Short Story—Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robison* (1999), Cynthia Whitney Hallett studied the poetic characteristics connecting literary minimalism and the short story as a genre. In her work, she mentioned five highly influential writers whose minimalist techniques were adapted by the Minimalist Movement's writers in the 1970s: "The seeds of art and artifice that inform both literary minimalism in general and the short story in particular can be traced to such otherwise diverse writers as Edgar Allan Poe, Anton Chekhov, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and Ernest Hemingway--all of whose conscious codes of omission are designed to make audiences feel more than they understand ... and Hemingway's communication of complex emotional states by the ostensibly simple

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<sup>13</sup> David Sexton, "David Sexton Talks to Raymond Carver" (1985), in *Conversation with Raymond Carver (Literary Conversations Series)*, eds. Marshall Bruce Gentry and William L. Stull, (Mississippi: UP of Mississippi, 1990), 126.

<sup>14</sup> Raymond Carver, *No Heroics, Please: Uncollected Writings*, (New York: Vintage, 1992), 121.

patterning of concrete details--his “tip of the iceberg” effect.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, she confirmed that Hemingway’s “Theory of Omission” played a crucial role in the development of American literary minimalism because of its reliance on the description of concrete details enables the visualization of the scene for maximum emotional effects.

Another critic who supported Hallett’s ideas was James Nagel. In his article, “Ernest Hemingway: A Centennial Assessment” (1999), Nagel affirmed that Hemingway was “one of the finest prose stylists in English” whose work “gave rise to the minimalist movement in American fiction, to the work of Raymond Carver and Susan Minot,” as well as many others.<sup>16</sup> According to him, Hemingway was an inspiration for American minimalist writers.

Furthermore, following Hallett’s path, other scholars were also interested in tracing the origins of literary minimalism. To name a few, Clark Robert Charles traced the origin and development of literary minimalism in his doctoral dissertation, “American Literary Minimalism” (2011). He declared that important literary works, which constitute the core of the development of American minimalism, began to emerge around the 1890s. He argued that American minimalism originated in literary impressionism because Carver’s esthetic cherished techniques of precision and austerity, which are, in reality, basic tenets of literary minimalism.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in his doctoral dissertation, “Mining for Meaning: A Study of Minimalism in American Literature” (2010), Jeremy Robert Bailey traced the literary development of minimalist techniques from Hemingway to Carver and showed how the minimalist techniques of Hemingway, Carver, Amy Hempel, and Cormac McCarthy can influence and heighten a reader’s understanding of a story.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, in his doctoral

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<sup>15</sup> Cynthia Whitney Hallett, *Minimalism and the Short Story--Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel and Mary Robison*, (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), 13.

<sup>16</sup> James Nagel, “Ernest Hemingway: A Centennial Assessment,” *Hemingway Retrospective* (1999), (accessed August 20, 2008), <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/books/1999/hemingway/stories/nagel/>.

<sup>17</sup> Robert C. Clark, “American Literary Minimalism,” (PhD *diss.* Athens, Georgia, 2011), 47–48.

<sup>18</sup> Jeremy Robert Bailey, “Mining for Meaning: A Study of Minimalism in American Literature,” (PhD *diss.*, Texas Tech University, 2010).

dissertation, “Less is More: American Short Story Minimalism in Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver and Frederick Barthelme,” Philip John Greaney suggested ways in which “less” becomes “more” in the minimalist approach of these three short story writers who have appeared at decisive moments in the minimalist timeline (loosely, at the beginning, middle, and now): Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver, and Frederick Barthelme.

Indeed, some critics and scholars studied the influence of Hemingway’s fiction on Carver’s short stories in some aspects. To name a few, in the third chapter of his book, *The Carver Chronotope: Inside the Life-World of Raymond Carver’s Fiction* (2004), G.P. Lainsbury discussed the wilderness and the natural and showed the intertextual dynamics between Hemingway’s “Big Two-Hearted River” and Carver’s “Pastoral.” Despite the intertextual dynamics between these two stories, the differences in the protagonists’ behaviour by the end of the stories disclose that Carver rejected the idea of heroism by parodying Hemingway’s code hero.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, in his article, “‘After the Denim’ and ‘After the Storm’: Raymond Carver Comes to Terms with the Hemingway Influence” (1994), James Plath explained the intertextual relationship between Carver’s story and Hemingway’s. He concluded that there are structural parallels that link them.<sup>20</sup>

More importantly, in his book, *Technique and Sensibility in the Fiction and Poetry of Raymond Carver* (2002), the critic Arthur F. Bethea alluded to Hemingway’s influence on Carver’s works. In his book, Bethea considered Carver a ‘neo-realist’ writer who “shares with Hemingway a symbolic technique and the impressionist method of dotting the outlines of reality.”<sup>21</sup> He also established the thematic influence between Carver’s “The Student’s

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<sup>19</sup> G.P Lainsbury, *The Carver Chronotope: Inside the Life-World of Raymond Carver’s Fiction*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 24–48.

<sup>20</sup> James Plath, “‘After the Denim’ and ‘After the Storm’: Raymond Carver Comes to Terms with the Hemingway Influence,” *The Hemingway Review* 13, 2(Spring 1994), in *The Hemingway Society*, (Moscow, Idaho: U of Idaho P, 1994): 37–51.

<sup>21</sup> Arthur F. Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility in the Fiction and Poetry of Raymond Carver (Studies in Major Literary Author)*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 269.

Wife” and Hemingway’s “Cat in the Rain,” as both of them deal with the sterile marriage of modern couples.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, in his article, “Raymond Carver’s Inheritance from Ernest Hemingway’s Literary Technique”(2007), Bethea claimed that Hemingway’s domestic stories, such as “Hills Like White Elephants” and “Cat in the Rain,” influenced Carver’s stories in the collection, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* Additionally, in my magister dissertation, entitled *A Comparative Study of Selected Stories by Raymond Carver and Ernest Hemingway* (2013), I compared six selected short stories by Hemingway and Carver in the light of the New Criticism Theory. The thematic and the stylistic comparison proved Carver’s influence by Hemingway’s stories.

While Hemingway’s influence on Carver drew the attention of critics and scholars, little, if any, attention has been paid to his influence on Ford’s and Mason’s works. There is only one article about the influence of Hemingway on Ford’s short stories, “Gendering Men: Re-Visions of Violence as a Test of Manhood in American Literature,” authored by Joseph M. Armengol, who provided an introduction to the study of masculinities in American literature and culture. To demonstrate the relevance of masculinity studies to literary theory, Armengol analysed and compared Hemingway’s “An African Story” with Ford’s “Communist.” He concluded that Ford challenged Hemingway’s version of masculinity and violence as a test of manhood.<sup>23</sup>

Despite their significance, the aforementioned references concentrated exclusively on the evolution of literary minimalism by tracing its history chronologically and demonstrating the effects of minimalist narrative strategies on readers. Nevertheless, they valued Hemingway’s style and his contribution to the development of American literary

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<sup>22</sup> Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility*, 61.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph M. Armengol, “Gendering Men: Re-Visions of Violence as a Test of Manhood in American Literature,” *Atlantis*, 29, No. 2, (December 2007): 75–92,( Accessed 5 Aug. 2012), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41055289>.

minimalism. Furthermore, the majority of these researchers were more interested in researching the technical features of Hemingway's style, with an emphasis on the effects of gaps and implications, whereas his thematic concerns received minimal attention. In addition, there is only one article on Hemingway's influence on Ford's works. Meanwhile, no one has looked into Hemingway's influence on Mason's works so far. A more important point yet is that, with the exception of Philip John Greaney, none of these scholars used Wolfgang Iser's Reception Theory to read the stories.

Although the previous studies established Hemingway as a founding father of literary minimalism and addressed some aspects of his influence on Carver, in particular, his influences on minimalist writers are still ripe with interpretations. In contrast with these studies, this doctoral work goes a step further and studies Hemingway's influence not just on Carver, but also look on Ford and Mason. Thus, these researchers only set the stage for my doctoral research, which is unparalleled among these dissertations in that it is the first single work to compare selected stories by Hemingway, Carver, Ford, and Mason together from different aspects of their styles. I will argue that these minimalist writers, who were influenced by Hemingway's "Iceberg Theory," employ specific stylistic and narrative techniques to convey their themes, with a focus on the process of recreation of the emotional experience of facts in readers.

The major research question of this dissertation is: what are the aspects of Hemingway's style that are associated with his "Iceberg Theory" and that are adapted by Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason in the selected stories to achieve Carver's, Ford's, and Mason's specific purposes?

This major question can further be divided into other questions:

1- What are the different stylistic and narrative techniques that characterize Hemingway's minimalist style, that are adapted by these minimalist writers in the selected stories? How

do these writers rely on these stylistic and narrative techniques to achieve maximum effects on implied readers?

2- What themes are associated with Hemingway's style and are also treated by these minimalist writers to portray the reality of post-war American society and communicate moral lessons to people about human beings' existence and social relationships? How do they affect implied readers' emotions, and, thereby, the ethical code of conduct?

3- To what extent are the similarities between the compared aspects of Hemingway and these minimalist writers significant to the foundation of the Minimalist Movement?

The research seeks to prove Hemingway's influence on the short fiction of Carver, Ford, and Mason on both techniques and themes, in particular, and to provide a strong argument as to the significance of Hemingway's legacy on the foundation of the Minimalist Movement, in general. Hemingway's method of evoking the emotional truth in his readers is based on the idea that the world is perceived through the senses and that the world of the text is comprehended through imagination. Thus, the research discusses the use of imagery and repetition techniques, narrative techniques such as omission, implication, and epiphany, is creatively adapted by Carver, Ford, and Mason in the selected stories to achieve maximum effects on implied readers in order to make them feel more than understand the emotional experience of facts, allowing them to construct their own aesthetic object.

Additionally, Hemingway and these minimalist writers are interested in the selected stories to portray the American people's lives under the rubric of high capitalism and consumer culture. Specifically, they focus on showing the impact of social and cultural changes on human beings' lives and individuals' psychology. Subsequently, the research proves that these minimalist writers adapt Hemingway's themes that are predominant in producing strong emotional effects because they communicate a sense of human life and reveal much about the disillusionment of American society. These themes are alienation and

existential depression; masculinity and violence; marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication. They make readers more aware of the relevant ideology making American society in the twentieth century. Indeed, the gist of this study is to substantiate the assertion that the compared stories will reveal important similarities more than differences in the studied aspects.

To conduct the research, twenty short stories are selected from different collections at various stages in the authors' careers, including Hemingway's *In Our Time* and *Men without Women*; Raymond Carver's *Where I'm Calling From* and *Selected Short Stories*, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, and *Cathedral*; Bobbie Ann Mason's *Shiloh, and Other Stories* and *Love Life*; and Richard Ford's *Rock Springs* and *Women with Men*. I have taken into consideration that the selected short stories are the most appropriate and most interesting for the comparative study meant to trace Hemingway's overreaching influence. Hence, I will resort to Wolfgang Iser's Reception Theory, because in comparison with other theorists, he gives a lot of value to text-reader interaction, and the notion of indeterminacy or blanks, on the one hand, and the reader's response and emotional growth, on the other hand. He also values reading literary texts concerning their repertoire (historical, social, cultural, and literary allusions). Therefore, to achieve my primary goal, I will rely on the different concepts of this literary theory, with a focus on the role of the implied reader in the interpretive process of the text and his function in decoding the extratextual elements of the text or the repertoire.

To achieve the goals I set earlier, the dissertation is divided into six chapters. Before conducting the comparative study of the selected short stories and illustrating my claims, the first chapter, entitled "Theoretical Background and Context for the Study," is done in order to briefly explain the principles of Wolfgang Iser's Reception Theory and introducing this lesser-known style of minimalism and its great writers.

In the second and third chapters, the focus is put on the technical and narrative aspects of the writers' styles to illustrate which aspects of Hemingway's style the minimalist writers adapt in the selected stories. In the first chapter, entitled "Imagery and Repetition in Ernest Hemingway's 'Up in Michigan,' Raymond Carver's 'Chef's House,' Richard Ford's 'Rock Springs,' and Bobbie Ann Mason's 'Residents and Transients,'" there will be a discussion of how these writers evoke emotions in the implied readers using poetic language (imagery and repetition). In the third chapter, entitled "Implication, Omission, and Epiphany in Ernest Hemingway's 'Cross Country Snow,' Raymond Carver's 'Fever,' Richard Ford's 'Optimists,' and Bobbie Ann Mason's 'Shiloh'," I will argue how these writers bring into play important narrative devices (implication, omission, and epiphany) to transmit and evoke affecting emotions in readers and how the readers receive, and eventually, decode these devices so as to experience the evoked emotions and understand the conveyed themes.

In the remaining three chapters, the comparative study involves discussions of themes that are tied to the moral enterprise of 'truth-telling.' Accordingly, there will be a comparison of stories of alienation and existential depression in the fourth chapter, entitled "Alienation and Existential Depression in Ernest Hemingway's 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,' Raymond Carver's 'Cathedral,' Richard Ford's 'Great Falls,' and Bobbie Ann Mason's 'The Rookers' " in order to illustrate how the minimalist story can evoke strong emotions about human beings or the individual's psychological pain in the modern world, though nothing happens at the surface level, and how these emotions affect the readers' feelings and understandings of the world around them.

In the fifth chapter, "Masculinity and Violence in Ernest Hemingway's 'An African Story,' Raymond Carver's 'Pastoral,' Richard Ford's 'Communist,' and Bobbie Ann Mason's 'The Ocean'," I will discuss the theme of masculinity and violence, which is tied to the notion of heroism. The comparison between Hemingway's concept of masculinity and



that of the minimalist writers will point out the writers' and the readers' responses regarding gender issues in American society.

Finally, in the sixth chapter, entitled "Marital Dissatisfaction and Miscommunication in Ernest Hemingway's 'Cat in the Rain,' Raymond Carver's 'The Student's Wife,' Richard Ford's 'The Womanizer,' and Bobbie Ann Mason's 'The Retreat,'" there will be a comparison of one of the most vital themes in contemporary fiction, which is the theme of marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication due to the emotional rupture between couples. The discussion will demonstrate how these writers evoke emotions in their implied readers with the purpose of raising their awareness of the reality of the modern world regarding family ties.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **Theoretical Background and Context for the Study**

This introductory chapter sets the theoretical background for this research, without which it will be impossible to follow through with our findings. It aims at providing the theoretical

background and research contexts needed for a constructive understanding of the selected short stories. It is divided into two main sections. The first section elaborates light on Wolfgang Iser's Reception Theory, its definition, and its components. The second section highlights the emergence of the American Minimalist Movement with a focus on its socio-cultural context, definition, characteristics, and phases. The first phase is represented by Ernest Hemingway's minimalist style, and the second phase is embodied in the minimalist styles of Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason.

### **1.1 Wolfgang Iser's Reception Theory**

During the sixties, there was a crisis in the methods of criticism following larger social and political changes in Germany and the Western World. This resulted in the rise of new critical theories such as Reception Theory. Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007) was one of the most famous advocates of Reception Theory in the contemporary literary field, presenting a meditative solution to how literary texts should be read and to what end. Therefore, his theory accords more value to the aesthetic response and the interaction between the reader and the text because, according to Iser, "...it stimulates the reader's imagination, which in turn gives life to the intended effects...Reception theory focused not only on the interface between text and readers but also on that between text and context."<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, readers should not be considered as passive recipients, but active participants in extracting meaning from text and so responding to the underlying messages. Each reader will contribute to the final outcome based on his socio-cultural background, previous experience, and expectations. In what follows, there is an explanation of its main tenets, components, and elements.

#### **1.1.1 Artistic Pole Versu Aesthetic Pole**

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<sup>24</sup> Wolfgang Iser, "Do I Write for an Audience?" *PMLA* 115, no. 3 (2000): 31 1, (Accessed 15 Dec., 2015), <https://doi.org/10.2307/46345>.

Iser values the process of reading and clarifies that there are two poles involved in the reader's experience of a text. In Iser's words:

The text as such offers different "schematised views" through which the subject matter of the work can come to light, but the actual bringing to light is an action of Konkretisation. If this is so, then the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the aesthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the artistic pole refers to the text with its linguistic and syntactic properties, while the aesthetic pole is the reader's revelation of meaning.<sup>26</sup> Hence, the meaning of the text can only be achieved by readers through the concretization of its structures first, and then, its interpretation based upon their literary and personal background. He also acknowledges: "Thus, the meaning of a literary text is not a definable entity but, if anything, a dynamic happening."<sup>27</sup> This means that the meaning of the text is an event in time and space. As the literary text provides the reader with a set of schematized and incomplete instructions, the reading process achieves its goals only through the interaction between the structure of the literary text and its recipient. An activity that is not complete; it stays unfinished. Moreover, aesthetic objectivity is neither the objective of the text nor the subjective experience of a given reader. Stanley Fish sustains that Iser generally reserves the word "meaning" for the "intersubjective" structure that incites the readers' activities, while he refers to the product of those activities—the construction of aesthetic object—as significance.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (1972): 279, (Accessed 23 Dec., 2019), <https://doi.org/10.2307/468316>.

<sup>26</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, (London and Henley: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1978), 21.

<sup>27</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> Stanley Fish, "Review of *Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser*, by Wolfgang Iser," *Diacritics* 11, no. 1 (1981): 4, (Accessed 23 December, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.2307/464889>.

Subsequently, Iser argues that “intersubjective structure of meaning assembly can have many forms of significance, according to the social and cultural code or the individual norms which underlie the formation of this significance.”<sup>29</sup> Hence, readers have to build up the aesthetic object of the text depending on their individual disposition and real life experiences. The reader’s primary role is to focus on what is “given” and fill in the “blanks” left by the author based upon personal experiences but limited by the structure of the text. For example, in Hemingway’s “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” nothing happens at the surface level as the narrator focuses only on reporting the two waiters’ dialogue and the old waiter’s monologue. The story opens with the image of an old deaf man sitting in a Spanish café. His image implies that he lives a meaningless life and that he is searching for happiness in that clean, well-lighted café. The narrator relies on the techniques of implication, omission, and imagery to activate the readers’ mental processes to visualize the scenes and understand the characters’ feelings of alienation and existential depression. He also gives “clues” to guide readers in building their own informed meanings of the text by prompting them to fill in the gaps and interpret the characters’ speeches, dialogue, actions, and gestures. Although the narrator does not provide solutions to his conflict, he is able to make readers think about questions of nada, Beings, and existentialism.

### **1.1.2 Components of the Reading Process**

Iser sees the literary work as a synthesis of the text and the reader’s subjectivity, and he identifies three domains for its exploration during the reading process. The first domain is the text, with its schemata, or layers of determination, and the concomitant places of indeterminacy that the reader needs to detect so as to understand the meaning of the text. For that reason, the reader’s responsibility is to register the code with its different impositions in the mind; in the reader’s framework of sense-making, including the strategies that can be

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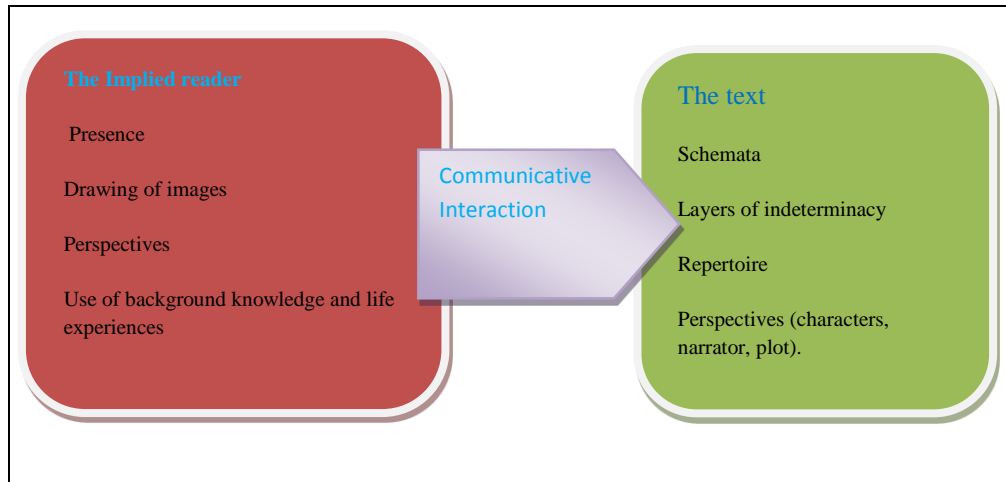
<sup>29</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 151.

discerned through the techniques employed in the text (narrative or poetic), the references made in the text, and the various social and cultural conventions presented in an attempt to achieve the final goal: “to defamiliarize the familiar.”<sup>30</sup> For example, in “Cathedral,” Carver employs defamiliarization technique in order to make his readers see the world through blindness, thus, allowing them to experience new feelings and learn from the narrator’s experience with the blind man. Second, he explores the reader’s internal processing of the text. The emphasis here is put on the reader and his or her approach to the text, including the reader’s presence in the text, his making of the mental images, and his usage of background knowledge and literary experience in an attempt to construct a cohesive aesthetic object. Finally, Iser focuses on the communicative structure of literature by examining the interaction between the text and its readers. He suggests that the interaction between the text and the readers is of unique nature because it is different from face-to-face interaction; the readers can never judge their understanding of the text: “The partners in dyadic interaction can ask each other questions in order to ascertain how far their views have controlled contingency, or their images have bridged the gap of the inexperienceability of one another’s experiences.”<sup>31</sup> The following figure summarises the elements involved in the process of reading in his theory.

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<sup>30</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 87.

<sup>31</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 166.



**Figure 1: Components of the Reading Process in Wolfgang Iser's Reception Theory**

In considering these three areas, Iser attempts to explain not only how the reader generates meaning, but also what effects the reading has on its readers. Thus, the literary text, if it activates the reader's faculties, it involves the reader in the recreation of the alternative/subversive world it presents. This creative reading produces what Iser calls the "virtual dimension of the text."<sup>32</sup> Consequently, Iser's theory targets the readers' engagement with the literary work, the literary structure, and the textual signals that allow their interaction, the role of the readers, and the effects experienced during and after their interaction with the text. Indeed, his theory is based on the following aspects: the repertoire, the wandering viewpoint, the blank, and the implied reader.

**a) The Repertoire:**

Iser argues that the distinguishing feature of literature is that it tells us about reality without referring to world objects by ordering conventions. He refers to the conventions that are familiar to the reader and that consist of material from social norms, historical contexts, cultural aspects, and literary traditions as the repertoire of the text.<sup>33</sup> Regarding this point, Iser points out that "[t]he literary text does not copy the referential field it relates; instead it

<sup>32</sup> Iser, "The Reading Process," 284.

<sup>33</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 69.

is a reaction to the extratextual systems whose elements have been incorporated into the text.”<sup>34</sup> For him, the referential fields are turned into observable objects once they are selected in the text.

Moreover, the reader is expected to achieve a solid awareness of the literary text because according to Iser, the reader ultimately has the opportunity to “take a fresh look at the forces which guide and orient him, and which he may hitherto have accepted without question.”<sup>35</sup> These “forces” are the “thought systems” or “prevailing norms” that have formed the basis for social action and the conduct of human relations.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Iser believes that the literary work rearranges these systems in such a way that the readers can understand their transfixing effects on them. Hence, while “the literary work arises out of the reader’s own social or philosophical background, it will serve to detach prevailing norms from their functional context. Thus enabling the reader to observe how such social regulators function, and what effect they have on the people subject to them.”<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, he aptly notes that “the literary repertoire can be seen to have a two-fold function: it reshapes familiar schemata to form a background for the process of communication and provides a general framework within which the message or meaning of the text can be reorganized.”<sup>38</sup> The author names the mode of the organisation of the repertoire as the “strategies.” The latter also designate the “social conditions under which those materials are communicated.”<sup>39</sup> The repertoire and its presentation of unfamiliar combinations are essential parts of the discussion of the thematic concerns of a literary text.

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<sup>34</sup> Wolfgang Iser, “Do I Write for an Audience?” 312.

<sup>35</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 74.

<sup>36</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 73–74.

<sup>37</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 74.

<sup>38</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 81.

<sup>39</sup> Robert. C Holub, *Crossing Borders: Reception Theory, Poststructuralist, Deconstruction*, (Madison: U of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 194; Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 88.



## **b) The Blank:**

Stanley Fish maintains that Iser's version of the reader's response theory distinguishes itself from other theories by avoiding the search for empirical reactions of particular readers to literary texts. For him, the meaning of the text does not emerge solely from the interpretation of a particular reader but "implies" an ideal reader.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, the literary text is distinguished from the non-literary text by leaving "gaps" or "indeterminacies" or "blanks" which have to be spontaneously and immediately filled in by the reader according to his "individual disposition."<sup>41</sup> Although the author provides the readers with linguistic knowledge, in Iser's word "given," the readers can sense that some textual elements are missing from the text and they become aware of the role they are assigned: to fill in the blanks. He suggests that the blank "prompts acts of ideation on the reader's part."<sup>42</sup> Despite the fact that the meaning of the literary text remains connected to what the text says, the readers' creative imaginations play a potential role in connecting its elements and putting them all together.<sup>43</sup>

While filling in the gaps, it is expected that different readers can provide different interpretations. Blanks play a significant role in joining the various segments of the text, especially at the level of the plot, and they are among the best methods used by authors to control the interaction between the text and its readers. Readers actively participate in the process of 'picturing' as they fill in the gaps, forming what is known as the 'gestalt.' According to Iser, the critic's primary goal should not be to explain the text, but rather to understand the reader's response and the effects that texts have on them. As a result, he

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<sup>40</sup> Fish, "Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser," 6.

<sup>41</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 123.

<sup>42</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: from Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1989), 34–35.

<sup>43</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 142.

employs Gestalt psychology to investigate a reader's perceptions and responses.<sup>44</sup> In explaining it, Iser states: "The 'consistent interpretation,' or gestalt, is a product of the interaction between text and reader, and so cannot be exclusively traced back either to the written text or to the disposition of the reader. Now psycholinguistic experiments have shown that meanings cannot be grasped merely by the direct or indirect decoding of letters or words, but can only be compiled by means of grouping."<sup>45</sup> For Iser, apprehension of the text is dependent on gestalt groups because meaning "is not manifested in words," and the reading process consequently cannot be merely the recognition of individual linguistic signs.

**c) The Wandering Viewpoint:**

Iser describes the concept of the wandering viewpoint as "a means of describing the way in which the reader is present in the text. This presence comes at a point where memory and expectation converge, and the resultant dialectic movement brings about a continual modification of memory and an increasing complexity of expectation."<sup>46</sup> As is known, the reader can never grasp and process the whole text instantaneously as a whole. Iser notes that "as the readers' wandering viewpoint travels between all these segments; its constant switching during the time flow of reading intertwines them thus bringing forth a network of perspectives."<sup>47</sup> The reader's understanding and involvement in the text depend on the degree of attention he pays during his journey. Iser refers to each phase of the reader's journey as "perspective," and he suggests four possible narrative perspectives: those of the plot, the narrator, the characters, and the fictitious reader. Thus, the story's focus can change from one perspective to another.<sup>48</sup> When the reader adopts the wandering viewpoint, he will be able to synthesize different views and perspectives, which will allow him to construct his

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<sup>44</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 90.

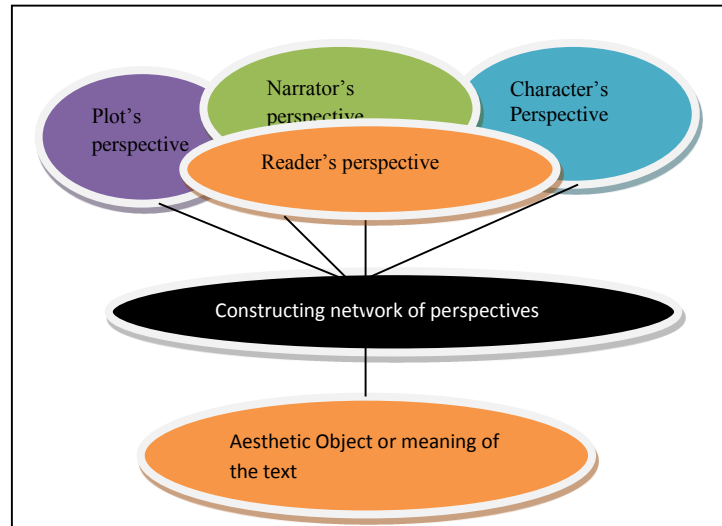
<sup>45</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 119.

<sup>46</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 118.

<sup>47</sup> Wolfgang Iser, "Interaction between Text and Reader," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism*, ed. Peter Simon, (United States: Norton & Company, Inc., 2010), 1528.

<sup>48</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 35.

own aesthetic object or meaning of the text. The following diagram illustrates the wandering viewpoint in Iser's Reception Theory:



**Figure 2: The Wandering Viewpoint in Wolfgang Iser's Reception Theory**

**d) The Implied Reader:**

Perhaps the most important element in Iser's Reception Theory is the concept of the implied reader. In his view, the implied reader is an abstract concept that cannot be identified with any person. It is used to describe two interrelated things: it refers to both the interaction between the reader and the text and the reader's activity, and it "incorporates the pre-structuring of the potential meaning by the text and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process."<sup>49</sup> In fact, Iser defines the "implied reader" as follows: "If, then, we are to try and understand the effects caused and the responses elicited by literary works, we must allow for the reader's presence without in any way predetermining his character or his historical situation. We may call him, for want of a better term, the implied reader."<sup>50</sup> Thus, Iser removes the empirical real reader and invents the term 'the implied reader' to

<sup>49</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1974), XII.

<sup>50</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 34.

embody “all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effects.”<sup>51</sup> The textual structure of the implied reader embodies three basic components: “the different perspectives represented in the text, the vantage point from which he joins them together, and the meeting place where they converge.”<sup>52</sup>

In sum, Wolfgang Iser’s Reception Theory accords more value to the aesthetic response and the interaction between the reader and the text. There are two poles involved in the reader’s experience of interpreting a text: The artistic pole refers to the text with its linguistic and syntactic properties, while the aesthetic pole is the reader’s revelation of meaning. Moreover, Iser focuses on three domains in the reading process. The first domain is the text, with its schemata and the concomitant places of indeterminacy that the reader needs to concretize in order to understand the meaning of the text. Second, Iser values the role of the reader in the reading process, his presence, his capacity for drawing mental images, interpretations, and his use of background knowledge and literary experiences while filling in the blanks in an attempt to construct a cohesive aesthetic object. Finally, Iser explores the interaction between the text and its readers and suggests that the reader is supposed to interact with the text by analysing its textual signals and literary structures. In this theory, there are four interrelated aspects: the implied reader, the repertoire, the blank, and the wandering viewpoint.

## **1.2 Development of American Literary Minimalism: Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason**

The minimalist style has attracted the attention of scholars and critics. It has been able to hold a specific position in American literary history due to the works of many minimalist writers. The specificities and characteristics of the minimalist short story can be fairly understood in relation to the history of American literary minimalism. Shazia Khatoon

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<sup>51</sup> Iser, *The Implied Reader*, 34.

<sup>52</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 36.

remarks that, by and large, literary minimalism is divided into three phases: the first phase is represented by the writing of Ernest Hemingway; the second phase deals with the writing of Raymond Carver and his contemporaries, including Richard Ford and Bobbie Ann Mason; and the third phase comes up with the writing of Frederick Barthelme.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, despite the fact that the minimalist style has become well-known in the late 1970s and 1980s in American literature, its origins can be traced back to Ernest Hemingway's fiction and non-fiction writings.

Warren Motte notes that people qualify things as “small” depending on physical size, duration, intensity, significance, the quantity of the elements composing them, and the simplicity of the structures. These different registers of perception share the notion of reduction. Critics and scholars refer to the piece of art, which is principally based on the notion of reduction, as minimalist.<sup>54</sup> According to him, the Minimalist Movement was developed as a reaction to Abstract Expressionism. Until the 1950s, writers tended to express their feelings and emotions through art. However, with the rise of the Minimalist Movement, there was a shift toward more objective, non-referential, and unexpressive art.<sup>55</sup> As Edward Strickland defines it, generally, minimalism is “a movement, primarily in post-war America, towards an art –visual, musical, literary, or otherwise –that makes its statement with limited, if not the fewest possible, resources.”<sup>56</sup> Specifically, the term “minimalism” refers to movements in painting, sculpture, architecture, and music that emerged and flourished in the 1960s and 1970s and have remained influential to the present day. These movements

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<sup>53</sup> Shazia Khaton, “Three Phases of Literary Minimalism.” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research*. 2, Iss. 12, (December 2016):74, (Accessed 12 June, 2017), <http://www.socialsciencejournal.in/download/236/2-11-37-556.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> Warren Motte, “Toussaint's small world,” *The Romanic Review* 86, no. 4 (1995): 747+, *Literature Resource Center*, (Accessed March 18, 2017), <http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.librarypoint.org/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=ctrl&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA114861529&asid=fef45a5822fb2af4828c34d4b09eb281>.

<sup>55</sup> Warren Motte, “Toussaint's Small World,” 747+.

<sup>56</sup> Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 2<sup>nd</sup>ed., (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000), 7.

provided the basic elements for the development of the Minimalist Movement in literature in the late 1970s.

### **1.2.1 The Historical and the Socio-cultural Context of Literary Minimalism**

Indeed, the Minimalist Movement, which began as an offshoot of postmodernism, evolved into a new development in literary history. But it did not start from scratch, as its writers were influenced by the preceding literary movements, especially modernism, realism, and postmodernism. Herzinger argues that Carver and his followers are “both allied with and in opposition to postmodernism.”<sup>57</sup> As this doctoral research compares selected stories by Hemingway, Carver, Ford, and Bobbie Ann, it is worthwhile to start the discussion by briefly explaining postmodernism in relation to modernism, and then move on to provide evidence for arguments concerning the connections that exist between postmodernism and minimalism. The latter is a realistic mode of expression.

It is a tautology to advance that, postmodernism is a reaction against modernism. Historically, Farhat Iftekharuddin maintains the fact that the United States established itself as a major power after World War II stimulated social, cultural, philosophical, economic, and political changes. In reality, the social and political ideologies that dominated the modern era collapsed. This provided the impetus for the emergence of an assortment of philosophical statements, critical, strategic, and rhetorical practices that are grouped together under the rubric of “postmodernism.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, Nath clarifies that postmodernism is considered a reaction to the assumed certainty of objective efforts to explain reality, which was associated with modernism. Thus, postmodernism is better understood in comparison with modernism.

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<sup>57</sup> Kim A. Herzinger, “Minimalism as a Postmodernism: Some Introductory Notes,” *New Orleans Review* 16. 3(1980): 79.

<sup>58</sup> Farhat Iftekharuddin, “Introduction,” in *The Postmodern Short Story: Forms and Issues*, ed. Farhat Iftekharuddin et al., (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 1.

Postmodernism certainly brought new ideas to challenge the existing modes of thought, economic ideology, and political assertions. While modernism is concerned with the principles of identity, unity, authority, and certainty, postmodernism focuses on the principles of plurality, textuality, and skepticism. The main assumptions regarding reality and truth are the following. First, postmodernism believes in the multiplicity of worlds and views as opposed to modernism, which believes in the existence of a single reality governing the world.<sup>59</sup> Postmodernism affected the writers' views of the world and led to the production of different literary forms. Second, epistemically concerned, modernism believes in the possibility of knowing the unified world, while postmodernism denies this fact and believes instead in a reality that only comes into being through interpretations of what the world means for each person. As a result, the latter has to construct his own reality using his cognitive capacities. Third, postmodernism develops a highly sceptical view regarding the existence of valid explanations for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races. As such, it advocates that there is no such universal, objective, scientific, philosophical, or religious truth that serves to explain everything for people. However, it is impossible to obtain an absolute and certain truth that can help explain everything. According to postmodernism, truth is evolving and limited. From a philosophical view, postmodernism holds that reality cannot be known, nor can it be described objectively.<sup>60</sup>

Subsequently, as Iftekharrudin claims, the purposes of writing and criticising literature have changed so that the search for social, historical, and moral meaning has been disregarded by postmodernism since the end of the Second World War.<sup>61</sup> Marry C. Brennan points out that although the United States enjoyed a long period of prosperity and

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<sup>59</sup> Shanjendu Nath, "The Concept of Reality from Postmodern Perspectives," *Blue Ocean Research Journals* 26. 3, No.5(May 2014): 27, ( Accessed April 12, 2017), <http://www.borjournals.com/a/index.php/jbmssr/article/viewFile/1684/1058>.

<sup>60</sup> Shanjendu Nath, "The Concept of Reality," 27–28.

<sup>61</sup> Iftekharruddin, "Introduction," 9.

modernization following its victory in the Second World War, the anxieties of the Cold War had a massive impact on American society. First, the Cold War led to the spread of anti-communism within the USA. The hostilities between the United States and the Soviet Union made the world dangerous as both powers created armed conflicts and changed the lives of people, even those who did not participate directly in the anti-communist conflicts.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, Iftekharrudin also explicates that American interference in the Vietnam War (1955–1975), which was also related to the issue of the Cold War, intensified people’s fear and depression. Interestingly, the Cold War and its threat of thermonuclear annihilation prompted writers to depict people’s chaos, depression, and fragmentation and try to interpret the post-war world that had already undergone countless disasters and was beyond redemption.<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, these updates were certainly reflected in fiction and affected its forms. Malcolm S. Bradbury observes that the fiction of the sixties was moved “towards fantastic factuality, attempting to penetrate the functionality of the real.”<sup>64</sup> By this he means that postmodern literature deviates from modern literature by breaking with realism. So, postmodern literature is no longer capable of representing objective reality. Postmodernist writers questioned the very sense of reality and admitted that from a scientific point of view there is no guarantee that commonplace “reality” is “real.” This view of reality was reflected in their writing, so they were no longer interested in depicting the ‘real’ world, but rather they relied on their imagination to produce their stories and novels. Therefore, the fragmentation of the postmodern world and its violence resulted in the literature that notably

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<sup>62</sup> Marry C. Brennan, “The Cold War World,” in *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade against Communism*, (University Press of Colorado, Colorado, 2008), 13, (Accessed 11 Sept., 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1d8h9s3.5>.

<sup>63</sup> Iftekharrudin, “Introduction,” 9–10.

<sup>64</sup> Malcolm S. Bradbury, *Modern American Novel*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1983), 158.



rejected the boundaries between “high” and “low” forms of literature and art and did not distinguish between the different genres of literature.<sup>65</sup>

Stylistically considered, Robert L. McLaughlin characterizes US postmodern fiction in terms of some or all of the following features: “double coded language or, more popularly, irony; self-referentiality; experiments in form and style; contingent truths manifested through multiple, dialogic narratives that work to subvert totalizing systems; the breakdown of the autonomous, integrated individual.”<sup>66</sup> Moreover, Abby H.P. Werlock sustains that the postmodernists employed the techniques of allusion, parody, pastiche, intertextuality, metafiction, historiographic metafiction, dark humor, minimalism, maximalism, magical realism, temporal distortion, and reader’s involvement. These forms of literature do not only differ from modernist forms, but they are a reaction to them.<sup>67</sup> In fact, postmodernist writers have long derided modernist works in their own writings.

In addition, Tony Hilfer asserts that the difference between modernism and postmodernism lies in the “general attitude towards selfhood, subjectivity and essence.”<sup>68</sup> Postmodernist writers rejected heroic modernism and its subjective bias. Furthermore, in contrast to modernist writers, postmodernist writers rejected access to consciousness, the employment of myth as a unifying principle, and the use of epiphanies in their works.<sup>69</sup> According to Abby H.P. Werlock, the postmodernist writers attempted to portray the fragmented postmodern world, and their appearance challenged the conventions of the narrative order, closure, and mimetic fidelity that characterized the modernist works.<sup>70</sup> The

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<sup>65</sup> Iftekharruddin, “introduction,” 10–11.

<sup>66</sup> Robert L. McLaughlin, “After the Revolution: US Postmodernism in the Twenty-First Century,” *Narrative* 21, no. 3 (2013): 285, (Accessed 10 July, 2020), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24615397>

<sup>67</sup> Abby H.P., Werlock, “Postmodernism,” in *The Facts On File Companion to the American Short Story*, (New York: Facts On File, 2000), *Bloom’s Literary Reference Online*, (Accessed May 22, 2009), <http://fofweb.com/activelink2.asp?ItemID=WE54&SID=5&iPin=Gamshrtsty0563&SingleRecord=True>.

<sup>68</sup> Tony Hilfer, *American Fiction since 1940*, 99.

<sup>69</sup> Tony Hilfer, *American Fiction since 1940*, 100.

<sup>70</sup> Werlock, “Postmodernism.”

experiment of postmodernism was a failure because of its disconnection with the social world. Thus, the new emerging writers turned their attention to the Minimalist Movement.

Karaagac reports that for historical and socio-economic reasons, American society experienced changes in almost all fields in the 1970s and 1980s. Historical events such as the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the effects of the Vietnam War (1945–1975), the Watergate Scandal, President John F. Kennedy’s assassination in 1963, and his brother Robert F. Kennedy’s assassination in 1968 all had an impact on the lives of ordinary Americans. The economic and political policies of President Jimmy Carter and his follower, President Ronald Reagan, moved the country into economic hardship and widened the gap between social classes.<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, Eugene Goodheart asserts that American culture was distinguished by a strong sense of political and social conservatism. A cultural malaise settled upon the country and changed people’s lives so that there was “a general sense that things [had] not only gone wrong, but that they [would] never be right again.”<sup>72</sup> Richard D. Heffner reports that although Ronald Reagan attempted to improve the lives of the poor classes, his economic and political policies further widened the gap between the social classes.<sup>73</sup> Subsequently, the American Dream became a mere mirage for the majority of lower-middle-class and working-class Americans.

The socio-cultural conditions making America during the 1970s and 1980s were an impetus for a return to realism with the Minimalist Movement. In his article, “Discipline and Publish,” Addington R. Welling argues that the growth of creative writing programs in postwar America has greatly contributed to the revival of the short story by offering a new

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<sup>71</sup> Karaagac, *Between Promise and Policy*, 143.

<sup>72</sup> Eugene Goodheart, “Four Decades of Contemporary Fiction,” in *American Literature: Volume Nine of the New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, ed. Boris Ford, (New York, Viking Penguin, 1988), 634.

<sup>73</sup> Richard D. Heffner, *A Documentary History of the United States*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., (New York: Signet, 2002), 489.

institutional home for literary production.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, Margaret Doherty explains that minimalist fiction became popular in the early 1980s because it was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (the NEA). Despite the fact that these minimalist writers wrote for “[their] own artistic reasons,” most critics argue that their experimentation with the terse style and unadorned language “reflected the national trauma of recent Vietnam.”<sup>75</sup>

The NEA, which was on the verge of being defunded as an agency irrelevant to American life, was determined to encourage fiction that combined “popular appeal” with aesthetic merits. As the new minimalist fiction fit both criteria, it was highly supported regardless of its commercial appeal. It dovetailed with Reagan-era ideology that favored the market and fostered a vision of the United States as a culturally and politically unified social body. Put differently, minimalist fiction produced in the wake of the Vietnam War suggested that despite the country’s most contentious war, national unity could be restored.<sup>76</sup>

As far as the connection between minimalism and postmodernism, many scholars argue that minimalism is closely connected to the postmodern system of thought. Kim Levin considers minimalism as “the last of the modern styles...a transition between the modern and the postmodern.”<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, Kim Herzinger claims that minimalism is both an extension of postmodernism and a revolt against.<sup>78</sup> In his article, “Minimalism VS. Postmodernism in Contemporary American Fiction,” Abádi-Nagy Zoltán supports Herzinger’s opinion by noting that “minimalism and postmodernism [are] like two eggs in the same basket,” though there are many different opinions on the dynamics of such relationship.<sup>79</sup> He emphasizes that

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<sup>74</sup> Robert Welling Addington, “*Discipline and Publish: Creative Writing programs, Literary Markets and the Short Story Renaissance*,” (Doctoral thesis, Case Western Reserve University, August, 2003), 6.

<sup>75</sup> Margaret Doherty, “State-Funded Fiction: Minimalism, National Memory, and the Return to Realism in the Post-Postmodern Age,” *American Literary History* 27, no. 1 (2015): 81, (Accessed April 3, 2022), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43818731>.

<sup>76</sup> Doherty, “State-Funded Fiction,” 81.

<sup>77</sup> Kim Levin, “Farewell to Modernism,” *Arts Magazine* 54, no.2 (1979): 90.

<sup>78</sup> Herzinger, “Minimalism as a Postmodernism,” 79.

<sup>79</sup> Zoltán Abádi-Nagy, “Minimalism VS. Postmodernism in Contemporary American Fiction,” *Neohelicon* 28, No. 1 (January 2001):130, (Accessed 15 Feb., 2017), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023>.

“minimalism is a response to the same (i.e., postmodernist) view of the world, but the same philosophical conclusions regarding the postmodern nature of the world result in a radically different arts poetica.”<sup>80</sup> In other words, although they adhere to the same ontological and epistemological apprehensions, these two movements adopted different modes of expressions.

First, the most important similarity is that both movements reject the modernist totalization worldview by employing different techniques because they both diminish content to an essential state, aiming for a sublime purity. In his article, Abádi-Nagy Zoltán retains that although minimalism adheres to totalization, there is a slight difference in its outlook. As he pronounces: “while postmodernism rejects totalizability most by relativizing and deconstructing totalities(metanarratives) and by parodying(ironically aborting) its own attempt at totalization, minimalism’s conspicuous *elliptic* incompleteness simply *dramatizes* nontotalizability by declining to attempt (or even to parody such attempt).”<sup>81</sup> It be deduced that the existence of indeterminacies in a minimalist style argues for its rejection of totalizability.

Additionally, according to Herzinger, minimalism is influenced by the sense of fragmentation and chaos of postmodernism, which are used to create playful texts.<sup>82</sup> He views that both movements are interested in the discontinuities of human interaction.<sup>83</sup> Regarding this point, Graham Clarke also observes that the characters in the minimalist stories live “in an America devoid of its unifying myths [...]. In which the terms of meaning have been replaced by scattered and fragmented plurality.”<sup>84</sup> According to him, another important shared technical feature between postmodernism and minimalism is that both tend

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<sup>80</sup> Zoltán, “Minimalism VS. Postmodernism,” 129.

<sup>81</sup> Zoltán, “Minimalism VS. Postmodernism,” 130.

<sup>82</sup> Herzinger, “Minimalism as a Postmodernism,” 79.

<sup>83</sup> Herzinger, “Minimalism as a Postmodernism,” 79.

<sup>84</sup> Graham Clarke, “Investing the Glimpse: Raymond Carver and the Syntax of Silence,” in *The New American Writing: Essays on American Literature*, ed. Graham Clarke, (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), 106.

to blur the demarcation line between facts and life.<sup>85</sup> For example, the characters of Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, Ann Beattie, and Bobbie Ann Mason, live in a world where they cannot even understand its meaning. Besides, their stories bear similarities to their lives because these writers experienced the different problems of their fictionalized characters.

Indeed, perhaps the differences between these two movements are more significant than the similarities. As stressed above, minimalism was also a revolt against postmodernism. Indeed, the socio-cultural conditions of America during the 1970s and 1980s were an impetus for a return to realism. In his article, "A Few Words about Minimalism," John Barth, who provided the best commentary on the subject, claims that minimalism "was a reaction against the ironic, black-humoristic 'fabulism' and/or the (sometimes academic) intellectuality and/or the density, here byzantine, there baroque, of some of their immediate American literary antecedents: the likes of Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, Stanley Elkin, William Heller, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut (and, I shall presume, myself as well)."<sup>86</sup> Barth stresses the fact that minimalism rejected some principles of postmodernism, and thus, its writers were in contradiction with the aforementioned postmodernist writers.

Supporting Barth's view, Herzinger states that minimalism is characterised by: "conspicuous structural inventions, reliance on the aesthetic of collage, overt concern with the limitations of language, and the rejection or parody of traditional, time tied story lines are backgrounded or managed differently in minimalist fiction."<sup>87</sup> In this statement, Herzinger focuses on the differences in stylistic variation that exist between minimalism and postmodernism.

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<sup>85</sup> Clarke, "Investing the Glimpse," 106.

<sup>86</sup> John Barth, "A Few Words about Minimalism," *The New York Times Book Review* (28 Dec., 1986), (Accessed 13 May, 2009),

<http://www.nytimes.com/1986/12/28/books/a-few-words-about-minimalism.html?pagewanted=all&mcubz=3>

<sup>87</sup>Herzinger, "Minimalism as a Postmodernism," 74.

Another important difference between postmodernism and minimalism is the subject matter. Frederick Barthelme cites the most essential characteristics of minimalist fiction as opposed to postmodernism: “In particular, the main charges are (A) omission of big “philosophical” ideas, (B) not enough history or historical sense, (C) lack of (or wrong) political posture, (D) insufficient “depth” of character, (E) commonplace description too reliant on brand names, (F) drabness of “style,” (G) moral poverty.”<sup>88</sup> Hence, for Barthelme, minimalism departed from postmodernist philosophical concerns and relied on surface descriptions of characters and common subjects. By adapting realism as a mode of expression, the minimalist writers departed from the subject matter of the postmodernist writers because minimalism attempted to reenergize the social mission of literature and its capacity to impact individuals and social institutions. According to Barthelme, there was a return to social concerns, such as family relationships and emotional interactions, instead of indulging in philosophical questions.<sup>89</sup>

Minimalist writers were the leaders of the so-called “Dirty realism” school following Bill Buford’s introduction in the *Granta* issue.<sup>90</sup> It is worth mentioning that the realistic style has never truly hold literary history, but its re-emergence as a literary phenomenon by the end of the 1970s revealed that “literary history has reached another stage of exhaustion, which the demise of experimental postmodernism attests to.”<sup>91</sup> Shanjendu Nath explains that postmodernism cherished the principles of plurality, textuality, and skepticism. With regard

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<sup>88</sup> Frederick Barthelme, “On Being Wrong: Convicted Minimalist Spills Bean,” *The New York Times Book Review* (3 April, 1988), (Accessed 3 August, 2017), <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/04/03/books/on-being-wrong-convicted-minimalist-spills-beans.html?pagewanted=all&mcubz=3>.

<sup>89</sup> Barthelme, “On Being Wrong.”

<sup>90</sup> Buford, “Dirty Realism,” 4.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Claviez, “Introduction: Neo-Realism and How to ‘Make It New,’ ” *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 49, no. 1 (2004), 4, ( accessed April 15, 2017), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41157908>.

to reality and truth, postmodernism believes in the multiplicity of worlds. This means that reality is achieved through one's own interpretation of the world.<sup>92</sup>

Robert McLaughlin claims that American fiction, which went through “an aesthetic sea change” by the end of the 1980s, was stimulated by a desire to make a close reconnection between literature and the social sphere, as opposed to postmodernism.<sup>93</sup> When Carver began writing, experimental postmodernism was the dominant literary mode. Fascinated with complex forms and structures, its leading practitioners were mainly concerned with the act of writing itself and the exploration of the arbitrariness of the language. However, in an interview with McCaffery and Gregory, Carver expressed that he was not interested in the kinds of writing that gave ascendance to techniques over the content. He even described postmodernists' writing content as being “all texture and no flesh and blood.”<sup>94</sup>

In his book, *The Minimal Self*, Christopher Lash describes the art that was most appropriate to depict the reality of such a historical period as “anti-art or minimal art... [referring] to a widespread conviction that art can survive only by a drastic restriction of its field of vision.”<sup>95</sup> Differently put, the minimalist writers became interested in portraying real-life situations. Carver affirmed that he favoured fiction that has “some bearing on how we live and how we conduct ourselves and how we work out the consequences of our actions.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, he thought that postmodernism was no longer a suitable genre for the expression of people's disillusionment and human existence because of its disconnection with the social sphere.

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<sup>92</sup> Shanjendu Nath, “The Concept of Reality,” 27.

<sup>93</sup> Robert L. McLaughlin, “Post-Postmodern Discontent: Contemporary Fiction and the Social World,” *Symploke* 12.1–2 (2004), 54.

<sup>94</sup> Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, “An Interview with Raymond Carver”(1984), in *Conversations with Raymond Carver (Literary Conversations Series)*, eds. Marshall Bruce Gentry and William L. Stull, (Mississippi: UP of Mississippi, 1990), 110.

<sup>95</sup> Christopher Lash, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times*, (New York: W.W. Northon and Co., 1984), 131.

<sup>96</sup> Carver, *No Heroics, Please*, 184.

This new type of short story, with unmotivated characters involved in meaningless actions, has been widely published, especially in the 1970s. By 1985, Robert Dunn commented: "... fiction has, in the past few years, fallen into a holding pattern with what has been called minimalism..."<sup>97</sup> In 1989, Madison Smartt Bell praised the success of minimalist fiction by saying: "nothing else could get through into the light."<sup>98</sup> Moreover, in his article, "The Pursuit of the Ordinary," Morris Dickstein explains why the minimalist style became adequate for the period of Carver and his contemporaries: "Carver's so-called minimalism—its implications were anything but minimal—was perfectly suited to a period when Americans were lowering their expectations, learning to live with limitation, to make fewer demands in their own lives."<sup>99</sup> In other words, the minimal style reflected the social, economic, and cultural conditions of the oppressed classes who were obliged to cope with the emerging harsh realities and lead a minimal existence.

George Hovis maintains that the minimalist writers' concern with these social classes distinguishes them from their naturalist forbears.<sup>100</sup> In an interview with David Sexton, Carver admitted that his preference for a minimalist approach was not political, but stemmed mostly from his goal of writing about the "submerged population," or ordinary people using their language.<sup>101</sup> Thus, the minimalist realist short story, with its techniques and themes, was appropriate for the depiction of the reification of life under capitalism, new consumerism, globalization, media, and technology in American society.

Influenced by postmodern experimentation as it was, minimalism did not endorse all the principles of postmodernism. Kim Herzinger emphasizes that minimalism differs

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<sup>97</sup> Robert Dunn, "After Minimalism," *Mississippi Review* 14, no. 1/2 (1985): 53, (Accessed 12 January, 2019), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20115384>.

<sup>98</sup> Madison Bell et al., "A Round-Table Discussion: Throwing Dirt on the Grave of Minimalism," *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, no. 14 (1989): 61, (Accessed 5 April, 2019), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41806999>.

<sup>99</sup> Morris Dickstein, "The Pursuit of the Ordinary," *Partisan Review* 58/3 (Summer 1991): 509.

<sup>100</sup> Hovis, "Minimalism," 493.

<sup>101</sup> Sexton, "David Sexton Talks," 130.



radically from postmodernism in that it does not rely on the strategies of self-reflexiveness and irony as a mode of presentation. Moreover, he states that because minimalism “appears to retain the referential function,” it is “usually read as a form of realism.”<sup>102</sup> G.P Lainsbury sustains that the minimalist writers rejected the heroic self-assertion of Thomas Pynchon as well as contexts that illustrate the link between objects and events. They deliberately hid the personality of the artist and insisted on the random quality of existence.<sup>103</sup> In his article, “A Few Words about Minimalism,” John Barth observes that minimalism is “the kind of terse, oblique, realistic or hyper realistic, slightly plotted, extrospective, cool-surface fiction.”<sup>104</sup> In describing minimalist short stories, Doherty states that they are unadorned, unfurnished, and their characters are, most of the time, ordinary people in their daily life activities such as watching television, reading newspapers, cheap romances or listening to music.<sup>105</sup>

Erin Fallon maintains that minimalism is generally regarded as having the “texture of realism”, though certain mythic features may be retained.<sup>106</sup> In providing arguments about why this style is called “neo-realism,” Thomas Claviez points out that “what happens in neo-realism is that the physical scepticism of postmodernism infuses, is combined, or even (intentionally or unintentionally) collides with the formal language of realism. The latter is thus disconnected from its own metaphysics, epistemology, and claims of representation.”<sup>107</sup> In other words, the modes of representation of both styles are different.

Additionally, neo-realism relies on specific techniques to impress readers instead of relying much on context. In this respect, Winfried Fluck affirms: “What is lost in context,

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<sup>102</sup> Herzinger, “Minimalism as a Postmodernism,” 79.

<sup>103</sup> Lainsbury, *The Carver Chronotope*, 8.

<sup>104</sup> John Barth, “A Few Words about Minimalism.”

<sup>105</sup> Doherty, “State-Funded Fiction,” 88.

<sup>106</sup> Erin Fallon, et al., eds. *A Reader's Companion to the Short Story in English*, (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2001), 31.

<sup>107</sup> Claviez, “Introduction,” 11.

however, is gained in intensity and aesthetic effect.<sup>108</sup> The minimalist writers, as Doherty notes, “traded on absence and opacity in a way that differentiated their work from more familiar models of literary realism.”<sup>109</sup> Cynthia J. Hallett suggests that because many of its writers use plain style and what is unsaid speaks most, it is commonly known as the “aesthetic of exclusion.”<sup>110</sup> In fact, according to Claviez, the claims of representation and language forms that characterize neo-realism play a great role in creating uncanny effects and tensions. As a result, the effects of defamiliarization lead readers to experience emotional responses while seeing familiar objects in a new way.<sup>111</sup>

More importantly, in his article, “Minimalist Fiction and Critical Doctrine,” Diane Stevenson argues that the minimalist writers did not stick to the traditional double form-content. Instead, they created a new single format that enabled them to express reality at the surface. In other words, for them, the reality is a code and the surface is reality.<sup>112</sup> Minimalist writers are, generally, interested in writing as an act of communication in order to convey reality.<sup>113</sup>

The late seventies were a time of realism, but they were also affected by the spirit of stylistic experimentation. The emergence of different labels, such as: “Dirty Realism,” “Ironic Realism,” “Fantastic realism,” “Modern Surrealism,” “Experimental Realism,” “Kmart Fiction, and “TV Fiction,” “White Trash Fiction,” “Grit Lit” demonstrates that writers searched for new forms of realism to depict the essence of a world that “seemed to change gears and directions, along with its rules, everyday.”<sup>114</sup> Hovis views that these names

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<sup>108</sup> Winfried Fluck, “Surface Knowledge and ‘Deep’ Knowledge: The New Realism in American Fiction,” in *Neo-Realism in Contemporary American Fiction*, ed. Kristaan Versluys, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), 72.

<sup>109</sup> Doherty, “State-Funded Fiction,” 87.

<sup>110</sup> Cynthia J. Hallett, “Minimalism and the Short Story,” *Studies in Short Fiction* 33.4 (1996): 487.

<sup>111</sup> Claviez, “Introduction,” 11.

<sup>112</sup> Diane Stevenson, “Minimalist Fiction and Critical Doctrine,” *Mississippi Review* 14, No. 1/2 (Winter, 1985): 87, *University of Southern Mississippi*, (accessed Dec. 2, 2015), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20115388>.

<sup>113</sup> Lainsbury, *The Carver Chronotope*, 12.

<sup>114</sup> John Barth, “A Few Words about Minimalism.”

allude to some aspects of both the form and content of minimalist short stories and suggest that fiction is an amalgamation of popular and high culture. The recurrence of the term ‘realism’ indicates that it is a central characteristic of minimalist fiction.<sup>115</sup>

Moreover, in explaining the differences between traditional realism and “neo-realism,” Margaret Doherty notes that the term “minimalism” refers to the relationship between form and content: “plain style dictated by quotidian subject matter.”<sup>116</sup> This means that minimalism is referred to as “neo-realism,” primarily because, unlike traditional realists, these “dirty realists” were all concerned with decrying the plight of America’s marginalized people. According to her, as opposed to nineteenth-century realism, minimalism rarely mentions “the structural forces impinging on characters’ fates, but typically left those public taxonomies implicit.”<sup>117</sup> As such, through their terse style, the minimalist writers were able to fuse quotidian content with skillfully crafted techniques in a way that made this style appealed to readers of different social classes.<sup>118</sup>

Furthermore, minimalist writers focus on writing moral fiction, which boosts specific goals as opposed to postmodernist writers. In an interview with Kay Bonetti, Carver criticizes the postmodernist metanarrative discourse because, according to him, “it’s self-expression run rampant.”<sup>119</sup> He explains what good art should be: “I mean, in my view art is a linking between people, the creator and the customer. Art is not self-expression, it is communication. And I’m interested in communication.”<sup>120</sup> Thus, the minimalist writers, unlike the postmodernists, were more interested in writing as an act of communication between the author and the reader because they attempted to portray what was taking place

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<sup>115</sup> Hovis, “Minimalism,” 493.

<sup>116</sup> Doherty, “State-Funded Fiction,” 88.

<sup>117</sup> Doherty, “State-Funded Fiction,” 88.

<sup>118</sup> Doherty, “State-Funded Fiction,” 88.

<sup>119</sup> Kay Bonetti, “Ray Carver: Keeping it Short, (1983),” in *Conversations with Raymond Carver (Literary Conversations Series)*, eds. Marshall Bruce Gentry and William L. Stull, (Mississippi: UP of Mississippi, 1990), 58.

<sup>120</sup> Bonetti, “Ray Carver: Keeping it Short, (1983),” 58.

in real life accurately without any complications. They wrote for the common people, using common language to achieve this goal.

Abádi-Nagy retains that the minimalist “preoccupation with the human being as a *real* world entity means that minimalism returns to a world outside the text even if the view presented of that world is reduced in the minimalist fashion.”<sup>121</sup> This dictates that minimalism refers to external focalization with the focus on the emotional involvement of the reader.<sup>122</sup> Certainly, ellipses and gaps that are left for readers to fill in with their imagination are meant to emotionally involve readers in the reconstruction of the text. To appreciate and comprehend minimalist works, readers must actively participate in the creative process. In this respect, their writing resembles Ernest Hemingway’s.

Given the fact that minimalist writers are influenced by both realism and postmodernism, they experience with a variety of voices and methods. However, their minimalist writings share certain characteristics, which can be drawn from the discussion of well-known definitions provided by Mark A. Facknitz, John Barth, and Kim Herzinger. In his article, “Minimalism,” (1991), Mark A. R. Facknitz classifies minimalist writers into two types, formal and social: the “formal minimalist” being “a technician with a taste for clear, colloquial language and uncluttered plots,” using “narrow temporal frames, present tense, and first-person narrators while eliminating editorial or authorial intrusions.” Being a subset category of “formal minimalism, “social minimalism,” or what he called “Dirty Realism,” and “Kmart Realism,” can be described in the same way as the former.<sup>123</sup>

Additionally, in his article, “A Few Words about Minimalism” (1986), John Barth makes his first systematic attempt to define the minimalist short story and differentiated

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<sup>121</sup>Abádi-Nagy, “Minimalism VS. Postmodernism,” 134.

<sup>122</sup>Abádi-Nagy, “Minimalism VS. Postmodernism,” 136.

<sup>123</sup> Mark A. R Facknitz, “Minimalism,” in *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*, ed., George B. Perkins, Barbara Perkins, and Phillip Leininger, Vol. 1, (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 714. *General OneFile*. (Accessed 8 Feb., 2015), <http://go.galegroup.com>.

between the minimalism of style and the minimalism of material. In his accounts, the minimalist style includes “short words, short sentences and paragraphs: a stripped-down vocabulary, a stripped-down rhetoric, and non-emotive tone”; whereas minimalism of material consists of “minimal characters, minimal exposition, minimal mise-en-scenes, minimal action and minimal plot.”<sup>124</sup> According to him, minimalist writers rely on a few simple words, which are arranged into short sentences and paragraphs and are written with an objective style. They also use very few characters and minimal plots with open endings. These two types are, definitely, complementary because they are fused to produce literary minimalist works that have great effects on readers.<sup>125</sup>

Interestingly, in his famous article, “Introduction: On the New Fiction” (1985), Kim Herzinger asserts that there is a stable critical consensus on how minimalism in the American short story is defined, by stating: “Still, most critics, here and elsewhere, can generally agree as to the salient characteristics of “minimalist” fiction ... “equanimity of surface, ‘ordinary’ subjects, recalcitrant narrators and deadpan narratives, slightness of story, and characters who don’t think out loud.”<sup>126</sup> Herzinger adds other traits to the list: compression, “aggressive lucidity,” “spareness and cleanness, above all the obvious ‘craftedness,’” and a “profound uneasiness with irony as a mode of presentation.”<sup>127</sup> This definition has become well-known because it specifies the characteristics of minimalism.

Thematically considered, Chuck Palahniuk, a contemporary minimalist himself, declares that all the elements of the story have to be related and illustrate a given theme by stating: “In minimalism, a story is a symphony, building and building, but never losing the original melody line. All characters and scenes, things that seem dissimilar, they all illustrate

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<sup>124</sup> John Barth, “A Few Words about Minimalism.”

<sup>125</sup> John Barth, “A Few Words about Minimalism.”

<sup>126</sup> Herzinger, “Introduction,” 7.

<sup>127</sup> Herzinger, “Introduction,” 14.

some aspect of the story's theme."<sup>128</sup> Differently put, writers manipulate and inter-relate all the elements of the short story, including setting, conflict, characters, and point of view, in such a manner so as to convey their themes to impact readers. By and large, the main concern of the minimalist story is the realistic depiction of the everyday with an emphasis on contemporary commonplace subject matter such as love, failing marriages, disillusionment, alienation, isolation, unemployment, and poverty. Consequently, minimalist writers pay attention to the external and leave the rest to the reader. They are, generally, interested in writing as an act of communication in order to convey reality.

In sum, literary minimalism has been both a new development of postmodernism and a revolt against it. Although it retained some affinity with postmodernism, minimalism rejected many of the basic principles of postmodernism. It developed new techniques that were derived from different literary movements, including realism, modernism, and postmodernism. The minimalists' reliance on the conventions of realism is triggered by their attempt to express their world views and portray the sufferings of the oppressed class, which is caused by economic and social problems. Although it has no census in respect to its meaning, its writers share much in terms of techniques. They base their style on omission, implication, and objective representation of small details to activate readers' mental processes and make them sense the evoked emotion that is left underneath the surface. These techniques recall Ernest Hemingway's style.

### **1.2.2 The First Phase of Literary Minimalism: Ernest Hemingway's Style**

Although he was not labelled a minimalist writer in his own life time, Ernest Hemingway's early style is considered the first phase of American literary minimalism. Indeed, Stewart F. Sanderson points out that Hemingway's biographical, socio-historical, and cultural contexts

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<sup>128</sup> Chuck Palahniuk, "She Breaks Your Heart," *L.A. Weekly*, (18 Sept. 2002), (Accessed 12 March, 2017), <https://www.csub.edu/~mault/palahniuk.htm>.

played a major role in the development of his talent as a writer with his distinct style. First and foremost, the environment in which he lived was conducive to artistic expression. His father taught him hunting, fishing, and camping skills. In doing so, he promoted what became a lifelong love of nature and travel. His mother also introduced him to music and visual art before he turned to literature.<sup>129</sup> Undoubtedly, the techniques he inherited from these two arts, with their special characteristics, played a role in the development of his minimalist style. He also grew up in the midst of his mother and his family problems, which caused him depression.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, Debra A. Moddelmog and Suzanne del Gizzo opine that Hemingway grew up surrounded by four sisters. This encouraged him to take an interest in depicting the psychology of female characters, such as in his stories “Cat in the Rain” and “Hills like White Elephants.”<sup>131</sup> Thus, according to Sanderson, the influence of his family milieu is manifested in his interest in depicting the violent and the morbid; and in his preoccupation with themes of violence and of family discord and rupture in several stories of his collections *In Our Time* and *Men without Women*. He was also famous for the pain and the discomfort he experienced throughout his life, including his World War I injury, alcoholism, three divorces, mental and physical illness, self-destructiveness, and eventual suicide. These life experiences constituted significant raw material for his themes that gained him fame such as love, death, disillusionment, and war.<sup>132</sup>

Lisa Tyler further sustains that Hemingway’s experience in journalism forced him to develop his terse style with its distinct rhetoric. Sanderson affirms that Hemingway adopted the rules of the newspaper *The Star* and used them, especially in his early fiction.<sup>133</sup> The

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<sup>129</sup> Stewart F. Sanderson, “Ernest Hemingway: Overview,” in *Reference Guide to Short Fiction*, ed. Noelle Watson, (Detroit: St. James Press, 1994), 2, *Literature Resource Center*, (Accessed 24 Feb., 2015), <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420003901&v=2.1&u=crrl&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=b4edced14b2471fb5c07fce0fb6956a3>.

<sup>130</sup> Sanderson, “Ernest Hemingway: Overview,” 3.

<sup>131</sup> Debra A. Moddelmog and Suzanne del Gizzo, eds. *Ernest Hemingway in Context*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 12.

<sup>132</sup> Lisa Tyler, *Student Companion to Ernest Hemingway*, (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 1–2.

<sup>133</sup> Sanderson, “Ernest Hemingway: Overview,” 2.

rules of the newspaper constitute the basic foundation of his minimalist style. For example, the first of over one hundred rules are read like a manifesto: “Use short sentences. Use short first paragraphs. Use vigorous English. Be positive, not negative.”<sup>134</sup> *The Star* also includes other rules which insist on the use of short declarative sentences, the avoidance of adjectives, especially extravagance ones such as splendid, gorgeous, grand, magnificent, and the telling of interesting narrative.<sup>135</sup> *The Kansas City Star* stimulated its reporters to tell the real thing simply and concisely with an objective and accurate style.<sup>136</sup> Hemingway adapted these rules and used them, especially in his early fiction. By so doing, Hemingway learned how to write objectively and accurately from journalism.

The fact that Hemingway started writing fiction during Modernism is also significant to the development of his minimalist style because he was affected by its events, especially World War I (1914–1918), and he learned much from the cultural milieu in the USA and Europe. The First World War hastened the process of change and distressed American society. In effect, the USA enjoyed a period of prosperity from the end of World War I to the beginning of the Great Depression of the 1930s, which is referred to by various names, such as “Flaming Youth,” “The Jazz Age,” “The Roaring Twenties,” and “The Era of Wonderful Nonsense.” Politically, it witnessed Progressive Reform and the New Deal policies and was a turning point in American history because it was different from what came before and after. Despite the fact that the political system of the first president of this decade, Warren G. Harding (1865–1923), was not very successful as it witnessed political scandals, his successor, Calvin Coolidge (1872–1933), passed several measures and adapted a laissez-faire policy that led to economic prosperity and societal and cultural changes after

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<sup>134</sup> Cited in Charles A. Fenton, *The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway: The Early Years*, (New York: American Book –Stratford P, Inc.,1954), 30-31.

<sup>135</sup> Fenton, *The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway*, 37, 41.

<sup>136</sup> Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *From Fact to fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 139.



1922. He also encouraged the creation of the “associative state,” which forged voluntary cooperation between business and government and controlled the power of the centralized state. This decade was characterized by the development of the New Era of industrial capitalism and the rise of big business, mass production, mass consumption, high wages, social progress, technological innovation, mass marketing, and managerial leadership.<sup>137</sup>

Furthermore, as noted by Jesse Zuba, the boom also encouraged the emergence of clubs, cafés, schools, magazines, newspapers, and many other institutions that fostered the spread of mass culture and led to an extreme transformation of life, especially in the city.<sup>138</sup> As a result, a confluence of cultural issues became the primary problem in American society, with the dominance of the “flaming youth” being perhaps the most well-known image. The emergence of this young culture, which was centred on schools and colleges, promoted the appearance of a “revolution in manners and morals.”<sup>139</sup> In short, N.G. Meshram assumes that the 1920s became “the age of wonderful nonsense, and a time of social hopelessness.”<sup>140</sup> George Parker Anderson thinks that, precipitated by these changes, American writers developed the modernist movement in an attempt to express their shifting perceptions of the world around them and the place of humanity as well. They saw the cold machinery and increased capitalism as the real causes of individuals’ alienation and loneliness.<sup>141</sup>

In his article, “Hemingway on War and Its Aftermath,” Thomas Putnam finds that, being affected by their war experience, American modernist writers lost faith in the central institutions of Western civilization, including the institution of literature itself. As a reaction

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<sup>137</sup> “The 1920s: Prosperity and Cultural Tensions,” in *World War I and the Jazz Age*, American Journey Online, (Woodbridge, CT.: Microfilm, 1999), *Student Resource Center – Gold*, (Accessed 6 March, 2010), <http://find.galegroup.com>.

<sup>138</sup> Jesse Zuba, ed., “The Jazz Age and the Great Depression,” in *New York: Bloom's Literary Places*, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2019), 99.

<sup>139</sup> “The 1920s: Prosperity and Cultural Tensions.”

<sup>140</sup> N.G. Meshram, *The Fiction of Ernest Hemingway*, (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2002), 2–5.

<sup>141</sup> George Parker Anderson, *American Modernism 1914-1945 (Research Guide to American Literature)*, (New York: Facts on File Inc., 2010), 14-15, (Accessed 12 June, 2017), [http://didattica.uniroma2.it/assets/uploads/corsi/135534/Extracts\\_from\\_G.P.\\_Anderson\\_-\\_American\\_Modernism\\_.pdf](http://didattica.uniroma2.it/assets/uploads/corsi/135534/Extracts_from_G.P._Anderson_-_American_Modernism_.pdf).

to Victorian literature, which was prone to elaborate style, Hemingway wrote the American sentence by creating a new and distinct style “in which meaning is established through dialogue, through action, and silences—a fiction in which nothing crucial—or at least very little—is stated explicitly.”<sup>142</sup> Moreover, Putnam reports that Gail Caldwell, a speaker at the Hemingway Centennial, thought that the modernist writers rebelled against the hypocrisy of Victorian literature after living through the event of the First World War, which was also a turning point “that changed world literature as well as how Hemingway responded to it.”<sup>143</sup>

Hemingway has long been considered an interesting social critic of twentieth-century American fiction and an articulate interpreter of the American cultural milieu. Owing to his war experience, he held a modern existentialist worldview that influenced twentieth-century literature. Hemingway and his successors of the Minimalist Movement were influenced by its ideas of being, nihilism, and knowing. Richard Grivil sustains that, although there were disagreements between their ideas, existentialist philosophers all tried to answer fundamental philosophical questions: why do we exist? What is our purpose in life? What is our relation with the world and other people?<sup>144</sup> Moreover, Wesley Barnes points out that they discussed questions about human existence, the feeling that there is no purpose or explanation at the core of existence, as well as the problems that arise from it.<sup>145</sup> Bret W. Davis explains that Martin Heidegger was not concerned with the question of being in its Western traditional sense, but he approached it from an ontological angle by asking the fundamental question: “what does it mean for anything to be at all?”<sup>146</sup> In addition, at the

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<sup>142</sup> Thomas Putnam, “Hemingway on War and Its Aftermath,” *The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration* 38, No. 1 (Spring 2006), (Accessed 12 Jan., 2017), <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/spring/hemingway.html>.

<sup>143</sup> Putnam, “Hemingway on War and Its Aftermath.”

<sup>144</sup> Richard Grivil, *Existentialism: Existence Precedes Essence*, (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2007), 7, (Accessed 28 May, 2020), <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000tww&AN=373353&lang=fr&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>145</sup> Wesley Barnes, *The Philosophy and Literature of Existentialism*, (New York: Barron’s Educational Series, Inc., 1968), 3.

<sup>146</sup> Bret W. Davis, *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2010), 2–6.

centre of Heidegger's thought is his assumption that "the question of being must be understood as a question of the relation between being and human existence," or what he described as a "belonging together."<sup>147</sup> Jack Reynolds further clarifies that Heidegger believed in the existence of God as a transcendent entity that ensured the existence of all other things.<sup>148</sup>

More importantly, in his book *Being and Time* (1962), Martin Heidegger maintained that it is the march toward death that makes people more aware of the question of Being. He constantly speaks of death as a "non-relational possibility." For him, when Dasein (the rooted human being) is face-to-face with the "possibility of no-longer-being-able- to be there," then "all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone."<sup>149</sup> Likewise, in his major work, *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre introduced the key elements of existentialist ontology, or theory of being. He believed that there are three modes of human 'being': being-in-itself (*en-soi*), being-for-itself (*pour-soi*), and being-for-others (*pour-soi*). Although they may look incomprehensible, these three modes are useful for analysing the behaviour of human beings.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, Robert C. Clark notes that some critics regard literary minimalism "to be nihilistic or morally neutral," owing to the mode's reportorial nature, authors' and narrators' self-effacement in the minimalist stories, the implication of emotions, and the absence of explanatory expositions in which the protagonists might analyse what is happening to them.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Davis, *Martin Heidegger*, 8.

<sup>148</sup> Jack Reynolds, *Understanding Existentialism*, (Malta: Gutenberg Press, 2006), 21.

<sup>149</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans., John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (London: SCMP, 1962), 293–294.

<sup>150</sup> Jean- Paul Sartre, Trans. Hazel E. Barnes, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, (New York: Washington Square P, 1992), XXV.

<sup>151</sup> Robert C. Clark, "Keeping the Reader in the House: American Minimalism, Literary Impressionism, and Raymond Carver's 'Cathedral,'" *Journal of Modern Literature* 36, no. 1 (2012):107, (Accessed 4 July, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.2979/jmodelite.36.1.104>.

Moreover, in his essay “Less is Less,” Madison Smart Bell contends, that minimalism is “a trim, minimal style, an obsessive concern for surface detail, a tendency to ignore or eliminate distinctions among the people it renders, and a studiedly deterministic, at times nihilistic, vision of the world.”<sup>152</sup> This means that because minimalism is too blank and bare-boned, it tends to represent a nihilistic world view.

Additionally, Sartre thinks that human beings should also act in the face of what Jean-Paul Sartre called “nothingness” and not attribute what happens to them to socio-cultural or biological aspects.<sup>153</sup> Lee Spinks points out that Friedrich Nietzsche’s notions of “nihilism” and “nothingness” are other enduring insights of existentialism. He posed a radical question: “What is thought for?” This questions the meaning of thinking itself and what relationship it has with other forces of life. One of his primary concerns is how culture and way of life reflect human values, how values are created, and how these values are related to people’s changing lifestyles and behavior.<sup>154</sup> In addition, Spinks argues that Nietzsche’s challenge resides in his concern about the meaning and value of life. He also believed that modern life is characterized by a fateful form of ‘nihilism.’ The word “nihilism” describes the feeling of nothingness or emptiness experienced by people who do not believe in the norms and values that regulate their daily lives and who are unable to find new ways to either create their own values or bring them into being.<sup>155</sup>

Furthermore, in his article, “Nietzsche, Nihilism and Meaning,” Lawrence J. Hatab notes that Nietzsche’s ideas about nihilism resulted from the collapse of traditional western belief systems, which are: “a) values have some kind of objective validity and justification, b) human existence has an ultimate meaning or purpose, and c) there are objective, knowable

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<sup>152</sup> Madison Smartt Bell, “Less is Less: The Dwindling American Short Story,” *Harper’s* 272, (1986): 65.

<sup>153</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, XXVI.

<sup>154</sup> Lee Spinks, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

<sup>155</sup> Spinks, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 4.

truths about the world.”<sup>156</sup> Based on this, Stijn Latré declares that Heidegger explained the death of God metaphysically, as God stands for the supra-sensory world that Plato regarded as the only true reality. Accordingly, Heidegger believed that nihilism refers to the absence of a supra-sensory world that has a crucial role in controlling, connecting, and orienting every being.<sup>157</sup> Since nihilism is inhuman, philosophers have attempted to find solutions to this world, which seems to have lost its traditional western values.

In his article, “Nietzsche, Nihilism and Meaning,” Hatab contends that Nietzsche was one of the well-known philosophers who suggested ways to solve the problem of nihilism, though he criticized the foundations of western thought. Indeed, if God is dead, then, in Nietzsche’s view, nothing is true and everything becomes tolerated.<sup>158</sup> In interpreting Nietzsche’s philosophy of nihilism, J. Harvey Lomax claims that this conviction has practical effects on society because it contributes to “liberating the most barbaric passions and of legitimating the right of the faster, the cruellest, the strongest to rule.”<sup>159</sup> In effect, Spinks notices that, according to Nietzsche, these moral values restrict human beings’ instinctual forces and discourage people from actively creating their own values and moral laws. Hence, he proposed that the problem of nihilism can only be solved when traditional standards of “truth” and “being” are overcome through the transhuman, for the reason that these two traditional values hinder the existence of a world of becoming.<sup>160</sup>

Likewise, Nietzsche put forward alternative thinking that could be appropriate for the world of becoming. In his book, *The Will to Power*, he considered art as a distinctive “countermovement” to the western tradition and every form of nihilism, and advanced that

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<sup>156</sup> Lawrence J Hatab, “Nietzsche, Nihilism and Meaning,” *The Personalist Forum* 3, no. 2 (1987): 91, (Accessed 12 June, 2020), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20708503>.

<sup>157</sup> Stijn Latré, “Nietzsche, Heidegger, Girard on ‘The Death of God’,” *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 57, no. 2 (2001): 300, (Accessed 7 July, 2020), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40337628>.

<sup>158</sup> Hatab, “Nietzsche, Nihilism and Meaning,” 94.

<sup>159</sup> J. Harvey Lomax, “Löwith’s Nietzsche,” *Interpreting Nietzsche: Reception and*

*Influence*, ed., Ashley Woodward, (Ashley Woodward and Contributors: New York, 2011), 20.

<sup>160</sup> Spinks, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 5.

the world can be seen as “a work of art that gives birth to itself.”<sup>161</sup> He also suggested that the narrower sense of art can give another general view of the world, which can be more suitable for the condition of becoming.<sup>162</sup> In the West, existentialism played a major role in philosophical and literary life, as well as reflecting the spiritual crises of people who witnessed disastrous wars.

Hemingway was, indeed, a self-taught and extraordinarily well-read man in his life, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth-century European literature. In “Interview with George Plimpton (1958),” Hemingway acknowledged that he learned from many writers, such as Mark Twain, Flaubert, Stendhal, Bach, Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Anton Chekhov, Andrew Marvell, Shakespeare, Mozart, Dante, Cézanne, Guy de Maupassant, Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, and Ezra Pound.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, Daniel S. Burt purports that Hemingway also learned from European modernist masters, to name a few, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, and Franz Kafka.<sup>164</sup> He skilfully fused the techniques he learned from different writers to produce a minimalist style that has the power to express the emotional truth. Because he relied on minimalist techniques, which would be developed by the writers of the Minimalist Movement, he has been considered the founding father of American literary minimalism.

### **1.2.3 Second Phase of Literary Minimalism: Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason**

As underlined above, Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason were pioneer writers who adapted literary minimalism in their short fiction. Together with other

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<sup>161</sup> Walter Kaufmann, ed., Kaufmann, *Friedrich Nietzsche: The Will to Power*, trans. Walter and R.J. Hollingdale, (New York: Vintage, 1968), 419.

<sup>162</sup> Kaufmann, *Friedrich Nietzsche: The Will to Power*, 419.

<sup>163</sup> Ernest Hemingway, “Interview by George Plimpton, 1958,” in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interview*, George Plimpton, ed., (2<sup>nd</sup> ser., New York: Penguin, 1963), 220–221.

<sup>164</sup> Daniel S. Burt, *The Chronology of American Literature: American Literary Achievements from Colonial Era to Modern Times*, (New England: Boston Houghton- Mifflin Trade and Reference, 2004), 335.

contemporary minimalist writers, they represent the second phase of American literary minimalism. Certainly, they contributed to the foundation of the Minimalist Movement through the publication of outstanding collections with their distinct styles and themes. Compared to Hemingway, their minimalist styles were developed under certain influences, including their life experiences, cultural and socio-historical context, and their acquaintance with great authors. These factors helped shape their styles and paved the way for their artistic achievements.

To start with, Raymond Carver was a prominent social 'neo-realist' writer in the tradition of Guy de Maupassant, Anton Chekhov, and Ernest Hemingway. In an interview with Mona Simpson and Lewis Buzbee, Carver expressed his dislike of the label, "minimalism," by saying: "There's something about "minimalist" that smacks of smallness of vision and execution that I do not like."<sup>165</sup> However, he did not reject the idea of his influence by Hemingway minimalist style. Regarding this point, Iftekharuddin declares that Carver would hardly disagree with the "many scholars (who) believe that minimalism, as it is called, is not so much a break with modernism as it is a carryover from the Hemingway-type story with its sparseness of detail and objective stance."<sup>166</sup>

In his article, "Raymond Carver," Charles E. May alludes to the fact that Carver's gritty stories of the working class often reflect his background, including his upbringing as a child. He was born in Oregon in a logging town and grew up in Yakima, Washington. He belonged to a lower-class family. In his teenage years, he lived in the Pacific Northwest, where many of his stories were set, and where he married and fathered two children before

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<sup>165</sup> Mona Simpson and Lewis Buzbee, "Raymond Carver" (1983), in *Conversations with Raymond Carver (Literary Conversations Series)*, eds. Marshall Bruce Gentry and William L. Stull, (Mississippi: UP of Mississippi, 1990), 44.

<sup>166</sup> Farhat Iftekharuddin, "Introduction," in *The Postmodern Short Story: Forms and Issues*, ed. Farhat Iftekharuddin et al., (Westport: Praeger, 2003), XI.

he turned twenty.<sup>167</sup> Regarding this point, Carver told Bruce Weber: “All my stories have in some way to do with my own life.” But he asserted that his fiction was not an outright autobiography.<sup>168</sup> Furthermore, in an interview with Kay Bonetti, Carver affirmed that his family fell apart due in part to his alcoholism after the breakup of his first marriage.<sup>169</sup>

Raymond Carver gained a considerable reputation both in America and around the world during the mid-1980s after the publication of his collections of stories and poems, owing to the subject matter of his fiction, which focuses on portraying the lives of the submerged population. Adam Meyer asserts that Carver’s collections of short stories, including *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976), *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981), and *Cathedral* (1983)—and the volume of selected stories, *Where I’m Calling From* (1988), reflect the general downbeat mood of these decades: post-Vietnam, post-Watergate, and post-energy crisis.<sup>170</sup> In addition, his precisionist aesthetic was developed under his influence by great poets and writers, and he placed himself firmly in the realist tradition. Regarding his literary influences, Kay Bonetti and Laurie Champion report that Carver admired his contemporaries, such as John Gardner and Dick Day. He also learned from his ancestors like Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, Leo Tolstoy, Gustav Flaubert, Frank O’Connor, Isaac Babel, and Anton Chekhov, who was “the father of minimalist writing.”<sup>171</sup>

Indeed, in an interview with Nicholas O’Connell, Raymond Carver acknowledged that he considered himself a witness to the lives of the downtrodden and the submerged population since he felt more kinship with them and knew something about them, more

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<sup>167</sup> Charles E. May, ed. “Raymond Carver,” in *Short Story Writers, Volume, 188-197*, (New Jersey: Salem Press, Inc., 2008), 188.

<sup>168</sup> Bruce Weber, “Raymond Carver: A Chronicler of Blue-Collar Despair” (1984), in *Conversations with Raymond Carver (Literary Conversations Series)*, eds., Marshall Bruce Gentry and William L. Stull, (Mississippi: UP of Mississippi, 1990), 95.

<sup>169</sup> Kay Bonetti, “Ray Carver: Keeping it Short,” 55.

<sup>170</sup> Adam Meyer, *Raymond Carver*, (New York: Twayne, 1995), 1.

<sup>171</sup> Bonetti, “Ray Carver: Keeping it Short,” 58; Laurie Champion, “What We Talk About When We Talk ‘About Love’: Carver and Chekhov,” *Journal of the Short Story in English* (28 Spring 1997):74, (Accessed 4 August, 2009), <http://jsse.revues.org/index83.html>.



specifically about their economic and social sufferings.<sup>172</sup> He also explained in an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory that his characters are people on the economic margin who cannot afford to provide for their necessary needs.<sup>173</sup>

Essentially, the themes in his stories are implicitly expressed in his fictional material with existential and domestic conflicts in an attempt to paint a vivid picture of working-class life. In this respect, O'Connell affirms that his fiction was well-received by critics because he had an ability to describe emotions honestly and depict, with a sense of unflinching truth that came from his life experience, the cramped conditions of working-class existence.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, his style was developed due to his great desire to underline the emotional truth and represent reality as accurately as he deems possible. His distinct minimalist style, narrative techniques, fascinating themes, and character types have captured the interest of most writers of the Minimalist Movement, including Richard Ford and Bobbie Ann Mason.

Like his close friend Raymond Carver, Richard Ford's personal, academic, and literary experiences helped shape his minimalist style and themes. In his article, "Ford, Richard," H. Oakes maintains that Ford was born in Jackson, Mississippi. Because he was the son of a traveling salesman, he had the opportunity to travel around his country and learn about different cultures. At an early age, he developed a sense of strong personal responsibility for his life after the death of his father.<sup>175</sup> Moreover, Richard Ford with and Molly McQuade write that Ford lived in fourteen American states, Mexico, and France, so he was called a "peripatetic" writer by many critics. The fact of moving from one place to

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<sup>172</sup> Nicholas O'Connell, *At the Field's End: Interviews with 22 Pacific Northwest Writers*, (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1998), 26.

<sup>173</sup> McCaffery and Gregory, "An Interview with Raymond Carver" (1984), 112.

<sup>174</sup> O'Connell, *At the Field's End*, 26.

<sup>175</sup> H. Oakes, "Ford, Richard," *American Writers, American Biographies*, (New York: Facts On File, 2004), *Bloom's Literary Reference Online*, (Accessed 28 March, 2009), <http://fofweb.com>.

another created a sense of itinerancy that influenced his fiction; his characters are psychologically, culturally, and geographically rootless.<sup>176</sup>

In his book, *Perspectives on Richard Ford*, Huey Guagliardo asserts that Ford started to draw attention as a minimalist short story writer during the 1970s with the publication of the acclaimed volume of short stories, *Rock Springs* (1987), and the collection of three connected long stories, *Women with Men* (1997).<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, in an interview with Kay Bonetti, Ford confessed his admiration for William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway. He acknowledged that he was influenced by Faulkner's language, especially the efficacy of telling and the precise language since they have the potential to provide consolation and redeem loneliness. He also explained that his fiction is a reflection of his own life experiences; he attempted to capture the sense of a lived life and he was fascinated by writing love stories.<sup>178</sup>

Stylistically, Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Rabalais note that Carver learned much from Ford Madox Ford, Harold Pinter, Jorge Luis Borges, and others.<sup>179</sup> Elinor Ann Walker illuminates that, like Carver, Ford's minimalist style, which reflects the dreary lives of western American people, is based on the economy of language and descriptions of the smallest details to achieve the verisimilitude of ordinary life. His preoccupation with concepts of being, knowing, and nothingness reflects his existentialism-influenced philosophy.<sup>180</sup> Indeed, reoccurring themes in his stories are loneliness and alienation, the

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<sup>176</sup> Richard Fordwith and Molly McQuade, "Richard Ford," *Publishers Weekly* 2 37.20 (18 May 1990), 66.

<sup>177</sup> Huey Guagliardo, "Introduction," in *Perspectives on Richard Ford*, ed. Huey Guagliardo, (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000), xii.

<sup>178</sup> Kay Bonetti, "An Interview with Richard Ford," *The Missouri Review* 10, No. 2 (1987), 80–81, (Accessed 3 August, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1353/mis.1987.0095>.

<sup>179</sup> Jennifer Levasseur, and Kevin Rabalais, "Invitation to the Story: an Interview with Richard Ford," *The Kenyon Review* (2001): 123+, *Literature Resource Center*, (2015), (Accessed 8 Dec. 2018), <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA81102619&v=2.1&u=crrl&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=48a0deba7e9d2dc0ad236fa2e22de055>.

<sup>180</sup> Elinor Ann Walker, "Redeeming Loneliness in Richard Ford's 'Great Falls' and *Wildlife*," in *Perspectives on Richard Ford*, ed. Huey Guagliardo, (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000), 122.

emotional rupture between couples and family members, the yearning for human connection, the failure of communication, as well as a sense of disappointment in the American dream.

Additionally, Bobbie Ann Mason has established herself as a famous minimalist writer and a new significant voice in Southern literature and in contemporary American literature after the publication of her first collection of short stories, *Shiloh and Other Stories* (1982). Compared to Carver and Ford, her life and literary experiences helped form her minimalist style and themes. In an interview with Albert E. Wilhelm, Mason affirmed that she was raised on her family's dairy farm in western Kentucky near Mayfield. Like Hemingway, she was interested in journalism, and she developed creative writing when she worked as a writer for fan magazines in New York City.<sup>181</sup> She also recognized that, given the fact that she was exposed to social anomalies and cultural shock, she decided to portray the blue-collar Southern life of the rural and small-town people in Kentucky. She affirmed that her childhood loves including her obsession with jigsaw puzzles and her love of helping her grandmother piece quilts were her strongest early artistic foundations.<sup>182</sup> Mason asserted in her book that as a child she liked reading detective stories where girls like Judy Bolton, Cherry Ames, and Nancy Drew solve mysteries. These childhood hobbies and activities played a great role in the development of her creative writing as she stated: "The combination of all those influences led me to delight in the intricate design of fiction. I'm still a girl sleuth, setting my magnifying glass onto words and images and the great mysteries of life."<sup>183</sup>

Furthermore, in the same interview with Wilhelm, Mason confirmed that her understanding of how her people communicated and interacted with one another aided her in developing her minimalist style.<sup>184</sup> Regarding her literary influences, although her fiction

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<sup>181</sup> Albert E. Wilhelm, "An Interview with Bobbie Ann Mason," in *Bobbie Ann Mason: A Study of the Short Fiction*, ed., Albert E. Wilhelm, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 97.

<sup>182</sup> Wilhelm, "An Interview with Bobbie Ann Mason," 28.

<sup>183</sup> Bobbie Ann Mason, "A Preface," in *The Girl Sleuth: A Feminist Guide to the Bobbsey Twins, Nancy Drew, and Their Sisters*, (New York: Feminist Press, 1975), X.

<sup>184</sup> Wilhelm, "An Interview with Bobbie Ann Mason," 133.

seems distinct, Mason did not start from scratch; she told Wilhelm that she was influenced by some great authors. She was fascinated by the works of Thomas Wolfe, F. Scott Fitzgerald, J.D. Salinger, James Joyce, and Vladimir Nabokov. More interestingly, she was dazzled by the way they manipulated language to imply their complicated feelings, emotions, and visions. Through her artistic creativity, she was able to fuse different techniques that she learned to produce fascinating and realistic short stories.<sup>185</sup>

Influenced by different cultures, Mason emerged as a famous writer in the postmodern period owing to the distinctiveness of her characters, themes, and style. In her works, as Wilhelm reports, she portrays everyday western Kentucky life through her characters who are preoccupied with larger philosophical issues such as the search for individual identity, especially in times of social and personal transitions, and their attempts to adapt to the new emerging socio-cultural values. The main themes of her stories are cultural shock, death, loss of love, divorce, lack of communication, alienation, existential depression, and hopelessness.<sup>186</sup>

All in all, although Hemingway was not considered a “minimalist” writer, he was credited with having established the basic principles of literary minimalism, which were developed by the Minimalist Movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s. His terse style was in service of the emotional truth of lived experiences or given sensations of American society, which underwent drastic socio-political transformations on multiple levels. Moreover, Carver, Ford, and Mason were pioneer writers who contributed to the foundation of the Minimalist Movement through the publication of outstanding short story collections. Like Hemingway, their social and cultural backgrounds helped shape and ground their minimalist styles.

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<sup>185</sup> Wilhelm, “An Interview with Bobbie Ann Mason,” 131–132.

<sup>186</sup> Wilhelm, “An Interview with Bobbie Ann Mason,” 131–132.

In a nutshell, historically, the Minimalist Movement, which began as an offshoot of postmodernism, evolved into a new development in literary history by the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. The minimalist style took techniques from the visual and musical art that emerged and flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. Although it retained some affinity with postmodernism, minimalism rejected many of the basic principles of postmodernism and developed new techniques that were derived from different literary movements, including realism, modernism, and postmodernism. Minimalism began with Ernest Hemingway's style, which is based on his "Iceberg Theory." It was further developed by Raymond Carver and his contemporaries, including Richard Ford and Bobbie Ann Mason. The emergence of this minimalist style in both periods was triggered by socio-cultural and political reasons. Like Hemingway, these minimalist writers adopted existentialism as a philosophy, and their writing was the most appropriate style to depict life under the rubric of consumerism and high capitalism.

On the whole, this first chapter provides the theoretical framework and context for a better comprehension of the thesis statement of this doctoral research. Its first section sheds some light on Wolfgang Iser's Reception Theory. It is well-known that Iser values the process of reading and explains that there are two poles involved in the reader's experience of interpreting a text: the artistic pole and the aesthetic pole. The meaning of the text or the aesthetic object can only be achieved by the implied reader through the concretization of the structures of the text, his interpretation, and the making of mental images based upon his literary and personal background. The implied reader has to resort to a pre-given repertoire underlying the process of interpretation and has to fill in the blanks left by the author. While doing so, he/she experiences certain effects and becomes more aware of the world around him/her.

The second section provides a general overview of the American Minimalist Movement with a focus on its socio-cultural context, definition, characteristics, and phases. It also contextualizes the minimalist style by focusing on four writers: Hemingway, Carver, Ford, and Mason. These minimalist writers who revived the minimalist realist short story in Hemingway's tradition attempted to reenergize the social mission of literature and its capacity to impact individuals and social institutions. Hemingway's "Iceberg Theory" impacted the writing of these minimalist writers who were not only concerned with the reflection of the "real world," but rather were more interested in the recreation of the emotional experience of facts in readers through the manipulation of specific techniques and themes. To prove Hemingway's influence on the works of Carver, Ford, and Mason and show the extent to which his legacy is significant to the foundation of the Minimalist Movement, I will carry out a comparative study of selected short stories by these writers in the next five chapters, using Wolfgang Iser's Reception Theory.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

**Imagery and Repetition in Ernest Hemingway's "Up in Michigan,"  
Raymond Carver's "Chef's House," Richard Ford's "Rock Springs," and  
Bobbie Ann Mason's "Residents and Transients"**

The minimalist styles of Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason have attracted the attention of critics and readers alike. Processing a given text is an important phase in Iser's reading theory of literary texts. Iser asserts that this process is based not only on the reader but also on the cooperation between the reader and the literary text. While the real world is perceived through the senses, the world of the text is apprehended through the imagination. The writer has to select from different stylistic devices in order to persuade his readers, activate their imagination, and create certain emotional effects on them. The reader's role is to use his mental abilities to form mental images based on his individual dispositions and literary experiences, while filling in the blanks in his attempt to construct a cohesive aesthetic object.<sup>187</sup>

In this second chapter, I compare Hemingway's "Up in Michigan," Carver's "Chef's House," Ford's "Rock Springs," and Mason's "Residents and Transients" to demonstrate that Carver, Ford, and Mason deploy the techniques such as imagery and repetition to achieve certain effects on readers, as does Hemingway in "Up in Michigan." Hence, in the following discussion, the main aim is to look at the way these writers engage in image-making, how they cooperate with the reader, and how they make use of these techniques in order to prompt the reader to uncover the implied themes and recreate the characters' sensory experiences to register their predicaments and pains. The discussion proves that these 'neo-realist' writers are influenced by Hemingway's method of deploying imagery and repetition techniques because they all rely on the economy of language and the direct treatment of the

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<sup>187</sup> Iser, *The Reading Act*, 107.



thing, as well as the creation of symbolism through language to activate the readers' mental processes and make them sense the evoked emotional truth of a given sensation or lived experiences. As such, the writers intend to make readers more aware of the American social reality that is reflected in the extratextual elements of each story.

## **2.1 “Circles Breaking the Smooth Surface”: the Significance of the Image of the Mist and the Technique of Repetition in Ernest Hemingway’s “Up in Michigan”**

Ernest Hemingway’s “Up in Michigan” was first published in his collection *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923), and then it was included in his collection *In Our Time* (1925). The story’s events illustrate how short fiction can be effective in providing a cultural critique of Victorian ideology that sanctioned gender roles and sexuality. Indeed, Hemingway intends to communicate emotions and increase the readers’ imagination to make them feel more than they understand the predicament of Liz, through his employment of imagery and repetition techniques in his story “Up in Michigan.” The effaced narrator omits key details and implies others, gradually leading the readers to construct an aesthetic object and recreate the characters’ sensory experiences to better register their emotions and feelings.

Hemingway’s method of expressing emotions seems, at first sight, simple, but if one looks beneath the surface, one is bound to change his/her tune completely. Michael S. Reynolds argues that Hemingway modeled his style on the most important figures of the literary movements in Paris as an expatriate, including Sherwood Anderson, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Sylvia Beach, and Ezra Pound.<sup>188</sup> In delineating the importance of evoking emotions, Hemingway explains the writer’s work: “When you are excited about something is when the first draft is done. But no one can see it until you have gone over it again and again until you have communicated the emotion, the sights and the sounds to the reader.”<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Michael S. Reynolds, *Hemingway: The Paris Years*, (New York: Norton, 1989), 4.

<sup>189</sup> Hemingway Ernest, ed., *By-Line: Ernest Hemingway: Selected Articles and Dispatches of Four Decades*, (William White New York: Scribner’s, 1967), 185.

Indeed, in Hemingway's stories, there is always a description of actions and objects that represent the "tip of the iceberg," while the characters' emotions denote the submerged part of the iceberg.

In *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan define the term "imagery" as follows: "Imagery refers to images produced in the mind by language, whose words may refer either to experiences that could produce physical perceptions were the reader actually to have those experiences, or to the sense- impressions themselves."<sup>190</sup> In his 1918 article, "A Retrospect," Ezra Pound sets out the main rules and objectives of "imagism." He discusses his 'principles of imagism,' which include cutting, eliminating, omitting, and compressing. He also defines an 'image' as "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."<sup>191</sup> In fact, Hemingway gleaned a great deal of insight from Pound about to how to employ images to convey the emotional truth.

In essence, Hemingway developed his style by borrowing Pound's new poetics to his fiction. This imitation is reflected in "Up in Michigan," which is shaped like an 'Iceberg,' whereby its main theme and characters' feelings and emotions are left beneath the surface of things. The story is about an adult named Liz Coates, a young waitress who falls in love with a man called Jim Gilmore. Her ignorance about how things work in the world of masculinity leads her to be a victim of rape by the man she loves and dreams of marrying. Thus, this story is one of Hemingway's commentaries on sexuality and gender. This is the subject that characterizes most of his famous works. Although the effaced narrator omits the story's cultural and social context, he provides the readers with a "given," which allows them to access the text and interprets the story's meaning. According to Iser, meaning in a literary text does not simply lie there, it must be brought by an act of concretisation: "The text itself

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<sup>190</sup> Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, eds., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1993), 560.

<sup>191</sup> Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect (1918)," *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot, (London: Faber, 1960), 4.

simply offers 'schematized aspects' through which the subject matter of the work can be produced, while the actual production takes place through an act of concretization."<sup>192</sup> Iser focuses on the role of image-building in producing the meaning of the text: "The 'picturing' that is done by our imagination is only one of the activities through which we form the 'gestalt' of a literary text."<sup>193</sup>

Iser also maintains that in literary texts, authors usually leave blanks, either consciously or unconsciously in order to make the reader construct the story's meaning.<sup>194</sup> He further argues that these blanks hamper the reading experience by breaking off the flow of thoughts. In so doing, they become "stimuli for acts of ideation ... what they suspend turns into a propellant for the reader's imagination, making him supply what has been withheld."<sup>195</sup> Thus, blanks force the readers to use their imagination in order to visualize "a sequence of colliding images." Hence, they can understand and construct the story's meaning.<sup>196</sup> The narrator starts telling the story from Liz's perspective and eventually distances himself from the story to achieve objectivity. He begins it in *media-res* without any descriptions of the setting. The descriptive passages that are provided throughout the story allow the readers realize that it takes place in a small town in Hortons Bay around the 1890s. It develops in the mode of a love story or a romance between a man and a woman. The effaced narrator focuses on describing the characters' physical appearances, actions, and gestures.

The narrator tells the events preceding the dock scene from different focalizations and relies on blanks to propel the readers visualizing the scenes by forming mental images so as to feel the emotional state of the raped girl. Regarding this point, Gorka Diaz asserts

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<sup>192</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 21.

<sup>193</sup> Iser, "The Reading Process," 288.

<sup>194</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 192.

<sup>195</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 194.

<sup>196</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 203.

that Hemingway's style has the power to evoke affecting emotions through the conjugation of verbalization and visualization.<sup>197</sup> To familiarize the readers with his characters and the story's main thematic concern, the effaced narrator opens his story by narrating Jim's physical appearance, occupation, and hobbies.<sup>198</sup> Experienced readers can detect that there is nothing special about Jim, except that he is from Canada. However, the narrator draws the readers' attention to Jim's masculinity by telling them that he has "big mustaches," and "big hands." On the other hand, the narrator describes Liz as follows: "Liz Coates worked for Smith's. Mrs...said Liz Coates was the neatest girl she'd ever seen. Liz had good legs and always wore clean gingham aprons and Jim noticed that her hair was always neat behind."<sup>199</sup> Through this description of Liz, the readers are able to visualize her physical appearance and form perspectives on her possible effects as a young lady on men who may be attracted to her. Based on their cultural knowledge of American society, the readers can presume that her physical appearance may attract Jim.

One way of creating connections to suggest meaning and effects in Hemingway's fiction is through the use of repetition. Hemingway learned how to use this stylistic device from Gertrude Stein. In his book, *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway acknowledged that she influenced him considerably and taught him—among other things— "valid and valuable...truths about rhythms and the uses of words in repetition."<sup>200</sup> Indeed, the repetition of words or phrases prompts the reader to compare one instance to another while trying to find the implication and significance of such a repeated word or phrase. It is used to emphasize an emotion or an idea.

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<sup>197</sup> Gorka Diaz, *Language, Emotion and Imagination: Constructing Human Identity Through Hemingway's Work*, (A Master Thesis, Michigan: Eastern Michigan U, 2009), 18.

<sup>198</sup> Ernest Hemingway, "Up in Michigan," in *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 81.

<sup>199</sup> Hemingway, "Up in Michigan," 81.

<sup>200</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, ed. William White New, (1<sup>st</sup>ed, 1964, New York: Scribner's, 1967), 17.

In “Up in Michigan,” the narrator strives to intensify the readers’ aesthetic response by describing Liz’s attraction to Jim and gradually defining what she adores in him, with an emphasis on his sexuality. He aptly notes: “Liz liked Jim very much.... She liked it about his mustache. She liked it about how white his teeth were when he smiled. She liked it very much that he didn’t look like a blacksmith. She liked it how much D. J. Smith and Mrs. Smith liked Jim.... Liking that made her feel funny.”<sup>201</sup> In this quotation, there is a repetition of the pronoun “she” followed by the verb “to like.” There is also the repetition of the pronoun “it,” which does not have a definite antecedent. The narrator puts an emphasis on the fact that Liz likes Jim by relying on such repetitions and insistence. This emphasis on the verb “to like” precipitates the readers’ awareness of the degree of Liz’s feelings and her childish attraction towards Jim.

Charles A. Fenton informs that Hemingway learned the repetitive style by reading Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* and that Stein’s method was particularly apparent in “Up in Michigan,” especially in the third paragraph, which “is wholly a use of repetition for emphasis and clarification.”<sup>202</sup> Because the narrator informs the readers that Jim does not pay attention to her, such repetitions provoke a feeling of immaturity and coming disaster and establish certain closeness between her and the readers. The use of the indefinite pronoun “it” early in the story creates ambiguity. Clearly, through such juxtaposition, the narrator increases the readers’ feeling of the coming dramatic event in the dock scene. The readers can also develop different viewpoints and perspectives on the personalities of the major characters and sense that the girl’s innocent personality is juxtaposed with the man’s rude personality.

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<sup>201</sup> Hemingway, “Up in Michigan,” 85.

<sup>202</sup> Fenton, *The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway*, 152.

In addition, the narrator makes the readers aware that Liz entertains under non-reciprocated feelings for Jim, though she herself does not understand what is happening to her, by reporting that she badly misses him when he goes on a deer hunting trip. After seeing him come back from his trip, Liz, as the narrator states, “feels weak and sort of sick inside.”<sup>203</sup> According to Iser, blanks “make the reader bring the story itself to life.”<sup>204</sup> The readers can sense that Liz is in infantile attraction with Jim, but she represses her feelings because she cannot express her love given her upbringing and culture. Her innocent behaviour can be juxtaposed with Jim’s cruelty in the dock scene, and this intensifies the readers’ empathy for her. When Jim comes back with the other men from their hunting trip, the effaced narrator describes the events: “Liz hadn’t known just what would happen when Jim got back, but she was sure it would be something.”<sup>205</sup> The readers seem to have memorized the preceding events, and like Liz, they can expect something to happen.

However, the effaced narrator’s surprises them when turns the narration into an unexpected direction by saying that nothing happens without recounting Liz’s reaction: “Nothing had happened. The men were just home.”<sup>206</sup> Iser asserts that “it is only inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamism. Thus whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections—for filling in the gaps left by the text itself.”<sup>207</sup> So, the readers’ role is to fill in this gap by imagining Liz’s reaction and form expectations about her future plans.

The language used by the narrator in the flirting scene tells us much about Liz’s sexual expectations that reflect women’s culture in the transitional period between Victorian

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<sup>203</sup> Hemingway, “Up in Michigan,” 82–83.

<sup>204</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 192.

<sup>205</sup> Hemingway, “Up in Michigan,” 83.

<sup>206</sup> Hemingway, “Up in Michigan,” 83.

<sup>207</sup> Iser, “The Reading Process,” 284–285.

times and Modernism. According to Catherine Lewis, this story demonstrates that nineteenth-century societal values and religious norms had great effects on American women's lives. They could neither freely satisfy their sexual desires nor express their emotions to their lovers outside a married relationship.<sup>208</sup> Alice Hall Petry notes that "the primary sources of the story's excellence are Hemingway's sympathetic etching of Liz, the gentle, ingenuous kitchen maid whose sexual initiation he so graphically records, and his powerful depiction of the glaring disparity between male and female attitudes toward love and sex."<sup>209</sup> While Liz already knows that sex is associated with marriage, Jim considers sex an impulse that emerges after the satisfaction of his stomach and his drinking of beer. The readers can comprehend the characters' distinct attitudes towards love and sex by closely interpreting their responses to the next events.

First, the narrator recounts what happens when Jim starts flirting with her. Liz is happy to finally realize her dream of attracting his attention, and she thinks: "He's come to me finally. He's really come."<sup>210</sup> The readers also feel that this is her first time being kissed or touched by a man, as the narrator declares: "She was terribly frightened, no one had ever touched her."<sup>211</sup> This scene intensifies the horror of the rape that follows Jim's flirting with her. With this new feeling, Liz does not appear to have the faintest inkling about how to react and follows him when he pretends to take her for a walk. In explaining Liz's response to Jim's sexual attraction, Lewis views that "Liz's avoidance of her own growing sexual feelings is a safeguard from having to acknowledge that she may be at odds with a Victorian feminine image that treated the unmarried sexual woman as deviant and in many cases

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<sup>208</sup> Catherine Lewis, *The Power of Popular Discourse on Sex and Love in Hemingway's "Up in Michigan,"* (Honors Research Thesis, The Ohio State University, 2014), 2.

<sup>209</sup> Alice Hall Petry, "Coming of Age in Hortons Bay: Hemingway's 'Up in Michigan,'" in *New Critical Approaches to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, ed. Jackson J. Benson, (Durham: Duke UP, 1990), 353.

<sup>210</sup> Hemingway, "Up in Michigan," 84.

<sup>211</sup> Hemingway, "Up in Michigan," 84.

dangerous.”<sup>212</sup> Although Liz’s story can happen to any girl in our time, what makes it more sensitive is that her feminine Victorian culture intensifies her emotional suffering after the dock scene.

The narrator’s description of the dock scene and its effects from Liz’s perspective allows the readers to share her sensory experience and feel her predicament. In a letter sent to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, Hemingway stressed the importance of the dock scene in his work: “It is an important story in my work ... It is not dirty but it is very sad.... But there on the dock it got suddenly absolutely right and it is the point of the whole story and the beginning of all the naturalness I ever got.”<sup>213</sup> Once Liz and Jim arrive at the shelter of the warehouse, Jim simply rapes her.<sup>214</sup> At this moment, building on the memorized information about Liz’s sexual expectations, the readers expect her shock after being coerced into having unsolicited sexual intercourse that she has not been expecting or ready for. Lewis suggests that “Liz cannot comprehend the sex act or her own desires due to the barriers of language—and thus knowledge and understanding—set in place by Victorian American norms and discourses.”<sup>215</sup> The differences between the characters’ attitudes towards sex and love are clearly underlined in the dock scene. Jim thinks that sex is a natural desire that can be satisfied by finding a woman, while Liz believes in platonic or romantic love before having sex with a man.

The existence of the Methodist Church in Hortons Bay alludes to society’s belief that sex is wrong unless it takes place between married couples. Liz’s feelings of humiliation, shame, and guilt stem from her belief that she did something that goes against her moral values. On the other hand, Jim, who has different moral values, does not care about anything.

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<sup>212</sup> Lewis, *The Power of Popular Discourse*, 3.

<sup>213</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters, 1917-196*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 468.

<sup>214</sup> Hemingway, “Up in Michigan,” 85.

<sup>215</sup> Lewis, *The Power of Popular Discourse*, 3.



Iser asserts that writers have to use certain techniques to make readers understand the text and communicate their emotions. In this respect, he stresses the importance of imagination by affirming: “A literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader’s imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative.”<sup>216</sup> Additionally, he affirms that the “literary text is something like an arena in which the reader and the author participate in a game of the imagination.”<sup>217</sup> Iser’s notion of the image (a way of grasping reality) stems from his understanding of meaning, not as an object, but rather as an effect to be experienced when the text and the reader merge in the process of reading. He also suggests that the reader’s role is to connect the different phases of the text together through the process of anticipation and retrospection. This active interweaving of anticipation and retrospection leads “to the formation of the virtual dimension, which in turns transforms the text into an experience for the reader.”<sup>218</sup>

In the last paragraphs which describe the dock scene and Liz’s reaction, the effaced narrator focuses on a specific language. The readers have to concretize the structures of the sentences and interpret the author’s word choice and their categories because they play a crucial role in generating specific effects. Hemingway learned from Pound to distrust adjectives, depend on concrete nouns, and use natural objects as symbols to create images. Pound believes that an adjective is “an aesthetic evaluation” that should be used to create a specific image. He reinforces this explanation of the use of language in this statement: “Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something.”<sup>219</sup> For Pound, adjectives should be used to “reveal” and clarify the expression rather than being enhanced by them. He avoids the use of adjectives and replaces them with “a series of words that create a word-

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<sup>216</sup> Iser, “The Reading Process,” 280.

<sup>217</sup> Iser, “The Reading Process,” 280.

<sup>218</sup> Iser, “The Reading Process,” 286.

<sup>219</sup> Pound, “A Retrospect (1918),” 4.

picture.”<sup>220</sup> This means that the images would accumulate to create an overall effect on the readers.

Additionally, Michael Reynolds purports that it was Pound who taught Hemingway that symbols must be natural objects first.<sup>221</sup> Pound believes that a natural object should be enjoyed as an object before it can have symbolic power in a story. He avoids the use of expansive figurative language and notes in “A Retrospect”: “I believe that the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object, that if a man use ‘symbols’ he must so use them that their symbolic function does not obtrude; so that *a sense*, and the poetic quality of the passage, is not lost to those who do not understand the symbol as such, to whom, for instance, a hawk is a hawk.”<sup>222</sup> Perhaps the strength of Hemingway’s style lies in his emphasis on simple and short sentences. He also depends on straightforward language and statements, which have the effects of directness, clarity, and freshness.

Therefore, dispassionate representation and suggestiveness are interesting techniques for short story writers because they help in masking the authors’ subjectivity in writing “the inherently deeply personal short story” and increase the process of interpretation on the part of the readers.<sup>223</sup> On this last point, Susan F. Beegel writes: “The underwater part of the iceberg is the emotion, deeply felt by reader and writer alike, but represented in the text solely by its ‘tip’—[what Eliot termed] the objective correlative.”<sup>224</sup> Furthermore, in his essay “Hamlet and His Problems,” T.S. Eliot explains that the only way of expressing emotion in poetry is by finding an ‘objective correlative’: “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the

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<sup>220</sup> Pound, “A Retrospect (1918),” 4

<sup>221</sup> Reynolds, *Hemingway: The Paris Years*, 29.

<sup>222</sup> Pound, “A Retrospect (1918),” 9.

<sup>223</sup> Robert Paul Lamb, *Art Matters: Hemingway, Craft, and the Creation of the Modern Short Story*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2010), 26–27.

<sup>224</sup> Susan F. Beegel, *Hemingway’s Craft of Omission: Four Manuscript Example*, (Ann Arbor: MI: UM I Research P, 1988), 91.

external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.”<sup>225</sup> As this brief description suggests, both Eliot and Hemingway are interested in the evoked emotions of the readers, and they focus on the actual things that produce emotions.

Hemingway uses simple, direct language and symbolism in order to help the readers build mental images and visualize the dock scene. A close examination of the language used in the dock scene highlights that the writer uses few common adjectives and adverbs that are relevant to the story’s meaning, such as “frightened,” “cold,” “hot,” “miserable,” “hard,” “asleep,” “heavy,” “crying,” “neatly,” “carefully,” “uncomfortable,” and “cramped.” On the other hand, Hemingway relies on nouns and noun phrases that are common and concrete, and their occurrence does not lay a burden on the readers, such as “planks of the dock,” “the dock,” “the warehouse,” “coat,” “mist,” “bay,” “head,” “cheek,” “mouth,” “lap,” “leg,” “hand,” “bed,” and “woods.” However, they help create simple sentences that have the effect of stimulating the readers’ imaginations and evoking the intended emotions. Tom Stoppard thinks that Hemingway, with his new revolutionary style, “certainly helped to bury the notion...that the more you pile on the adjectives the closer you get to describing the thing.”<sup>226</sup> Moreover, in his article, “Observations on the Style of Ernest Hemingway,” Harry Levin aptly notes: “Hemingway puts his emphasis on nouns because, among parts of speech, they come closest to things...he approximates the actual flow of experience.”<sup>227</sup> Hemingway relies on nouns, especially concrete words and noun phrases, to help the readers visualize the actual scene and elicit an aesthetic response.

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<sup>225</sup> T.S. Eliot, “*Hamlet and His Problems*,” *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, (London: Methune, 1921), 92.

<sup>226</sup> Tom Stoppard, “Reflections on Ernest Hemingway,” in *Ernest Hemingway: The Writer in Context*, ed., James Nagel, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 21.

<sup>227</sup> Harry Levin, “Observations on the Style of Ernest Hemingway,” *The Kenyon Review* 13, No. (4, Autumn 1951), 600, (Accessed 20 July, 2011), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4333275>.

The conclusion of “Up in Michigan” reflects Hemingway’s influence by Ezra Pound’s style, particularly his technique of direct treatment of the object and the economy of language, as well as the creation of symbolism through language. However, what is distinct about Hemingway’s style is that, unlike the symbolism deployed by others, the meaning of his symbols can be understood by the readers from the context, as Bern Oldsey puts it: “The symbolic or mythic overlay. His images and symbols are organic, interior, and naturalistic; almost always they come out of the fictional context.”<sup>228</sup> Hemingway advocates that the writer’s crucial role is to describe the action that creates the emotion: “Remember what the noises were and what was said. Find out what gave you that emotion; what the action was that gave you the excitement. Then write it down making it clear so the reader will see it too and have the same feeling that you had.”<sup>229</sup> This means that he is not only concerned with the reflection of the “real world,” but rather, he is more interested in making the readers trace its emotional impact in their attempt to recreate the story’s meaning. According to Hemingway, the “truth” should be shown through the actions of his characters in order to invite readers to make their own interpretation of the text.<sup>230</sup>

The narrator reports Liz’s actions when she realizes what has happened to her in the dock scene: “Liz started to cry. She walked over to the edge of the dock and looked down to the water. There was a mist coming down from the bay. She was cold and miserable and everything felt gone. She walked back to where Jim was lying and shook him once more to make sure. She was crying.”<sup>231</sup> In this commentary, Hemingway relies on the direct treatment of the thing; he describes a series of actions to enhance the readers’ imagination using clear and direct language. Reynolds explains that Hemingway allows the action to speak

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<sup>228</sup> Bern Oldsey, “The Snows of Ernest Hemingway,” *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 4 (Spring-Summer 1963): 197.

<sup>229</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, (New York: Scribner’s, 1932), 2.

<sup>230</sup> Lamb, *Art Matters*, 27.

<sup>231</sup> Hemingway, “Up in Michigan,” 85–86.

for itself; the reader is assigned an active role to discover the omitted emotions by interpreting the actions.<sup>232</sup> In this story, Hemingway uses a language that is very relevant to the context because it stimulates the readers' imagination, such as: "cold," "miserable," "uncomfortable," "cry," and "mist."

Moreover, Iser thinks that the images follow a given order and they also influence each other during the process of reading: "The discarded image itself on its successor, even though the latter is meant to resolve the deficiencies of the former. In this respect, the images hang together in a sequence and it is by this sequence that the meaning of the text comes alive in the reader's imagination."<sup>233</sup> In "Up in Michigan," the narrator organizes a series of actions as follows: When Liz is forced to have sex with Jim, she cries, walks, and looks down. When she looks down into the water, she thinks about the shocking events she has just experienced and what she sees is just the mist. Diaz also maintains that this series of visual images, which are verbalized using a particular language, has the power to affect the readers' emotions as they terminate in sensory experience.<sup>234</sup> The readers can imagine these actions and feel Liz's emotional state depending on their individual dispositions and literary experiences.

Furthermore, Iser views that the symbolic image has a great role in evoking emotions: "the image brings something to light which can be equated neither with a given empirical object, nor with the meaning of a represented object, as it transcends the sensory, but is not yet fully conceptualized."<sup>235</sup> In "Up in Michigan," the narrator increases the readers' imagination and makes them understand the evoked emotions through the image of the mist. In this respect, Diaz sustains that the image of the mist has a symbolic power that is

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<sup>232</sup> Reynolds, *Hemingway: The Paris Years*, 31.

<sup>233</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 203.

<sup>234</sup> Diaz, *Language, Emotion and Imagination*, 16.

<sup>235</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 132.

“achieved after the meaning of the natural object is developed throughout the story,” especially in the dock scene.<sup>236</sup>

More crucially, Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes emphasize that the writer presents his image through language and tells it from Liz’s perspective so as to help the readers understand the conditions of its meaning.<sup>237</sup> If the readers try to understand the final lines without considering the story’s whole meaning, they may be led to think that the writer is informing them that the mist of Michigan is cold; however, Hemingway makes them feel the tragic ending of Liz’s story through the direct treatment of the things or verbalization and visualization. These techniques are closely interrelated in a given way to allow the readers to perceive the image as an object and form perspectives in line with how the story unfolds. The mist stands for Liz’s confusion and her worries about an uncertain future. The narrator does not tell the readers about Liz’s thoughts, but he expresses her melancholy through the image of the mist. Subsequently, although he informs the readers that Jim forced her to accept despite her repeated refusal, he focuses on visualizing her actions without explicitly telling her viewpoints or opinions about the dock scene.

In the last line of the story, the narrator redirects the readers’ attention to Liz’s sadness, confusion, and unknown thoughts by referring again to the image of the mist, thereby offering a powerful experience for his readers. Therefore, Hemingway purposely says less and allows the actions to speak for themselves to create certain effects on the readers, who, by extension, are solicited to create their own imprints by filling in the gaps. Regarding this last point, Comley and Scholes maintain that “Hemingway expects us to fill in the gaps of his narrative, to make the story our own. We must supply her feelings of disappointment, which makes them both stronger and less sentimental than they would be if

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<sup>236</sup> Diaz, *Language, Emotion and Imagination*, 16.

<sup>237</sup> Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes, “Reading UP in Michigan: A First Reading,” in *New Essays on Hemingway’s Short Fiction*, ed. Paul Smith, (New York: Cambridge UP, 1998), 42.

the author has insisted on telling us about them.”<sup>238</sup> The combination of the minimalist language and the visual images stimulates the readers’ imagination so that they elicit an aesthetic response and share Liz’s sensory experience. They may provide answers to questions, such as: Why does the narrator end with the image of the mist exactly? Depending on the readers’ experience with the adult world, love relationships, and the many and varied literature, interpretations can be suggested with the aim of understanding the narrator’s reliance on the image of the mist to imply Liz’s emotional state. The readers may also think about how can she cope with her psychological and physical situations after losing her virginity, her reputation in the small town where she lives? And how can she regain confidence in the man she has long been attracted to, and, presumably above all else, the larger outlines of her future life?

As is shown in the above analysis, Hemingway employs an effaced narrator in “Up in Michigan,” which narrates the story from Liz’s perspective in order to draw the readers’ attention to her story. Influenced by T.S. Eliot’s method of expressing emotions, Ezra Pound’s imagism, and Gertrude Stein’s technique of repetition, Hemingway relies on the techniques of imagery and repetition in his story. He intends to compel his readers to construct mental images while interpreting the story’s meaning, depending on their prior knowledge and individual dispositions. As such, the readers do not only understand, but also, because of the activation of their mental processes, they can feel the emotional truth of the girl and learn from her virtual reality. Hemingway’s style has the power to evoke affecting emotions through the conjugation of verbalization and visualization. By and large, the readers become more aware of the dynamics of male and female relationships and how sexual expectations can reverse women’s lives in a masculine society.

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<sup>238</sup> Comley and Scholes, “Reading UP in Michigan,” 21–22.

## 2.2 The Significance of Storm Symbols and Repetition Technique in Raymond Carver's "Chef's House"

Raymond Carver was a 'neo-realist' who devoted his fiction to portraying the submerged population's predicament in American society during the 1980s. Many Americans became preoccupied with self-awareness, in response to the social and economic problems. Linda Trinh Moser and Kathryn West report that Tom Wolfe refers to this trend of the 1970s as the "me decade." Individualism, as a cultural image, reemerged when Americans focused more on improving their lives as individuals rather than relying on the government.<sup>239</sup> According to Gerald J. Kennedy, Carver focuses on depicting three cultural practices of working-class characters that are somehow representative of contemporary life, working against the formation of personal relationships or communal ties. The most important of these is "authorial obsession"—the chronic, self-abuse drinking whose behaviour leads to the destruction of family ties or love relationships.<sup>240</sup> Like Hemingway, Carver seeks to convey an emotional truth to his readers. His story, "Chef's House," is a critique of the American economic and political system of the 1980s that affected the people's lives. The narrator's use of imagery and repetition allows the readers to experience the aesthetic response as they understand the predicament of a couple who experiences family dissolution, alcoholism, and depression.

Carver maintains that his short stories have the same effects as his poetry because, in both genres, there is a compression of language and emotion. In Sam Halpert's book, *Raymond Carver: An Oral Biography*, Tobias Wolff comments on Carver's aesthetic mode of communication by stating: "A good writer should make you feel as if he lived the story

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<sup>239</sup> Linda Trinh Moser and Kathryn West, "Historical and Social Context in Contemporary American Literature, 1970 to Present," in *Contemporary Literature, 1970 ?Present*, (Facts On File, 2010), *Bloom's Literature*, (Accessed 20 July, 2020), [online.infobase.com/Auth/Index?aid=19863&itemid=WE54&articleId=476071](http://online.infobase.com/Auth/Index?aid=19863&itemid=WE54&articleId=476071).

<sup>240</sup> Gerald J. Kennedy, ed., *Modern American Short Story Sequences: Composite Fictions and Fictive Communities*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995), 210.



he is telling.... It is an artist achievement to make someone feel they have an encounter with reality, when what they have had an encounter with is a writer's imagination."<sup>241</sup> Thus, like Hemingway, Carver is interested in the recreation of the emotional dimension of lived experience in readers so that they can share the characters' sensory experiences. Lainsbury affirms that the minimalist writers attempt to best achieve an authentic communication between the reader and the writer through their use of plain language; a common language and the language of the real man and women.<sup>242</sup> So, the stories of both writers are written in what Carver calls "common language, the language of normal discourse the language we speak to each other."<sup>243</sup> Like Hemingway, Carver's style has the power to evoke affecting emotions through the conjugation of verbalization and visualization. Furthermore, Iser explains that "the literary text activates our faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. The product of this creative activity is what we might call the virtual dimension of the text, which endows it with reality. This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination."<sup>244</sup> The narrator activates the readers' mental processes and compels them to fill in the blanks with imagery in order to uncover the story's implied meaning. Although the narrator omits details about the story's cultural context, the readers can comprehend that it is a story about the fall of the American Dream.

"Chef's House" portrays the dream of a couple who attempt to restore their marriage and love relationship after renting a furnished house, which lends them a happy time and a glimpse of a lost paradise. Although Carver rejects Hemingway's code hero, he adapts his fatalistic code as Eugene Goodheart aptly notes: "Like Hemingway's characters, Carver's

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<sup>241</sup> Sam Halpert, *Raymond Carver: An Oral Biography*, (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1995), 156.

<sup>242</sup> Lainsbury, *The Carver Chronotope*, 12.

<sup>243</sup> William H. Stull, ed., *Call me if you Need me: The uncollected Fiction and Other Prose*, (New York: Vintage: 1984), 10.

<sup>244</sup> Iser, "The Reading Process," 284.

characters possess a code (there is even the code of the alcoholic) which dictate their behaviour. There is a right way and a wrong way to be despairing, or ineffectual, or lost.”<sup>245</sup> Wes, who is an alcoholic, decides to quit drinking and seek recovery by moving to live in the house of a recovered alcoholic named Chef. After quitting his girlfriend, Wes calls his wife and invites her to join him in the new house. The story is told from a female’s perspective, who eventually distances herself from the events in the hope of turning her story more plausible. She does not provide details about the characters’ histories, personalities, or occupations. This omission stimulates the readers to build expectations about the upcoming events. In contrast to Liz in Hemingway’s “Up in Michigan,” who is unable to understand her emotions toward the man she loves, Edna is not only aware of her emotions but also her marital conflict. Right from the outset of the story, Edna draws the readers’ attention to the conflict between her and Wes. She starts the story with a description of the conversation that took place before she accepted to join him:

He called again and said, Edna, you can see the ocean from the front window. You can smell salt in the air [...]. A week later he called again and said, Are you coming? I said I was still thinking. He said, We’ll start over. I said, If I come up there, I want you to do something for me. Name it, Wes said. I said, I want you to try and be the Wes I used to know. The old Wes. The Wes I married. Wes began to cry, but I took it as a sign of his good intentions. So I said, All right, I’ll come up.<sup>246</sup>

Thus, the wife’s language suggests that there exists a subterranean dimension beneath the surface of the couple’s love relationship. Like in Hemingway’s fiction, characters’ feelings are the submerged part in Carver’s fiction. In an interview with William L. Stull, Carver affirms that his characters’ feelings “remain incomprehensible, so inexplicable that it is safe to say Carver’s subtle and precise art is an art of effects, never of causes.”<sup>247</sup> Besides,

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<sup>245</sup> Goodheart, “Four Decade of Contemporary Fiction,” 164.

<sup>246</sup> Raymond Carver, “Chef’s House,” in *Where I’m Calling From: New and Selected Stories*, (New York: *The Atlantic*, 1988), 199.

<sup>247</sup> William L. Stull, Trans., “Prose as Architecture: Two Interviews with Raymond Carver,” *Clockwatch Review*, (1995–96), (Accessed 12 Dec., 2009), <http://www.iwu.edu/~jplath/carver.html>.

like Hemingway, Carver uses language that is appropriate to the context, such as “ocean,” “cry,” “old,” “intention,” “thinking,” “calling,” and “again.” These words underline the character’s emotions and feelings of confusion and frustration. Arthur M. Saltzman points out that the husband “needs her to complete his self-reclamation project.”<sup>248</sup> The readers can realize that the husband seeks his wife’s company because he struggles to recover from his alcoholism, while she accepts his proposal when she feels that he is emotionally honest. Thus, unlike in Hemingway’s story, Wes is more mature than Jim because he desires to strengthen his love relationship with his partner.

In the next scene, the narrator describes the couples’ life in Chef’s house and how things go fairly well for them because they renew their romantic love relationship and start to feel their solidarity again. Through detailed descriptions of the characters’ actions using simple declarative sentences and concrete words, the narrator motivates the readers to imagine the scene and experience the virtual reality: Edna puts her wedding ring back on, though she had not worn it in two years; Wes stops drinking alcohol and starts attending Don’t Drink meetings; they go to the movies; Wes picks up flowers for her; they go fishing.<sup>249</sup> Indeed, in 1981, Carver spoke in “A Storyteller’s Shoptalk” of the importance of using objects and details in his fiction. He said that the correct use of facts “bring[s] to life the details that will light up the story for the reader. For the details to be concrete and convey meaning, the language must be accurate and precisely given. The words can be so precise they may even sound flat, but they can still carry; if used right, they can hit all the notes.”<sup>250</sup> Essentially, just like Hemingway, Carver relies on concrete words to achieve the maximum effects. Indeed, the spareness of details confuses readers because it creates a disconnected

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<sup>248</sup> Arthur M. Saltzman, *Understanding Raymond Carver*, (Columbia, South Carolina: U of North Carolina P, 1988), 129.

<sup>249</sup> Carver, “Chef’s House,” 199–200.

<sup>250</sup> Raymond Carver, “A Storyteller’s Shoptalk,” *New York Times Book Review* (15 Feb.1981), (Accessed 4 July, 2018), <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/01/01/21/specials/carver-shoptalk.html?mabReward=relbias%253Aw&module=Search>.

narrative structure. Thus, readers must make the required connections between seemingly insignificant details and the periods of stasis that his vulnerable protagonists hide behind in his works. In Carver's story, the description of the insignificant details prompts readers to form opinions about the characters' future plans as they start feeling that something might happen.

Nevertheless, the narrator surprises the readers and turns the story into another direction in the next scene. Unfortunately, the couple's happy time is ruined when Chef comes one day and asks them to vacate the house for his daughter. The narrator describes his coming: "I looked and saw Chef's big car pull in. I could see his car, the access road and the freeway, and behind the freeway, the dunes and the ocean. Clouds hung over the water."<sup>251</sup> Readers who concentrate on the repetition of the wife's reference to meteorological signs can deduce that the clouds' movement is symbolic in this story. In his article, "Symbolic Significance in the Stories of Raymond Carver," Daniel W. Lehman maintains that the couple's "new lease on life is in trouble the moment that 'clouds hung over the water as Chef comes to revoke their lend-lease."<sup>252</sup> The wife refers again to the "weather" and "the ocean" while describing her husband's behaviour when he seems to have lost his hope of restoring their marriage: "I knew that look. He kept touching his lips with his tongue.... He kept thumbing his shirt under his waistband. He got up from the chair and went to the window. He stood looking out at the ocean and at the clouds, which were building up. He patted his chin with his fingers like he was thinking about something. And he *was* thinking."<sup>253</sup> As is the case with the previous scenes, the narrator also describes the weather in this scene.

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<sup>251</sup> Carver, "Chef's House," 200.

<sup>252</sup> Daniel W. Lehman, "Symbolic Significance in the Stories of Raymond Carver," *Journal Of the Short Story in English* (Spring 2006), (Accessed 1 March, 2018), <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/493>.

<sup>253</sup> Carver, "Chef's House," 201.

Hence, comparable to Hemingway, Carver also relies on the economy of language and direct treatment of the object to present his images to the readers, and he uses natural objects as symbols. Although the narrator does not explain the significance of the weather, its repetition draws the readers' attention to its importance as a natural symbol that emerges from the story's meaning. In an interview with William L. Stull, Carver asserts that he does not think in terms of images while writing, but he centers his fiction on images that emerge from the story.<sup>254</sup>

In his essay "On Writing," Carver refers to the same point by stating: "It's possible, in a poem or a short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow those things—a character, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman's earring—with immense, even startling power."<sup>255</sup> If the readers attempt to understand the story without taking into consideration the couple's emotional situation, then they may understand that the writer is telling them about the weather. Instead, if they relate the characters' emotional states to the weather, they can infer that the image of the clouds has a symbolic power that is achieved after the meaning of the natural object is developed throughout the story.

Following Hemingway's method in the quoted passage, Carver describes a series of actions using direct and precise language, as well as the technique of repetition in order to enable readers to visualize the scenes and find out the story's deeper meaning. Wes is forced to leave the new house; he touches his lips with his tongue; he keeps thumbing; he gets up from the chair; he goes to the window; he stands looking out at the ocean and the clouds; he pats his chin with his fingers, and he is thinking. In this case, the readers are compelled to fill in the gaps and generate images in order to understand and experience the character's

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<sup>254</sup> Stull, Trans., "Prose as Architecture."

<sup>255</sup> Raymond Carver, "On Writing," *Mississippi Review* 14, no. 1/2 (1985):48, (Accessed 5 Oct., 2014), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20115383>.

feelings of frustration and hopelessness. Indeed, both characters look at the clouds in different scenes. This means that the “clouds,” as a natural symbol, emerge from the story’s meaning and stand for the characters’ feelings of frustration, loss of hope, and confusion about their love relationship. The writer presents his image through language and tells the story to the readers from the wife’s perspective so that they can understand the conditions of its meaning and feel her emotional state. Although the story centers on Wes’ attempt to recover from alcoholism and restore his marriage, the wife experiences psychological problems as well. Yet, her emotional state remains wrapped in opacity.

In addition to the use of imagery in this scene, the writer relies on repetition to compel readers to fill in the gaps. In the quoted passage from “Chef’s House,” there is a repetition of sentence structure: the pronoun “he” is followed by a verb. There is also a repetition of vocabulary (“kept,” “was thinking”). These repetitions, which express insistence, affect the readers by drawing their attention to thinking about the significance of the words in this context and finding out the reasons for the man’s predicament and his constant thinking.

Carver’s children and work influenced his life and he learned “that [he] had to bend or else break. And [he] also learned that it is possible to bend and break at the same time.”<sup>256</sup> In this statement, Carver alludes to the fact that the best one can aspire for is a certain stoicism in defeat and unillusioned acceptance of the inevitable. This idea is the focal point of the couple’s conversation when it is becoming very clear that he is returning to the bottle. The narrator emphasizes this idea using another important repetition that occurs in the scene when both characters start discussing their future relationship after they have left Chef’s house. When Edna told Wes that their children love him, Wes realizes that he she is not telling the truth. In her attempt to convince her husband to forget the past and think about the future because he seems to have lost hope in achieving his dreams, the wife says: “then

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<sup>256</sup> Stull, *Call me if you Need me*, 106.

I said something. I said, Suppose, just suppose, nothing had ever happened. Suppose this was for the first time. Just suppose. It doesn't hurt to suppose. Say none of the other ever happened. You know what I mean? Then what? I said."<sup>257</sup> The repetition of the verb "suppose" in this statement creates an aesthetic response by evoking the man's emotions of loss of hope to realize his dreams. Wes decides to return to the bottle and expresses his predicament, as the narrator says: "Wes fixed his eyes on me. He said, Then I suppose we'd have to be somebody else if that was the case. Somebody we're not. I don't have that kind of supposing left in me. We were born who we are. Don't you see what I'm saying?"<sup>258</sup> Again, the repetition of the verb "suppose" and the noun "somebody" evokes affecting emotions of the man's psychological outburst and his feeling of defeat and loss. Wes's social and psychological problems are experienced by most working-class people in American society during the 1980s.

Resembling Hemingway, Carver also deploys images of nature that the readers have to detect in order to understand the characters' emotional states. In fact, Iser thinks that the images follow a given order and influence each other during the process of reading. The images hang together in a sequence that allows the reader to infer the meaning of the text.<sup>259</sup> In addition to the use of "clouds" as a natural symbol, the couples' failure to restore their marriage is expressed through another symbol of nature which is the "ocean." At the beginning of this story, Wes invites his wife to join him by informing her: "You can see the ocean from the front window. You can smell salt in the air."<sup>260</sup> Through this verbalization using concrete words, such as "ocean," "salt," and "window," the narrator activate the readers' mental faculties in order that they visualize the house's image and form different perspectives on its romantic position. In this scene, the husband is optimistic and genuinely

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<sup>257</sup> Carver, "Chef's House," 202.

<sup>258</sup> Carver, "Chef's House," 202.

<sup>259</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 203.

<sup>260</sup> Carver, "Chef's House," 199.

strives to restore his marriage and recover his health. The “ocean,” as a symbol of continuity and expanse that emerges from the story’s meaning, stands for the couple’s deep feelings of love and affection.

However, in the final paragraph, “Wes got up and pulled the drapes and the ocean was gone just like that.”<sup>261</sup> The narrator does not explicitly inform the readers about their final decision concerning their future life. Yet, by narrating that Wes pulls the drapes so that he can no longer see the ocean, she implies to readers that he loses hope of staying in this romantic house. In contrast with Hemingway’s open ending in “Up in Michigan,” Carver’s open ending is more complicated as the narrator does not tell the readers about the characters’ responses and thoughts, rendering the process of interpretation a demanding task. Nevertheless, the emotional impact created by Carver’s ending surpasses that of Hemingway’s, as the readers become more aware of the characters’ self-growth and development. Hence, the readers have to accumulate these images in order to provide meaning to the story’s open ending, so that they have to fill in the gaps based on their individual dispositions and literary experiences. In so doing, they may ask questions such as: If the wife is to convince him to stick to his dream and recover from his alcoholism? And what about their love relationship together in both cases?

Overall, like in Hemingway’s “Up in Michigan,” Carver deploys the techniques of imagery and repetition in “Chef’s House” to activate the readers’ mental processes. In so doing, they can create visual images and fill in the gaps with their imagination, depending on their prior knowledge and individual dispositions. He tells us his story from the point of view of the female character that experiences a break-up in her marriage after her husband entered the world of alcoholism and betrayed her with another woman. Through the use of symbols from nature and repetitions, she prompts the readers to imagine the scenes and build

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<sup>261</sup>Carver, “Chef’s House,” 203.



perspectives on their marital life. As such, she also engages them in the reconstruction of the story's meaning and makes them feel the characters' disappointment, depression, and fear of the unknown future. By linking the story to its extra-linguistic context, as a reader, I can deduce that the American submerged population experienced these emotions because they failed to realize their American Dream of success and live a happy life during the 1980s.

### **2.3 “The Car Breaks Down”: Symbolism and Repetition in Richard Ford’s “Rock Springs”**

Historically, the American West was a target of eastern and European colonization because it was rich in natural resources. In this respect, Russel Martin writes: “The entire region, perhaps inevitably, became a kind of colony, a place whose wealth was channeled elsewhere and that suffered, therefore, a colony’s classic sense of inferiority as well as its gnawing, troubled urge to assert its independence.”<sup>262</sup> In the West, human beings were exposed to the same economic forces as the environment because they were devalued, exploited, and, then abandoned. Jeffrey J. Folks sustains that Ford’s postmodern cowboys are rootless; they fail to achieve their dreams, and they try hard to avoid causing harm to the people who live around them and feel the need to understand and communicate their feelings of depression and anxiety.<sup>263</sup> He further adds that looking for a larger audience, Ford decided to write about the western cowboy myth, which was popularized in films and music during the 1970s. Compared to popular media and music, Ford drew on the cowboy “drifter” and “outlaw” who was a “romantic loser forever unsettled in love and in trouble with the law.”<sup>264</sup> In his collections, Ford portrays the desolated and ecologically new West that is populated by

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<sup>262</sup> Russel Martin, *Introduction to the New Writers of the Purple Sage: An Anthology of Contemporary Western Writers*, (New York: Penguin, 1992), xviii.

<sup>263</sup> Jeffrey J. Folks, “Richard Ford’s Postmodern Cowboys,” in *Perspectives on Richard Ford*, ed. Huey Guagliardo, (Jackson: University P of Mississippi, 2000), 143.

<sup>264</sup> Folks, “Richard Ford’s Postmodern Cowboys,” 142.

working people who lead a miserable life and try to escape bills and banks. Ford's characters, like Carver's, live a simple life as they cannot be certain of their economic survival and they constantly experience unstable social relationships.

Ford's "Rock Springs," which is one of the best examples of his use of "dirty realism," illustrates an idealized element of life in America. Similar to Hemingway and Carver in the afore-analysed stories, Ford starts his story in *media-res*. Its first-person narrator, Earl, describes the events, but he distances himself from the scenes in order to offer possibilities for the readers to interact with the text. Subsequently, they have to analyse the extratextual elements based on their background knowledge of American western culture and history so as to reconstruct their own informed meanings of the story. Although, the narrator provides the readers with a "given," he appears to depend quite heavily upon blanks, imagery, and repetition in order to prompt the readers to visualize the scenes. They form mental images and evoke emotions through the conjugation of verbalization and visualization, as with Hemingway's "Up in Michigan" and Carver's "Chef's House." Actually, the readers learn a great deal about how western people react to loneliness, turmoil, and desperation while struggling to realize their American Dream.

Like in Carver's "Chef's House," Ford narrates the events in a way that allows the readers to create meaning throughout the reading process. He writes the text with a familiar and simple vocabulary and sentence structure that reflect the dreary lives of his characters: Earl, Edna, and his daughter, Cheryl. These three major characters are victims of the "western- restricted" social environment, and they fail to realize their dreams. According to Elinor Ann Walker, Ford's style requires the reader "to determine the characters' likability, moral failure, self-consumedness, or virtue."<sup>265</sup> In fact, the story focuses on the tragedy of

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<sup>265</sup> Elinor Ann Walker, *Richard Ford, (Twayne's United States Authors' Series, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 2000), 21.*

Earl, who flees imprisonment on a “bad check” charge. He is a cowboy and an outlaw who attempts to change his lifestyle, but he fails because he has not learned from his mistakes. Subsequently, his behaviour leads to the destruction of his marriage, the failure of his love relationship with Edna, as well as his failure to identify his identity and his goals in life.

Indeed, the narrator informs the readers that he has been in jail for stealing tires and fighting with a man who lost his eye. Because he fails to improve his life, Edna starts to think about leaving him. She also had her own troubles with her ex-husband, who attempted to enter her house and steal her things after taking her kids. Therefore, the readers can infer that Earl and Edna have encountered difficult situations that prompt them to move to Florida. Indeed, both Hemingway and Ford clarify the type of love relationship their characters are experiencing right at the start of their stories, inviting readers to anticipate the consequences. In contrast to Hemingway’s “Up in Michigan,” in which Jim seeks only to satisfy his sexual desires and has no intention of marrying Liz, the narrator in Ford’s story informs the readers that he intends to marry Edna and that his love relationship with her is based on interest rather than profound grounds; she seeks protection from her ex-husband, Danny.<sup>266</sup>

While following their adventure, the readers are provided with plenty of clues that allow them to understand the characters’ dilemmas as they start to learn about the characters’ harmful experiences and predicaments. Because Earl cannot afford to get caught again by the police, he decides to make a new start with Edna and his daughter by travelling to Florida. The narrator describes the good time he, Edna, and the child enjoyed while driving before encountering the car problem: “I felt like a new whole beginning for us, bad memories left behind and a new horizon to build on.”<sup>267</sup> On the road, Earl encounters another problem because he does not get rid of the stolen car he is driving and drives it another day. When

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<sup>266</sup> Richard Ford, “Rock Springs,” in *Rock Springs*, (London: Collins Harvill, 198), 12.

<sup>267</sup> Ford, “Rock Springs,” 13.

the car goes bad, he is obliged to stop in Rock Springs, Wyoming, to manage the situation.<sup>268</sup> Like Hemingway's and Carver's narrators, Earl implies Edna's feelings about this situation through the use of visual images by reporting: "She looked around at Cheryl and Little Ducke ..., then out at the mountains, which were becoming black and lost in the distance. 'What're we doing?' she said. She wasn't worried yet, but she wanted to know what I was thinking about."<sup>269</sup> Ford, like Hemingway, uses natural symbols that emerge from the context; the black mountains are an example of a natural symbol that emerges from the context. They stand for Edna's feelings of frustration and confusion about her future life, and above all, her loss of hope to improve her life.

Additionally, the narrator makes the readers more aware of his love relationship with Edna and their emotional state by narrating two events that affect his outlook. First, Edna's story about her monkey is the first event that prompts the readers to rethink their viewpoints regarding the couple's love story. A guy who went to Vietnam told her that she would be killed by a monkey and informed her that people had been killed in Vietnam by monkeys. Getting frightened, Edna wired the monkey to the doorknob through her little silver collar and went to sleep. In the morning, Edna found that Mary had hung herself on the wireline.<sup>270</sup> This story reflects the American people's influence by the Vietnam War, as they learned about its horror from ex-soldiers who took part in it. Edna admits that it is a "shameful story" and thinks that it "was an awful thing that happened to [her]."<sup>271</sup> The readers can deduce that Edna seems badly affected by the monkey's story, but she does not like to assume the responsibility for her criminal actions against the monkey. They can also learn that, like Earl, Edna has an imposing perhaps aggressive personality. Thus, violence is a common behaviour for those who experience failing marriages, as well as economic and social problems in

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<sup>268</sup> Ford, "Rock Springs," 12–13.

<sup>269</sup> Ford, "Rock Springs," 14.

<sup>270</sup> Ford, "Rock Springs," 17.

<sup>271</sup> Ford, "Rock Springs," 18.

American society. When Earl does not show much sympathy for the monkey's story, Edna cannot bear his coldness and she angrily comments: "You've got a character that leaves something out, Earl. I've known that a long time."<sup>272</sup> This couple's conversation is a turning point in their relationship because Edna's speech shows that she is unsatisfied with Earl as she cannot even understand his character. As a result, the narrator makes the readers feel her sensory experience and motivates them to imagine what could happen shortly.

Like Hemingway and Carver in the preceding stories, Ford relies on the economy of language and direct treatment of the thing. According to Iser, the reader "is drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant from what is not said. What *is* said only appears to take on significance as a reference to what is not said; it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning. But as the unsaid comes to life in the reader's imagination, so the said "expands" to take on greater significance than might have been supposed: even trivial scenes can seem surprisingly profound."<sup>273</sup> The narrator incites the reader to question the significance of the monkey's story and establish its connection to the main story. Walker contends that "the monkey's story mirrors Earl's life: he, in effect, hangs himself, not literally, of course, but figuratively. One bad decision leads to the next, and the next, and the next."<sup>274</sup> Thus, the monkey's story stands in for Earl's life story. This imagery emerges from the story's context after telling the readers about Earl's past experiences, the problems he encounters with the car, and his love relationship with Edna. The readers can recognize that Earl is putting an end to his own success in life by repeating the same mistakes. Furthermore, by telling the readers that Edna feels that the monkey's story is her own, the narrator implies that she expects to have the same ending—hanging herself, figuratively, if she stays with Earl. In this case, the author uses the imagery of the

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<sup>272</sup> Ford, "Rock Springs," 19.

<sup>273</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 167.

<sup>274</sup> Walker, "Redeeming Loneliness," 126.

monkey's story in order to imply that the characters experience tremendous psychological problems, which are other variations of alienation, depression, and hopelessness.

Ford narrates a series of actions to propel the readers to create a meaningful story because of the activation of their mental processes and imagination. For Iser, "[t]he instructions provided stimulate mental images, which animate what is linguistically implied, though not said. A sequence of mental images is bound to arise during the reading process, as new instructions have continually to be accommodated."<sup>275</sup> In "Rock Springs," these actions are organized as follows: Earl and Edna were exposed to hurtful experiences in the past; they unite with the purpose of struggling and decide to move to Florida to restart their lives; the car breaks down on the road and Earl shows little response to the monkey's story; Edna feels ignored and reveals her dissatisfaction through language and identifies herself with her monkey, figuratively speaking. These series of actions have the potential to stimulate the readers' responses as their responses pave the way toward either sensory experience or an aesthetic response. The readers have to fill in the narrative and supply the characters' feelings of disappointment, frustration, and dissatisfaction after failing to realize their dream of ever renewing their lives.

Indeed, Earl informs the readers that he is struggling to avoid his troubles: "I thought, then, how I never planned things well enough. There was always a gap between my plan and what happened, and I only responded to things as they came along and hoped I wouldn't get in trouble."<sup>276</sup> Thus, the narrator invites the readers to form their own perspectives and opinions regarding Earl's expected change after this statement.

Another important event, which is used by the author in order to create certain effects on the readers, is Earl's encounter with an African woman when he reaches a trailer park in Rock Springs. When he informs her that his car broke down and that he wants to use her

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<sup>275</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 36.

<sup>276</sup> Ford, "Rock Springs," 27.

phone to call for help, the woman commiserates with his bad luck by asking: “We can’t live without cars, can we?” She adds: “They’re like our hearts.”<sup>277</sup> In comparing the car to the heart, the woman draws the readers’ attention to the position the car holds in American society after the process of modernization and development. It also alludes to the fact that American people are forced to leave their rural lifestyle and move on to more developed cities in the United States. Throughout the story, Earl shows that he loves possessing cars even if he steals them.

Indeed, Walker views that in Richard Ford’s stories, cars or trains hold special importance in that they “suggest at once freedom and entrapment, speed and the mechanistic grooves into which modern lives get stuck.”<sup>278</sup> The narrator draws on the symbol of the car in order to imply that Earl is searching for his freedom from his responsibilities and trying to escape his troubles as he wants to leave his past behind him by moving to another, safer place. However, the fact that he still breaks down his car suggests that he is still an irresponsible man, though he tries to act differently. After phoning the cab, Earl thanks the African woman for “saving him.” The woman replies: “You weren’t hard to save,” [...]. Saving people is what we were all put on earth to do. I just passed you on to whatever’s coming to you.”<sup>279</sup> Although it is not directly expressed, readers can feel that the woman’s speech deeply affects Earl, so that he remembers her and compares his life to her life. The narrator starts to understand the causes of the troubles he experiences by acknowledging: “I thought, then, how I never planned things well enough. There was always a gap between my plan and what happened, and I only respond to things as they came along and hoped I wouldn’t get in trouble. I was an offender in the law’s eyes. But I always *thought* differently, as if I weren’t an offender and had no intention of being one, which was the truth. But as I

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<sup>277</sup> Ford, “Rock Springs,” 21.

<sup>278</sup> Walker, “Redeeming Loneliness,” 126.

<sup>279</sup> Ford, “Rock Springs,” 27.

read on napkin once, between the idea and the act a whole kingdom lies.”<sup>280</sup> The narrator’s thoughts and feelings about his mistakes affect the readers’ emotions, leading them to sympathize with his situation and share his sensory experience.

Additionally, similar to Hemingway and Carver in the afore-analyzed stories, Ford relies on concrete words and the technique of repetition to create certain effects on the readers. While going to Rock Springs, the narrator approaches the whole company of buildings in which there is a gold mine. The operating golden mine alludes to the exploitation of the people’s wealth in this area. The couple is taken aback to discover the company has no guards or fence, only lights. Edna’s laugh makes Earl remember good memories when she begins to laugh, as he states:

Edna began to laugh then. Not the mean laugh I didn’t like, but a laugh that had something carrying behind it, a full laugh that enjoyed a joke, a laugh she was laughing the first time I laid eyes on her, in Missoula in the East Gate Bar in 1979, a laugh we used to laugh together when Cheryl was still with her mother and I was working steady at the track and not stealing cars or passing bogus checks to merchants. A better time all around. And for some reason it made me laugh just hearing her, and we both stood there behind the cab in the dark, laughing at the gold mine in the desert [...].<sup>281</sup>

Therefore, the narrator relies on concrete words and the technique of repetition to convey emotions, such as: “eyes,” “cab,” “mine,” and “the desert.” These words are appropriate for the story’s context and have the potential to stimulate the readers’ imagination. He repeats the word “laugh” as a verb and as a noun while he gradually describes the laughter of his lover. This repetition is used for emphasis and insistence, and it creates emotional effects on the readers. More importantly, the narrator invites the readers to make an analogy between the couple’s laughter during their old days when they lived without problems and their laughter at the gold mine. He implies to the readers that he misses

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<sup>280</sup> Ford, “Rock Springs,” 27.

<sup>281</sup> Ford, “Rock Springs,” 29.



those golden days of his past. This fact creates an emotional effect on the readers, who can sense the narrator's sadness and hopelessness instead of happiness.

Arriving at the motel, the couple starts arguing when Edna reveals her dissatisfaction with living with Earl because she does not like to live a restless life. She expresses her feelings: "Here I'm out in the desert where I don't know anything, in a stolen car, in a motel room under an assumed name, with no money of my own, a kid that's not mine, and the law after me."<sup>282</sup> In contrast to Liz in "Up in Michigan," who stays stagnant and cries after realizing her miserable situation, Edna shows more power to free herself from the tyranny of her love. She decides to take the bus the next morning to escape that situation. From her speech, readers can sense her disappointment and miserable life. This reveals that postmodern women show greater awareness of their social situations and are more interested in searching for their freedom and liberty.

As with the stories of Hemingway and Carver, Ford leaves his story with an open ending. Earl, who is dumbfounded to see his girlfriend quitting him after she expresses her dissatisfaction with living a rootless and restless life, endeavours to steal another car in the Ramada Inn's parking lot to continue his journey. He poses final questions to the eyes behind the motel room that may wonder what Earl is doing in the dark near the car: "Would you think his girlfriend was leaving him? Would you think he had a daughter? Would you think he was anybody like you?"<sup>283</sup> Clearly, the narrator compares himself to other people in an attempt to gain self-knowledge and understanding. When the readers resonate with Ford's story and Heidegger's march towards death, Earl questions his existence as a human being by comparing himself to others. He is able to infer that what connects him to others is his humanity, but there are some other crucial differences. In contrast to the characters in "Up in Michigan," Earl is concerned with ontological questions and reaches the conclusion that

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<sup>282</sup> Ford, "Rock Springs," 34.

<sup>283</sup> Ford, "Rock Springs," 37.

“the difference between a successful life and an unsuccessful one, and between him and the others, is his capacity to forget the troubles and not be bothered by them.”<sup>284</sup> Because Earl attributes everything that happens to him to “luck and design,” readers expect him to make the same mistakes and remain trapped in the same vicious circle.

In a nutshell, like the narrators of “Up in Michigan” and “Chef’s House,” the narrator of “Rock Springs” relies on imagery and repetition to stimulate the readers’ imagination so that they can form visual images and compel them to fill in his narrative. Based on their individual dispositions and life experiences, they provide different interpretations. The story is told from the point of view of the male character that always experiences trouble due to his conditions of living. Despite the fact that he attempts to change his life, he fails because there is always a gap between his plans and what actually takes place. Through the reading process, the narrator prompts the readers to recognize the characters’ mental states and learn about their disappointment and hopelessness because they fail to realize their American dream of success and build a successful love relationship. Ford’s story reflects the lives of western Americans, whose wealth has been exploited, leaving their people rootless and restless.

#### **2.4 Making over or Making off: Significance of Repetition Technique and Animal Symbolism in Bobbie Ann Mason’s “Residents and Transients”**

Bobbie Ann Mason relies on plain language and cultural icons to portray the reality of her country’s people who are belonging to western Kentucky. In her collections, she depicts their emotional states while trying to realize their American Dream. Like Hemingway, she insists that feelings and emotions are the most important elements in a literary work, as she expressed it in an interview with Wilhelm: “literature is principally about textures and feelings, not themes and symbols, which are sort of like lead weights on the bottom of a

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<sup>284</sup> Ford, “Rock Springs,” 36.

shower curtain. They hold it in place and give it shape, but they aren't the curtain itself."<sup>285</sup>

For Mason, writers have to give feelings more weight in their work and have to use certain techniques in order to convey them to the readers.

True to Hemingway's tradition, she also employs the techniques of imagery and repetition in her story "Residents and Transients" to accomplish authentic communication with her readers and underline the emotional truth. Mason evokes affecting emotions through the conjugation of verbalization and visualization. She also relies on gaps to propel the readers into visualizing the scenes by forming mental images. The narrator maintains certain objectivity in her narrative despite the fact that the story is told from a first-person vantage point. In Mason's story, unlike in Hemingway's and Carver's stories, the textures and the feelings are of uncertainty and transformation. Its central theme, as in her other stories, is how the characters respond to the changes brought about by contemporary culture to formerly rural life in western Kentucky. It also underscores the changes in her country's landscape. However, the narrator leaves her story open-ended and does not clarify if the change and the transformation will take place or not.

Similar to Hemingway's "Up in Michigan," the narrator of "Residents and Transients" starts her story in *media-res* without any description of the setting or the characters' histories or personalities. However, the readers have to analyse what is 'given' and fill in the blanks in order to participate in the recreation of the story's meaning. The narrator, Mary, finds herself in the middle of both emotional and cultural changes. Years ago, when she returned to her parent's home after spending eight years pursuing higher education, she married her husband, Stephen. Her parents, who embraced change, left for Florida while she stayed in their household and promised them to handle it while she waited

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<sup>285</sup> Wilhelm, "An Interview with Bobbie Ann Mason," 129.

to pick the corn before selling the house in the winter.<sup>286</sup> At this stage, the narrator leaves the real reasons behind her choice to stay behind in town beneath the surface of things.

In fact, Iser considers the literary text to be a reaction to the extratextual systems represented in the text.<sup>287</sup> In reality, Mason's story is a critique of the historical and cultural period that took place in rural areas of western Kentucky during the 1980s and 1990s. Michael French reports that searching for better lives, landowners started to immigrate to coastal states, leaving their farms, houses, and lands behind. Consequently, the acres that were dedicated to farming were taken by other people, or they were converted to housing and shopping malls by the local governments, which were given the right to create subdivisions.<sup>288</sup> In Mason's story, Mary's parents do not want to vacate their farms.

Moreover, the demographics of the region have changed as businessmen have come to the state and other people have migrated to more developed areas such as Louisville. Regarding this point, Mary reports that there are many changes in her town and that some people do not prefer to leave their town, while some others, "dreamers," want to live in Churchill Downs in Louisville because they expect it to be the grandest place in the world.<sup>289</sup> She also informs the readers that she is not interested in moving to Louisville, though she agreed to that arrangement with her husband, who moved there to start a new job and expected her to follow him as soon as he could find a house.<sup>290</sup> Nevertheless, she does not stay loyal to her husband as she starts a love relationship with a dentist named Larry.<sup>291</sup> In this way, right at the beginning of the story, she draws the readers' attention to the choices she has to make while she is trying to adjust to the new socio-economic and cultural changes

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<sup>286</sup> Bobbie Ann Mason, "Residents and Transients," in *Midnight Magic: Selected Short Stories of Bobbie Ann Mason*, (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1982, New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1998), 162.

<sup>287</sup> Iser, "Do I write for an Audience?" 312.

<sup>288</sup> Michael French, *US Economic History since 1945*, (New York: Manchester UP, 1997), 13.

<sup>289</sup> Mason, "Residents and Transients," 163.

<sup>290</sup> Mason, "Residents and Transients," 162.

<sup>291</sup> Mason, "Residents and Transients," 162.

her country is undergoing and solve her emotional dilemma. Hence, the readers have to fill in the blanks while trying to find out the main reasons behind her hesitation to decide where to live and with whom.

In spite of the fact that she is in contact with two men, Mary's emotional confusion is reflected in her inability to express her love to both of them. Although Larry is interested in her and cares about her, she shows little interest and cannot even identify what kind of relationship she has with him.<sup>292</sup> Her relationship with him remains unclear because, though "Larry wears a cloudy of expression of love," she doesn't feel any passion towards him.<sup>293</sup> The readers can infer that her feelings of loneliness prompt her to search for someone to talk to. Accordingly, the readers can anticipate their separation as she is just emotionally needy.

Furthermore, regarding her love relationship with her husband, Mary does not say anything about her past experiences with him or recount their life together. When she focuses on describing the new cultural changes occurring in her town, she tells us that he is a good example of the people who have adapted to the new cultural changes: "He is one of the Yankees who are moving into this region with increasing frequency, a fact that disturbs the native residents."<sup>294</sup> He also sells Word processors and typewriters. Mary's attitudes demonstrate that she is amongst the people who are disturbed by the changes that are taking place around her. She also seeks stability on her parents' farm, and she is not content with her marriage to a "Yankee." In a repetitive passage, she reveals her dissatisfaction with her husband's job, as the narrator reports: "Stephen is talking about flexibility and fluid assets. It occurs to me that word processing, all one word, is also a runny sound. How many billion words a day could one of Stephen's machines process without forgetting? How many pecks of pickled peppers can Peter Piper pick? You don't pick pickled peppers, I want to say to

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<sup>292</sup>Mason, "Residents and Transients," 164.

<sup>293</sup>Mason, "Residents and Transients," 169.

<sup>294</sup>Mason, "Residents and Transients," 162.

Stephen defiantly, as if he has asked this question. Peppers can't be picked till after they're picked, I want to say, as if I have a point to make."<sup>295</sup> From this passage, the readers can infer that Mary does not value the capacity of Word processors and believes that the system needs more time to be effective. In brief, she dislikes modernization and its new cultural values.

Besides, in an interview with Wilhelm, she explained how language functions in her writing and recognized the importance of tone and its effects on readers. Unlike Hemingway, Carver, and Ford in the studied stories, Mason relies on colloquial language to give voice to her country people and make readers more aware of their regional and cultural distinctions. She thought that the sounds of words are linked to music. The musical sounds, which resemble those of poetry, fascinate her.<sup>296</sup> In the above-quoted passage, Mason employs a well-known alliteration tongue-twister; there is a repetition of the sound 'p,' which is found in the following words: "pick," "pickled," "peppers," "picked," "Peter," "Piper," and "point." Such a repetition sounds musical to the readers and creates emotional effects on them. From her final sentence, "peppers can't be picked till after they're picked, I want to say, as if I have a point to make," the readers can understand that she wants her husband to discover an implied message. In fact, such an auditory imagery fascinates the readers and draws their attention to the author's colloquial language. It also creates a kind of suspense, forcing them to find out an implied meaning and experience her confusion.

Indeed, Mary does not express her real affection toward her husband. The only affection she shows after he phones her is by pronouncing: "his voice is familiar I can almost see him, and I realize that I miss him."<sup>297</sup> Although she has been a transient for eight years and she promised her husband to follow him, she rejects his lifestyle. After returning home,

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<sup>295</sup> Mason, "Residents and Transients," 167.

<sup>296</sup> Wilhelm, "An Interview with Bobbie Ann Mason," 128.

<sup>297</sup> Mason, "Residents and Transients," 166.

she longs to experience her childhood life when she did not have to worry about the time and change. Her phone conversations disclose that she is no longer interested in following him. As a Word processor, he is more interested in “monopoly money.”<sup>298</sup> As is the case with Larry, Mary’s emotional relationship with her husband remains unclear to the readers. Besides, Wilhelm explains that Mason’s stories deal with identity crises in a time of social change. In spite of the fact that her characters’ behaviours are different, he classifies them into two basic patterns: “When faced with confusion about their proper roles, they tend to become either doers or seekers. They stay put and attempt to construct a new identity or they light out for the territories in the hope of discovering one. In short, they try to make over or they make off.”<sup>299</sup> So, Mary falls within the second pattern as she seeks to discover herself. Building on the memorized events of the story, the readers can feel her confusion and her shattered personality. Thus, in contrast to Liz in “Up in Michigan,” Mary is more confident, and she is proud of her sexuality and freedom.

Similar to Hemingway, Carver, and Ford, Mason draws extensively upon the economy of language and the direct treatment of things. She uses imagery to make the readers understand Mary’s feelings, her shattered personality, and the choices she confronts in her life. When Mary recounts her travels with Larry, in so many passages, she describes the land and the farms she is looking at. For example, she says: “We circled west Kentucky, looking at the land, and when we flew over the farm I felt I was in a creaky hay wagon, skimming just above the fields.”<sup>300</sup> The narrator uses concrete words, such as: “land,” “fields,” “farm,” “bird,” “hay,” “wagon,” “corn,” “pasture,” and “squares.” These words, which are organized into simple sentences, have the potential to stimulate the readers’ mental

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<sup>298</sup> Mason, “Residents and Transients,” 173.

<sup>299</sup> Albert E. Wilhelm, “Making over or Making off: The Problem of Identity in Bobbie Ann Mason’s Short Fiction,” *The Southern Literary Journal* 18, no. 2 (1986): 77, (Accessed 3 May, 2018), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20077800>.

<sup>300</sup> Mason, “Residents and Transients,” 168–169.

processes to create visual images. With the help of these images, readers become compelled to visualize the actual scene according to their individual life experiences and sense its emotional effects. They can feel Mary's love for nature and her search for stability and happiness.

While recounting this event, Mary unconsciously expresses her confusion about her identity by declaring: "I am nearly thirty years old. I have two men, eight cats, no cavities. One day I was counting the cats and absent-mindedly counted myself."<sup>301</sup> Her unconscious identification with the cats of her parent's household confirms that she cannot easily recognize herself. Like the cats, she feels homeless and emotionally needy, though she is in contact with two men. Such ambiguity increases the readers' empathy for Mary and makes them feel her emotional confusion.

Like Hemingway, Mason relies on the use of symbolism to imply Mary's mental state. Her many references to her "cats" make the readers feel that their existence has a symbolic meaning within the story. In explaining her viewpoint regarding her people's movement, Mary tells Larry: "In the wild, there are two kinds of cat populations...Residents and transients. Some stay put, in their fixed home ranges, and others are on the move.... Everybody always thought that the ones who establish territories are the most successful.... They are the strongest, while the transients are the bums, the losers."<sup>302</sup> Through this verbalization using a specific language, the narrator propels the readers to visualize the scene and understand its deeper meaning. Mason chooses a language that is relevant to the context. In fact, the cat population stands for the people of Mary's town who are experiencing drastic cultural changes. Ever since the end of the Civil War (1861–1865) people of Kentucky have been engaged in a forced process of modernization.

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<sup>301</sup> Mason, "Residents and Transients," 169.

<sup>302</sup> Mason, "Residents and Transients," 170.



By analogy, there are two kinds of population: the residents and the transients. Throughout the story, she reminds the readers that she cares about all animals, especially the cats, which constitute her second family, or her “illegitimate children.”<sup>303</sup> The readers can feel Mary’s great interest in cats and can sense that they seem to play a metaphorical role in this story. Mary identifies herself with cats when she describes her possessions; this confirms the analogy in this commentary. It is clear that Mary has different opinions about the transients. Right from the outset of the story, she recalls telling her husband that she “can’t imagine living on a *street* again.”<sup>304</sup> Nevertheless, by the end of the story, she supports the transients. After describing the residents and the transients, Mary gives her opinion: “it may be that the transients are the superior ones after all, with the greatest curiosity and most intelligence.”<sup>305</sup> In this way, the readers can perhaps straightforwardly understand that she cannot make a definite decision about her own life, concerning whether to stay in her town or move to another place.

Additionally, another important imagery can be noted near the end of the story. When Mary and her lover, Larry, drive back to her parent’s farm at night, she sees “a rabbit move. It is hopping in place, the way runners will run in place. Its forelegs are frantically working, but its rear end has been smashed and it cannot get out of the road.”<sup>306</sup> Mary experiences this image as a “tape loop” when she contends: “the rabbit is a tape loop that crowds out everything.”<sup>307</sup> The rabbit cannot move on because her rear end is smashed. Like a tape loop, she stays moving in the same place and cannot get out of the road. Like in Hemingway’s “Up in Michigan,” Mason tells the rabbit scene from the female perspective and presents it in a language that aids the readers to realize the conditions of its meaning. The readers who

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<sup>303</sup> Mason, “Residents and Transients,” 163.

<sup>304</sup> Mason, “Residents and Transients,” 163.

<sup>305</sup> Mason, “Residents and Transients,” 170.

<sup>306</sup> Mason, “Residents and Transients,” 172.

<sup>307</sup> Mason, “Residents and Transients,” 172.

follow the development of Mary's psychological dilemma can discover that the rabbit, in this case, can serve as a metaphor for her inability to move beyond her current state; compared to the rabbit, she cannot move in her life because she cannot decide where to stay and with whom. This imagery reinforces the narrative and helps the readers better understand the meaning of the story.

Indeed, Joanna Price declares that "more unusually, the metaphoric potential of the images is apparent to the story's narrator, which enables her to approach an interpretation of her situation and from this to take some control over the choices that confront her."<sup>308</sup> In other words, similar to the readers of her story, Mary realizes the image of the rabbit and comes to the understanding of her psychological dilemma. Thus, the image of the rabbit has a symbolic power that is achieved after the meaning of the natural object becomes developed throughout the story.

Mason leaves her story open-ended in order to enable the reader to achieve an aesthetic response while sharing Mary's experience. In the last imagery, the author makes the readers more aware of Mary's emotional state by revealing her attitudes vis-a-vis change in her life. She says: "I see a cat's flaming eyes coming up the lane to the house. One eye is green and one is red, like a traffic light... In a moment I realize that I am waiting for the light to change."<sup>309</sup> The light has got a symbolic power as it stands for enlightenment, change, and transformation that Mary is waiting for. Nevertheless, since she sends different signals, red and green, it remains unclear to the readers if she is willing to adapt to the new cultural changes or if she will stick to her traditional ways of life. She is neither a resident nor a transient. More crucially, she has not decided whether she will spend the rest of her life with Stephen or Larry. This means that her future remains unknown to her as she is still watching

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<sup>308</sup> Joanna Price, ed., "Shiloh and Other Stories," in *Understanding Bobbie Ann Mason*, (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2000), 23.

<sup>309</sup> Mason, "Residents and Transients," 173.

herself waiting for something to happen instead of acting. In contrast to Liz in “Up in Michigan,” Mary is more aware of her psychological dilemma as she grows with the events of her experiences.

Similar to Hemingway’s “Up in Michigan,” this open ending offers the readers more opportunities to participate in the reconstruction of the story’s meaning and anticipate Mary’s decision depending on their textual analysis, their background knowledge, as well as their personal experiences.

Essentially, by adapting Hemingway’s method, Mason narrates a series of actions following an objective stance to increase the readers’ imagination. She organizes her actions as follows: Mary came back to her town after spending eight years pursuing educational degrees; she married Stephen, who left the town seeking a job; she started a relationship with Larry and has become torn between two men and two different cultures; she encounters problems of identity and cannot decide to be a resident or a transient; she sees a rabbit and a cat and experiences emotional effects that reveal much about her confusion. These series of images, which are verbalized using a particular language, have the potential to stimulate an emotional response as they terminate in sensory experience. The readers experience an aesthetic response while sharing the character’s feelings of confusion, fear of an unknown future, and failure to realize her dreams.

All in all, in “Residents and Transients,” Mason follows Hemingway’s method of engaging the readers in the recreation of the story’s meaning and affecting their emotions. Mary is torn between two men and between two cultures: rural culture and modern culture. She cannot make a serious decision about her future life. The text’s gaps, images, symbolism, and repetitions guide the readers toward a deeper understanding of her emotional and cultural crises. Mary’s experience reflects how people of western Kentucky struggled to adapt to the new cultural changes during the period of heavy modernization in the 1980s.

People were forced to choose to be either residents or transients, and they have to assume the social and cultural toll of their choice.

The comparative study of Hemingway's "Up in Michigan," Carver's "Chef's House," Ford's "Rock Springs," and Mason's "Residents and Transients" underlines that these minimalist writers deploy imagery and repetition techniques in the selected stories following Hemingway's footsteps. They rely on the economy of language and the direct treatment of the thing, as well as the creation of symbolism through language to activate the readers' mental processes. Similar to Hemingway, they employ a terse style, which is created through the use of simple concrete words that are organized in short and simple sentences. They also use straightforward language and statements, which have the effects of directness, clarity, and freshness. Carver and his contemporaries are 'neo-realists' who also use objects as natural symbols to imply the meanings of their stories. Using these techniques, they are able to engage the readers in the reconstruction of the meaning of their stories by prompting them to fill in the gaps and imagine the scenes so that they can understand and register the authentic emotions created by their minimalist styles. As such, depending on their individual dispositions and literary experiences, the readers interact with the texts by analysing their linguistic and extratextual elements. The aim is to interpret the meanings of the stories and uncover the implied themes, and feel the emotional states of the characters, including their frustration, confusion, depression, and fear of the unknown future. More importantly, the masterful of these techniques allows the readers to understand the socio-economic and cultural changes that emerged in American society and shaped the writers' viewpoints and the characters' personalities. Hence, these two narrative techniques have become basic

principles of the Minimalist Movement. They are necessary for making the reader to recreate the aesthetic object and share the characters' sensory experiences.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

**Implication, Omission, and Epiphany in Ernest Hemingway's  
"Cross Country Snow," Raymond Carver's "Fever," Richard Ford's  
"Optimists," and Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh"**

As a genre, the short story is based on gaps and implications. But the minimalist short story puts more emphasis on these techniques because its writers want to make their literary texts more engaging. Iser's theory of blanks is based on the idea that the reader and the text are not exclusively connected. For Iser, it is "the imbalance between text and reader" that increases the possibilities of communication and exchange of meaning.<sup>310</sup> The author of the text uses cues to guide the reader's concretisation process. As an active recipient, the reader uses the signals of the text as guiding elements for filling in the gaps and solving indeterminacies. Furthermore, Iser underscores a particular interest in the effects of creating indeterminacy in fiction by noting: "[...] it can be said that indeterminacy is the fundamental precondition for reader participation."<sup>311</sup> Knowing how the minimalist short story is based on reduction, Greaney views that "an increase in interpretative indeterminacy will see a consequent rise in reader participation."<sup>312</sup>

Indeed, Harold Bloom asserts that Hemingway has long been lauded for his "powerful style forming the mastery of the art of narration." He developed the "Theory of Omission" through which he would deploy interrelated techniques of implication, omission, and epiphany in order to strengthen the narrative and create certain effects on readers.<sup>313</sup> Likewise, the techniques of omission and implication are considered the most important characteristic of minimalism. In this respect, Robert C. Clark notes that Ann Beattie, a writer to whom the term was confined, stated that "minimalism resides in certain omissions."<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 166.

<sup>311</sup> Iser, *Prospecting*, 10.

<sup>312</sup> Greaney, "Less is More," 28.

<sup>313</sup> Harold Bloom, *Blooms' Major Short Story Writers: Ernest Hemingway*, (Broomall, PA: Chelsea, 1999), 13.

<sup>314</sup> Robert C. Clark, *American Literary Minimalism*, (A Doctorate Diss., Athens, Georgia, 2011), 104.

Accordingly, readers are actively engaged in the interpretation of the text using their imaginations and life experiences.

Therefore, in the light of Iser's theory, this chapter aims to argue that, like Hemingway's narrator in "Cross Country Snow," the narrators of Carver's "Fever," Ford's "Optimists," and Mason's "Shiloh" employ these narrative techniques with the purpose of increasing implied readers' engagement in the reconstruction of the meanings of their stories. Because of the activation of their mental processes, readers can share the characters' sensory experiences and better understand the socio-economic and cultural issues that are incorporated into the texts. Likewise, they achieve self-growth as they learn a lot about the dynamics of love relationships and become more aware of the effects of failing marriages on children. They also learn about male attitudes towards familial responsibilities and their effects on an individual's psychology in twentieth century American society. Thus, they can evaluate their own gender roles as they contrast them with what is presented in these stories.

### **3.1 "The Fear of Loss" and "The Poetics of Loss" in Ernest Hemingway's "Cross Country Snow"**

According to Iser, the meaning of a text emerges from interaction between the text and its readers. So, he objects to both subjective and mimetic approaches, as he notes: "The process of assembling the meaning of the text is not a private act, for although it does mobilize the subjective disposition of the reader, it does not lead to day-dreaming but the fulfilment of conditions that have already structured in the text. So, the connection between the text and the reader is that of "transmitter and receiver."<sup>315</sup> For him, implication and omission, or "blanks," techniques are important methods that are used by authors to control the interaction between the text and its readers. He values the implication technique, which is closely connected to gaps, because these interrelated techniques prompt the readers to interpret the

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<sup>315</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 49–50.

literary text, as he states: "... if all linguistic actions were explicit, then the only threat to communication would be acoustic. As what is meant can never be totally translated into what is said, the utterance is bound to contain implications, which in turn necessitate interpretation."<sup>316</sup>

Moreover, for Iser, an utterance must contain implications that the readers have to find out because they can feel that some textual elements are missing from the text and they become aware of the role they are assigned: to fill in the blanks. He also thinks that in literary texts, authors usually leave blanks, either consciously or unconsciously, to compel the readers to supply the missing information.<sup>317</sup> In other words, as Fish maintains, in Iser's theory, "the reader is given a more prominent role because what the text contains is not a meaning, however complex, but a set of directions for assembling a meaning, directions he will carry out in his own way" because the meaning of a literary text is a dynamic happening.<sup>318</sup>

Indeed, Hemingway's elliptical style is traced to his "Iceberg Theory" or the "Theory of Omission." According to Rama Rao, this theory alludes to suggestiveness or implication, which means "implied expression rather than explicit statement, or a subtle hinting at something by creating an impression through suppression." Suppression involves the use of figures of speech, such as symbols, metaphors, metonymies, and ironies in order to reinforce implications and understatement of emotions and help the readers discover the stories' deeper meaning.<sup>319</sup> Implication is achieved through omission or by leaving blanks in his stories. In fact, Hemingway explains how his fiction works: "If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if

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<sup>316</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 59.

<sup>317</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 192,194.

<sup>318</sup> Fish, "Review of *Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser*," 4.

<sup>319</sup> Rao P.G Rama, *Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea*, (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2007), 58.



the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing.<sup>320</sup> In his stories, there is always a description of actions and objects that can be the “tip of the iceberg,” while the characters’ emotions are left underneath the surface.

Hemingway’s “Cross Country Snow” is a prime example of his “Iceberg Theory,” as it shows how “less is more” in his short fiction. It is one of his simple and deceiving stories because it does not have an overt action and its main theme of how to escape and the need to escape life’s burden is left beneath the surface for the readers to find out. The protagonist, Nick, fears the loss of his freedom while expecting the responsibilities ahead of him after his marriage. William Adair acknowledges that “ ‘Fear of loss’ and ‘longing’ are most often the submerged seven-eighths of the iceberg of his work, the part that is ‘omitted’ yet provides the work’s essential motive or mood.”<sup>321</sup> The third-person narrator follows the characters, but he only records observable actions without making any commentaries or judgments. In explaining Hemingway’s choice of the “objective presentation,” Lamb clarifies how the writer withdraws the moral authority of the narrator and makes the readers feel that they are observers of the scene. The readers’ understanding of the situation resulted from their observation and interpretation of the writer’s textual ‘clues.’<sup>322</sup>

However, Lamb maintains that since the primary goal of literature is to represent the “real world,” a sort of judgment is compulsory in any literary work. In Hemingway’s stories, it occurs in the readers’ minds in their attempt to interpret what the characters do or say.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 192.

<sup>321</sup> William Adair, “Ernest Hemingway and the Poetics of Loss,” *College Literature* 10, no. 3 (1983): 294, (Accessed 2 June, 2018), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25111564>.

<sup>322</sup> Lamb, *Art Matters*, 27.

<sup>323</sup> Lamb, *Art Matters*, 27.

He also notes that, according to Hemingway, the “truth” should be shown through the actions of his characters in order to force readers to grapple with making their own interpretation of the text.<sup>324</sup> In effect, Hemingway’s reliance on the third objective point of view has played a significant role in the circulation of his style, mainly, because the readers are given more opportunities to contribute to the reconstruction of the story’s meaning. They have to analyse what is ‘given’ and supply the missing information. In truth, he depends on gaps to invite the readers to visualize the scenes by generating mental images; he omits key details and implies others, leading the readers to experience an epiphany by the end of the story. In doing so, he engages them in the recreation of the story’s meaning and makes them feel the characters’ emotional states.

The narrator starts this story in *media-res* without providing the readers with information about the socio-historical context of the story and its setting. Greaney explains that Hemingway tends to remove the historical context in order to create fiction. As a modernist, Hemingway acknowledged that art could transcend reality to create something “truer than anything true.” By omitting the historical context of his fictional stories, he intends to create stories that are not limited in scope. Thus, they can suggest more about the plight and the dislocation of the modern world than the reality itself.<sup>325</sup> Furthermore, the characters emerge fully developed and without histories. This omission invites the readers to imagine their own characters.

The readers who are familiar with Hemingway’s biography and Nick’s stories in his collections *In Our Time* and *Men without Women* can easily find out that “Cross Country Snow” contains biographical elements of the writer and this facilitates its understanding. In fact, Charles M. Oliver and Paul Smith note that this story reflects a period in Hemingway’s vocation at Chamby-sur-Montreux when he enjoyed a skiing season in the winter of 1922–

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<sup>324</sup> Lamb, *Art Matters*, 27.

<sup>325</sup> Greaney, “Less is More,” 49.

1923 in the company of David O'Neils and their son George. Hadley Richardson informed Hemingway that she was pregnant and that they had to return to Toronto to give birth to their baby.<sup>326</sup> Readers can realize that Nick is more mature in comparison with the preceding stories. In this respect, Robert E. Gajdusek sustains that “[t]his more mature Nick may be able to acknowledge that he can unknowingly have become to others, in his detachment, monstrous.”<sup>327</sup> Therefore, the readers have to analyse the story’s “given” and any extratextual elements in order to find out whether Nick has become mature enough to assume familial responsibilities.

Nick and George, the main characters, are close friends who go skiing somewhere. They are two men without women who are rootless in a foreign country and in nature. They have to choose between spending their lives pursuing their nomadic lifestyles, such as skiing, or returning to their responsibilities with their families. George summarises this idea in one sentence: “I wish we were Swiss.”<sup>328</sup> His speech indicates that Nick may want to escape the familial responsibilities after the pregnancy of his wife.

The story begins with Nick riding up the mountain on a funicular car, which is finally stopped when snow blocks its way. The narrator draws the readers’ attention to the characters’ masculinity by telling them about their skiing and courageous actions:

On the white below George dipped and rose and dipped out of sight. The rush and the sudden swoops as he dropped down a steep undulation in the mountain side plucked Nick’s mind out and left him only with the wonderful flying, dropping sensation in his body. He rose to a slight up-run and then the snow seemed to drop out from under him as he went down, down, faster and faster in a rush down the last, long steep slope . . . the snow driving like a sand-storm. . . he went over and over in a clashing of skis, feeling like a shot rabbit,

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<sup>326</sup> Charles M. Oliver, *Critical companion to Ernest Hemingway: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, (New York: Facts on File Inc., 2007), 9; Paul Smith, *A Reader’s Guide to the Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, (Boston: G.K Hall &Co., 1989), 81.

<sup>327</sup> Gajdusek Robert E., “‘An Alpine Idyll’; The Sun-Struck Mountain Vision and the Necessary Valley Journey,” in *Hemingway’s Neglected Short Fiction: New Perspectives*, ed. Susan F. Beegel, (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1992), 17.

<sup>328</sup> Ernest Hemingway, “Cross Country Snow,” in *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 188.

then stuck, his legs crossed, his skis sticking straight up and his nose and ears jammed full of snow.<sup>329</sup>

In this commentary, the narrator relies on specific language and imagery to create the story's mood and develop its theme. He uses action verbs such as: "dipped out," "rose," "went down," "dropped down," and participles, such as: "driving, dropping, clashing." He also employs two similes: 'the snow driving like a sand storm' and 'feeling like a shot rabbit.' In so doing, he stimulates the readers' imaginations so that they can visualize the scenes and feel the created emotions of harmony with nature, fun, and fear. The readers can also form perspectives on the characters' masculinity and physical strength. Although the narrator implies these issues, he just shows the readers through their actions the way they struggle to achieve their goals.

What is noticeable is the repetition of the sound /s/ at the beginning of words, such as: "solidly," "scouring," "surface," "swept," "skis," "sideways," and "slipped." In addition, Hemingway uses this musical repetition to create certain effects on the readers, who must react by trying to find out the reasons behind its use and linking it to the story's meaning. In her analysis of the lyrical dimension in "Cross Country Snow," De Wendolyn E. Tetlow argues that the sound /s/ "evokes the swift movement of escape Nick finds on skis."<sup>330</sup> In other words, Hemingway depends on this sound to mirror the psychology of Nick Adams, who wants to escape from something the narrator has not yet revealed.

Additionally, the image of Nick sticking one of his skis into the floor tells us much about his dilemma and confusion. For Tetlow, this image "conveys to readers a sense of anger and resentment, but also control and resoluteness."<sup>331</sup> The readers can guess what Nick is thinking about while skiing, and he arrives to make a decisive decision, though he is unsure

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<sup>329</sup> Hemingway, "Cross Country Snow," 183.

<sup>330</sup> De Wendolyn E. Tetlow, *Hemingway's In Our Time: Lyrical dimensions*, (Lewisburg: Associated UP, Inc., 1992), 85.

<sup>331</sup> Tetlow, *Hemingway's In Our Time*, 87.

about that decision. At this stage, Nick's behaviour creates suspense and ambiguity, obliging the readers to note what lies beneath the surface. The narrator implies that skiing is a fun activity that can make men happy without the presence of women, by showing the character's masculinity, strength, and enjoyment in the absence of women.

The third-person narrator reports the events that take place in the inn while he omits key details and implies others, creating more ambiguities for the readers. For example, when Nick and George enter the inn with the aim of getting drinks, they find two Swiss skiers inside.<sup>332</sup> The narrator does not provide any information about these minor characters or their functions in the whole story. More importantly, Nick and George are served by a pregnant young waitress, but Nick does not notice her pregnancy the first time: "The girl came in and Nick noticed that her apron covered swellingly her pregnancy. I wonder why I didn't see that when she first came in, he thought."<sup>333</sup> The narrator does not explain why Nick does not see her pregnancy. This fact prompts the readers to fill in the gaps while they try to comprehend Nick's stance, feelings, and reaction. They can also sense that there is something beneath the surface that Nick has not explained so far. Later, Nick expects that her pregnancy corresponds to an illegal relationship because she does not have a ring.<sup>334</sup> This gap compels the readers to connect the servant's pregnancy to Nick's problem with his wife, Helen. While drinking, the narrator reports their conversation over Helen's pregnancy: They sat there, Nick leaning his elbows on the table, George slumped back against the wall. "Is Helen going to have a baby?" George said, coming down to the table from the wall. "Yes." "When?" "Late next summer."

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<sup>332</sup> Hemingway, "Cross Country Snow," 185.

<sup>333</sup> Hemingway, "Cross Country Snow," 185.

<sup>334</sup> Hemingway, "Cross Country Snow," 186.

“Are you glad?”

“Yes. Now.”<sup>335</sup>

The characters’ ways of sitting indicate that they are physically tired and psychologically depressed. It seems that they also discuss an important subject. In fact, Hemingway is known for his innovations in dialogue techniques. Lamb views that Hemingway attempts to capture real life situations by leaving out unnecessary information and relying on the technique of repetition in order to authenticate his dialogue.<sup>336</sup> Iser views that conversation is a particular instance of the general constraint on ordinary language: “it presupposes reference to a given object [which] in turn demands a continuous individualization of the developing speech act so that utterance may gain its intended precision.”<sup>337</sup> In Hemingway’s dialogue, there is an omission of the guidelines from this conversation, but it is still possible for the attentive readers to identify the interlocutors. According to Waldhorn, “Hemingway’s characters dare not fully release their feelings, their emphatic language communicates feeling without having to define it too explicitly.”<sup>338</sup> This shorthand conversation indicates that they know each other very well and that they can understand each other without detailed explanations. Their colloquial and minimalist language serves to express their feelings and emotions with great intensity. Moreover, the conversation compels the readers to supply the missing information depending on their life experiences and background knowledge.

From their conversation, the readers can perceive that Nick is pleased to have a baby. Nevertheless, when they continue their speech, he affirms that he does not want to go to the States. At this stage, the readers start to understand the reasons behind the characters’ anger

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<sup>335</sup> Hemingway, “Cross Country Snow,” 187.

<sup>336</sup> R. Paul Lamb, “Hemingway and the Creation of Twentieth-century Dialogue,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 42, No 4 (Winter 1996): 453+.

<sup>337</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 184.

<sup>338</sup> Arthur Waldhorn, *A Reader’s Guide to Ernest Hemingway*, (New York: Syracuse UP, 2002), 34.

and resentment while skiing. Expecting the difficult responsibility ahead of his friend, George says: “It’s hell, isn’t it?” Nick’s reply, “No. Not exactly,” indicates that he does not want to show his fears.<sup>339</sup> Furthermore, by the end of this conversation, the narrator says that “George sat silent. He looked at the empty bottle and the empty glasses.”<sup>340</sup> The narrator implies that Nick experiences feelings of hollowness, loss, and emptiness through the images of empty bottles and empty glasses.

Influenced by James Joyce, Hemingway generally employs epiphanic moments to engage the reader in the rebuilding of the story’s meaning, while trying to comprehend the implication of the thematic concern. In *Stephen Hero*, Joyce defines epiphany as “a sudden spiritual manifestation either in the vulgarity of a speech or in a gesture in a memorable phrase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of *moments*.”<sup>341</sup> More recently, Robert Langbaum views that an epiphany results from a psychological association and asserts that “the epiphany is not an incursion of God from outside; it is a psychological phenomenon arising from a real sensuous experience, either present or recollected.”<sup>342</sup> Regarding the emotional effect an epiphany triggers the readers, Langbaum thinks that “the epiphany lasts only a moment, but leaves an enduring effect.”<sup>343</sup> Therefore, writers use the epiphany as a technique to create certain effects on the readers, leading them to grasp the story’s deeper meaning.

In “Cross Country Snow,” the epiphany is recognized only by the readers. This privilege helps them to become more aware of the thematic implications of the story and sense the characters’ emotional states. The narrator initiates the epiphany when he states that

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<sup>339</sup> Hemingway, “Cross Country Snow,” 187.

<sup>340</sup> Hemingway, “Cross Country Snow,” 187.

<sup>341</sup> James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1963), 211.

<sup>342</sup> Robert Langbaum, “The Epiphanic Mode in Wordsworth and Modern Literature,” *New Literary History* 14, no. 2 (1983): 341, (Accessed 9 July, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.2307/468689>.

<sup>343</sup> Langbaum, “The Epiphanic Mode in Wordsworth and Modern Literature,” 341.

the “Swiss got up and paid and went out.”<sup>344</sup> Unlike the Swiss, Nick and George do not pay their dues when they leave the inn. The narrator reports their actions: “They opened the door and went out . . . they took down their skis from the where they leaned against the wall in the inn. Nick put on his gloves. George was already started up the road, his skis on his shoulder. Now they would have run home together.”<sup>345</sup> The word “paid” triggers the epiphany and gives the story a sense of dramatic irony. The readers can infer that the narrator contradicts the actions of Nick and George with those of the Swiss. In their analysis of the epiphanic moment in this story, Gerhard Pfeiffer and Martina Konig explain that “[w]ithin the narrative context, the covert motif of ‘(non)payment’ evokes those inescapable obligations arising from Helen’s pregnancy.”<sup>346</sup> In other words, metaphorically, Nick who wants to enjoy more freedom has “to pay” for his union with Helen and assume his responsibility towards his family. This epiphany makes the readers increasingly aware of Nick’s fear of losing his freedom and his attempt to escape from the responsibilities ahead of him.

In addition, as said earlier, Nick acknowledges that he did not notice the servant’s pregnancy the first time. In explaining his reaction, Richard Hovey, whose reading is influenced by Freudian theory, argues that Nick “did not see it, of course, because a part of him did not want to, because unconsciously Nick does not want to recognize pregnancy.”<sup>347</sup> This means that the pregnant waitress stands in for his wife, Helen, whose pregnancy is not recognized by Nick. Although Nick does not inform his friend that he is not happy with her pregnancy, his reactions demonstrate his attitudes and perceptions towards pregnancy and

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<sup>344</sup> Hemingway, “Cross Country Snow,” 188.

<sup>345</sup> Hemingway, “Cross Country Snow,” 188.

<sup>346</sup> Gerhard Pfeiffer and Martina Konig, “‘The Bill Always Came’: Hemingway’s Use of the Epiphany in ‘Cross-Country Snow,’ (Analysis of Ernest Hemingway’s Short Story),” *The Hemingway Review* 16, no. 1, 1996): 97+, *Expanded Academic ASAP*, (Accessed 10 July 2018), <http://link.galegroup.com.proxy.librarypoint.org/apps/doc/A18963170/EAIM?u=crrl&sid=EAIM&xid=afa8ad97>.

<sup>347</sup> Richard Hovey, *Hemingway: The Inward Terrain*, (Seattle and London: U of Washington P, 1968), 14.



fatherhood responsibilities. In fact, this epiphany makes the readers more aware of Nick's feelings of hollowness, loss, frustration, and desire to escape from what annoys him. Furthermore, it elicits sympathy for Helen because readers can anticipate her dissatisfaction with living with a man who is unwilling to share familial responsibilities with her.

Indeed, the story closes with an open ending as the narrator does not provide a resolution to his conflict. The last sentence, "Now they would have the run home together," is ironic because, at the surface level, it seems to the readers that they are in a hurry to go home. Yet, if they read it in relation to the epiphanic moment, it becomes clear that Nick and George want to escape from the obligations and duties that are shown by the act of "non-payment." In explaining the role of gaps in a literary text, Iser notes:

These gaps have a different effect on the process of anticipation and retrospection, and thus on the "gestalt" of the virtual dimension, for they may be filled in different ways. For this reason, one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled. In this very act the dynamics of reading are revealed. By making his decision he implicitly acknowledges the inexhaustibility of the text; at the same time it is this very inexhaustibility that forces him to make his decision.<sup>348</sup>

Thus, the readers are given more opportunities to participate in the recreation of the story's meaning by forming perspectives and trying to imagine the conflict that may occur between the waitress and Nick and George over the bill. The omission of this confrontation makes the story a good example of Hemingway's "iceberg principle."

All in all, "Cross Country Snow," with its slightly plotted narrative, colloquial dialogue, selected vocabulary, and detailed descriptive passages, stands as one of Hemingway's best minimalist stories. By leaving gaps for readers at different levels and

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<sup>348</sup>Iser, "The Reading Process," 285.

by implying others, the narrator is able to convey his thematic concern, which is associated with Nick's fear of losing his freedom and his attempt to escape fatherhood responsibilities. The narrator engages readers in the reconstruction of the story's meaning by forcing them to interpret and imagine the scene and find out the deeper meaning. The employment of an epiphany, which is only recognized by readers, helps the narrator to achieve his goal; he intensifies readers' participation in the recreation of the story's meaning and makes them more aware of the character's hidden feelings. Because of the activation of their mental affinities, the readers grow intellectually with the story's events and experience the aesthetic object. They learn about male attitudes towards familial responsibilities and their effects on an individual's psychology in American modern society during the 1920s.

### **3.2 Marriage Breaking Dawn, Loneliness, Gaps, and Epiphany in Raymond Carver's "Fever"**

Like Hemingway, Carver's minimalist style is based on the techniques of omission, implication, and epiphany, which propel readers to fill in the blanks in order to reconstruct their own informed meaning of the story and share the characters' sensory experiences. Indeed, Cynthia J. Hallett highlights that minimalism is commonly known as the "aesthetic of exclusion" because what is unstated is more important than what is stated.<sup>349</sup> In an interview with Jo Sapp, Amy Hempel describes it as follows: "A lot of times what's not reported in your work is more important than what actually appears on the page. Frequently, the emotional focus of the story is some underlying event that may not be described or even referred to in the story."<sup>350</sup> Thus, she emphasizes the significance of the omission technique in a literary work and considers the emotional focus an implying event in the story. Likewise, in an interview, Carver acknowledged that he was fascinated by Hemingway's "Iceberg

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<sup>349</sup> Hallett, "Minimalism and the Short Story," 487+.

<sup>350</sup> Jo Sapp, "Interview with Amy Hempel," *Missouri Review* 16 (1993): 82–83.

Theory.”<sup>351</sup> Accordingly, his stories also operate by implication, rendering “every word and every gesture...fraught with significance.”<sup>352</sup> For Carver, the writer’s role is to underline the emotional truth to the readers using precise and concise language. His story “Fever,” which resembles an “iceberg,” provides an outstanding example of his use of omission, implication, and epiphany with the purpose of increasing readers’ engagement in the reconstruction of the story’s meaning.

Carver cherished invisibility in Hemingway’s stories and implemented his own theory of omission, which resembles Hemingway’s. In an interview with William Stull, he explains how his theory works: “If you can take anything out, take it out, as doing so will make the work stronger. Pare, pare, and pare some more.”<sup>353</sup> However, the presence of mysteries in Carver’s stories makes the task of interpretation even more challenging for implied readers. The latter are unable to understand the characters’ puzzlement, inarticulateness, and silence in several situations. In this regard, Greaney believes that, unlike in Hemingway’s fiction, “there is no clue within the texts as to how the implied reader fulfils its meaning” in Carver’s fiction. He bases his claim on the idea that for Carver “literature does not require an explanatory function; it is part of life quality that certain mysteries should remain unsolved, or at least with no easy answers other than those the reader invests in their interpretation.”<sup>354</sup> As a result, the presence of mysteries in Carver’s fiction heightens the emotional impact on readers.

Compared to Hemingway in “Cross Country Snow,” Carver relies on a detached third objective point of view that concentrates on describing the characters’ actions and what they say without making any comments. Kim Herzinger focuses on the challenges readers face

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<sup>351</sup> Pope and McElhinny, “Raymond Carver Speaking (1982),” 17.

<sup>352</sup> O’Connell, *At the Field’s End*, 133.

<sup>353</sup> William Stull, “Matters of Life and Death” (1986), in *Conversations with Raymond Carver*, eds. Marshall Bruce Gentry and William L. Stull, (Mississippi: UP of Mississippi, 1990), 182.

<sup>354</sup> Greaney, “Less is More,” 28.

while attempting to interpret and comprehend the minimalist text: “The reader of minimalist fiction is being asked to face the characters in the story the way we face people in the world, people who do not—in my experience at least—ordinarily declare their personal histories, political and moral attitudes, or psychological conditions for my profit and understanding.”<sup>355</sup> In her opinion, the characters in minimalist stories emerge fully developed and without histories. Readers get to know them through their actions and words without being explicitly described by the writers.

Readers have to discover the characters’ personalities and lives during the process of reading and interpretation. Accordingly, the narrator in Carver’s story does not also describe the physical appearances of the characters or their histories. This motivates the readers to imagine their own characters. Hence, the narrator deliberately omits key details and implies others, forcing the readers to imagine the scene so as to apprehend and sense the characters’ emotional states. Likewise, he starts his story in *media-res* without any description of the setting. However, readers can recreate the historical context for this story based on their knowledge of 1980s American culture.

Historically, American society underwent changes on different levels in the post-World War II era. There was a shift from a close-minded parochial community to a more wide-ranging cosmopolitan society. When the government began to diminish its restrictions on divorce, people started to accept it as a good solution to their marital problems. Children from broken homes were the first victims of the emotional shock. Indeed, when Carver wrote his collections of short stories, divorce was one of the main issues in society. “Fever” is one of his best tragedies, which provides a critique of the new emerging culture of divorce and shows its effects on family structure and offspring. It also reveals that women who embrace

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<sup>355</sup> Herzinger, “Introduction,” 17.

the concepts of the feminist movement's ideology were eager to leave everything behind in pursuit of freedom, liberty, and happiness.

"Fever" is about a school teacher called Carlyle who experiences depression because his wife abandoned him and left behind her two children to take care of. Like Hemingway's narrator, Carver's narrator deliberately reports some details but he implies others, forcing the readers to fill in the gaps. Right from the beginning of the story, readers learn that a fight occurred between Carlyle and his wife Eileen, but its real reasons are left beneath the surface for the readers to uncover throughout the process of reading. The narrator just reports: "she said she was going to Southern California to begin a new life for herself there."<sup>356</sup> In fact, the narrator focuses on showing Carlyle's emotional state while he tries to forget her and find a baby-sitter for his children. Indeed, every Carver's story is a tragedy in a long line of low-rent tragedies. In this respect, Michael Vander Weele thinks that Carver's stories are low-rent tragedies not because of the different social problems they treat, such as emotional rupture, violence against women, alcoholism, and unemployment, but rather because of "the characters' inability to go beyond their puzzlement over the significance of such event. They have neither the understanding nor the conditions for such speech."<sup>357</sup> Certainly, Carlyle's real problem, which affects his life, is not the departure of his wife, but his inability to move on and find someone to talk to about his problems and express his feelings.

In contrast to Nick Adams in "Cross Country Snow," Carlyle assumes the whole responsibility for his children. Thus, when Eileen had left him, his alertness to responsibility increased to the extent that he could not find time to engage with another woman.<sup>358</sup> Unlike Hemingway's characters, who prefer to spend their time outside their homes while escaping

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<sup>356</sup> Raymond Carver, "Fever," *Where I'm Calling From: New and Selected Stories*, (New York: *The Atlantic*, 1988), 203.

<sup>357</sup> Michael Vander Weele, "John Calvin's Notion of Exchange and the Usefulness of Literature," in *Hermeutics at the Crossroads*, ed. Vanhoozer Kelvin J, James K. A. Smith, and Bruce Ellis Benson, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2006), 111.

<sup>358</sup> Carver, "Fever," 205.

familial responsibilities, Carlyle devotes much of his time to take care of his children. Indeed, Carlyle's deep concern for his children suggests that he was looking for attention, sympathy, and affection.

The narrator focuses on Carlyle's psychological struggles to let go of his wife from his mind and life. Although he understands that his life is entering a new period, his confusion and frustration prevent him from believing that his wife will not come back home.<sup>359</sup> The narrator creates a kind of ambiguity by leaving out the couple's life together or their past events. He just mentions that they had lived together for eight years and that they loved each other to the extent that Carlyle could not imagine himself loving another person the way he loved her. She made him feel her love too. Nevertheless, she left him and the children without explaining her real reasons; she just said she was "going for it."<sup>360</sup> She went to continue her studies as an artist, and she started a new life with Carlyle's friend, Richard Hoopes, searching for freedom and happiness. Her behaviour indicates that she assimilated into the feminist movement's cultural norms and values as she looked for methods to educate herself, find a job, and develop her creativity.

At an early stage, Carlyle's deep attachments to his wife prevented him from thinking that she decided to leave him forever. In contrast to the narrator in "Cross Country Snow," who uses action verbs and repetition of musical sounds to create effects on readers so that they can feel the characters' emotional states, Carver's narrator enters the characters' consciousness in so many scenes to achieve certain effects on readers. For example, to inform the readers how he is spending his nights without his wife, Carlyle reports his self-contradictory feelings in a menacing monologue during a summer night: "He had wandered the rooms of his house with a glass in his hand, telling himself that, yes, sooner or later,

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<sup>359</sup> Carver, "Fever," 205.

<sup>360</sup> Carver, "Fever," 207.

Eileen would come back.”<sup>361</sup> However, because he was hurt by her infidelity, he could forgive her. Subsequently, in the next breath, he expresses his anger and his love: “I never want to see your face again. I’ll never forgive you for this, you crazy bitch.” Then, a minute later, “Come back, sweetheart, please. I love you and need you. The kids need you, too’.”<sup>362</sup> The narrator’s report of Carlyle’s speech makes the readers more aware of his psychological dilemma and his emotional state of loss, sorrow, melancholy, loneliness, emptiness, confusion, depression, hope, and love. Unlike in Hemingway’s fiction, Carver says of his prose that he prefers it to contain threatening elements:

I like it when there is some feeling of threat or sense of menace in short stories. I think a little menace is fine to have in a story. For one thing, it's good for the circulation. There has to be tension, a sense that something is imminent, that certain things are in relentless motion, or else, most often, there simply won't be a story. What creates tension in a piece of fiction is partly the way the concrete words are linked together to make up the visible action of the story. But it's also the things that are left out, that are implied, the landscape just under the smooth.<sup>363</sup>

In this story, Carver intensifies the readers’ menace by omitting key details and implying others. Because the narrator does not provide solutions to Carlyle’s situation, he purposefully provides readers with opportunities to reconstruct alternative perspectives on Carlyle’s situation. The narrator gradually makes the readers more aware of the couple’s communication problems by showing Carlyle’s reactions to her letters and phone calls. Over the summer, Eileen sent him letters, photographs, a few cards for her children, and specific letters in which she asked him to comprehend the fact of leaving him and accept things if he really loved her because she was enjoying her new life. In one of her letters, she wrote: “That which is truly bonded can never become unbounded.”<sup>364</sup> This sentence confused Carlyle to the extent that he could not distinguish if she was referring to his love relationship or her

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<sup>361</sup> Carver, “Fever,” 206.

<sup>362</sup> Carver, “Fever,” 206.

<sup>363</sup> Carver, “On Writing,” 50.

<sup>364</sup> Carver, “Fever,” 207.

new life. As a response, he thought: “Eileen must be losing her mind to talk like that.”<sup>365</sup> Indeed, Eileen’s perceived insanity is mentioned several times throughout the story. For instance, in a phone conversation, Eileen declared that she sounded insane: “You may think I’m crazy or something.”<sup>366</sup> On another occasion, Carlyle refused to answer the phone because she thought he had become crazy, as the narrator reports: “She’s losing her mind. She’s going crazy. I’m not going to answer it.”<sup>367</sup>

Furthermore, Carlyle accused Eileen of being insane when she advised him to write about his illness and feelings when he got a fever. She told him that the French writer Colette did so when she got a fever: “It was clear to him that she was insane.”<sup>368</sup> Carlyle’s responses towards Eileen demonstrate to the readers that there has been an emotional rupture as a result of her infidelity and that he has reached a point where he has become convinced that he can no longer live with her after she has changed herself. Despite the fact that the narrator leaves out all the details interrelated to Eileen’s new life with her lover and the readers can only hear her voice during her calls, the repeated references to her insanity or craziness indicate that she herself experienced a psychological shock, though she pretended to be happy. Thus, this failing marriage ruins the whole family to varying degrees.

Readers can also notice that Carlyle has difficulty communicating his emotions with others because he cannot find someone in whom he can put trust again. This fact is manifested in his rejection of different babysitters for no convincing reasons. Thus, in contrast to Hemingway, Carver presents an invisible character that has difficulty expressing his feelings and thoughts through language. Frederick Barthelme maintains that the characters of the minimalist stories “are skeptical about language and its use. But while they don’t haul out their souls for flailing about on the page, they do have something of the full

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<sup>365</sup>Carver, “Fever,” 207.

<sup>366</sup>Carver, “Fever,” 209.

<sup>367</sup> Carver, “Fever,” 214.

<sup>368</sup> Carver, “Fever,” 218.



range of human intelligence and emotion, which is communicate to the reader through gesture and resonance...every choice is a way of demonstrating a grasp and an appreciation and an opinion of the world.”<sup>369</sup> This means that the characters’ apparent inarticulateness forces them to rely on other ways of communication such as gestures and actions.

In this story, Carlyle’s life starts to change when he finally finds a trustworthy babysitter who does her job perfectly and takes care of the children. When Carlyle’s life has changed, he becomes motivated to express his love to his colleague Carol and starts dating her at home.<sup>370</sup> More importantly, although he has bypassed his repressive emotions towards Eileen, he gets a fever as a consequence of his psychological pressures. During his illness, the new babysitter takes care of him and his children. When his health has improved, she tells him that she must move to Oregon because she has personal duties. Having trusted her, Carlyle opens up to her about his problems with his wife and their effects on him. Being a wise and experienced woman, she listens to him attentively and encourages him to talk by expressing her emotions: “I know what you’re saying. You just keep talking, Mr. Carlyle. Sometimes it’s good to talk about it. Sometimes it has to be talked about... And you’re going to feel better afterward.”<sup>371</sup> Mrs. Webster knows that he must talk in order to cure his fever and release his psychological pressures. After finishing his story, she confirms to him that he and Eileen will be fine after getting separated. Even though Carlyle stopped answering his wife’s calls, the readers sense that he only decides to move on after talking with Mrs. Webster. He becomes more confident in his own capacity to manage his life and accept the changes.

In fact, an important omission and its implications occur by the end of this story. In this respect, Marc Chénétier emphasizes Carver’s reliance on indeterminacy by stating: “In

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<sup>369</sup> Quoted in Herzinger, “Introduction,” 16–17.

<sup>370</sup> Carver, “Fever,” 212.

<sup>371</sup> Carver, “Fever,” 220.

all typographical justice, Carver's stories should open and close with question marks."<sup>372</sup> The narrator does not provide a decisive resolution to his conflict, but, just as in Hemingway's "Cross Country Snow," he implies one by employing an epiphany to help the readers understand the story's preoccupations. In addition, in his essay "On Writing," Carver expresses his admiration of Chekov's fragment from his story: "... and suddenly everything became clear to him." In justifying his admiration, he declares: "I find these words filled with wonder and possibility. I love their simple clarity, and the hint of revelation that's implied... There are consequences as a result of such sudden awakening. I feel a sense of relief and—anticipation."<sup>373</sup> Besides, Meyer views that Carver's epiphanies do not always follow the Joycean tradition, and, in most cases, his characters cannot realize what is happening to them. In this way, the epiphany adds to the mystery and menace of his stories.<sup>374</sup>

Carlyle has been suffering psychologically for a long time, hoping in vain that his marriage can be saved, unlike Nick, who tries to avoid thinking about his lover's pregnancy because he is afraid of familial responsibilities. Nonetheless, a friendly gesture from Mrs. Webster prompts a sudden recognition; he believes his wife will never return. Consequently, he must face this reality and start a new life:

It was then, as he stood at the window [and saw his maid waving at him], that he felt something come to an end. It had to do with Eileen and the life before this. Had he ever waved at her? .... But he understood it was over, and he felt able to let her go. He was sure their life together had happened in the way he said it had. But it was something that had passed. And that passing--though it had seemed impossible and he'd fought against it-- would become a part of him now, too, as surely as anything else he'd left behind.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Marc Chénétier, "Living On/Off the 'Reserve': Performance, Interrogation, and Negativity in the Works of Raymond Carver," in *Critical Angles: European Views of Contemporary American Literature*, ed. Marc Chénétier, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1986), 176.

<sup>373</sup> Carver, "On Writing," 47.

<sup>374</sup> Meyer, *Raymond Carver*, 24.

<sup>375</sup> Carver, "Fever," 220.

In the quoted passage, the sudden illumination stems from the observation of a gesture that is not logically connected to the experience it causes. In this case, it is very much in line with the Joycean definition of a literary epiphany. Like in Hemingway's story, this epiphany is recognized by both characters and readers. However, Carver's character's achievement of self-growth intensifies the emotional impact of the story. According to Günter Leypoldt, "the defamiliarizing quality of the epiphanic vision" clarifies the 'truth,' guides readers to discover the plot's implicit "deep knowledge," and makes the protagonist's self-awareness tangible because the characters, in Carver's fiction, "for the most part do indeed learn and grow, albeit in a muted, implicit way."<sup>376</sup> Thus, the readers can understand that Carlyle learns from his experience and has grown so that he is able to move on and start a new life without Eileen. As with Carver's stories from his collection, *Cathedral*, this ending is optimistic. The readers can also feel a glimpse of hope and anticipate what a better future might be for Carlyle. Moreover, individuals who are in a similar situation might benefit from Carlyle's fight and will to continue their lives after being betrayed by their lovers.

In a nutshell, similar to Hemingway's "Cross Country Snow," Carver's "Fever" is shaped like an "iceberg" because it relies on the techniques of omission, implication, and epiphany to convey its main theme: the emotional rupture between a married couple, Carlyle and Eileen. Carlyle's real problem, which affects his life, is not the departure of his wife, but his inability to move on and find someone to talk to about his problems. The third-person narrator puts more emphasis on describing the characters' actions, gestures, dialogues, and silences. He leaves out important details and implies others, forcing the readers to fill in the gaps based on their imagination and background knowledge. As such, he deliberately

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<sup>376</sup> Günter Leypoldt, "Raymond Carver's 'Epiphanic Moments,'" *Style* 35, no. 3 (2001):532, (Accessed 20 July, 2011), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.35.3.531>.

engages them in the reconstruction of the story's meaning and makes them more aware of the characters' mental states. In contrast to Hemingway, Carver's character's achievement of self-growth intensifies the emotional impact of the story's ending. As a result of the interaction between readers and text, readers can learn a lot about the effects of divorce and failed marriages on American families during the 1980s.

### **3.3 “Loneliness in Frank’s Broken House”: The Significance of Gaps and Epiphanies in Richard Ford’s “Optimists”**

Like his contemporaries, Richard Ford's minimalist style is based on the aesthetic of exclusion and implication. The simplicity of his stories strengthens their complexity. To support this view, Vivian Gornick considers him the creator of the latest version of “a certain kind of American story that is characterized by a laconic surface and a tight-lipped speaking voice.”<sup>377</sup> As a matter of fact, just like Hemingway, Ford employs the techniques of omission, implication, and epiphany to express the major theme of the emotional rupture between family members who experience violence, shattered dreams, and emotional loneliness in his story “Optimist.” In doing so, he attempts to engage the readers in the recreation of the story's meaning and make them feel the characters' sensory experiences. As is the case with Carver's “Fever,” Ford's story provides a critique of the newly emerging cultural values during the 1980s by showing their effects on family structure. More specifically, it depicts the repercussions of domestic violence and divorce on children whose parents desire to start new lives rather than continue to live in loveless marriages.

As with Hemingway's “Cross Country Snow” and Carver's “Fever,” Ford's “Optimists” is slightly plotted because it starts in *media-res* and closes with an open ending. Fred Hobson comments that “a minimalist text requires a nonminimalist reader.”<sup>378</sup> His

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<sup>377</sup> Vivian Gornick, “Tenderhearted Men: Lonesome, Sad and Blue,” *New York Times Book Review* (September 16, 1990, natl., ed., sec. 7: 14): 1.

<sup>378</sup> Fred Hobson, *The Southern Writer in the Postmodern World*, (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1991), 19.

statement, surely, summarizes the role of the reader of a minimalist text; the reader should have an ability to interpret the text based on his life experiences and imagination. Unlike Hemingway and Carver, Ford uses the techniques of a story within a story and provides a brief historical background of the characters' lives. In this story, the young adult, Frank, narrates the events that changed his life in an imaginative way when he was fifteen. Although the narrator tells a story about what happened to him, he calls the readers' attention to the fact that it is just a story, a constructed tale. As such, he distances himself from the story to achieve objectivity. In doing so, he provides more opportunities for readers to participate in the reconstruction of its deeper meaning, as well as to perceive the extent to which the narrated events affected him and how they changed his life.

Like Carver, Ford does not provide enough clues to his readers, making the process of interpretation more difficult than in Hemingway's story. The narrator does not go into much depth about the setting; he just informs us that the events happened in Great Falls, which refers, metaphorically, to the emotional rupture between family members and their broken dreams. The narrator recaps the major events in his life right away, including his parents' divorce, his father's crime, and his enlistment in the army without returning home for a long time: "All of this that I am about to tell happened when I was only fifteen years old, in 1959, the year my parents were divorced, the year when my father killed a man and went to prison for it, the year I left home and school, told a lie about my age to fool the Army, and then did not come back. The year, in other words, when life changed for all of us and forever—ended really, in a way none of us could ever have imagined in our most brilliant dreams of life."<sup>379</sup> The narrator's repetition of the word "year," which is used for emphasis, makes the readers sense that he is profoundly affected by the unfortunate events of that year.

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<sup>379</sup>Richard Ford, "Optimists," in *Rock Springs*, (London: Collins Harvill, 1988), 181.

The last sentence stimulates the readers' curiosity to check the details of the shocking events. In addition, it prompts them to build common perspectives regarding the interconnectedness of their fate.

What is noticeable is that the narrator provides some details about his parents in separate paragraphs. This implies that they were separated. But he leaves out details about their life together and the real causes of their separation, forcing the readers to fill in the gaps with their imagination throughout the reading process. Only through a close reading can the readers find out that his parents suffered from a lack of communication, interest, and confidence. The narrator introduces his father, Roy Brinson, who is a worker on the Great Northern Railway in Great Falls. He emphasizes his masculinity and his personality as a responsible husband. To feed his family and earn more money, he used to do extra job. By displaying positive attitudes toward his father, the narrator increases the readers' curiosity about his father's motivation for killing a man, knowing that the latter was not a violent person.

While women have a minor role to play in both Hemingway's and Carver's stories, Frank's mother is a major character who plays an interesting role in her son's development and self-growth. Indeed, she stopped working in bars in order to take care of Frank when he was young. She used to do daily life activities and liked going swimming in an indoor pool at the YWCA. The narrator informs the readers that "she would come home late in the afternoon, with her brown hair wet and her face flushed, and in high spirits, saying she felt freer."<sup>380</sup> Her swimming habits increase the readers' suspicion about her having love relationships with men outdoors. Because his father was occupied with his work most of the time, she enjoyed another life: she was secretly betraying him by her swimming habits and playing with her friends, Penny Mitchell and her husband Boyd, when his father was outside

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<sup>380</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 182.

the house at night.<sup>381</sup> To put it plainly, his parent's lack of communication is a contributing factor to their estrangement, which underlines that their love relationship is deteriorating.

In spite of the fact that Frank's parents were optimists, their lives took another unexpected direction after the killing accident. It happened during the night when his father had a bad day after observing a man killed on the railway.<sup>382</sup> The narrator describes his father's miserable situation after arriving home: "My mother was standing beside the card table when my father came inside. She was smiling. But I have never seen a look on a man's face that was like the look on my father's face at that moment. He looked wild. His eyes were wild. His whole face was. I was cold outside, and the wind was coming up... His face was red, and his hair was strewn around his bare head, and I remember his fists were clenched white, as if there was no blood in them at all."<sup>383</sup> By relying on a minimalist style and visual images, the narrator is able to force the readers to imagine the scene and experience an aesthetic response. They can perceive that the father's physical and emotional states were caused by his feelings of impotence, fear, anger, and shame for not being able to save the man's life. The narrator provides the impression that the father did not adore the visitors by not mentioning their presence. This fact is reinforced by the narrator's observation that his father "did not know them very well, and I thought he might tell them to get out, but he did not."<sup>384</sup> The readers are left to guess what is submerged beneath the father's response towards his guests.

Furthermore, by referring to the weather outside as being cold and windy, the narrator implies that his parents were suffering from emotional coldness and he expected problems to come up like the wind. The father's emotional state, after seeing a man dying, arouses the readers' empathy for him so that they can sense his fear and powerlessness. This fact also

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<sup>381</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 182.

<sup>382</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 184.

<sup>383</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 185.

<sup>384</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 185.

compels them to form opinions about the motivations for committing a crime, despite the fact that he appeared physically and emotionally powerless.

The story's turning point occurred during the violent act of killing Boyd Mitchell. When Roy told them about what happened with the man on the railway and how he could not help him, Boyd insulted him because he ignored the techniques of saving the man's life by telling him: "you are another featherbedder. You are not good at doing anything. You can't even help a dying man. You're bad for this country and you won't last."<sup>385</sup> As a response, Roy hit him as hard as he could in the chest and in the face, which led to his death. The death scene propels the readers to imagine the upcoming events and question the characters' responses. Frank did not like his father's violent behaviour after realizing that Boyd was drunk and he was not conscious of what he was saying.<sup>386</sup> Given the fact that the readers are surprised by the event because they are provided with insufficient information, they are invited to fill in the blanks so as to learn the real reasons for the murder and why the father acted in such a terrible manner.

While sitting in the room with Boyd Mitchell dead, Frank began to develop a detached reflection, which is common to Ford's protagonists, unlike Hemingway's. That moment was the demarcation line which separated his past and future lives: "I began to date my real life from that moment and that thought."<sup>387</sup> He thought that the bad accident would have damaging effects on the whole family. Overwhelmed by different feelings, he became involved in a series of realizations. First, he apprehended that "trouble, real trouble, was something to be avoided, inasmuch as once it has passed by, you have only yourself to answer to, even if, as I was, you are the cause of nothing."<sup>388</sup> Unlike Nick in "Cross Country Snow," who tries to escape thinking about his familial problems, this event taught Ford's

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<sup>385</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 188.

<sup>386</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 188.

<sup>387</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 191.

<sup>388</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 191.



narrator that trouble can be avoided, but if it happened, one could only reflect upon it by trying to find answers. This suggests he hated himself for not being able to assist his father in avoiding the crime or at the very least altering the outcome. As a result of this insight, the readers become progressively aware of Frank's deep feelings of remorse, powerlessness, guilt, loneliness, and melancholy.

This crime wrecked Frank's parents' relationship, which had reached a breaking point. When Frank's mother blamed her husband for not controlling himself, his father responded by apologizing: "I'm sorry. I lost control over my mind. I didn't expect to ruin things, but now I think I have. I was wrong."<sup>389</sup> While the son felt sad for his father and excused him because he was not in a good mood, the wife stayed silent. While he was drinking from the vodka bottle, his father told them: "bad things happen," and he justified Boyd's hatred and insult towards him by admitting: "Maybe he was in love with you Dorothy... Maybe that's what the trouble was."<sup>390</sup> Thus, his father directly accused his mother of having a love relationship with Boyd, and he confessed that he killed him because of his feelings of betrayal and jealousy. The narrator creates a sense of menace by leaving out his mother's response to her husband's speech. After this suspicion, the readers begin to form various opinions about the couple's future relationship, despite the fact that the relationship was clearly deteriorating long before that moment.

By the end of the story, the narrator implies to the readers that the mother had really had a relationship with Boyd because she defended him. To protect her reputation, Frank's mother came close to Frank and told him: "Don't hold anything against anyone, Poor Boyd. He's gone." She also justified Boyd's hatred of his father by affirming: "He must've seen something in your father that he just hated."<sup>391</sup> The narrator reports her speech without any

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<sup>389</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 194.

<sup>390</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 194.

<sup>391</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 196.

comments. Thus, he leaves it to the readers to fill in the gaps while trying to find explanations for her arguments based on their individual dispositions and literary experiences. Furthermore, the mother tried to console Frank by telling him before he slept that night: “We will all survive this. Be an optimist.”<sup>392</sup> The fact that he did not show any response to his mother’s speech demonstrates that Frank had started to distance himself from her. Priscilla Leder points out that “the incident eventually estranges Frank from his mother as much as from his father...he comes to associate his mother’s mysterious sexuality with his father’s violence.”<sup>393</sup> His silence implies much about his psychological dilemma. That night, he dreamt of a plane crashing. A bomber with wings like knives came to their house and levelled everything.<sup>394</sup> The demolition of their house stands, metaphorically, for the demolition of their family relationship.

Following his parents’ conversation over the killing incident and its possible causes, Frank’s second and perhaps sudden realization occurred when he looked at a picture on the wall. While listening to his father’s story in jail, Frank observed that his father was staring at a picture on the wall. In the picture, there was a man and a woman with a baby on the beach.<sup>395</sup> In fact, he always thought that he was the son in the picture with his parents, but that night he realized that it was his father with his grandparents. He reflected upon this situation: “I wondered why I hadn’t known that before, hadn’t understood it myself, hadn’t always known it.”<sup>396</sup> As a result, Leder notes that his realization signals to the readers that he has begun to comprehend the world around him.<sup>397</sup> His reflection invites readers to use their imaginations to fill in the gaps and come up with answers to his thoughts.

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<sup>392</sup> Ford, “Optimists,” 197.

<sup>393</sup> Priscilla Leder, “Men with Women: Gender Relations in Richard Ford’s *Rock Springs*,” in *Perspectives on Richard Ford*, ed. Huey Guagliardo, (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000), 104.

<sup>394</sup> Ford, “Optimists,” 197.

<sup>395</sup> Ford, “Optimists,” 194.

<sup>396</sup> Ford, “Optimists,” 195.

<sup>397</sup> Leder, “Men with Women,”

Moreover, that moment made him aware of his resemblance with his father. Frank acknowledged that the fact of not realizing the picture before did not matter, but what mattered to him was that “he felt, that my father had fallen down now, as much as the man he had watched fall beneath the train just hours before. And I was helpless to do anything as he had been. I wanted to tell him that I loved him, but for some reason I did not.”<sup>398</sup> Frank’s analogy affirms to the readers that he has become capable of analysing situations with the aim of understanding the world around him, unlike Nick in Hemingway’s “Cross Country Snow.” He realized his father’s failure in life and his own incapacity to help him or even express his emotions. His revelation, or realization, makes the readers more conscious of the emotional bonds that existed between his family members before the fatal event. As he learned to recognize their personalities and real dreams in this world, his perception of his parent changed.

Frank’s family was obliterated six months later when his father was released from prison and returned to the railroad job. His parents were separated after arguing about things. The main problem was that his mother wanted to live in California instead of Montana. Her desire to relocate suggests that she was seeking a change in her life in order to forget about the past, but her husband resisted, forcing her to leave following their divorce.<sup>399</sup> Frank decided to leave school and join the Army, and he did not come back until he was forty-three. During that time, he just heard about his father who lived an unexpected life; he left his job, divorced his mother, and entered the world of drinking, gambling, and violence.<sup>400</sup> This indicates that he experienced emotional depression, loneliness, and poverty. Frank tells the readers about his father’s situation without expressing any feelings or comments. As a result, readers are compelled to form their own opinions on Frank’s emotional ties and

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<sup>398</sup> Ford, “Optimists,” 195.

<sup>399</sup> Ford, “Optimists,” 198.

<sup>400</sup> Ford, “Optimists,” 198.

attitudes toward his father and they can deduce that the father-son love relationship has deteriorated.

After fifteen years, Frank saw his mother in a grocery store in Montana, not far from their old house. He walked to the store where she was and talked to her: "Hello, Dorothy. It's me Frank."<sup>401</sup> Frank expresses to the readers that he had become a stranger to his mother and was scared that she might not recognize him by introducing himself and addressing her by her first name. Leder comments that in Ford's stories, "[w]omen possess the mystery of life and death, which eludes the 'understanding' men attempt to exert order to protect themselves from 'coincidence' and to cope with its consequence."<sup>402</sup> She also maintains that children in his stories "Optimists" and "Great Falls," seem traumatised by their encounter with their mothers' mysteries because they do not assume their responsibility toward them as adults.<sup>403</sup> Frank found his mother with a man younger than her, and she looked pretty and younger than her age. She told her son that she still liked swimming because it still made her "feel freer."<sup>404</sup> Concerning swimming, his mother had not changed yet. This means that swimming has a metaphoric meaning; it may refer to having sex with men and to her desire to escape the murky reality.

Like Eileen in Carver's story, Frank's mother also adopts a feminist vision as she is looking to change her lifestyle and satisfy her sexual desires. According to Leder, "the mother's sexuality continues to draw her away from her son and into some unknown realm."<sup>405</sup> She also revealed secret things about her marriage to his father and told him that she did not appreciate him enough. Their marriage, as she said, was arranged and this is why they lost their love.<sup>406</sup> Thus, the readers become aware of the genuine reasons for her divorce

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<sup>401</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 198.

<sup>402</sup> Leder, "Men with Women," 105.

<sup>403</sup> Leder, "Men with Women," 105.

<sup>404</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 200.

<sup>405</sup> Leder, "Men with Women," 106.

<sup>406</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 200.

from his father. Frank's parents did not share things, and they lost interest and love. In fact, another reason for the couple's breakup was that his mother adopts the newly emerging feminist vision and began searching for her freedom, liberty, and the right to live with a partner she picked herself. Moreover, her inability to communicate with her husband is what drove her to seek relationships with other men to fulfil her desires. In truth, unlike his father, Frank's mother realized her dream after being separated from him. However, the fact that she quit her son explains that she has become more materialistic as she did not place a higher importance on familial relationships.

Similar to Hemingway's "Cross Country Snow" and Carver's "Fever," Ford's "Optimists" closes with an open ending. When he met her, his mother wanted to confirm that her son did not believe his father's suspicions about her love relationship with the man he killed. She told him: "Did you ever think back then that I was in love with Boyd Mitchell? Anything like that? Did you ever? Frank replied to her questions by saying: "no" ... "I did not."<sup>407</sup> She confessed to him that she adored his father and that the man adored his wife.<sup>408</sup> The mother increased the doubt about her love story with Boyd by insisting on her son not believing it and explaining things to him. In "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," Iser argues that blanks or gaps have a significant position within the communicatory situation. He thinks that the text should be structured in a way that allows readers to ask questions, give their opinions and views, and comment on the story.<sup>409</sup> Ford's story allows the reader to comment and give their views on the son's behaviour in order to understand the dynamics of his relationship with his mother. The irony here is that the readers already suspect that the son knew something, but he confirmed to her that he believed

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<sup>407</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 201.

<sup>408</sup> Ford, "Optimists," 201.

<sup>409</sup> Iser, "The Reading Process," 280

her. Despite the fact that she was no longer a close person, the readers can infer that he did not want to harm her feelings in this circumstance.

Like in the preceding stories by Carver and Hemingway, “Optimist” closes with an epiphany that is recognized by both the narrator and the readers. While facing her son from the open window of her car, she approached to kiss him. The narrator describes her actions: “And she bent down and kissed my cheek through the open window and touched my face with both her hands, held me for a moment that seemed like a long time before she turned away, finally, and left me there alone.”<sup>410</sup> Frank finally recognized his loneliness after being abandoned by his parents fifteen years ago. This ending increases the readers’ participation in the reconstruction of the meaning of the story because the narrator does not provide enough details on characters’ responses and reactions. As in Carver’s story, this ending intensifies the emotional impact of the story. The narrator encourages the readers to envision the situation and feel his emotional state of wrath and loneliness by detailing his mother’s acts while abandoning him forever. His mother’s reaction showed him that she could not abandon her world of free sex and drinking. Frank’s epiphany prompts the readers to infer his loneliness in a world of violence and unsuccessful relationships and feel his self-growth, as is the case in Carver’s “Fever.” He paid for his parents’ arranged marriage, his father’s killing crime, and his mother’s drinking and free sex proclivity.

On the whole, the narrator of “Optimists” talks about the event that took place the year he was fifteen. He weaves together narrative techniques of omission, implication, and epiphany to prompt the readers to reconstruct the story’s meaning and empathize with the characters’ emotional states. He shows how his family relationship reached its end when his father killed a man who expected him to be his wife’s lover. The event had damaging effects on the narrator’s life as it forced him to escape by joining the army. After coming back, he

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<sup>410</sup> Ford, “Optimists,” 201.

did not find the warmth of the family he was hoping for and ended up feeling lonely and depressed. In fact, the story criticizes the impact of divorce on American family structure during the 1980s.

### **3.4 “Norma Jean’s Strange Love,” “Poetics of Loss” and Epiphany in Bobbie Ann Mason’s “Shiloh”**

Bobbie Ann Mason’s stories show a special concern with the fragility of modern marriages. Like her several contemporaries, Mason also employs minimalist textual strategies that have great effects on her readers. Praising her, Robert Towers emphasizes that she “is one of those rare writers who, by concentrating their attention on a few square miles of native turf, are able to open up new and surprisingly wide worlds for the delighted reader.”<sup>411</sup> Furthermore, Wilhelm thinks that “she avoids unnecessary embellishments” and, like Hemingway, she is concerned about telling the truth that lies beneath the surface.<sup>412</sup> In her famous story “Shiloh,” which is shaped like an “iceberg,” the narrator relies on implication, omission, and epiphany to underline the emotional truth. He compels the readers to interact with the text by analysing the linguistic systems and extratextual elements incorporated into the text to achieve the set objective. “Shiloh” illustrates the negative effects of the new socio-cultural values on family structure and individuals in western Kentucky during the 1980s.

As with Hemingway’s “Cross Country Snow,” “Shiloh” starts in *media-res* without a description of the characters’ histories, physical or psychological traits. Although it centers on the gradual disintegration of the Moffitts’ marriage, the narrator gives the readers details and events that do not explicitly outline this fact, making the process of interpretation more challenging than in Hemingway’s story. Iser notes that “[t]he gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves. Hence the structured blanks of the text

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<sup>411</sup> Robert Towers, “American Graffiti,” *New Review of Books* 29 (16 December 1982), 39.

<sup>412</sup> Albert E. Wilhelm, *Bobbie Ann Mason: A Study of the Short Fiction*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 5.

stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text.”<sup>413</sup>

Thus, through textual analysis and interpretation of the characters’ actions, gestures, and dialogues, the readers can uncover the emotional truth of the couple based on their individual dispositions and literary experiences. The name Shiloh refers historically to the Civil War battle which took place near Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee, where nearly 24,000 American soldiers were wounded or killed in April, 1862. However, in Mason’s story, Werlock comments that this name refers to other sorts of battles: “those between husband and wife, tradition and change, masculinity and femininity, the old and the new.”<sup>414</sup>

Hence, the idea of a disintegrating marriage is first implied in the story’s title, “Shiloh,” which refers to one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War, a symbol of destruction in the story. This fact is made crystal clear to the readers when the couple openly discusses the affair of their divorce in the historical background of Shiloh. Furthermore, Hal Blythe and Charlie Sweet recognize the importance of the title and note: “death and desolation permeate the Moffitts’ existence.”<sup>415</sup> Yet, the real reasons for the collapse of this couple’s marriage are left underneath the surface for the readers to discover and comprehend.

Indeed, the main characters are disillusioned because they have not been unable to accomplish their American dream; they had long believed that hard work and keeping up with the times would lead to success and happiness. In this respect, Wilhelm remarks that “Mason is primarily interested in explaining the crises in individual lives that are provoked

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<sup>413</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 169.

<sup>414</sup> Abby H.P., Werlock, ““Shiloh,”” in *The Facts On File Companion to the American Short Story*, Second Edition, (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2009), *Bloom’s Literature*, (Facts On File, Inc.,)(Accessed 27 July, 2016), <http://www.fofweb.com/activelink2.asp?ItemID=WE54&WID=19863&SID=5&iPin=CASS749&SingleRecord=True>.

<sup>415</sup> Hal Blythe and Charlie Sweet, “The Ambiguous Grail Quest in ‘Shiloh,’” *Contemporary Literary Criticism Select*, (Gale, 2008): 223, *Literature Resource Center*, (Accessed 18 Dec., 2016), [go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=crrl&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1100039985&it=r&asid=9940087c04de115974fd455b9b480fbc](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=crrl&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1100039985&it=r&asid=9940087c04de115974fd455b9b480fbc).



or intensified by radical changes in social relationships.”<sup>416</sup> The narrator presents the story from the third objective point of view, focusing on how Leroy Moffitt’s wife. Like Eileen in Carver’s story and Frank’s mother in “Optimists,” Norma Jean is empowering herself by adjusting to new attitudes and behaviours in order to cope with the new development and modernization in her town. He opens his story by illuminating that Norma Jean has become interested in body building by “working on her pectorals.”<sup>417</sup> Then, he introduces Leroy, with a focus on his handicap, by saying: “Leroy is truck driver. He injured his leg in a highway accident four months ago, and his physical therapy... prompted Norma Jean to try building herself up.”<sup>418</sup> Blythe and Sweet maintain that Leroy’s truck, “a mechanical tombstone marks the death of the Moffitt marriage.”<sup>419</sup> Following his accident, Leroy is in between jobs, much like Carver’s characters. Accordingly, although it is not stated explicitly, the readers can expect that the husband’s unemployment and his physical disability lead to the couple’s disrupted lives.

Unlike in Hemingway’s and Carver’s stories, the narrator provides some information while implying others, prompting readers to gradually comprehend how the marital conflict develops. After fifteen years on the road, Leroy is finally settling down with Norma Jean, his beloved wife. Staying at home most of the time, he does not have anything to do and he starts developing his hobby. He goes through a series of making things from craft kits. He begins by “building a miniature log cabin from notched Popsicle sticks.”<sup>420</sup> He also wants to develop this hobby into a dream of building a log cabin. Barbara Henning considers construction imagery: “The act of building offers the reader a framework for understanding

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<sup>416</sup> Albert E. Wilhelm, “Private Rituals: Coping with Change in the Fiction of Bobbie Ann Mason,” *Midwest Quarterly* 28 (1987): 272–273.

<sup>417</sup> Bobbie Ann Mason, “Shiloh,” *Shiloh and Other Stories*, (New York: The Modern Library, 1982), 6.

<sup>418</sup> Mason, “Shiloh,” 6.

<sup>419</sup> Blythe and Sweet, “The Ambiguous Grail Quest in ‘Shiloh,’” 223.

<sup>420</sup> Mason, “Shiloh,” 6.

this story.”<sup>421</sup> According to her, the focus on the activity of building becomes a displacement “for Leroy’s feelings about his marriage and his life, emphasizing the pain and alienation Norma Jean and he are experiencing.”<sup>422</sup> In fact, Leroy once promised his wife that he would build her a house. Only now, he realizes that they have always rented and now they live in a small house.<sup>423</sup> His decision to build a log cabin implies his great desire to rebuild his love relationship with her.

More crucially, the narrator demonstrates that the collapse of the couple’s marriage is also closely connected to the changes that have occurred in his hometown due to the process of modernization. In contrast to Hemingway’s story where the socio-economic conditions are not referred to by the narrator, in Mason’s story, the narrator concentrates on showing how societal changes and modernisation affect the couple’s marriage. Leroy’s life has become meaningless when he stays to watch the new changes in his society: “Now that Leroy has come home to stay, he notices how much the town has changed.” The narrator evokes these emotions in a simile: “Subdivisions are spreading across western Kentucky like an oil slick.”<sup>424</sup> Thus, this imagery invites the readers to visualize the scene so that they can sense Leroy’s feelings of alienation, strangeness, and astonishment. So, while Hemingway relies on action verbs and musical sounds to express the movement of his characters to imply their emotional states, Ford uses imagery to create effects on his readers. In this respect, Price notes: “Leroy observes with a sense of bewildered helplessness, alienation and fear from the changes taking place in his hometown, his wife, and his marriage.”<sup>425</sup> What makes the situation alarming is that, although he feels alienated from his wife and society, he does not try to adapt to the new changes to save his marriage and improve his lifestyle.

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<sup>421</sup> Barbara Henning, “Minimalism and the American Dream: ‘Shiloh’ by Bobbie Ann Mason and ‘Preservation’ by Raymond Carver,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 35, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 691.

<sup>422</sup> Henning, “Minimalism and the American Dream,” 693.

<sup>423</sup> Mason, “Shiloh,” 6.

<sup>424</sup> Mason, “Shiloh,” 7.

<sup>425</sup> Price, “Shiloh and Other Stories,” 26.

In contrast to her husband, Norma Jean has assimilated some fragments of feminist discourse with the aim of realizing her American dream of success. According to Michal Smith, “the women who inhabit Mason’s short stories are more accepting of change, more willing to move with it, to explore, and to become.”<sup>426</sup> Therefore, comparable to other female characters in Mason’s stories, the narrator informs the readers that Norma Jean seeks personal autonomy through working at the Rexall drugstore, taking up body building, and enrolling in further education.<sup>427</sup> She has become more concerned with “building herself up” and with creating a new self-image that will enable her to free herself from her husband. By working in her pectorals, Price argues that Norma Jean is regarded as “a testimony to consumer culture’s dictum that to re-create the body is to reinvent the self.”<sup>428</sup> Moreover, Wilhelm considers the heroine of this story a “good example of a character who attempts to construct a new identity.”<sup>429</sup> More interesting, the readers can detect that her adaptation of the new emerging cultural norms has created a class difference between her and her husband, who has not understood what is happening around him at home and outside.

Unlike Nick in Hemingway’s “Cross Country Snow,” Leroy recognizes that in order to comprehend the present, he has to stop and reflect on the past. But there is, in fact, a tragic memory: the sudden infant death of their only son years ago. The details of the child’s death and its connection to the couple’s marital life are one of the most important omissions in this story. Because Leroy has read that the death of a child can lead to the divorce of his parents, he senses that “they are lucky they are still married.”<sup>430</sup> What distinguishes Mason’s text from those of Hemingway, Carver, and Ford is her heavy reliance on cultural icons and allusions to imply her theme. As with her story “Transients and Residents,” Mason makes

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<sup>426</sup> Michael Smith, “Bobbie Ann Mason, Artist and Rebel,” *Kentucky Review* 8.3 (1988): 59.

<sup>427</sup> Mason, “Shiloh,” 7.

<sup>428</sup> Price, “Shiloh and Other Stories,” 26.

<sup>429</sup> Wilhelm, “Making over or Making off,” 77.

<sup>430</sup> Mason, “Shiloh,” 8.

allusions to American culture in order to imply that the baby's death is connected to his parents' conflict.

In delineating the role of the reader in the reconstruction of text's meaning and in finding the "rich" and the lasting meaning by interpreting the figurative and the symbolic language of the text, Hallett clarifies: "At first reading, many minimal narratives can seem internally disconnected, the sentences detached from one another, the ending as much a beginning as the first line; but when the stories are read closely, oblique references and dim designs combine into a rich texture of trope—exposing a pattern of meaning within the symbolic structure."<sup>431</sup> In other words, she advocates that the reader must make a close reading of the text with the aim of discovering patterns of meaning exposed in "the oblique references and dim designs." After discovering the unique patterns, the reader has to combine them with his real life experiences and his background knowledge including the literary one so as to find out a "rich" meaning of the text. The narrator reports that the child died while Leroy and Norma Jean were watching a double feature at a drive-in theatre (*Dr. Strangelove* and *Lover Come Back*).<sup>432</sup> Leroy's description of the first film, *Dr. Strangelove*, is filled with references to the war between the United States and the Soviet Union, and bombs and death imagery.<sup>433</sup> The references stand symbolically for the conflicts between Leroy and Norma Jean after the child's death. Laurie Champion explains that while the title of the first film suggests "strange love," the title of the second film, *Lover Come Back*, refers to "renewal or symbolic rebirth." In making a connection between the two titles, he thinks that since Leroy knows he cannot hope for the coming back of his son, he hopes to renew his love relationship, or his "strange love," with Norma Jean and bring her back. Making references

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<sup>431</sup> Hallett, *Minimalism and the Short Story*, 12.

<sup>432</sup> Mason, "Shiloh," 9.

<sup>433</sup> Mason, "Shiloh," 10.

to the films that deal with love relationships implies that the child's death is one of the causes which have led to the couple's emotional rupture.

Furthermore, it is symbolic that the baby died when they were watching a film featuring a destroyed world. This means that their life together was also destroyed and has become meaningless and empty after their son's death.<sup>434</sup> These facts invite the readers to form their own informed opinions about the connections between the child's tragic death and the parents' disintegrating marriage.

Unlike in Hemingway's story, the narrator gives readers enough information about the causes of main character's unhappiness and his psychological struggle to comprehend his marital conflict. The third-person narrator maintains a certain distance between himself and his readers to leave room for interpretation by reporting Leroy's observations in his attempt to comprehend his present situation. His dream seems unrealisable because he even loses the ability to communicate with his wife freely, as if they do not know each other. The narrator implies this sensation by reporting that, in the past, Leroy used to tell her about his travels and stories, while now he wants to tell her about himself as if "he [has] just met her," but instantly "he forgets why he wants to do this."<sup>435</sup> Since his accident, his relationship with Norma Jean has reached an unsettling stasis. In explaining her strange behaviour to her husband, Stewart J. Cooke maintains that when Leroy has stopped moving, his wife has already started to find "new organizing principles" for her life and has begun to distance herself from him.<sup>436</sup> Thus, having fewer affinities spills over into their life together.

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<sup>434</sup> Laurie Champion, "Bobbie Ann Mason's (Open-ended) Marriages," *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed., Jeffrey W. Hunter, vol. 303, (Gale, 2011), *Literature Resource Center*, (Accessed 18 Dec., 2016),  
[go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=crrl&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1100105078&it=r&asid=64bfd8a441938c4a12dc460c059c6a5](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=crrl&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1100105078&it=r&asid=64bfd8a441938c4a12dc460c059c6a5).

<sup>435</sup> Mason, "Shiloh," 13.

<sup>436</sup> Stewart J. Cooke, "Mason's 'Shiloh,'" in *Short Story Criticism*, ed. Jelena O. Krstovic, vol. 101, (Gale, 2008), *Literature Resource Center*, (Accessed 18 Dec. 2016),  
[go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=crrl&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1420077668&it=r&asid=49950c128aa4a18e110a3acc194eca93](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=crrl&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1420077668&it=r&asid=49950c128aa4a18e110a3acc194eca93).

The narrator communicates the husband's emotions of fear by noting that he watches these changes in his wife and realises, intuitively, that "something is happening" and that he knows "he is going to lose her."<sup>437</sup> He reports Leroy's observation while watching the birds after watching the changes of his wife: "He notices the peculiar way goldfinches fly past the window. They close their wings, then fall, then spread their wings to catch and lift themselves. He wonders if they close their eyes when they fall. Norma Jean closes her eyes when they are in bed."<sup>438</sup> The readers' brain processes are stimulated by this description, which uses tangible words and visual imagery to allow them to imagine the scenario and experience an aesthetic response. Cooke sustains that Leroy's analogy between the falling goldfinches and his own feelings about his love relationship is left implied, the readers can realize that his account of the birds as they "close their wings, then fall, then spread their wings to catch and lift themselves" stands as a metaphor for Leroy, who is attempting to protect himself against change by preserving his traditional cultural norms.<sup>439</sup>

Besides, in making a connection between the birds and Norma Jean, Cooke thinks that "the flight of the birds symbolizes the trajectory of Norma Jean's life." Like the birds, Norma Jean was forced to marry at the age of eighteen; she "closed her wings and fallen into marriage" because her mother did not accept an unwed mother in her family.<sup>440</sup> The birds' scene heightens the readers' awareness of the characters' feelings of loneliness and emptiness after their love relationship has become fruitless. In fact, this analogy invites the readers to provide different interpretations based on their own life experiences.

In his attempt to bring his lover back, Leroy is encouraged by his mother-in-law to visit the place of Shiloh with his wife. Because of its romantic and historical significance for Mabel, she deems this place restorative for their marriage. She insists on visiting Shiloh: "I

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<sup>437</sup> Mason, "Shiloh," 16.

<sup>438</sup> Mason, "Shiloh," 11.

<sup>439</sup> Cooke, "Mason's 'Shiloh.'"

<sup>440</sup> Cooke, "Mason's 'Shiloh.'"

always thought Shiloh was the prettiest place, so full of history.... You do as I said. A little change is what she needs.”<sup>441</sup> Upon their arrival, Leroy does not find what he had expected because he thought that it would look like a “gold course.” As they sit on the ground near graveyard, Norma Jean criticizes his idea of building a log cabin and directly reveals her decision to leave him after the failure of their marriage. At this stage, Leroy has to face some truths about himself. He hopes that they can start over, but she contradicts him with this statement, “[w]e *have* started all over again.”<sup>442</sup> His gaze takes in the Shiloh cemetery, the place where thousands of soldiers died.<sup>443</sup> The reference to this past event invites readers to expect that the marital conflict may be caused by the death of their child. It may also allude to the death of their romantic relationship. The readers have to fill in the blanks and build perspectives on his emotions.

The connection between Mabel’s honeymoon, Leroy’s marriage, and the historical facts of Shiloh remains the submerged part of the story. However, the narrator further uses visual images to compel the readers to register what is taking place and share the sensory experience of the characters. As with Hemingway’s “Cross Country Snow,” Mason also employs an epiphany to strengthen her narrative and illuminate the story’s deeper meaning. Thus, Leroy recognizes that “he is leaving out a lot. He is leaving out the insides of history. History was always just names and dates to him. It occurs to him that building a house out of logs is similarly empty—too simple. And the real inner workings of a marriage, like most of history, have escaped him.”<sup>444</sup> This epiphany is understood by the readers and the character.

Leroy finally discovers his own mistakes and thinks about changing. Nevertheless, he is too late for this realisation because he makes it only when his marriage falls apart and

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<sup>441</sup> Mason, “Shiloh,” 16.

<sup>442</sup> Mason, “Shiloh,” 21.

<sup>443</sup> Mason, “Shiloh,” 20.

<sup>444</sup> Mason, “Shiloh,” 18.

only when his wife seems to ignore their history as a couple. The readers can assume that, though he hopes to restore his marriage, he is unable to detect the depth in the restlessness that drives her to leave him. The narrator saves the readers from incomprehension of Leroy's feelings of regret and depression.

In explaining the reasons behind Norma Jean's dissolution of her marriage, Dee Bakker argues that Norma Jean's adaptation of new cultural norms and her improvement of her body and mind gained her self-empowerment in the world. Hence, "she decides to dissolve her marriage in order to further explore and expand her power."<sup>445</sup> Furthermore, according to G. O. Morpew, Leroy, who is even unable to understand what is taking place around him, "by himself is no match for Norma Jean, and like the Union army of the original battle of Shiloh, she is the aggressor, the invader, and she wins her own battle when she announces she is leaving Leroy."<sup>446</sup> Hence, Leroy's cultural shock prevents him from moving on as opposed to his wife. Depending on their individual life experiences, the readers can imagine various explanations for Norma Jean's decision.

Like in the afore-compared stories by Hemingway, Carver, and Ford, the open ending of "Shiloh" invites the readers to fill in the gaps based on their imagination in their attempt to participate in the recreation of the story's meaning. In the last scene, Norma Jean moves away and walks off to a bluff overlooking the Tennessee River. Leroy tries to "hobble towards" her, but his good leg is asleep and his bad leg still hurts him.<sup>447</sup> Susan Lohafer views that, symbolically, his legs are "unsteady, but they are moving."<sup>448</sup> Additionally, the narrator,

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<sup>445</sup> Dee Bakker, "Women Writers and Their Critics: A Room with a View," *Mid-American Review*, 13:2 (1992), 83–84.

<sup>446</sup> G. O. Morpew, "Downhome Feminists in *Shiloh and Other Stories*," *Southern Literary Journal*, 1:2, 1989: 45, ( Accessed 18 October 2019), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20077956>.

<sup>447</sup> Mason, "Shiloh," 22.

<sup>448</sup> Susan Lohafer, "The Largeness of Minimalism in Bobbie Ann Mason," *Short Story Criticism*, ed. Jelena O. Krstovic, vol. 101, (Gale, 2008), *Literature Resource Center*, (Accessed 18 Dec. 2016), [go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=crrl&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1420077676&it=r&asid=04fa11b03f675b7da50ff737824b5c6b](https://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=crrl&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1420077676&it=r&asid=04fa11b03f675b7da50ff737824b5c6b).



metaphorically and comically, describes how she turns towards her husband: “Now she turns toward Leroy and waves her arms. Is she beckoning to him? She seems to be doing an exercise for her chest muscles. The sky is unusually pale—the color of the dust ruffle Mabel made for their bed.”<sup>449</sup> This open ending prompts the readers to interpret the ambiguity evoked by Norma Jean’s gesture and anticipate Leroy’s responses because is he literally and symbolically unable to keep up with her. Thus, in contrast to Hemingway’s story, the character’s puzzlement, while trying to understand what happens, increases the emotional impact of the sudden illumination on readers in Carver’s story.

Likewise, critics deploying feminist lenses of this story think that her gesture is a sign of exclusion. For example, Morpew defines Norma Jean as a “down home feminist”—a woman who simply wants “more breathing space with [her] man.” On this basis, he views that what she really seeks is her independence and self-hood apart from her marriage or heterosexual love relationship.<sup>450</sup> Additionally, Lohafer ponders that Norma Jean’s last gesture can be regarded as an exercise of her “chest muscles,” showing her “feminine independence,” and, therefore, re-excluding her husband from her life forever.<sup>451</sup> This idea is also confirmed by Robert H., Jr. Brinkmeyer, who describes her “open-armed embrace of a world promising the potential for growth and freedom.”<sup>452</sup> Indeed, Leroy’s responses are not clearly explained.

In the last sentence, the narrator expresses Leroy’s reaction towards Norma Jean’s behaviour using imagery. Leroy’s observation that the sky is pale and the dust ruffle is beige, Mabel-made, refers metaphorically to the couple’s unhappy and fake marriage. In his shock, Leroy desperately delivers such a description to the readers, who have to generate mental

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<sup>449</sup> Mason, “Shiloh,” 22.

<sup>450</sup> Morpew, “Downhome Feminists,” 41.

<sup>451</sup> Lohafer, “The Largeness of Minimalism.”

<sup>452</sup> Robert H., Jr. Brinkmeyer, “Never Stop Rocking: Bobbie Ann Mason and Rock-and-Roll,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 42.4 (1989), 12.

images in order to visualize the situation so that they may feel his sensory experience more than they grasp his loss, melancholy, loss, depression, fatigue, loneliness, and confusion. The degree of the emotional impact is greater than that in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," because the ending of "Shiloh" makes the readers more aware of the characters' self-growth and development.

Overall, Mason's "Shiloh" narrates the unhappy and disintegrating marriage of a postmodern couple. It is shaped like an "iceberg" because the most important details of the couple's marital conflict are left out, as is the case with the previously compared stories of Hemingway, Carver, and Ford. To comprehend its main theme, the readers are invited to fill in the gaps and interpret linguistic systems and extratextual elements, including the narrator's metaphors, symbols, signals, gestures, dialogues, allusions, and epiphanies. Leroy experiences a marital conflict with his wife because he cannot cope with the new social and cultural changes occurring in his town. However, Norma Jean, who adopts a feminist posture to her life, is able to move on and decides to leave her husband, seeking more freedom and liberty. Thus, through careful execution of omission, implication and epiphany, the narrator is able to engage the readers in the reconstruction of the story's meaning and make them feel the sensory experiences of the characters. During the reading process, they grow intellectually as they learn about how social and cultural changes can influence family life and affect marital relationships.

The comparative study of Ernest Hemingway's "Cross Country Snow;" Raymond Carver's "Fever," Richard Ford's "Optimists and Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh" demonstrates that these minimalist writers were influenced by Ernest Hemingway's "Iceberg Theory." They employ the techniques of implication, omission, and epiphany to achieve set goals. Differently put, they all aim to increase readers' engagement in the recreation of the story's meaning. They prompt readers to visualize characters' mental states left underneath

the surface of dramas. The stories' titles, settings, figures of speech, characters' gestures, actions, and silences imply significant details about the dynamics of love relationships between couples and show the implied themes. Hemingway's use of omission inspires these authors to consider how meaning can be enhanced and conveyed by style and form at the same time. It is established that omission generally emerged at the syntactic and narrative levels in the reconstruction of scenes and emotive description of settings and characters. Interestingly, these writers give the readers and characters simultaneously quiet spaces to meditate on meanings and contemplate details by stimulating their mental processes in order to generate images and fill in the gaps based on their individual dispositions and literary experiences. Consequently, different readings, literal or metaphorical, always lead to a visualization of omission, implication, and epiphany.

However, unlike in Hemingway's fiction, the presence of mysteries in Carver's and Mason's stories intensifies emotional impact on readers. Because the minimalist writers do not offer enough clues within the texts, the process of interpretation becomes more challenging to non-American readers, unlike in Hemingway's fiction. This implies that these minimalist writers are less universalist in scope. Moreover, as the minimalist writers focus on leaving things out to suggest something bleaker, the readers are unable to understand their actions, real emotions or silences when they are confronted with problems, but the epiphanic moments allow the readers to understand the characters' self-growth, unlike with Hemingway's story.

It is deduced that these techniques are of paramount importance in the minimalist style since they incite the readers to develop their imagination. They also increase their desire to read literary texts so as to uncover the socio-cultural and historical context that is incorporated into the text. Thus, the minimalist writers' adaptation of these narrative techniques stems from their having to write realist short stories that evoke the emotional

truth of a given sensation or of lived experiences for readers by writing “less” and expecting “more” from them.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

**Alienation and Existential Depression in Ernest Hemingway’s “A  
Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” Raymond Carver’s “Cathedral,” Richard  
Ford’s “Great Falls,” and Bobbie Ann Mason’s “The Rookers”**

In the twentieth century, the world experienced two tragic and disastrous wars that caused terrible man-made social, economic, and political tensions. Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason depicted real-life situations that showed cases of different conflicts and shifts in their short fiction. Thus, their minimalist stories provided a critique of major issues associated with the time of their production. Indeed, Wolfgang Iser’s Reception Theory does not only focus on the interaction between the text and its readers but also on the text and its content. In this respect, Iser writes: “If fiction and reality are to be linked, it must be in terms not of opposition but of communication, for the one is not the mere opposite of the other—fiction is a means of telling

us something about reality.”<sup>453</sup> Readers have to analyze the extratextual elements—social, historical, cultural, and literary systems—that exist as referential fields outside the text and for the text. As literature also promotes change and growth in the individual by heightening his self-awareness, readers grow intellectually and personally while imagining new experiences.<sup>454</sup>

This chapter aims to underline how these minimalist writers, like Hemingway, use stylistic and narrative techniques to elicit emotions in implied readers about human beings or the individual’s psychological suffering in the modern world while adapting to existentialism as a philosophy of life. It also demonstrates how these emotions impact the readers’ feelings and appreciation of the world around them. To accomplish this aim, a comparison of Hemingway’s “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” Carver’s “Cathedral,” Ford’s “Great Falls,” and Mason’s “The Rookers” is made to communicate how these minimalist writers adapt Hemingway’s nihilistic vision, expressing the theme of alienation and existential depression, for the sake of understanding the reality of American society. These writers use their stories to depict the effects of people’s feelings of alienation and existential depression in order to inspire implied readers to investigate the emotional intensity and find a more meaningful existence than the one offered by twentieth-century American consumer culture.

#### **4.1 Alienation, ‘Nada,’ and the Need of Light in Ernest Hemingway’s “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place”**

Hemingway’s style was revolutionary, mainly because he pioneered a method of presenting reality through the emotional truth. In this respect, Leo Gurko comments that Hemingway did not only lead a revolution in the American style, but he also expressed “an attitude toward the contemporary world as relevant at mid-century as when first announced

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<sup>453</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 53.

<sup>454</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 159.

in the 1920s.”<sup>455</sup> Hence, Hemingway offered readers opportunities to share his philosophy of life and tried to register the world he experienced and lived in. Regarding this point, John Killinger thinks that Hemingway’s “literary popularity” resulted in part from his “extreme sense of contemporaneity,” especially his special interest in adopting the “rigorous philosophical movement” of his time-existentialism.<sup>456</sup> In this respect, J’aimé L. Sanders thinks that Hemingway, along with other authors, attempted “to inspire readers to find a more genuine, meaningful existence than the one offered by the modern and postmodern “American Dream” consumer culture that America had been cultivating throughout the twentieth-century....”<sup>457</sup> In his early collections, *In Our Time* (1925) and *Men Without Women* (1927), he displayed a particular focus on illustrating the effects of living in the modern world on American society after the First World War.

As Hemingway’s short stories resist straightforward interpretation, he was a pioneer of what might be called ‘existential realism’, where the unspoken and the unrepresented signify more than the overtly represented. Iser maintains that “[t]he literary text, therefore, does not copy the referential field to which it relates; instead it is a reaction to the extratextual systems whose elements have been incorporated into the text[...]the text must implicitly contain the basic framework of the respective systems, for these are what cause the problems that literature reacts to.”<sup>458</sup>

In one of his minimalist masterpieces, “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” Hemingway adopts an existentialist philosophy to depict the individuals’ feelings of emotional isolation and existential depression, which are reflected in the characters’ fear of nothingness and

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<sup>455</sup> Leo Gurko, “The Achievement of Ernest Hemingway,” *The English Journal* 41, No. 6 (Jun., 1952): 291.

<sup>456</sup> John Killinger, *Hemingway and the Dead Gods*, (Lexington: U of Kentucky Press, 1960), 21–22.

<sup>457</sup> J’aimé L. Sanders, “*The Art of Existentialism: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer and the American Existential Tradition*,” (A Doctorate Diss., U of South Florida, 2007), 23.

<sup>458</sup> Iser, “Do I write for an Audience?” 312.

death, and the search for a clean, well-lighted place, to borrow the word of the title. Indeed this story reflects the influence of Heidegger's philosophy of being and Nietzsche's ideas of nihilism and nothingness. Regarding this point, Mimi Reisel Gladstein clarifies that Hemingway's ideas are connected to "existential despair and nihilism, the encounter with the cultural wasteland, and loss of faith."<sup>459</sup>

Susan F. Beegel argues that Hemingway's uniqueness is crystal clear in the relationships between his technique of omission and his thematic concern with "nothingness" and she considers his "thematic omission" the most "significant omission at the heart of the universe." She also comments on Hemingway's special interest in the theme of "nothing" by writing: "When everything is left out, nothing remains, and like 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,' Hemingway's archetypal story of 'nada,' much of his writing is ultimately about nothing" or about nothingness."<sup>460</sup> Lee Spinks points out that, according to Nietzsche, the word "nihilism" denotes the feelings of nothingness and emptiness that are experienced by people who do not believe in the already existing norms and values in their society. More alarming, they are unable to create their own values to cope with the new developments in society that can sustain a new vision of life.<sup>461</sup> Moreover, as Stijn Latré notes, both Heidegger and Nietzsche view that the absence of a transcendent God causes nihilism because people do not feel that their actions are controlled and oriented.<sup>462</sup> Therefore, there is no objective truth in a nihilistic world. People also suffer from the feeling of meaninglessness and a lack of moral values.

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<sup>459</sup> Mimi Reisel Gladstein, "'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,'" in Werlock, Abby H. P., *The Facts On File Companion to the American Short Story*, (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2000), *Bloom's Literary Reference Online*, Facts on File, (Accessed 23 April, 2014), Inc.<http://fofweb.com/activelink2.asp?ItemID=WE54&SID=5&iPin=amshrtsty0158&SingleRecord=True>

<sup>460</sup> Beegel, *Hemingway's Craft of Omission*, 91-92.

<sup>461</sup> Spinks, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 4.

<sup>462</sup> Latré, "Nietzsche, Heidegger, Girard on 'The Death of God,'" 300.



Indeed, what makes “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” interesting and complicated at the same time is that, at the surface level, nothing happens. The narrator implies meaning through the characters’ actions, dialogue, monologue, and gestures. He does not explain everything to the readers and reduces his narration to reporting the two waiters’ dialogue and the old waiter’s monologue. In “The Death of the Author,” Roland Barthes asserts that “the writer’s language is not expected to represent reality, but to signify it.”<sup>463</sup> In other words, Hemingway is not representing a particular reality, but he is symbolizing the painful reality of the American people during the post-War era. Moreover, in his article “Writing the Vanishing Real: Hyper Reality and Magical Realism,” Eugene L. Arva emphasizes that “[s]ignification needs things that can be understood not as an imitation of reality (mimesis) but rather, as its reconstruction, as its signification by imagination.”<sup>464</sup> In fact, Hemingway draws on the techniques of omission and implication, and figures of speech to prompt the readers to visualize the scene and find out the deeper meaning of the story. Thus, they can infer the story’s implied theme and understand the world around them.

The story starts in *media-res* without any detailed descriptions of the setting or the characters’ histories or personalities. Besides, even the characters are not precisely identified because they are referred to as “the young waiter,” “the old waiter,” “the old man,” and “the barman.” These gaps stimulate the readers’ imagination to form mental images and predict the characters’ social situations so as to cognize their feelings during the process of reading. They can also infer their personalities from the interpretation of their actions and thoughts. No one fails to notice that Hemingway writes this story from an existentialist approach, employing the technique of existential depression to convey the loneliness of his characters.

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<sup>463</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed., David H. Richter, (Boston: Bedford/ST. Martin’s, 2007), 875.

<sup>464</sup> Eugene L. Arva, “Writing the Vanishing Real: Hyper reality and Magical Realism,” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 36.3 (2006): 66.

Ron Berman recommends that Hemingway's work, like that of his pioneering authors, is viewed as an "ethical action" since it is based on philosophical and epistemological inquiries. The characters in this story investigate a few thoughts associated with the importance of life and its relevance in real life. According to him, these characters achieve the point that "maybe there is no importance in life, no profound quality for causation, no directing all inclusive."<sup>465</sup> The old man and the old waiter, who experience *nada*, or nothingness, live just for the sake of living without having any specific goal. The old man's life has become meaningless when he has become old, deaf, and hopeless. Furthermore, because he has no family, the old waiter prefers to spend the nights somewhere instead of going home. Like the old man, the old waiter's life seems meaningless, and his feelings inspire him to raise questions about the inevitability of life and death.

According to existentialists such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, all human beings live with the existential fear of nothingness, which drives them into despair if they do not find ways to cope with it. The idea of nothingness is expressed explicitly through the narrator's employment of the Spanish word "*Nada*," which signifies "aimlessness" or "nothing." To convey the image of "*nada*," the narrator focuses on the characters' feelings of loneliness and isolation from the outside world. He opens his story with the following description of the old man sitting in a Spanish café: "It was late and every one had left the café except an old man who sat in the shadow of the leaves of the tree made against the electric light. In the day time the street was dusty, but at night the dew settled the dust and the old man preferred to sit late because he was deaf and now at night it was quiet and he felt the difference."<sup>466</sup> The image of the old deaf man entails that he lives a meaningless life and that he is looking

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<sup>465</sup> Ron Berman, "Vaudeville philosophers: 'The Killers,'" *Twentieth Century Literature*, (Durham Vol. 45, Iss. 1), (Spring 1999): 79, *Literature Resource Center*, (Accessed 1 Apr., 2016), <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA54895476&v=2.1&u=crrl&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=f4a8e083708ad1ddf77c68a2f1d21b98>.

<sup>466</sup> Ernest Hemingway, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," in *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 379.

for happiness somewhere. Furthermore, the old man's deafness exacerbates his sense of estrangement from the outside world, allowing him to only discern between day and night. Despite the fact that he is sitting alone in the café, his loneliness gives him a sense of purpose because he knows that he can interact with other people. Thus, he feels his existence. In fact, the narrator first introduces the notion of nothingness in the waiters' conversation:

"Last week he tried to commit suicide," one waiter said.

"Why?"

"He was in despair."

"About What?"

"Nothing."

"How do you know it was about nothing?"

"He has plenty of money."<sup>467</sup>

In this commentary, the omission of the names of the interlocutors creates menace and suspense because the readers cannot identify who is speaking. Through their dialogue, the old waiter and the young waiter reflect on the ephemeral nature of happiness and the inevitability of death. The fact that Hemingway refers to the concept of death right from the start of this story before delving into the questions of Being demonstrates his influence with Heidegger's concept of death, which opens up the question of being. At this point, the readers can understand that the young waiter seems incapable of cognizing the old man and his own world of "nothingness." However, it is only when they continue reading the two waiters' dialogue that the readers can infer that the old man and the young man are leading different lives. The young waiter cannot feel the old man's emotional depression for the reason that he has not experienced it yet; he enjoys a meaningful life as he still has youth, a job, and a wife. On the other hand, the old waiter, who lacks "everything but work," starts thinking

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<sup>467</sup> Hemingway, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," 379.

about the old man's situation and his feeling of *nada*. He arrives to realize and feel his emptiness, loneliness, despair, and fear of nothingness because both of them live on a deserted island of their own. Readers can identify with the characters and share their sensory experiences based on their individual dispositions and philosophical beliefs.

Furthermore, the narrator refers explicitly to the notion of nothingness in the parody of the Lord's Prayer, as he replaces the Spanish word "*nada*" (nothing) for all the key terms. In a monologue, the old waiter replies to the young waiter's rhetorical question, "What did he fear?" by thinking: "It was not fear or dread. It was nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it was all nada pues nada y nada y pues nada (nothing and then nothing and nothing)."<sup>468</sup> Steven K. Hoffman affirms that nothingness "was not fear or dread," implying a specific object to be feared, but a pervasive uneasiness and existential anxiety.<sup>469</sup> This statement alludes to the fact that nothingness is not a specific threat but a universal state of uneasiness that arises when an individual becomes conscious of the danger of nothingness. The characters' feelings of nothingness drive them to search for some light and cleanness. In this case, the old man experiences nothingness, and he is searching for some light in a clean, well-lighted café. The characters' psychological suffering is intensified in the absence of God because they have to encounter their problems and find ways by themselves to deal with the fear of nothingness. Accordingly, both the old man and the old waiter have this pervasive dread of the fear of nothingness, which threatens their lives and existence.

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<sup>468</sup> Hemingway, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," 383.

<sup>469</sup> Steven K. Hoffman, "Nada and the Clean, Well-Lighted Place: The Unity of Hemingway's Short Fiction," in *New Critical Approaches to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, ed. Jackson J. Benson, (Durham: Duke UP, 1990), 174.

Additionally, through contrasting images of light and darkness, the narrator is able to make the readers feel the characters' emotional states and express their fear of death and nothingness. The old waiter considers a clean, well-lighted place a refuge from the deserted nights and thinks that the café, with all its light and cleanness, is the only place that provides safety from darkness and fear. The old waiter pronounces: "This is a clean and pleasant cafe. It is well lighted. The light is very good ..."<sup>470</sup> Compared to the old man, the old waiter is one of those who enjoys staying late at night in a clean, well-lighted place. This justifies the old waiter's action of opening the café late at night "for those who need a light for the night."<sup>471</sup> These two characters hope to escape this feeling of *nada*, which reduces their lives to meaninglessness and void. Another image can be noticed in the scene where the old waiter stands before a bar with a "shining steam pressure coffee machine," where "the light is very bright" and the old waiter "smiled."<sup>472</sup> This image of the old waiter smiling in the night under the light denotes his happiness and increases the readers' awareness of the significance of light in the life of someone who suffers from *nada*. Regarding this point, Carter Steven views that this image exemplifies the complementary nature of *nada* and light.<sup>473</sup> Therefore, through contrasting images of light and darkness, the narrator reports the characters' feelings of *nada* and their search for light or a clean, well-lighted place to escape the feelings of nothingness. Davis highlights that, according to Heidegger, the question of being is connected to the idea of "belonging together."<sup>474</sup> In the sense that a human being can only understand his existence in relation to other things in this universe, and that God ensures their existence. For both the old man and the old waiter, light can provide them with a feeling

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<sup>470</sup> Hemingway, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," 382.

<sup>471</sup> Hemingway, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," 383.

<sup>472</sup> Hemingway, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," 383.

<sup>473</sup> Carter Steven, "Hemingway's A Clean, Well-Lighted Place and Tolstoy's The Death of Ivan Ilych," *The Explicator* (61), Iss. 3 (4 January 2003): 163, (Accessed 6 July, 2017), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00144940309597795>.

<sup>474</sup> Davis, *Martin Heidegger*, 8.

of some hope and communion with other people and the world. However, ironically, the readers can easily detect that the light that is supposed to provide warmth for their souls is temporary and artificial.

Hemingway's preoccupation with death in his stories is noticeable because it is one of the most fearsome incarnations of nothingness. Philip Young notes that Hemingway's injury in the First World War influenced his themes and suggests that Hemingway "had his preoccupation with death as a result of an overexposure to it" and that his narration of violent scenes is a method to get rid of his fear of violence and death."<sup>475</sup> In other words, Hemingway's fiction has become an art form for redeeming loneliness and attempting to forget death.

In fact, Heidegger believes that humans become increasingly aware of the question of Being as they approach death. He always refers to death as a "non-relational possibility." When Dasein (the rooted human being) is confronted with the "possibility of not-being-able-to-be-there" of evaporation, then, "all its links to any other Dasein have been undone," according to him.<sup>476</sup> He also suggests that it is the march toward death that makes people more aware of the question of Being. He constantly speaks of death as a "non-relational possibility." For him, when Dasein (the rooted human being) is face to face with the "possibility of no-longer-being-able-to be-there," or being able to connect with these who are also there, then "all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone."<sup>477</sup> Thus, Paul Edwards illuminates that, for Heidegger, all human beings die alone. This means that a person is dying alone—not necessary physical extinction—if he is psychologically isolated.

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<sup>475</sup> Philip Young, *Ernest Hemingway: Reconsideration*, (Pennsylvania: Penn State P, 1966), 166.

<sup>476</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294.

<sup>477</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294.

This implies that a person may die alone psychologically in the physical presence of someone else.<sup>478</sup>

In “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” an image of violent death occurs in the story of an eighty-year-old man. The old man tried to hang himself, but he was saved by his niece because he had become lonely after his wife’s passing.<sup>479</sup> The old man is isolated, sitting in the “shadow” left by nature in the modern artificial world.<sup>480</sup> Indeed, M. Guy Thompson and Stanley A. Leavy assert that Heidegger believes that new scientific and technological developments cannot shield humans from experiencing feelings of fear and nothingness because they are unavoidable.<sup>481</sup> The old man’s sitting in shadow symbolizes the death of a human being’s happiness after absorbing modernization. In this respect, John Berryman suggests that all the story’s light is artificial, standing for the human reliance on them to provide the semblance of what they need after being abandoned by nature.<sup>482</sup> Hemingway also entails the concept of death at the syntactic level. His employment of alliteration (dew, dust, deaf, and difference) can be a variation on the word “death.” There is also the chronic repetition of the word “late,” which refers to the fact of being on the edge of death. The readers can infer that these images allude to his obsession with death and his fear of nothingness, as exemplified by the old man and the old waiter.

Consequently, in “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” the narrator forces readers to interpret the story with the intention of coming to an understanding of his characters’ feelings of “*nada*,” or nothingness, which is reflected in their emotional separation from the world,

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<sup>478</sup> Paul Edwards, “Heidegger and Death: A Deflationary Critique,” *The Monist* 59, no.2, (1976), 162, *JSTOR*, (Accessed 10 Aug., 2020), [www.jstor.org/stable/27902414](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27902414).

<sup>479</sup> Hemingway, “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” 379–380.

<sup>480</sup> Hemingway, “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” 379.

<sup>481</sup> M. Guy Thompson and Stanley A. Leavy, “Heidegger’s Conception of Truth,” in *The Truth About Freud’s Technique: The Encounter With the Real*, (Leavy, NYU Press, New York: London, 1994), 57, *JSTOR* (Accessed 4 July, 2020), [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfvqq.13](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfvqq.13).

<sup>482</sup> John Berryman, “Hemingway’s ‘A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,’” in *The Freedom of the Poet*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976), 217.

isolation, loneliness, and existential depression. However, he thinks that in order to escape the hard feeling of *nada* and the emotional darkness, that most existentialists delineate, someone has to survive with dignity and has to find a clean, well-lighted place. More significantly, Hemingway's story is universal, and his characters' feelings of disillusionment, their fear of nothingness, and death do not only reflect the reality of the American people after having experienced a frightful and terrible World War I, but also human beings' lives in our time.

What is important is that, through the use of omission, implication, and imagery techniques, the narrator activates the readers' mental faculties so that they can build mental images. Thus, they can contribute to the reconstruction of the story's meaning and understand the characters' feelings and the author's intentions. By not providing solutions to the conflict in the story, the narrator prompts the readers to think about the questions of Being and existentialism. In doing so, readers become more aware of the fact that in their daily life, existential conflicts and pressures are becoming increasingly inevitable. They have to focus on realizing their dreams because they cannot escape the feelings of nothingness and existential depression, as they are associated with inherent feelings of loss.

#### **4.2 'What's a Cathedral without People': Blindness, Loneliness, and Existential Depression in Raymond Carver's "Cathedral"**

In spite of the fact that American society enjoyed material prosperity and political stability in the second half of the twentieth century, human beings' lives became fragmented and restless. These facts are depicted in the fiction of postmodern writers, especially the minimalist writers, including Carver, Ford, and Mason. Commenting on the fiction of this era, Karen Weekes states that "the dejection and cynicism of the moderns appear to have



culminated in the fatalism and brokenness of postmodern era: fragmentation, alienation and inescapable isolation permeate the characters of fiction.”<sup>483</sup> Additionally, Reamy Jansen thinks that the short story form gave more value to “loneliness and isolation,” which were the most dominating qualities of the twentieth century.<sup>484</sup> He also argues that Carver gained wide and popular success because he was able to take “the measure of our loneliness with greater precision than” other contemporary writers. Readers were drawn to his stories about loneliness, mainly because they appealed to the age when people became less communal and it helped them appreciate their world.<sup>485</sup> Thus, Carver’s fiction has been praised for its stunning depiction of the cultural and moral climate of contemporary America. Just like Hemingway, Carver focused on underlining the emotional reality of his characters, especially their feelings of loneliness and emotional depression. In this respect, Dobyns opines that, for Carver, “the writing was the medium for something more important: the apprehension of human emotion.”<sup>486</sup> For him, Carver portrayed how people lived and how they connected and communicated with other human beings.

As in many of his stories, in “Cathedral,” Carver employs a naïf narrator who is unaware of the significance and, at times, the meaning of what he is saying. Yet, Bethea affirms that the faux naïf narrator learns from his experience something about life or about himself, which leads to his change.<sup>487</sup> Iser sustains that “...because the function of literature is by no means entirely covered by its interaction with its readers and with its referential realities. Moreover, if a literary text does something to its readers, it simultaneously tells us something about them. Thus literature turns into a divining rod, locating our dispositions,

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<sup>483</sup> Karen Weekes, “Postmodernism in Women’s Short Story Cycles: Lorrie Moore’s Anagrams,” in *The Postmodern Short Story: Forms and Issues*, ed. Iftekharrudin, et al., (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 94.

<sup>484</sup> Reamy Jansen, “Being Lonely- Dimensions of the Short Story,” *Cross Currents* 39(1989-90): 391+.

<sup>485</sup> Jansen, “Being Lonely,” 391.

<sup>486</sup> Stephen Dobyns, “Laughter’s Creature,” in *Remembering Ray: A Composite Biography of Raymond Carver*, ed. Williams L. Stull and Maureen P Carroll, (Santa Barbara: Capra, 1993), 110.

<sup>487</sup> Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility*, 272.

desires and inclinations and eventually our overall makeup.”<sup>488</sup> Therefore, the readers are also supposed to learn from the events and feel changed by the end of the story. In other words, the readers experience emotional growth alongside the characters as they share their sensory experience. Unlike Hemingway’s characters, the narrator of “Cathedral” is an uneducated and self-insulated figure that begins to recognize the world around him after sensing the seriousness of his insularity. Unemotionally, he narrates the events that take place during the one-night visit of a blind man named Robert to his house. However, he does not tell us where his story actually takes place. Also, he does not name most of his characters that emerge fully developed and without history.

Consequently, the readers have to infer from the characters’ actions and behaviour with the intention of understanding their emotional states and personalities. Indeed, Clarke confirms that the main reason for telling the story is to chronicle the narrator’s personal and emotional metamorphosis from a state of unconsciousness and prejudice to awareness and understanding of the world around him.<sup>489</sup> Thus, applying Sartre’s philosophy of existentialism, the readers can infer that the narrator is struggling between two stages of reality: being-for-itself and being-for-others. Moreover, although Carver does not refer explicitly to the notion of nothingness, like in Hemingway’s “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” he implies that his characters’ lives are meaningless because they experience existential depression due to their feelings of loneliness and alienation from the outside world and their lovers.

Influenced by existentialism, especially that of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre, Carver holds an existentialist worldview in his story “Cathedral.” Thematically, this story can be compared to Hemingway’s “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” because both of them capture the feelings of alienation, existential depression, and frustration that are so much a

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<sup>488</sup> Iser, “Do I Write for an Audience?” 312.

<sup>489</sup> Clarke, “Investing the Glimpse,” 108.

part of modern life. In explaining the relationship between nihilism and American literary minimalism, Francisco Collado-Rodríguez states: “minimalism can be ultimately associated with nihilism and cultural relativism. In the minimalist text, the humanist belief in the sublimity of man’s existence gives way to the description of pointless lives being lived by utterly non-heroic characters.”<sup>490</sup> In contrast to Hemingway, what makes Carver’s work existentialist is his concentration on describing the smallest details of his characters’ daily activities. This is mainly because his characters spend most of their time watching TV, eating food, consuming alcohol, shopping at the mall, or travelling from one place to another. Furthermore, unlike Hemingway, though he is interested in depicting contemporary life, the sense of the heroic is lost to Carver and other minimalist writers.<sup>491</sup> Thus, the narrator of “Cathedral” is no exception because he does not have anything to do. His behaviour demonstrates that he is undergoing existential depression.

Despite the fact that the narrator does not confess his alienation from his society, the readers can detect this fact from the characters’ conversations. The narrator is the only character who is an unemployed man, and he does not reveal any interest whatsoever in transcending his everyday life, like the old man in Hemingway’s story. The readers learn that, similar to Hemingway’s characters, the narrator’s circle is very limited, not only because he does not know any blind men, but because he has no friends, as his wife declares in a conversation with him: “I don’t know any blind friends,” to which he replies, “You don’t have *any* friends.”<sup>492</sup> In contrast to the waiters in Hemingway’s story, who empathize with the old man, Carver’s narrator has little experience with the blind and faces the visit

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<sup>490</sup> Collado-Rodríguez Francisco, “Minimalism, Post-Humanism, and the Recovery of History in Bobbie Ann Mason’s ‘Zigzagging down a Wild Trail,’” *The Southern Literary Journal* 39, no. 1 (2006): 99, (Accessed 8 Nov., 2018), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20077865>.

<sup>491</sup> Francisco, “Minimalism, Post-Humanism,” 99.

<sup>492</sup> Raymond Carver, “Cathedral,” in *Where I’m Calling From: New and Selected Stories*, (New York: *The Atlantic*, 1988), 239.

anxiously.<sup>493</sup> Although he tells his wife that the idea of blindness bothers him, his interest in informing the readers about his wife's former relationship with this man shows that he is suspicious and jealous. He knows that his wife used to disclose intimate details to the blind mind and has probably complained about his faults.<sup>494</sup>

Feeling guilty, insecure, and somewhat hostile towards both his wife and Robert, the narrator recalls that the blind man once "touched his fingers to every part of her face, her nose, even her neck! She never forgot it. She even tried to write a poem about it."<sup>495</sup> Since he lacks social graces, he is apprehensive about having to entertain Robert, and he does not know what he should do or say.<sup>496</sup> Hence, the readers have to fill in the blanks in order to find out the reasons for his alienation from his society.

Carver, unlike Hemingway, does not take part in any wars, thus he is not particularly fascinated with the idea of death. But he still refers to it in some of his famous stories, including "Errand" and "Cathedral." As is the case in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," Carver refers to the subject of death in a suicide attempt, which is caused by psychological pressures in both stories. In her first marriage, the narrator's wife experienced a spiritual crisis and existential nothingness that reached its explosive expression in her unsuccessful suicide attempt and her longing for someone to talk to. Her life had become meaningless and lonely after her husband left her, much like the old man in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place."

The narrator uses an emotionless tone in describing his wife's attempted suicide by stating: "... one night she got to feeling lonely and cut off from people she kept losing in that moving-around life. She balked, couldn't go it another step. She went in and swallowed all the pills and capsules in the medicine cabinet and washed them down with a bottle of gin.

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<sup>493</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 237.

<sup>494</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 237-238.

<sup>495</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 237.

<sup>496</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 242.

Then she got in a hot bath and passed out. But instead of dying she got sick. She threw up.”<sup>497</sup> The fact of telling his wife’s suffering without compassion designates that the narrator is selfish, callous, and emotionless. Clearly, for him, suicide is ordinary and a question of balking at life; however, dying is something that one might do instead of throwing up. Indeed, the sense of menace is one of the most salient features of Carver’s stories. He justifies its use by noting: “I like it when there is some feeling of threat or sense of menace in short stories.... For one thing, it’s good for the circulation. There has to be tension, a sense that something is imminent, that certain things are in relentless motion, or else, most often, there simply won’t be a story.”<sup>498</sup> Unlike Hemingway’s style, Carver’s emotionless style has the ability to evoke emotions of suspense and menace and make the readers more conscious of the character’s mental states, who seek to escape from the world of nothingness and meaninglessness. The narrator implies that his marriage is disintegrating by referring to his wife’s relationship with the blind man and her former marriage.

Undeniably, Carver’s influence by Nietzsche’s philosophy of truth is evident in his characters’ resort to an act of creativity or art in order to escape the feeling of nihilism and nothingness. Both Robert and the narrator’s wife try to find a deeper meaning in their lives by producing something creative. In this respect, Cara McClintock-Walsh observes: “Both Robert and the narrator’s wife express and enact a longing for contact with the greater world, and their search for deeper meaning in their lives could be read as evidence of a spiritual quest.”<sup>499</sup> In her second marriage, the wife starts composing poetry “after something really important [has] happened to her.”<sup>500</sup> In doing so, she succeeds in generating joy, affirmation, and fulfilment; and starts a new life with a new husband. However, she encounters other

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<sup>497</sup> Carver, “Cathedral,” 238.

<sup>498</sup> Carver, “On Writing,” 51.

<sup>499</sup> Cara McClintock-Walsh, “Spirituality in ‘Cathedral,’” in *Encyclopedia of Themes in Literature*, 3-Volume Set, (Facts On File, 2010), *Bloom’s Literature*, (Accessed 20 July, 2020), [online.infobase.com/Auth/Index?aid=19863&itemid=WE54&articleId=38601](http://online.infobase.com/Auth/Index?aid=19863&itemid=WE54&articleId=38601).

<sup>500</sup> Carver, “Cathedral,” 238.

problems in her second marriage, which makes her life again meaningless. Yet, similar to the old waiter and the old man in Hemingway's story, the narrator does not seek to find a deeper meaning to his life, but instead, as McClintock-Walsh refers, "he shows only a desire to escape his life by retreating further into his own deeply entrenched alienation."<sup>501</sup> Although he does not attempt suicide, the fact that he drinks at night and watches TV to forget his frightening dreams points out that he lives a meaningless life and experiences moments of existential depression.

What makes the narrator's life dreadful is that he is also alienated from his wife. The couple's spiritual emptiness is reflected in their physical separation, as he contends: "My wife and I hardly ever went to bed at the same time."<sup>502</sup> This forces the readers to reflect that the couple is not getting along due to the emotional rupture and might be on the verge of divorce. The narrator progressively reveals to the readers that these characters suffer from emotional rupture, loneliness, and lack of communication. Feeling guilty, insecure, and somewhat hostile towards both his wife and Robert, the narrator recalls that the blind man was the first who enjoyed her favors while touching parts of her body.<sup>503</sup>

Clearly, this information makes the readers aware that he is jealous because he discloses the eroticism of the blind man's touch and he does not even name his wife's ex-husband, who was her childhood sweetheart. Moreover, the narrator does not like to speak about his intimate matters with his wife and withdraws from the conversation when she reminds him that he has no friends. Mark A. R Facknitz illuminates that the fact of having no friends at all designates that the narrator is numb and isolated and that he is a representative of Nietzsche's 'last man.' Life has become meaningless after losing emotional

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<sup>501</sup> McClintock-Walsh, "Spirituality in 'Cathedral.'"

<sup>502</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 245.

<sup>503</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 237.

ties with the people around him.<sup>504</sup> These facts invite the readers to suppose that the lack of communication is one reason for the couple's emotional rupture and the failure of their marriage, and that the husband's alienation from his society further intensifies his feelings of existential depression.

The narrator has not recognized the insufficiencies of his life until he meets the blind man. Through his conduct and behaviour, the blind man was able to help the narrator transform his self-insularity and isolation into an understanding of himself and the world around him. Indeed, the two men possess different personalities and knowledge of the world. In comparison with the narrator, he is more knowledgeable, educated, generous, and has a sense of humor. Before meeting Robert, the narrator expresses his empathy for Beulah, the blind man's wife, because she could go on day after day and never receive the smallest compliment from her beloved. He confesses that her life with the blind man is beyond his understanding.<sup>505</sup>

In fact, the narrator's feeling of pity for the couple prompts the readers to reflect that he has a wrong idea about blindness and love. In this respect, Bethea elucidates that, according to the man, "one must literally see to experience life fully."<sup>506</sup> The narrator could not realize that Robert could see his wife in a nonphysical way. Thus, Robert is able to obliterate the narrators' misconceptions about blindness. Therefore, the readers can contemplate that the narrator does not attempt to apprehend his relationship with his wife, and he does not really get to know his role in life, either.

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<sup>504</sup> Mark A. R. Facknitz, "'The Calm,' 'A Small Good Thing,' and 'Cathedral': Raymond Carver and the Rediscovery of Human Worth," in *Studies in Short Fiction* 23.3 (Summer 1986): 287–296, Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed., Jeffrey W. Hunter, Vol. 126, (Gale, 2000), *Literature Resource Center*, (Accessed 3 June, 2016), <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1100019620&v=2.1&u=crrl&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=6879ad23f67a82c365f34eb0e6b88a23>.

<sup>505</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 239.

<sup>506</sup> Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility*, 155.

Despite the fact that the narrator does not show any interest in experiencing new things, in the dinner scene, he expresses his narrow realization of things and his feeling of spiritual emptiness, like Hemingway's characters. When they start the dinner, he quips at it: "Now let us pray," ... "Pray the phone won't ring and the food doesn't get cold," I said."<sup>507</sup> His mock prayer over the food forces the readers to question his religion, and they can assume that he is a sarcastic atheist. After finishing the dinner, the narrator states: "We dug in. We ate everything there was to eat on the table. We ate like there was no tomorrow. We didn't talk. We ate. We scared. We grazed that table. We were into serious eating."<sup>508</sup> His sensory descriptions stimulate the readers' imaginations and make them feel that there is something submerged beneath the surface of things. In this respect, McClintock-Walsh thinks that "the narrator and his companions eat so voraciously as to suggest that their hunger is not just physical but perhaps indicative of a deeper, spiritual hunger."<sup>509</sup>

In contrast to the old waiter in Hemingway's story, who expresses his existential depression through a monologue, Carver's narrator discloses much about his psychological pressures and spiritual emptiness while eating. After the dinner scene, the narrator and Robert start a conversation about cathedrals when they watch a program about them on television. This television program, as McClintock-Walsh views it, "introduces the spiritual into the conversation and ushers into the narrative an event that grants the narrator a profound moment of transcendence."<sup>510</sup> At this stage, just like the old waiter in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," the narrator confesses his loneliness to Robert and reveals that he is frightened by the emptiness that confronts him at night by saying: "Every night I smoked dope and stayed up as long as I could before I fell asleep .... When I did go to sleep,

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<sup>507</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 242.

<sup>508</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 242

<sup>509</sup> McClintock-Walsh, "Spirituality in 'Cathedral.'"

<sup>510</sup> McClintock-Walsh, "Spirituality in 'Cathedral.'"



I had these dreams. Sometimes I'd wake up from one of them, my heart going crazy."<sup>511</sup>

Thus, the narrator's insomnia reflects the suffering of his inner life.

In response to his guests' question about his religion when they watch a television program about medieval cathedrals, his remarks confirm that he believes in anything. He also expresses his sorrow and uncertainty: "I guess I don't believe in it. In anything. Sometimes it's hard. You know what I'm saying?"<sup>512</sup> Later, he admits his inability to describe the cathedral, "I'm just no good at it"; "I can't do any more than I've done."<sup>513</sup> His statements show that he is in pain and sad. Accordingly, the readers can deduce that it is against his will to be an atheist. Clarke confirms that, "no matter how or where," Carver's "characters travel, the primary movement is inwards or towards a found emptiness."<sup>514</sup> As stressed earlier, the absence of a transcendent God, according to Nietzsche, leads people to experience nihilism and nothingness. Like in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," the readers can infer that God does not exist in Carver's story and that the characters attempt to solve their problems by themselves. This is why they experience existential depression, emotional isolation, and emptiness.

At the end of the story, when the blind man fails to describe the cathedral to the narrator, the blind man proposes to draw a cathedral to help him imagine it. In explaining the real value of art, Nietzsche maintains: "A psychologist, on the other hand, asks: what does all art do? does it not praise? glorify? choose? prefer? With all this it strengthens or weakens certain valuations ... Art is the great stimulus to life: how could one understand it as purposeless, as aimless, as *l'art pour l'art*?"<sup>515</sup> The creative process motivates people to give significance to their lives. Accordingly, the blind man prompts the narrator to create a

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<sup>511</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 245.

<sup>512</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 247.

<sup>513</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 247.

<sup>514</sup> Clarke, "Investing the Glimpse," 107.

<sup>515</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete work of Friedrich Nietzsche: The Twilight of the Idols*, (Hastings: Delfi Classics, 2017), 24.

piece of art in order to give meaning to his life and feel his enjoyment and fulfillment, unlike the old man and the old waiter in Hemingway's story, who recognize the complementary nature of light and nada in redeeming loneliness. The blind man and the narrator draw each hand over another in a collaborative act. In this respect, Bethea observes that this act is "a higher level of communication that helps to endow the scene with a quasi-religiosity."<sup>516</sup> First, the narrator draws a box that looks like a house. Robert also says to him: "Put some people in there now. What's a cathedral without people?"<sup>517</sup> Clearly, Robert wants to teach him the importance of people in his life.

In fact, McClintock-Walsh maintains that the narrator does not only feel empathy for Robert, but also accepts him "to occupy the same world in a moment of spiritual enlargement when they draw a cathedral together."<sup>518</sup> The readers may question the narrator's ability to appreciate Robert's message, and if he will accept integrating into his society's norms by having friends. In this respect, Keith Cushman suggests that the narrator's statement can be interpreted as: "the bruised, strung-out, cynical narrator has reentered the human community."<sup>519</sup> In other words, the fact of placing people in the drawn cathedral indicates that the narrator symbolically begins to accept his belonging to a larger community with venerable and religious dimensions.

What is important is that the narrator's contact with the blind man offers him an opportunity to apprehend the existential dimensions of life. Bethea asserts that this story is based on the "Sophoclean irony of seeing the truth only when literally blind."<sup>520</sup> Undoubtedly, the sighted narrator confesses that his knowledge of blind people is very

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<sup>516</sup> Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility*, 156.

<sup>517</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 249.

<sup>518</sup> McClintock-Walsh, "Spirituality in 'Cathedral.'"

<sup>519</sup> Keith Cushman, "Blind Intertextual Love: 'The Blind Man and Raymond Carver's 'Cathedral,'" in *DH Laurence's Inheritors*, eds. Keith Cushman and Dennis Jackson, (New York: St Martins' P, 1991), 156.

<sup>520</sup> Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility*, 156.

limited.<sup>521</sup> However, Bethea thinks that after being deprived of sight for a short while, when he closes his eyes, he is able to see things in another manner.<sup>522</sup> Therefore, the narrator could only perceive reality when he was blind, and he chose to stay longer with his eyes closed because he was learning what he has long been incapable of perceiving and even now he cannot articulate. The following dialogue takes place while both are closing their eyes:

I thought I'd keep them that way a little longer.

I thought it was something I ought not to forget.

"Well?" he said. "Are you looking?"

My eyes were still closed. I was in my house and

I knew that. But I didn't feel inside anything.

"It's really something," I said.<sup>523</sup>

Unlike in Hemingway's story, where the old man can feel his existence through his interaction with people in a clean, well lighted café, the act of drawing a cathedral with his eyes closed allows the narrator to use his imagination and, thus, attain communion with himself. Similarly, his ambiguous remarks stimulate the readers' imagination to fill in the gaps with the aim of registering his feelings. Like Carver's characters, the narrator is unable to articulate his feelings, but he can still make the readers sense that he experiences changes in his mind and heart after closing his eyes, and that he discovers another reality. In this respect, Bethea views that, although the narrator is unable to articulate his feelings of liberation and the nature of this freedom that he refers to as "something," he begins to appreciate this liberation from his "claustrophobic existence."<sup>524</sup> Accordingly, the act of creativity enables the narrator to minimize his isolation from others. His spiritual experience of drawing the cathedral allows him to pursue happiness and a new meaning in his life

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<sup>521</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 239.

<sup>522</sup> Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility*, 156.

<sup>523</sup> Carver, "Cathedral," 249.

<sup>524</sup> Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility*, 156.

through his feelings of solidarity with the blind man, who teaches him to see things from the heart and not just from the eye.

Iser thinks that the reader learns from the experience of the characters of any literary text. On this point, he notes: “Reading reflects the structure of experience to the extent that we must suspend the ideas and attitudes that shape our own personality before we can experience the unfamiliar world.”<sup>525</sup> Accordingly, the readers can feel the change the narrator experiences because they can experience this unfamiliar world and share the character’s sensory experiences. They can learn how to give a new meaning to their lives by working collaboratively with other human beings of their societies.

Therefore, like Hemingway’s “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” Carver’s “Cathedral” deals with the issues of alienation and existential depression that people feel in the modern world. As existentialists, Hemingway and Carver demonstrate in these stories how their characters think and behave when there is no faith or a big idea to motivate their inner lives. They also demonstrate that their major characters attempt to achieve meaningful lives through action. In Hemingway’s story, the older waiter gives meaning to his life by acting on behalf of the old blind man. Similarly, the collaborative action of drawing a cathedral, a creative art form, enables the narrator of “Cathedral” to give a new meaning to his life as he starts to consider himself a social creature. The story’s ending indicates that the main character of “Cathedral” begins to experience a sort of freedom and liberation after suffering from alienation and isolation. In fact, like Hemingway, Carver does not offer solutions to the existential problems he dramatizes. This downbeat ending makes the readers depressed and perplexed, yet it encourages them to search for solutions according to their convictions, life experiences, and individual interactions.

#### **4.3 Nothingness, Knowing, and Existential Depression in Richard Ford’s “Great Falls”**

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<sup>525</sup> Iser, “The Reading Process,” 296.

Richard Ford is one of the most famous writers due to his distinct style and his interest in recording Americans as individuals and their social disillusionment during the 1970s and 1980s. Generally, Ford's fiction deals with the new emerging issues in postmodernism that affect the individual and society. In the words of Guagliardo, it "dramatizes the breakdown of such cultural institutions as marriage, family, and community."<sup>526</sup> Similar to Hemingway, Carver, and Mason, Ford is also influenced by the philosophy of existentialism, as he is concerned with underlying the emotional truth of alienated individuals. In fact, Gornick sustains that Ford employs narrators who "[have] been made inarticulate by modern life" to depict an individual's isolation and loneliness in the modern world,<sup>527</sup> like Carver's unnamed narrator.

Moreover, Philip Orr maintains that *Rock Springs* emphasizes man's loneliness in the world—"man's emotional disconnectedness from his world and his attempts... to reconcile himself with his emotions."<sup>528</sup> Hence, resembling Hemingway and Carver, Ford relies on different narrative techniques in his story "Great Falls," such as omission and implication to engage with his main theme of the emotional rupture between family members, which caused their feelings of alienation, loneliness, and existential depression. Ford's aim is not to provide solutions to their existential problems, but to invite his readers to share their sensory experiences and learn from them. Like in "Optimists," he shows the effects of the newly emerging cultural and social values on the family structure during the 1980s, especially the effects of divorce and violence on children.

At the surface level, "Great Falls" seems slightly plotted and meaningless. In it, an adult Jackie, an adolescent boy aged sixteen, recounts the incidents that changed the course of his teenage years and shaped his personality and attitudes towards others. He tells us the

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<sup>526</sup> Huey Guagliardo, "Introduction," in *Perspectives on Richard Ford*, ed. Huey Guagliardo, (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000), xiv.

<sup>527</sup> Gornick, "Tenderhearted Men," 1.

<sup>528</sup> Philip Orr, "Rock Springs," *Northwest Review* 26. 2(1988): 143.

events that precipitated his parents' separation. As opposed to Hemingway's and Carver's stories, which are concerned with narrating stories of old man, Ford's narrator confines himself to the perceptions and thoughts of his adolescent self, thus, emphasizing his confusion and his sense of displacement when his family falls apart. Like in the preceding stories by Hemmingway and Carver, Ford's story's title is explicitly ironic, and, therefore, it establishes the perspective of the narrator, which can interact with the perspective of the character.

According to Iser, this interaction prompts the reader "to build up syntheses which eventually individualize the aesthetic object."<sup>529</sup> Indeed, the title refers to the breakdown of Jackie's family and his isolation. On this point, Griffin thinks that it also represents the setting, which is an allegory of the family's dissolution and disintegration.<sup>530</sup> After the separation of his parents, Jackie Russell sought maturity in an isolated town in Great Falls, Montana, which is characterized by a picturesque landscape. Ford's choice of this setting is symbolic, as Henry Brian notes: "the large physical distances are mirrored by an equally large emotional distance between the characters."<sup>531</sup> Accordingly, this setting is meant to reinforce the individual's feelings of insignificance and isolation. Moreover, the narrator's descriptions of the landscape and of his family's solitary house 'out of town' emphasize the characters' alienation from their society and their emotional isolation.<sup>532</sup> As a matter of fact, the narrator's selection of the title and setting introduces the readers to the main theme and the characters' problems.

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<sup>529</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 118.

<sup>530</sup> Larry D Griffin, "Short Stories to Film: Richard Ford's "Great Falls" and "Children" as Bright Angel," in *The Postmodern Short Story: Forms and Issues*, ed. Iftekharrudin, et al., (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 175.

<sup>531</sup> Henry Brian, "Richard Ford," in *American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies*, ed. Jay Parini, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000), 57–75, Rpt., in *Short Story Criticism*, ed. Janet Witalec, Vol. 56, (Detroit, Gale, 2003), *Literature Resource Center*, (Accessed 8 Dec., 2015), <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420046392&v=2.1&u=crrl&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=c490ec8fb9933ce45f4b3c0bb9039c39>.

<sup>532</sup> Richard Ford, "Great Falls," in *Rock Springs*, (London: Collins Harvill, 1988), 39.

Given the fact that “Great Falls” is written in the first-person point of view, the author sets up his story within a story so as to seem more objective and distance the readers from his narration. The story’s events play out between the mother and father, but they are passively witnessed by their son, Jackie, the narrator. The narrator raises the readers’ feelings of empathy by opening his story with words warning them that it is not a happy story. Then, he tells us about his life with his parents when he was a young boy: “This is not a happy story, I warn you. My father was a man named Jack Russell, and when I was a young boy in my early teens, we lived with my mother in a house to the east of Great Falls, Montana.”<sup>533</sup> The fact of not describing the characters’ personalities forces the readers to imagine their own characters and build more perspectives on their personalities and history together throughout the process of reading. By analyzing the linguistic system of these sentences, the readers can understand that the narrator’s reference to his parents in separate sentences implies their spiritual and physical separation. The narrator’s feelings of loneliness and existential depression are primarily caused by his confrontation with the considerable failings of his parents, and, thereby, the distance that separated them from him.

Despite the fact that the narrator does not detail the causes of his parent’s emotional rupture, he reports that it started as a miscommunication between his father and his mother, which developed into a serious problem. He also concentrates on showing its effects on him as a son and how he was unable to control the father-mother relationship, though he was the only one who connected them. In spite of the fact that his mother, Mrs. Russell, held different ideas from her husband about how their lives should proceed, the couple were able to live a happy life in the early years of their marriage and fulfill some of their dreams and see the world together.<sup>534</sup> Once his mother’s internal life and buried desires grew larger by the days, she became a stranger to both her husband and her son. In contrast to the old man in

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<sup>533</sup>Ford, “Great Falls,” 39.

<sup>534</sup>Ford, “Great Falls,” 40.

Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" and the wife in Carver's "Cathedral," whose loneliness and isolation drive them to commit suicide, Jackie's mother's loneliness and isolation drive her to commit adultery with an adult and become a prostitute after leaving the house.<sup>535</sup> Thus, in all the stories, the characters react against their will and commit unlawful acts while enduring an existential depression.

By drawing the readers' attention to his father's illegal actions and behaviour, the narrator uncovers much about his personality, his mother's psychological depression, and the disintegration of his marriage. Unlike in Carver's story, Ford's narrator gives readers significant details about the causes of the rupture of the love relationship between his father and mother. In spite of the fact that the son spent a long time in the company of his father while hunting and fishing, his narration of the past events discloses that he did not want to resemble him. Essentially, his emotional isolation from his father is reflected in his ambivalence about enjoying these opportunities to discover new and beautiful places, as he reflects: "...these were opportunities other boys would dream of having but probably never would. And I don't think that I was wrong in that."<sup>536</sup> This means that the narrator does not express intrinsic pleasure in the activities of catching fish and shooting duck. Leder notes that though the narrator describes the bleak landscape and the expeditions he shares with his father, his "account typifies Ford's ironic treatment of the stereotyping male adventure. Though Ford's style often evokes Hemingway's, Ford consistently undermines Hemingway's depiction of hunting and fishing as ritualized, almost sacramental struggles between worthy adversaries. Rather, hunting and fishing expeditions go wrong and/or result in mindless slaughter."<sup>537</sup> According to Jackie, his father did not "know the limits" because he killed a hundred fish in a weekend and shot all the ducks that he could find to sell them.<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>535</sup> Ford, "Great Falls," 45.

<sup>536</sup> Ford, "Great Falls," 40.

<sup>537</sup> Leder, "Men with Women," 101.

<sup>538</sup> Ford, "Great Falls," 40.



Hence, Jackie explicitly displays his father's faults and considers his hobbies excesses since they lie against the law. The readers can detect that Jackie's father did not believe in the existence of God, like Carver's narrator in "Cathedral," because, as Nietzsche wonders, if God is dead, then nothing is true and everything is permitted. Thus, Jackie's father was at a loss and he seemed to allow whatever he wanted without taking into consideration the moral repressions of his toleration. Hence, the fact of his being cruel and strong prompted him to impose his authority over his wife and son, thus, rendering their lives as meaningless.

Furthermore, Jackie did not adore his father's drinking behavior. His father used to spend the evenings drinking in a bar with friends, and Jackie used to play pinball and "wasted money in the jukebox."<sup>539</sup> His drinking behaviour discloses that, just like the unmanned narrator of Carver's "Cathedral," and the old man in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," he experienced existential depression, which was caused by his feeling of nothingness and nihilism. As a matter of fact, by telling us about his father's illegal actions, drinking habits, and the time of his arrival home, Jackie force the readers to imagine his mother's evening alone in an isolated house. They may also expect that the father did not work to fulfill her desires and that his passions excluded her from his life.

The turning point of the story, which occurred the night his father divorced his mother, had a great impact on the narrator's emotional state. Arriving home late at night, Jackie and his father found a stranger's car parked off the road, and a young man—not much older than Jackie—was standing in the kitchen. The narrator did not witness what took place between his father and his mother because they were upstairs. Instead, he focuses on describing only what happened outside; his father's anger and violence against Woody. In contrast to Hemingway's story, in which the narrator relies on a dramatic tone, Ford's narrator employs a menacing tone to describe the turning point scene of this story. Having

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<sup>539</sup> Ford, "Great Falls," 42.

hurt himself, the father came out of the house and attempted to shoot Woody with a pistol. His behavior pushed the mother to pack her suitcase and walk out of the house.<sup>540</sup> The father's use of violence against Woody, again, shows that he did not know the limits as anticipated by Jackie. The emotional effects of the incident were so strong that they made him feel as if his life had "turned suddenly."<sup>541</sup> This scene creates suspense on the part of the readers, who feel the emotional impact of the tragic event on the characters.

In contrast with the father, the mother seemed so calm, with a normal voice. Passively, she did not ask Jackie to accompany her where she intended to go, and she only reminded his father that he had school in the morning.<sup>542</sup> On this point, Leder remarks that she behaves like other women in Ford's stories as "she stands untouched and controlled amidst chaos and change, moving away from her son into the mysterious realm of her own sexuality."<sup>543</sup> As a result, unlike in Carver's "Cathedral," where the female character has no desire to change her lifestyle, Jackie's mother chose divorce to solve her marital problems because she couldn't continue living her life with an emotionless and violent husband. Similar to other Ford women's characters, she adopted a feminist vision: she sought her freedom and liberty in order to give her life new meaning by fulfilling her desires and wants. In her last encounter with Jackie, she told him that she liked a "less domestic life, is all."<sup>544</sup> In her pretty looks and behavior, her son began to feel that she had become a sexual being rather than a nurturer and that she looked different in many ways, even in regard to him as a son.<sup>545</sup> After losing trust in his mother, he distanced himself from her so that by the end of the story, he felt that they barely knew each other.<sup>546</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> Ford, "Great Falls," 45.

<sup>541</sup> Ford, "Great Falls," 59.

<sup>542</sup> Ford, "Great Falls," 51.

<sup>543</sup> Leder, "Men with Women," 102.

<sup>544</sup> Ford, "Great Falls," 56.

<sup>545</sup> Ford, "Great Falls," 59.

<sup>546</sup> Ford, "Great Falls," 56.

Since he could not fully identify with a violent father and a mysterious mother, Jackie attempted to identify himself with Woody. In fact, Jackie unconsciously compared his arms to Woody's: "his arms, which were long and pale. They looked like a young man's arms, like my arms."<sup>547</sup> According to Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of being, this comparison suggests that he moved from a state of unconsciousness to a state of consciousness about his adulthood strength, powerful body, and masculinity. Furthermore, in order to assume the responsibilities ahead of him, Jackie felt that he must be an intellectual and an educated man.

Indeed, Leder comments that his repetition of the verb "to know" dominates his sentences, discloses his hidden desires, and expresses his fascination with meeting Woody who was knowledgeable.<sup>548</sup> He thought that Woody knew "about a lot of things, about the life out in the dark, about coming out here, about airports, even about me. He and I were not so far apart in age, I *knew* that. But Woody was one thing, and I was another."<sup>549</sup> Ford's interest in knowledge reflects Sartre's influence, who claims in *Being and Nothingness* that "Knowledge appears then as a mode of being...this means that the for-itself can be only in the mode of reflection (reflect) causing itself to be reflected as not being a certain being."<sup>550</sup> This means that a human being can prove his or her existence through a search for knowledge. Hence, Jackie's search for knowledge and his comparison to Woody (the other) reflect his search for his being or existence.

Additionally, in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre highlights that it is through distinguishing oneself from the other that a for-itself individuates itself.<sup>551</sup> This means that a human being can only understand himself if he only considers himself an object of another subject or vice-versa. Sartre affirms in this regard: "...it is true that at least one of the

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<sup>547</sup> Ford, "Great Falls," 46.

<sup>548</sup> Leder, "Men with Women," 103.

<sup>549</sup> Ford, "Great Falls," 49.

<sup>550</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, Trans. Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Washington Square P, 1992), 242.

<sup>551</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 337.

modalities of the Other's presence to be object-ness."<sup>552</sup> According to Griffin, Jackie's last sentence, "Woody was one thing, and I was another," confirms that he started to recognize the basic distinctiveness that characterizes all human beings.<sup>553</sup> Furthermore, Walker points out that Jackie's reflection "transforms the teenage Jackie's encounter with Woody into a fundamentally existential moment; Jackie knows he exists and that Woody exists, but he cannot make the common fact of existence pull them into each other's sphere of knowing."<sup>554</sup> Like the unnamed narrator in Carver's "Cathedral," Jackie's meeting extended his knowledge of human beings' differences and their connectedness to each other. He learned that to feel happy, he had to connect with the world around him.

Jackie's encounter with Woody and his reflection on being a human being is common to Ford's characters who reach a point of existential depression. In this respect, Leder suggests that this identification with Woody proves that he began to develop the "detached reflection which both sustains and limits the Ford protagonist."<sup>555</sup> As opposed to Hemingway's old waiter, who expresses his thoughts in a dramatic monologue about nothingness and nada, Jackie continues to formulate his memory in terms of questions: "Why my father wouldn't let my mother come back? Why would Woody stand in the cold with me outside my house and risk being killed? Why would he say my mother had been married before, if she hadn't been? And my mother herself--why would she do what she did?...."<sup>556</sup> Although he does not try to provide answers to his questions, they reveal much about his emotional state. In other words, he experiences existential depression and emotional loneliness and gains self-knowledge despite the inscrutableness of others after the breakdown of his family.

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<sup>552</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 340.

<sup>553</sup> Griffin, "Short Stories to Film," 77.

<sup>554</sup> Walker, "Redeeming Loneliness," 127.

<sup>555</sup> Leder, "Men with Women," 103.

<sup>556</sup> Ford, "Great Falls," 59.

Like in the preceding stories of Hemingway and Carver, Jackie demonstrates that he is able to apprehend the world around him, and he summarizes his philosophy about life to his readers in the last lines as follows: “It is just low-life, some coldness in us all, some helplessness that causes us to misunderstand life when it is pure and plain, makes our existence seem like a border between two nothings, and makes us no more or less than animals who meet on the road--watchful, unforgiving, without patience or desire.”<sup>557</sup> In this statement, the narrator’s occupation with human predicament, existence, and nothingness also reflects the influence of Ford by Jean-Paul Sartre. He thinks that the existence of certain “coldness” and “helplessness” hinders our apprehension of life, which is supposed to be plain and simple. According to his epistemological and existential inquiries, people can never know each other because they exist in the face of nothingness. Whenever we fail to communicate with each other using language, which distinguishes us from animals and other things, we are no more (or less) than animals. Like Hemingway’s characters in “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” Jackie experiences nothingness and the feeling of living a meaningless life.

According to Iser, “If a theory of aesthetic response concerns it- self first and foremost with the concretization of a text [...] it nevertheless alerts us to certain human dispositions that are worked on in that process. While reading we are transposed to a realm outside our bodily existence having the illusion of leading another life. We are with and simultaneously outside ourselves and we obviously enjoy such a doubling.”<sup>558</sup> Readers are expected to understand Jackie’s feelings of nothingness and meaninglessness as they identify themselves with him and share his sensory experience. Since they become more conscious of their humanity, they are expected to learn how to make their lives seem more meaningful.

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<sup>557</sup>Ford, “Great Falls,” 59.

<sup>558</sup>Iser, “Do I Write for an Audience?” 312-313.

Hence, after he experienced bereavement, disappointment, and betrayal at the hands of his parents, the narrator felt alienated and isolated from his society. Similar to the old man in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" and the narrator in Carver's "Cathedral," his identification with Woody made him aware of the world around him, and he has started to discern the limitations and the meaninglessness of his own existence. In an interview with Walker, Ford confirms that "the inherent loneliness of human being condition" is a central theme in his works because he believes that "if loneliness is the disease, then the story is the cure."<sup>559</sup> Thus, compared to Carver, Ford is also influenced by Nietzsche's philosophy of art. Although he acknowledges the failure of language in communication, Jackie resorts to language in order to transform his traumatic event into a story; like the narrator of "Cathedral," shattered between self and other, Jackie's construction of his story becomes an act of consolation and redeeming loneliness.

Overall, in Ford's "Great Falls," the narrator recounts a turning point in his adulthood when he witnessed his parent's conflict, which led to their divorce. By giving the readers some clues about his family's problems and omitting others, he progressively explains to them the reasons for his alienation and existential depression. He demonstrates that he alienated himself from his violent and stubborn father and accused him of breaking apart his family. He also shows that his mother's feelings of loneliness and alienation prompted her to commit adultery and adopted a feminist vision in her search for a meaningful life. By the end of the story, he poses several epistemological questions, leading to his self-awareness and recognition of the world around him. Like in Carver's story, Ford believes in the importance of art and communication in redeeming loneliness.

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<sup>559</sup> Elinor Ann Walker, "An Interview with Richard Ford," *South Carolina Review* 31, no 1(Spring 1999): 141.

Hence, he creates this story to end his feelings of existential depression. As is the case in Carver and Hemingway's stories, the moral lesson that the readers can learn from Ford's story is that human beings are constantly suffering from nothingness and the meaninglessness of their lives. They can also absorb that in order to understand the world around them, they should be connected to each other. In reality, the narrator makes them feel the characters' predicament and alienation, which reflect the lives of so many American individuals who experienced family dissolution during the 1980s.

#### **4.4 Cultural Shock, Loneliness and Existential Depression in Bobbie Ann Mason's "The Rookers"**

Bobbie Ann Mason's stories seem deceptively simple, but they are heavy in meaning. She acquired high culture through her education. Also, western Kentucky, with its popular culture, inspired her to write about her people so as to understand their resentment while living in a period of social and cultural changes. Indeed, the loss of place, identity, and culture shock are the connecting themes of her stories. In an interview with Lila Havens, Mason stated: "I'm constantly preoccupied with...exploring various kinds of culture shock—people moving from one class to another...people being threatened by other people's ways and values."<sup>560</sup> As a minimalist, she is also concerned with nihilism, which is reflected in the characters' fear of nothingness and their concern with daily life activities.

Mason's "The Rookers" is one of the best stories that exemplify her craft in using her realist style to depict the Southern predicament in the semi-rural, small-town of Kentucky in the 1980's. As with Ford's "Great Falls," it focuses on the effects of social and cultural changes on individuals and family structures. It deals with the theme of alienation and existential depression, and it reflects her exposure to the existentialist philosophy of

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<sup>560</sup> Lila Havens, "Residents and Transients: An Interview with Bobbie Ann Mason," *Crazyhorse* 29 (Fall 1985), 95.

nothingness as well as Heidegger and Nietzsche's nihilism. Mack, the protagonist, experiences predicaments as he tries to confront the rapid changes brought on by modern technology and modern civilization. Like in Hemingway's, Carver's, and Ford's stories, in the absence of a transcendent God, Mack's suffering from cultural shock caused him to feel alienated and experience existential depression, which is expressed in his behaviour towards his society and family.

As with Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," little seems to happen in "The Rookers" because no important action takes place throughout the story. Mack and Mary Lou Skaggs, a middle-aged couple, begin to feel lonely after their two daughters marry and the last child leaves home to pursue her studies in higher education. Therefore, after the departure of their children and due to the process of heavy modernization in that part of the country, they have lost essential aspects of their identities. Mason employs different stylistic techniques such as omission, implication, imagery, and allusions in order to make the readers understand and sympathize with her characters, who struggle to understand themselves and the world around them.

As is the case in the preceding stories by Hemingway, Carver, and Ford, the story starts in *media-res* without any descriptions of the characters' histories or personalities. Besides, the third-person narrator does not also give details about the historical context of the story and its setting. In this case, the readers rely on what is "given" to them by the narrator and try to interpret the story on the basis of their background knowledge of American culture and the writer's biography. Like the unnamed narrator of Carver's "Cathedral," Mack lacks social graces and starts to distance himself from his society. His depression is first expressed by his inability to do his work as a carpenter as he used to; his wife "feels that Mack never charges enough for his work," but she always helps him to do



different tasks.<sup>561</sup> Moreover, frightened by the people and the highways, he retreats to his basement workshop and prefers to spend time at home reading books.<sup>562</sup> The fact of having no friends and his inability to express his feelings and emotions to his wife discloses that he is experiencing an existential depression and that he is living a meaningless life. In fact, like the narrator in Carver's "Cathedral," he is a representative of a modern man who fails to integrate into his society.

As for his relationship with his family, the narrator omits details about the history of the couple together with their children, but he says that Mack feels his life is changing and that "he has missed something" after staying alone with his wife.<sup>563</sup> Mack starts to feel insecure and restless after staying alone with his wife: "He seems embarrassed that they are alone in the house now for the first time in years. When Judy fails to come home on weekends, he paces around restlessly."<sup>564</sup> Like the female character in Carver's "Cathedral," Mary Lou's observation of her husband's new behaviour suggests that he is experiencing emptiness and loneliness even in her presence, as he finds life unsettling and vaguely threatening. Additionally, despite the fact that he is unsecured in his relationship with his wife, he attempts to maintain both his marriage and his love relationship with her. This is shown in his gift on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of their marriage. Mary Lou, who admires the table and counts twenty one pieces in the table top pattern, thinks that "it seemed that Mack was trying to put together the years of their marriage into a convincing whole and this was as far as he got."<sup>565</sup>

In addition, Mack wants to surprise his daughter Judy by giving her something special for Christmas. He decides to build a home entertainment; an intricately designed

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<sup>561</sup> Bobbie Ann Mason, "The Rookers," in *Shiloh and Other Stories*, (New York: The Modern Library, 1982), 19.

<sup>562</sup> Mason, "The Rookers," 19.

<sup>563</sup> Mason, "The Rookers," 22.

<sup>564</sup> Mason, "The Rookers," 20.

<sup>565</sup> Mason, "The Rookers," 20.

cabinet whose small compartments will hold everything in its proper place.<sup>566</sup> As is known, people are suffering from the feeling of meaninglessness and a lack of moral values in the world of nihilism. In point of fact, Mack's attempt to create new things indicates that he is unsatisfied with the confused postmodern world he is living in and that he is searching for a more orderly system. However, he fails to establish his own moral values and create a meaningful life.

In spite of the fact that Mary Lou does not discuss with her husband the subject of his change, the narrator informs us that she is conscious of the psychological problems that he is suffering from and that she tries to be patient with him, thinking that he will recover soon.<sup>567</sup> Although television has become the most important cultural medium in the 1980's, Stanley Aronowitz maintains that its excessive watching has a negative impact on working-class people because it increases the feelings of alienation and loneliness by distancing them from real concerns in their lives.<sup>568</sup> Accordingly, Mack's watching of television distances him more from his family and society. Feeling his melancholy, Mary Lou tries hard to convince him that they can still enjoy their life together without the presence of their children. Before she starts playing regularly with her friends, she proposes going camping, bowling, and going to Opryland. Yet, he always makes excuses for the traffic.<sup>569</sup> His behaviour confirms that he does not like to integrate into the new, changing society.

Similar to Norma Jean in Mason's "Shiloh," and Jackie's mother in Ford's "Great Falls," Mary Lou adopts a feminist vision and starts finding new ways of enjoying her life. Unlike her husband, she tries to escape from her feelings of nothingness and meaninglessness by doing things, while Mack, who is not conscious of his dilemma, watches

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<sup>566</sup> Mason, "The Rookers," 25.

<sup>567</sup> Mason, "The Rookers," 22.

<sup>568</sup> Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness*, (Durham: Duke UP, 1992), 79.

<sup>569</sup> Mason, "The Rookers," 22.

what is taking place around him without trying to act positively to save his marriage and change his life. Additionally, Mack's behaviour with his wife's friends, who are called the "Rookers," indicates that he does not desire to integrate with the new emerging women of his society. When they come over, Mack does not join the group who plays rook, but rather he stays in the den watching TV and hardly emerges to talk to them. In point of fact, the only thing that keeps Mary Lou more powerful, sane, and happy is the existence of her friends, from whom she learns many interesting things. However, Mack is not satisfied with her new behaviour and tells her that "it is unhealthy for her to socialize with senior citizens."<sup>570</sup> These "Rookers" seem to fulfill his wife's desires and needs as a social creature.

Nevertheless, Mary Lou's failure to build a strong relationship with her husband makes her feel lonely, and she herself experiences moments of emptiness and loneliness, resembling the female character of Carver's "Cathedral." The readers sense her anxiety and pessimism in the scene when her brother phones her: "The man on the phone has a loud voice that blares out at her. He makes her guess who he is. He turns out to be Ed Williams, her long-lost brother. Mary Lou is speechless, having concluded several years ago that he must be dead."<sup>571</sup> The readers can infer that, like her husband, Mary Lou feels lonely to not hearing from her brother for nine years, especially while living with a man who unconsciously alienates himself from her.

Compared to Hemingway and Carver, Mason refers to the concept of death, which is the most tremendous incarnation of nothingness and nihilism. Mary Lou's thinking that her brother died years ago has led to her feelings of nothingness and nihilism because she has become afraid of death herself, as she knows that her life has become meaningless while seeing her family falling apart. Similar to the old man in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-

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<sup>570</sup> Mason, "The Rookers," 20.

<sup>571</sup> Mason, "The Rookers," 22-23.

Lighted Place,” Mack reaches the apogee of loneliness because he does not allow her to visit her brother in California without explaining the real reasons.

In fact, Judy’s lectures on the concept of quantum mechanics are the ‘tip of the iceberg’ in “The Rookers” because they explain the reasons for the characters’ feelings of existential depression and alienation. Defining to her parents what professor Bob calls quantum, Judy clarifies that it is “just the study of elementary particles- the littlest things in the world, smaller than atoms. There’s some things called photons that disappear if you look for them. Nobody can find them.... If you try to separate them, they disappear. They don’t even exist except in a group.”<sup>572</sup> Mack is confused and wants to know more by asking: “How do you know they’re there, then?”<sup>573</sup> Judy explains to him: “In quantum mechanics, there’s no final answer. Anything you look at might have a dozen different meanings. Bob says the new physics is discovering what the Eastern mystics have known all along...They know about them when they’re in bunches.”<sup>574</sup> Judy’s concept of quantum mechanics becomes a metaphor for the whole story because it stands for the breaking apart of the group or the family when its particles or members lose their meanings and functions. Thus, this imagery stimulates the readers’ imagination so that they can recognize and sense that the real reasons for Mack’s insularity are the falling apart of his family and his confusion about the new emerging values in his society.

Similar to Hemingway, Carver, and Ford, Mason is influenced by Heidegger’s philosophy of Being, in which the latter suggests that the question of being is connected to the idea of “belonging together.” Mason explains how her characters view the world around them and their relationship with each other. In contrast to Mack, Mary Lou applies what she learns from Judy about quantum mechanics to human beings’ relationships by stating to her

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<sup>572</sup>Mason, “The Rookers,” 27.

<sup>573</sup>Mason, “The Rookers,” 27.

<sup>574</sup>Mason, “The Rookers,” 28.

friends: “If you break up a group, the individuals could disappear out of existence. She has the unsettling thought that what is happening with Mack is that he is disappearing like that, disconnected from everybody, the way Ed did.”<sup>575</sup> According to her, Mack, who is becoming a little strange, will disappear from existence the way her brother disappeared from the country years ago. As a matter of fact, similar to Ed, who decides to leave his country and move to another place with the purpose of finding job opportunities and living freely with his lover and children, Mack is also distancing himself from his society in his search for peace and tranquillity. In this case, he resembles the unnamed narrator in Carver’s story, and the old man and the old waiter in Hemingway’s story. However, Mason’s characters fail to achieve their goals.

In this way, like the unnamed narrator in Carver’s “Cathedral,” the narrator in Ford’s “Great Falls,” and the old waiter in Hemingway’s “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” Mary Lou infers the idea that connection with a fellow human being is a necessity if someone wants to live in peace with himself and with others. Indeed, the narrator comments: “Sooner or later, she and Mack will have to face growing older together.”<sup>576</sup> In making an analogy between Judy’s definition of quantum mechanics and the narrator’s idea, the readers can deduce that Mack and Mary Lou have to live together and connect with their society if they want to exist.

Regarding this point, Wilhelm thinks: “As the reference to physics suggests, the basic problem for all of these characters is one of composition, integrating self with society and creating a convincing whole out of many disparate parts.”<sup>577</sup> In other words, these characters are unable to unite together to form a meaningful family because they need to forge new identities so as to integrate into the new, changing society. At this stage, the readers can feel Mary Lou’s sensory experience and achieve intellectual and personal growth by learning

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<sup>575</sup>Mason, “The Rookers,” 29.

<sup>576</sup> Mason, “The Rookers,” 22.

<sup>577</sup> Wilhelm, “Making over or Making off,” 78–79.

that a human being is a social creature that can exist only if he integrates with other human beings physically and emotionally.

In contrast to Hemingway's characters, due to their feelings of alienation and existential depression, Mason's characters experience an identity crisis, which reflects a common problem for American people during the 1980s. In fact, Mary Lou is able to compensate for her loss by joining a group of women and forging a new identity for herself in order to cope with a rapidly changing society. However, Mack does not try to join any group and begins to distance himself from society as a whole. Hence, while living in a world of rapid change, Mack suffers from an identity crisis because he has become shattered between the world he has known and the world he is living in right now. In this respect, Darlene Reimers Hill observes that "Mason's characters live in a protean world of rapid, dizzying change." They are primarily concerned with themselves and they search for ways to establish their identities in "the midst of constant flux, they seek to discover something to hold on to this modern emotional environment."<sup>578</sup> However, according to existentialism, in the world of nihilism, there is no objective truth. The narrator refers to this idea by informing the readers that, after reading carefully Judy's physics text, Mack tells Mary Lou: "I think I've found a mistake in this book."<sup>579</sup> Indeed, Mack's search for certainty is also reflected in his constant calling of the time and temperature number and his placing of great importance on the facts it gives—the exact time and the exact temperature.<sup>580</sup> Hence, like the old man in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," Mack is constantly searching for truth and certainty in an uncertain postmodern world.

Because Mack is unable to understand and accept the world around him, he isolates himself from his society to the extent that he does not want to talk to anyone, even his family

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<sup>578</sup> Darlene Reimers Hill, "'Use To, the Menfolks Would Eat First': Food and Food Rituals in the Fiction of Bobbie Ann Mason," *Southern Quarterly* 30, nos. 2–3 (winter–spring 1992), 83.

<sup>579</sup> Mason, "The Rookers," 31.

<sup>580</sup> Mason, "The Rookers," 33.

members. The narrator demonstrates that Mack has become even more unable to control his own behaviour by ending his story with this line: “She sees the way her husband is standing there, in a frozen pose. Mack looks as though he could stand there all night with the telephone receiver against his ear.”<sup>581</sup> This image prompts the readers to sense his existential depression, sadness, unhappiness, and failure to achieve his dreams and construct his own ordered world. Mack stays in a frozen position waiting for the light, similar to the old man in Hemingway’s “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place.”

Essentially, unlike the narrator in Carver’s “Cathedral,” Mack cannot give a new meaning to his life because he is unable to collaborate with others. As the reader’s activity becomes more strenuous, Iser believes that the reader receives to a greater degree the chief benefits of literary experience and he has the opportunity to “take a fresh look at the forces which guide and orient him, and which he may hitherto have accepted without question.”<sup>582</sup> These “forces” are the “thought systems” or “prevailing norms” that have provided the reader with “a framework for the social action”<sup>583</sup> and a basis for the conduct of human relations.<sup>584</sup> This open ending prompts the readers to build expectations and opinions about the deeper meaning of the story and become more aware of the conduct of human relations and their role in society as social creatures.

Therefore, influenced by existentialism, Mason depicts characters that experience alienation and existential depression in “The Rookers.” The third-person narrator depicts Mack’s alienation from his society and family because, like other Mason’s male characters, he is unable to cope with his society’s rapid changes. Mack cannot also find a new meaning to his life and he cannot move toward a higher level of understanding of himself and the world around him. His wife’s adoption of the new values of her society saves her from

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<sup>581</sup> Mason, “The Rookers,” 33.

<sup>582</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 74.

<sup>583</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 71.

<sup>584</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 73.

becoming isolated, and she is able to grasp the world around her and move on towards a more optimistic lifestyle. The narrator relies on gaps, implications, and imagery to convey meaning. While they are involved in the story's events, the readers can identify with the characters who experience these universal feelings of nothingness and hopelessness. They also grow intellectually as they learn that in order to live in peace, someone must establish new values and morals, and he must build emotional ties with his family and society members because a human being is a social creature.

The comparison of Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," Carver's "Cathedral," Ford's "Great Falls," and Mason's "The Rookers" shows that these writers adopted an existentialist approach to depicting the individual's feelings of alienation and existential depression. Such authorial choices tell us much about the reality of American society in the twentieth century, in particular, and human beings' predicament in general. Through their minimalist styles, which are based on omission, implication, and figures of speech, these writers are able to make readers not only apprehend inevitable human destiny, but also feel and imagine the characters' lives in the world of nothingness and nihilism. While filling in the gaps left by these writers, readers become engaged in the reconstruction of the stories' deeper meaning depending on their individual dispositions and background knowledge of American culture of the twentieth century. In fact, the characters represent alienated individuals who suffer from emotional isolation and existential depression. They are exposed to new changing values and traditions due to the process of modernization and technological development. Like Hemingway and Carver, Ford thinks that art, rather than religion, is the best method to provide consolation and redemption where life has become void of meaning in the world of nothingness.

Consequently, in these stories, the writers succeed in communicating their worldviews. They prompt the readers to share characters' emotional experiences. This is



because the texts are designed to activate their mental faculties. As a matter of fact, the writers' main theme involves readers in the world of nothingness and makes them more aware of the meaning of life and death and helps them take responsibility as they grow conscious of the complications of contemporary life. As such, they are ready to make their own choices and live peacefully with themselves and the world around them. Hemingway and the minimalist writers use art not only for the sake of art, but also to elicit emotional truth in their readers and teach them lessons on morality, existence, and the art of living in the modern world. In order to give meaning to their lives and escape the feeling of nothingness and nihilism, people have to cope with the development of their society by creating their own morals and values.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

**Masculinity and Violence in Ernest Hemingway's "An African Story,"  
Raymond Carver's "Pastoral," Richard Ford's "Communist," and  
Bobbie Ann Mason's "The Ocean"**

In spite of the fact that the body of literary masculinity constitutes a significant part of minimalist fiction, this field has remained largely unexplored. Such a situation prompts the exploration of the subject of masculinity and violence to show how the minimalist short story deviates from the traditional norms set by Ernest Hemingway's minimalist style to follow historical and cultural changes in American society. As Iser is interested in how texts affect readers and how they demand creative engagement through interpretation, it can be argued that the issue of gender is one of the themes that translates readers' emotions, promoting both a deeper understanding of the linguistic aspects of the text and a subjective

interpretation of implied readers, which is related to their socio-cultural and historical contexts.

Armengol sustains that gender, as a cultural prescription, has long been given special importance as a component of social and political life. It is one of the main factors that shape human beings' lives and one of "the main mechanism which determines the distribution of power" in societies.<sup>585</sup> No one denies the fact that gender issues played an important role in the making of modernism and its artistic creation. With regard to Hemingway's assumption, he depicts two main types of characters. In his Nick Adams stories, as well as others, he focuses on the growth and development of the code hero. In others he deals with the issues of family relationships, especially the emotional rupture between men and women.

According to Sanders, Hemingway has long received considerable acclaim from critics, due in part to his vision of modernity and his formation of what has become known as the "characteristic philosophy" of life, death, and art- the "Hemingway's Code" or "Hemingway's Code Heroes."<sup>586</sup> Furthermore, it is observable that Hemingway depicts in his works the psychological effects of violence on his characters in his descriptions of war, bullfighting, big-game hunting, and surviving in the wilderness. In this chapter, there is an emphasis on one of the most important thematic concerns that contributed to his fame; his stereotyping of masculinity and violence. Similarly, because there was a return to family issues with the rise of the Minimalist Movement, gender roles were given special importance by the minimalist writers, with a focus on how male violence led to family dissolution.

In this chapter, there is a comparison of Ernest Hemingway's "An African Story," Raymond Carver's "Pastoral," Richard Ford's "Communist," and Bobbie Ann Mason's "The Ocean." It is designed to demonstrate that these minimalist writers are influenced by Hemingway's method of expressing the thematic concern about masculinity and violence.

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<sup>585</sup> Armengol, "Gendering Men," 75–76.

<sup>586</sup> Sanders, "The Art of Existentialism," 172.

However, they all challenge the Hemingwaysque version of masculinity and violence as a test of manhood and heroism. As a result, the chapter aims to show how these writers portray masculinity and violence in the selected stories to implied readers and illustrate the similarities and differences between Hemingway's stereotyping of male violence and the minimalist writers. It also reveals the readers' responses to the evoked emotions and the writers' viewpoints with regard to the studied theme. In fact, the findings will substantiate that, since the social concept of masculinity is culture-specific and context-bound, its literary representation has changed from the period that separates Hemingway's short fiction and that of the Minimalist Movement. It reveals that the minimalist short stories of the 1970s revised the representation of male violence in American culture and literature. Thus, readers will gradually learn how to evaluate the socio-cultural and political values that exist in their societies. Besides, they will develop personally and emotionally alongside the characters, as well as learn how to live in the newly emerging societies. They will challenge traditional views of male power.

### **5.1 "The Greatest Hunting Battle:" Masculinity and Violence as a Test of Manhood and Heroism in Ernest Hemingway's "An African Story"**

Ernest Hemingway's life experiences, such as his travelling and living in different countries, his love of adventure, and his participation in wars, helped him develop his stoic style and understated "masculine" style. In this respect, Rena Sanderson retains that, by the early 1920s, Hemingway worked hard to deliberately "develop and embellish a masculine public image."<sup>587</sup> In reality, central to the study of his male character is his notion of the "code hero." Kevin A. Boon and Kevin Alexander Boon report that Hemingway defines it as: "the

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<sup>587</sup> Rena Sanderson, "Hemingway and Gender History," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hemingway*, ed. Scott Donaldson, (New York: Cambridge UP, 1998), 170.

code hero is a man who lives correctly, following the ideals of honor, courage and endurance in a world that is sometimes chaotic, often stressful, and always painful.”<sup>588</sup>

Moreover, La Rocque Du Bose thinks that Hemingway’s hero is considered a fictional character whose basic response to life appealed very strongly to the people of the 1920s.<sup>589</sup> According to Jeffrey Meyers, the “code” dictates that the hero acts honorably in the midst of what will be a losing battle. As a man of action, he gets involved in so-called manly activities to achieve his goals: to prove his manhood and his worth. The phrase “grace under pressure” is usually used to describe the conduct of the code hero, and his world is very often violent and disorderly.<sup>590</sup> Thus, the Hemingway hero is a man who has a strong personality and a body that enables him to face fear and death, but he has to act according to the code.

Hemingway’s “An African Story” best illustrates how his representation of masculinity and violence are closely linked to his notion of heroism. In this respect, Armengol thinks that Hemingway “represents his idea of hunting as a symbol of virility and heroism” in this story.<sup>591</sup> As with other stories, it seems meaningless because its main theme remains underneath the surface. Based on their background knowledge regarding Hemingway’s biography, the readers can infer that the story is drawn from his adventures in Africa. Hence, the third omniscient narrator starts his narration in *media-res*, giving no information about the characters’ histories, personalities, or physical appearances. The narrator deliberately omits key details and implies others so as to engage readers in the reconstruction of the story’s meaning, allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of the

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<sup>588</sup> Kevin A. Boon and Kevin Alexander Boon, *Ernest Hemingway: The Sun Also Rises and Other Works*, (New York: Cavendish, 2007), 143.

<sup>589</sup> La Rocque Du Bose, *For Whom the Bell Tolls: Notes*, (Lincoln, Neb: Wiley, 1965), 41.

<sup>590</sup> Jeffrey Meyers, *Ernest Hemingway: The Critical Heritage*, (1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1982, London and New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 313.

<sup>591</sup> Armengol, “Gendering Men,” 84.

behaviour of Hemingway's code hero, and build perspectives on Hemingway's viewpoint regarding the lives of American society during modernism.

Simply, the story narrates the hunting adventure of David, his father, and his friend Juma in an African forest. Explicitly, it tells us about their attempt to kill an old elephant with the purpose of gaining his big tusks and ivory. While filling in the gaps, it is expected that different readers can provide different interpretations. According to Iser, "one text is potentially capable of several different realizations," and more important, "no reading can ever exhaust the full potential" of a text.<sup>592</sup> Throughout the reading process, the readers are engaged in a comparative process between the characters so as to understand their personalities and their ways of viewing the world around them. The narrator does not only focus on showing the masculinity of his two experienced hunters, but he also makes the readers feel David's development and growth from a state of unconsciousness to a state of consciousness about the world of masculinity, violence, and heroism, though he is still a young boy.

The narrator describes the strength of the hunters and the power and elegance of the target elephant in many scenes so as to draw the readers' attention to the difficulty of the battle. The story begins with the scene when the boy, David, and his dog, Kibo, discover the place of the old elephant that has "great ears." David is also fascinated with his tusk. As he describes it: "his right tusk was as thick as his own thigh and it curved down almost to the ground."<sup>593</sup> Furthermore, when they camp in the forest, David learns that the old elephant is "close to two hundred. Bigger than anything I've ever seen. He says there's only been one greater elephant and he came from near here too."<sup>594</sup> These descriptions using visual images

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<sup>592</sup> Iser, *The Implied Reader*, 280.

<sup>593</sup> Ernest Hemingway, "An African Story," *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, (New York: Scribner's, 1987), 441.

<sup>594</sup> Hemingway, "An African Story," 443.

activate the readers' mental processes so that they can build different perspectives regarding the majesty of the old elephant and can foreshadow the danger of its hunting.

Likewise, while describing the hunters' way of following the elephant's trail, the narrator reveals the masculinity of the two experienced hunters: their courage, enthusiasm, and endurance. He points out that the "professional hunters" are experienced and knowledgeable in their field: "They knew everything the elephant had done, they pointed out the signs of it to each other without speaking and when the tracking became difficult his father always yielded to Juma."<sup>595</sup> Furthermore, when Juma and David's father follow the spoor of the elephant on an old elephant trail that is a hard-packed, worn road through the forest, the readers learn more about their strong personalities from the narrator's description: "Juma was very confident and they moved fast. Both his father and Juma seemed very sure of themselves and the going on the elephant road was so easy..."<sup>596</sup> Juma is a type of Hemingway hero who craves revenge and defeats the old elephant that killed hundreds of people to prove his manhood and heroism.<sup>597</sup> Hence, the readers learn much about the characters' heroic personalities and their experience in hunting and become curious to know who will be the winner in the battle.

Likewise, the narrator draws the readers' attention to David's powerlessness at the beginning of the journey in comparison with the other two hunters. For instance, while describing the characters' way to the broken country, the narrator makes the readers feel that David does not have the strength to resist sleepiness, hunger, and fatigue like the other professional hunters who are engaging in many manly activities. Progressively, David begins to understand that the difference between a boy and a man is not only the need for sleep, but that it is hunting that makes "the difference between a man and a boy."<sup>598</sup> In this respect,

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<sup>595</sup> Hemingway, "An African Story," 443.

<sup>596</sup> Hemingway, "An African Story," 444.

<sup>597</sup> Hemingway, "An African Story," 445.

<sup>598</sup> Hemingway, "An African Story," 442.

Armengol maintains that “despite the hunters’ purpose of killing the elephants for their tusks, the hunt is also shown to be a violent test of manhood.”<sup>599</sup> As opposed to his father and Juma, readers can detect that David has a sentimental and powerless personality. However, the narrator does not clarify the reasons for David’s feelings of betrayal, which overwhelm him throughout the journey. Yet, his repetition of the idea of “never telling them anything again” evokes in the readers emotions of depression, anger, and regret.

Although he knows that Juma and his father crave killing the old elephant in order to loot his ivory, David is not convinced that hunting is a good job. He also acknowledges that the death of the old elephant was an unjust action: “My father doesn’t need to kill elephants to live.”<sup>600</sup> In this way, David shows his sympathy for the old elephant, whom he considers to be “his brother” and “his friend.”<sup>601</sup> David’s thoughts provoke a feeling of sympathy toward him.

Nevertheless, the narrator turns the story into an unexpected direction by demonstrating that David is able to kill two spur fowl with his slingshot out of a small flock that walks across the trail.<sup>602</sup> In describing the birds’ deaths, the narrator states: “The birds had come into the old elephant trail to dust ... and when the pebble broke the back of one and the bird began to jerk and toss with its wings thumping, another bird ran forward to peck at it and David pouched another pebble and pulled it back and sent it against the ribs of the second bird.”<sup>603</sup> By using concrete words and visual images to describe the death of the births, the narrator activated the readers’ sense of urgency and immediacy. Thus, they can imagine the scene and form perspectives on David’s heroic character. As a reaction, David’s father congratulates him on his heroic action by telling him: “I’ve never seen that type of francolin

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<sup>599</sup> Armengol, “Gendering Men,” 84.

<sup>600</sup> Hemingway, “An African Story,” 445.

<sup>601</sup> Hemingway, “An African Story,” 445.

<sup>602</sup> Hemingway, “An African Story,” 443.

<sup>603</sup> Hemingway, “An African Story,” 443.



quite so high. You did very well to get a double on them;” “You were splendid today,” ... “I was very proud of you. So was Juma.”<sup>604</sup>

Following the killing of the birds, David begins to comprehend and feel the importance of doing something heroic. Before the start of the battle, the narrator makes the readers feel that David tries to understand why he has distinct emotions towards the old elephant by saying: “He tried to remember how he had felt. He had no love for the elephant yet. He must remember that. He had only a sorrow that had come from his own tiredness that had brought an understanding of age. Though being too young, he had learned how it must be to be too old.”<sup>605</sup> By trying to convince himself that he has become older than his age, David makes the readers understand that he is unconsciously moving from a state of adulthood to a state of manhood and that he is ready to engage in a decisive battle against the old elephant.

When the three hunters eventually find the old elephant, the battle proves extremely violent and bloody. Although David does not play a great role in the fighting, the narrator draws the readers’ attention to his feelings while watching it. David thinks: “They’d like to have killed him where they killed his friend. That would be a big joke. That would have pleased them. The god damned friend killers.”<sup>606</sup> The narrator’s report of David’s thoughts reinforces the idea of the traditional conception of Hemingway’s heroes.

Furthermore, the use of David’s voice in this description of the battle engages the readers to note the violent fighting. At the beginning of the battle, both Juma and the old elephant are wounded: “[t]here was plenty of blood. One stream as high as David’s head that had squirted bright on trunks and leaves and vines and another much lower that was dark

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<sup>604</sup>Hemingway, “An African Story,” 443.

<sup>605</sup>Hemingway, “An African Story,” 445.

<sup>606</sup>Hemingway, “An African Story,” 445.

and foul with stomach content.”<sup>607</sup> In addition, the narrator raises the readers’ empathy toward the old elephant when he states that the hunters find the old elephant anchored in “such suffering and despair that he could no longer move.”<sup>608</sup> David and his father ran along the heavily splashed blood trail until they find him out again. David, who stands watching, compares the old elephant to “a ship” whose blood comes from his flanks and runs down his sides. Without pity, his father raises his rifle and fires twice at the elephant, so that he is anchored with his shoulder broken. The narrator shows David’s sympathy for the old elephant that looks at him as if he is asking for help: “He did not move but his eye was alive and looked at David.”<sup>609</sup> The readers can expect David’s melancholy upon seeing his “friend” dying, but he cannot help him. This last image reveals the violent fighting against the old elephant and says much about the courage and strength of David’s father.

David feels pity for the old elephant and refuses to shoot him when his father orders him to. At this moment, despite the fact that he is wounded, Juma comes up limping and bloody, and then he takes the rifle from David without speaking, and fires twice at the old elephant. Juma, Hemingway’s hero, seems to prefer death to humiliation. The narrator describes the death of the old elephant using visual images so as to provoke the readers’ imagination while focusing on the effects of the violent scene on David: “The eye of the elephant had opened wide on the first shot and then started to glaze and blood came out of the ear and ran in two bright streams down the wrinkled gray hide .... Now all the dignity and majesty and all the beauty were gone from the elephant and he was a huge wrinkled pile.”<sup>610</sup> Therefore, after several attempts, the two hunters were able to kill the old elephant. Although the description of the elephant’s death provokes the readers’ empathy for him, it

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<sup>607</sup> Hemingway, “An African Story,” 446.

<sup>608</sup> Hemingway, “An African Story,” 446.

<sup>609</sup> Hemingway, “An African Story,” 446.

<sup>610</sup> Hemingway, “An African Story,” 446.

also makes the readers feel the heroic character of the two hunters. The readers can suggest several interpretations while expressing their distinct viewpoints regarding the violent act of hunting and the characters' heroism, depending on their individual experiences in the world of adventure.

Although David did not participate in the battle, its events affect him psychologically. That evening, when they sit by the fire, he looks so sad and he cannot believe that Juma was able to kill the old elephant because he was old and tired. Unsurprisingly, despite the fact he considers the old elephant his brother and his friend; he now describes him as "his hero," alongside his father and Juma.<sup>611</sup> David wishes that the old elephant would have killed Juma because he has started to hate Juma after his violent action against the old elephant.<sup>612</sup> The narrator's description of David's feelings provokes the readers' empathy for the young adult who has just witnessed a cold-blooded murder. He also evokes in the readers his emotions of sadness, depression, and melancholy after that horrifying event. The readers are compelled to form perspectives on the effects of this scene on David, and they anticipate the upcoming events.

The narrator surprises the readers and turns the story into an unexpected direction by detailing David's eventual understanding of the battle. In spite of the fact that David seems affected by the death of the old elephant, he soon turns his attention to the winners. The narrator reports that when they are finally back safely with the tall and thick tusks, they are welcomed by the natives as heroes.<sup>613</sup> In explaining the relationship between the hunting act and Hemingway's heroes, Armengol contends that, in this story, "hunting seems to be represented as a form of pitting man against nature, which is finally submitted and tamed by male violence."<sup>614</sup> Although the narrator draws the readers' attention to David's dissident

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<sup>611</sup> Hemingway, "An African Story," 447.

<sup>612</sup> Hemingway, "An African Story," 447.

<sup>613</sup> Hemingway, "An African Story," 447.

<sup>614</sup> Armengol, "Gendering Men," 84.

voice while narrating his story, Armengol views that the emphasis of the story is not on the “‘dissident’ comment on the hunting, but rather on the celebration of the hunt as a spectacle and performance of beauty, masculinity and heroism.”<sup>615</sup> This means that Hemingway’s story does not offer any challenge to male violence and heroism in American fiction. Thus, Hemingway’s characters engage in a dangerous excursion and a bloody battle in order to prove their superiority and heroic masculinity.

Although David shows his sympathy for the old elephant throughout the story, he seems happy to have participated in the adventure because he feels that “Juma and his father and he were heroes and Kibo was a hero’s dog and the men who carried the tusks were heroes.”<sup>616</sup> Then David accepts to make peace and celebrate the heroic action by drinking beer from gourd cups that are brought by a young girl and her younger brother, “the servant of heroes.”<sup>617</sup> David experiences the beauty of heroism as he experiences the beauty of the old elephant before being killed. The narrator illuminates this experience: “But he did not know that nothing would ever be as good as that again.”<sup>618</sup> Indeed, the story ends with the celebration of the three heroes for their great defeat of the old elephant, who had been the target of many hunters for five years. Iser trusts that not only does literature “call into question”<sup>619</sup> conventional notions of validity and coherence, but also promotes change and growth in the individual, as he states:

The significance of the work does not lie in the meaning sealed within the text, but in the fact that the meaning brings out what had previously been sealed within us. When the subject is separated from him- self, the resultant spontaneity is guided and shaped by the text in such a way that it is transformed into a new and real consciousness. Thus each text constitutes its own reader... This structure pinpoints the reciprocity between the constituting

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<sup>615</sup> Armengol, “Gendering Men,” 85.

<sup>616</sup> Hemingway, “An African Story,” 447.

<sup>617</sup> Hemingway, “An African Story,” 447.

<sup>618</sup> Hemingway, “An African Story,” 445.

<sup>619</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 61.

of meaning and the heightening of self-awareness which develops in the reading process.<sup>620</sup>

Therefore, like Hemingway hero, readers are expected to grow as they become more aware of American's society's concept of masculinity and violence at the beginning of the twentieth century.

All in all, in Hemingway's "An African Story," the omniscient narrator recounts David's adventure with his father and Juma in an African forest. By omitting some details and implying others, the narrator compels the readers to engage in the reconstruction of the story's meaning. He makes them feel more than they understand the personalities of Hemingway's heroes, who crave to prove their masculinity and violence and achieve their goals. Even though David uncovers his compassion for the old elephant throughout the story, he reaches an understanding of masculinity and heroism. The readers can deduce that the professional hunters have no pity for animals and are only interested in gaining their ivory and tusks. This suggests that people who inhabit the modern world have become more materialistic, living at the expense of their emotions. In reality, following his predecessors, Hemingway does not offer any challenge to male violence and heroism in American fiction, but rather seems to reinforce the traditional conception of violence and hunting as symbols of virility and heroism, as is the case with his other works of fiction.

However, through the use of his minimalist style to communicate his theme of masculinity and violence, he enables the readers to gain aesthetic response. The readers grow intellectually and emotionally alongside the characters as they learn much about the code heroes' adventures and male attitudes in American society during the 1920s.

## **5.2 "Is Harold a Hero?: Masculinity and Violence in Postmodernism as Depicted in Raymond Carver's "Pastoral"**

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<sup>620</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 157-159.

In spite of the fact that Raymond Carver did not focus in his writing on male protagonists, like in Hemingway's adventure stories, he also produced outstanding stories about hunting and fishing expeditions, such as: "The Aficionados," "Pastoral," "The Calm," and "So Much Water so Close to Home." However, in contrast to Hemingway, Carver did not subscribe to the ideals of the code hero because he devoted his writing to the depiction of the American people during the period of economic and social disenchantment, and spiritual bareness of the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. In this respect, Lainsbury explains: "the unity provided by the figure of the hero, a being endowed with a sense of self-possession and purpose, is no longer a plausible structural principle for a writer concerned with a true representation of the spirit of his time."<sup>621</sup> Likewise, in Sam Halpert's book, *Raymond Carver: An Oral Biography*, Carver confirmed that this rejection was closely allied to his "sense of life": he honored "the virtue of endurance, just staying alive in the world."<sup>622</sup> This means that Carver's sense of life influenced his fiction, as he believed that the notion of heroism was ideal in the world of spiritual bareness and financial hardship.

Unsurprisingly, Bethea argues that, although Carver learned much from Hemingway's style, he started his career by mocking the quiet heroism of Hemingway's code hero in his adventure story, "The Aficionados."<sup>623</sup> Moreover, Meyer points out that Carver's story "Pastoral" is also viewed by many critics as a parody of Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River."<sup>624</sup> Indeed, the comparative study of Hemingway's "An African Story" and Carver's "Pastoral" aims to prove the idea that Carver challenges Hemingway's version of masculinity and violence as a test of manhood and heroism.

Similar to Hemingway's "An African Story," Carver's "Pastoral" is an adventure story, which is shaped like an "iceberg," for the reason that its main theme of masculinity

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<sup>621</sup> Lainsbury, *The Carver Chronotope*, 9.

<sup>622</sup> Halpert, *Raymond Carver: An Oral Biography*, 155.

<sup>623</sup> Bethea, "Raymond Carver's Inheritance," 89.

<sup>624</sup> Meyer, *Raymond Carver*, 27.

and violence is seven-eighths submerged. Furthermore, Harold's marital conflict is implied throughout the text to intensify the suspense. The third-person narrator focuses on showing the characters' actions, gestures, and behaviors in order to force the readers to interpret them so as to understand the character's emotional states. In most of Carver's stories, male violence generally ends with family dissolution. Yet, in "Pastoral," Carver reveals how the protagonist, Harold, wants to prove his masculinity and heroism by going on a fishing expedition as he used to do in the past, but the appearance of a wounded doe and her hunters disrupts his fishing expedition and leads to his loss of heroism and virility.

The narrator starts his story in *media-res* without giving the readers any information about the histories or personalities of his characters. Right from the opening paragraph, the narrator draws the readers' attention to the masculinity of the protagonist Harold who plans to go fishing in the cold weather: "When he came out of the cafe it had stopped snowing and the sky was clearing over behind the hills on the other side of the river. He stopped beside the car for a minute and stretched, holding the door half open, yawning a big mouthful of cold air. He'd swear he could almost taste it."<sup>625</sup> This description of the snowy weather and its coldness using concrete words incites the readers to visualize the scene so as to infer how courageous and ambitious Harold is. Despite the fact that the narrator does not explain that Harold is subject to a marital conflict, he gives plenty of clues to the readers to make them aware of its effects on Harold and its connection to the fishing trip.

Furthermore, the narrator elaborates on how Harold is looking forward to starting doing something tomorrow, even if the weather is very cold: "he would still have a couple of good hours this afternoon. Then there was tomorrow. All day tomorrow. Just thinking about it was something."<sup>626</sup> The repetition of the word "tomorrow" increases the readers'

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<sup>625</sup> Raymond Carver, "Pastoral," in *Raymond Carver: Collected Stories*, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 2009), 193.

<sup>626</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 193.

curiosity to know what Harold is planning to do tomorrow. The readers can also infer that Harold is very enthusiastic and has a significant goal for his trip.

Definitely, the narrator directs the readers' attention to make a connection between Harold's fishing trip and his marital conflict. While travelling, Harold admires the beautiful landscape and remembers how he used to enjoy looking at it with his wife, Frances, years ago. The readers learn that Harold and Frances have a marital conflict because she does not want to accompany him: "It was a shame she hadn't decided to come along. Thinking about it, he edged a little in the seat, stroked his chin."<sup>627</sup> By interpreting Harold's gestures, the readers can deduce that he is suffering from depression.

Arriving at the Deluxe Cabins Office, Harold remembers his wife, Frances, when she used to accompany him to this place: "The last time he'd been here, Frances and he, three years ago that fall, they'd stayed for three days and he'd landed five nice fish in the hole downriver. They used to come often, two or three times a year."<sup>628</sup> The narrator implies that Harold longs for the days when he could spend time with his wife. Thus, in the company of his wife, Harold was able to prove his manhood, strength, and heroism by hunting five fish.

Additionally, Harold's encounter with a young couple on his way to the cabin plays a significant role in understanding his dilemma. The narrator describes the scene: "He noticed the way the man held her arm as they went down the stairs."<sup>629</sup> By analogy, this scene makes the readers imagine the way Harold enjoyed happy times when he used to come with his wife to this place and intensifies feelings of empathy for him. They can detect that his fishing trip will have an emotional effect on him because it signifies a return to the positive feelings toward his wife. In other words, he returns to nature, seeking tranquillity and calmness while recollecting his happy memories.

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<sup>627</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 193.

<sup>628</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 193.

<sup>629</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 194.



Although Harold feels lonely now, he still wants to test his manhood and heroism through fishing. The servant also reminds him about his wife while guiding him towards his room by saying: "I'm just sorry the missus couldn't come," ... Does not seem right."<sup>630</sup> The servant's questions demonstrate her astonishment at seeing Harold alone and invite the readers to suggest that this is the first time Harold has come without his beloved wife. Readers may question his capacity to achieve his goals while depressed.

When Harold unloads his baggage from his car, he enters his cabin and sets everything in place. He is happy to have finally settled down: "he was glad he'd come. And he still had a couple of good hours left this afternoon. Then tomorrow."<sup>631</sup> This indicates that Harold is looking forward to relaxation and proving his masculinity and heroism as he used to in the past. However, when he goes to bed, he wishes Frances was with him to talk to because he feels lonely. As a result, the readers learn that he still has strong feelings towards her, though she urged him to go fishing and refused to accompany him this time. This makes the readers more aware that Harold comes to the same cabin in an attempt to satisfy his emotional desires while remembering Frances because so far he does not say anything about his heroic achievements in the past.

Although it is very cold outside, he decides to walk out for a while during the first night. The narrator reports the scene as follows: "The cold air stung his cheeks and pinched his nostrils together, but it felt good."<sup>632</sup> As with Hemingway's characters in "An African Story," Harold demonstrates that he is happy to walk despite the coldness of the weather during the night to show his strength and courage. He is very enthusiastic about starting a new day tomorrow: "He still had tomorrow. Or it was today."<sup>633</sup> In fact, he gets up early the next day, though it is almost dark in the cabin.

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<sup>630</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 196.

<sup>631</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 197.

<sup>632</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 197.

<sup>633</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 198.

Compared to Hemingway's "An African Story," the narrator draws the readers' attention to Harold's heroic adventure, which starts on his way to the cold river. The road to the river is difficult to walk on because, as the narrator states: "Under the trees the snow lay drifted around grotesque, frozen bushes...it was thick with pine needles that crunched into crunched into the snow under his boots."<sup>634</sup> Harold's insistence on walking on this road alludes to his courage and strength. In addition, he wants to prove that he is a hero because he will fish in a cold river. According to Meyer, he "is described in terms reminiscent of the chivalric tradition"; he holds his heavy rod "under his arm like it was a lance ... and he'd imagine himself in the lists coming down on his opponents."<sup>635</sup> The readers learn that Harold looks like a hero who is already prepared to wage a war against his enemies. This reveals that, similar to Hemingway's characters in "An African Story," he is eager to use violence to achieve his goals.

He also dreams that he will celebrate his heroism: "The jays at the crowded edge of the woods screaming for him. Then, when it was over, he would sing something as loud as he could."<sup>636</sup> In other words, he wants to fish in the river and refresh his spirit. Although the river looks impossibly cold and the rocks are sharp and slippery to walk on, he is able to wade into the river while holding his breath for the cold water shock.<sup>637</sup> Even if he does not catch any fish after spending some time fishing, he begins "to feel some of the old excitement coming back."<sup>638</sup> The readers learn that Harold is a self-confident fisherman; he seems happy to wade the cold river and remember his old achievements.

Nevertheless, the narrator turns the story's events into an unexpected direction by informing the readers that Harold's feelings of peace and tranquillity are rudely interrupted

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<sup>634</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 199.

<sup>635</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 199; Meyer, *Raymond Carver*, 81.

<sup>636</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 199.

<sup>637</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 200.

<sup>638</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 200.

by the appearance of a wounded doe and its hunters. As with Hemingway's "An African Story," male violence against animals is carried out by the hunters whom Harold saw yesterday in the office. The narrator does not report the scene of the hunters while shooting the doe, but he informs the readers that Harold heard several shots in the morning and while taking a rest.

Furthermore, the narrator shows the effects of violence on the doe while being observed by Harold in order for the readers to register their reactions. The narrator objectively describes the scene: "He'd just changed flies and made the first cast when he saw the deer. It stumbled out of the brush upriver and onto the little beach, nodding and twisting its head, streaming long ropes of white mucus. Its left hind leg was broken and dragged behind."<sup>639</sup> Moreover, the wounded doe crosses the river "slipping and almost falling" until she reaches the shallow water on Harold's side. Seeing her coming out twisting her head and shaking, he feels pity for her and screams: "Dirty bastards."<sup>640</sup> This description of the wounded doe using concrete words and visual images stimulates the readers' imaginations so that they visualize the scene, feel empathy for her, and understand Harold's responses toward her situation. They can detect that he has anti-hunter sentiments and he considers violence against animals an awful thing, like David in "An African Story." Thus, the readers become convinced that he goes fishing in order to relax more than to prove his heroism, as opposed to the characters in Hemingway's "An African Story" who do not feel relaxed until they kill the old elephant.

Furthermore, the image of the wounded doe affects Harold so that he has a bad taste in his stomach. Although he eats his sandwich slowly, he feels it is dry and he does not enjoy it. Yet, he forces himself to eat while trying not to think about the deer.<sup>641</sup> Hence, learning

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<sup>639</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 201.

<sup>640</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 201.

<sup>641</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 201.

about the effects of the wounded doe on him, the readers can feel his depression, sadness, and sensitivity. He remembers that he was a hero because he caught five fish last year when he came with Frances. However, this time he fails to catch any fish since it is colder now. Overwhelmed by feelings of failure and depression, he first decides to build a fire, and then he thinks that he will not stay much longer.<sup>642</sup> His decision turns the story into an unexpected direction and surprises the readers, who may inquire about his ability to regain his courage and strength.

Additionally, Harold's day is spoiled by the appearance of the young hunters who are chasing the wounded doe. They are equipped with what they need as hunters, and all of them wear what resemble holsters or knife sheaths on their sides, and only one of them has a rifle. They are very serious and enthusiastic about finding her, and they insist on Harold telling them where the wounded doe goes because they know he has an answer. Nevertheless, he begs them to leave her because her leg was almost shot off.<sup>643</sup>

Indeed, the narrator puts more emphasis on describing the dialogue and the barbaric behaviour of the hunters without expressing their emotions. Moreover, he prompts the readers to interpret their meaning and infer their impact on Harold. One of the hunters tells Harold: "He's pretty smart, ain't he, Jule? Tell us where it went, you sonofabitch!"<sup>644</sup> Another "point[s] the barrel somewhere at his stomach, or lower down maybe ...."<sup>645</sup> What is alarming is that the leader threatens him to shoot him as he did with the doe, while the other boys start throwing rocks at him.<sup>646</sup> Overwhelmed by his feelings of fear and shame, "Harold nod[s] his head dreamily. He [keeps] feeling like he [wants] to yawn, opening and closing his mouth."<sup>647</sup> The boys continue threatening him by warning him: "You did not

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<sup>642</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 201.

<sup>643</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 202.

<sup>644</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 202.

<sup>645</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 203.

<sup>646</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 203.

<sup>647</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 203.

want to fish here anyway, did you?"<sup>648</sup> For the boys, this dramatic scene is just a joke, yet for Harold, who thinks that he has been shot, as Ewing Campbell notes, it is quite serious and menacing: "In the unexpected confrontation between the imaginary good old days and the vulgar reality of the present, he stands like a stag brought up to bay by the hounds."<sup>649</sup> This menacing scene involves the readers into the story and makes them feel how impolite and violent these boys are. Harold's silence implies that he is shocked to know that the world around him has changed and has become more complicated.

By the end of the story, Harold proves to have a weak personality because he is unable to defeat the hunters, as opposed to Hemingway's characters in "An African Story." When he returns to his lodge, Harold remembers that he has lost his rod. Campbell maintains that his fishing rod symbolically refers to "the weapon of knighthood and the emblem of male virility."<sup>650</sup> Hence, as opposed to Hemingway's characters in "An African Story," Harold will not celebrate his heroism because he loses the battle in which he is supposed to prove his masculinity.

Besides, the boys' gestures, insults, and violence against the deer make him feel that the pastoral is no longer a good place to heal the psychological wounds he is suffering from. The narrator alludes to this point in the final lines of the story by saying: "Somehow he had missed it and it was gone. Something heroic. He didn't know what he was going to do. He couldn't very well go home. Slow, thick flakes sifted down through the freezing air, sticking on his coat collar, melting cold and wet against his face. He stared at the wordless, distorted things around him."<sup>651</sup> Thus, Harold cannot realize his dream as he ends up in despair and loneliness. The new emerging civilisation has destroyed the natural environment that was

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<sup>648</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 203.

<sup>649</sup> Ewing Campbell, *Raymond Carver: A Study of the Short Fiction*, (New York: Twayne, 1992), 5.

<sup>650</sup> Campbell, *Raymond Carver*, 7.

<sup>651</sup> Carver, "Pastoral," 204.

once a place of calmness and tranquillity. The snowy, freezing air stands metaphorically for his stagnation and helplessness in the new distorted world.

By and large, in comparison to Hemingway's "An African Story," Carver deals with the theme of masculinity and violence in "Pastoral." In both stories, the characters want to prove their masculinity and heroism by going on expeditions in the forest. In "Pastoral," Harold goes on a fishing trip, thinking that the natural environment can help him recover from his psychological wounds after having a marital conflict with his wife. During his first day, Harold seems very enthusiastic about re-experiencing the feeling of heroism and tranquillity as he did in the past few years. However, the violent male hunters threaten his life and compel him to go back home earlier. In so doing, they destroyed his dream. Thus, like Hemingway, Carver deals with the theme of masculinity and violence; nevertheless, he does not celebrate violence as a test of male virility and heroism. In point of fact, Carver makes the readers more aware of the new ideals of masculinity that have emerged in postmodern society. The writers' minimalist styles allow them to convey authentic emotions and engage the readers in the reconstruction of the meaning of their stories so that they can experience an aesthetic response.

### **5.3 "Most Hunting is Only Shooting": Les' Rejection of Masculinity and Violence as a Test of Manhood and Heroism in Richard Ford's "Communist"**

Like in Hemingway's short fiction, Ford's stories are peopled with male protagonists who are always engaged in manly activities such as sports, hunting, boxing, and fishing. As such, violence is also one of his thematic concerns, which is associated with masculinity. In this regard, critic Ned Stuckey-French believes that "allusion to violence, or the threat of

violence...is often there and then the story unfolds.”<sup>652</sup> Hemingway’s “An African Story,” unlike Ford’s “Communist,” deals with the theme of masculinity and violence in a way that Ford's does not. Ford’s story questions this traditional conception by revealing the gradual demise of this archaic association between masculinity and violence.

In “Communist,” Les, who is forty-one, tells a story within a story while recounting a turning point event in his life, which happened in 1961 when he was just sixteen years old. The recounted event was important to the whole family, especially to him, because it taught him how to encounter the world of violence and forced him to enter into a world that he had not yet experienced. He starts his story in *media-res* without informing the readers about the characters’ histories or personalities. The story is shaped like an ‘iceberg’ for the reason that its main theme and characters’ feelings and emotions are left beneath the surface of things. By omitting some details and implying others, the narrator propels the readers to engage in the construction of the story’s deeper meaning and feel the characters’ emotional states. The narrator rejects the masculine violence that he learned from his father and Glen Baxter, revealing how male violence leads to the emotional rupture between his mother and her friend.

Furthermore, as is the case in Ford’s stories in *Rock Springs*, the narrator’s choice of the setting in Great Falls alludes to the falling apart of Les’s family after the death of his father. The readers learn that when he was sixteen years old, he lived with his mother in the little house where his father had once lived. His mother, who was aged thirty-two, did part-time waitressing work up in Great Falls, and she used to go to the bars in the evening, where she spent nights with her friend, Glen Baxter. Moreover, Les affirms that he hated Glen, but he does not explain the reasons.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>652</sup> Ned Stuckey-French, “An Interview with Richard Ford,” in *Conversations with Richard Ford*, ed. Huey Guagliardo, (Jackson: Mississippi UP, 2000), 106.

<sup>653</sup> Richard Ford, “Communist,” in *Rock Springs*, (London: Collins Harvill, 1988), 225–226.

In addition, Les understood his mother's need to have a love relationship with a man as she was still young, though she seemed unsatisfied with her behaviour with Glen: "I think she probably thought that what she was doing was terrible, but simply couldn't help herself. I thought it was all right, though. Regular life it seemed and she still does. She was young, and I knew that even then."<sup>654</sup> Consequently, the readers become curious to know the causes of the mother's feelings and anticipate how things will end with her lover.

Glen was a self-proclaimed labor organizer and a communist whose view of the world could not be imagined by Les. He was a Westerner who worked as a ditcher on wheat farms and spent the winters drinking with women like Eileen, who had jobs and money. Historically, during the 1960s, American communists were harassed and were obliged to bear arms to protect themselves. Glen was a communist who was afraid to be killed, and his way of life was not an uncommon way of life to lead in Montana.<sup>655</sup>

Therefore, the story's title, "Communist," is suggestive as it alludes to violence. Hence, in making a connection between the thematic concern of the story and its title, Glen could be described as a violent man who used violence to protect himself. He was also interested in showing his masculinity through violent actions, much like Hemingway's characters in "An African Story."

The focal story began when Glen invited Les and his mother to go hunting on a Saturday in November 1961. In fact, Glen loved hunting: "Glen Baxter was a communist and liked hunting, which he talked about a lot."<sup>656</sup> His father also taught him to hunt and box, an equally violent sport.<sup>657</sup> Thus, like the characters in Hemingway's "An African Story," Ford's characters like hunting as a test of their masculinity. Because Les grew up in

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<sup>654</sup> Ford, "Communist," 226.

<sup>655</sup> Ford, "Communist," 226.

<sup>656</sup> Ford, "Communist," 226.

<sup>657</sup> Ford, "Communist," 236.



an environment that encouraged violent activities, the readers can expect him to follow Glen and his father's traditional concept of male violence.

For a period of time, as Les first mentions, his mother did not see Glen because they had a fight.<sup>658</sup> When Glen returned to Illinois, his mother knew other men, and she used to enter late at night and stay watching television and drinking beer.<sup>659</sup> The woman's infidelity makes the readers sense that she had an insecure relationship with Glen and that she was living a meaningless life while looking to satisfy her desires after the death of her husband. This information invites the readers to imagine what could happen when they meet again.

Like his father and Glen, Les loved hunting and wanted to savour the occasion of accompanying Glen to hunt snow geese, despite his mother's refusal.<sup>660</sup> Glen also invited Eileen to accompany them so as to see "dead animals." Yet, she got angry because, unlike him, she did not like violent actions against animals. Moreover, Les observed that "she was so mad at him. I would've thought she'd be glad to see him. But she just suddenly seemed to hate everything about him."<sup>661</sup> His observation confirms that his mother had started to hate Glen and that their love relationship was deteriorating. While driving through Great Falls, Les gives the readers plenty of clues to make them feel more than understand his mother's attitudes towards Glen. For example, he says: "My mother sat in the backseat of Glen's Nash and looked out the window while we drove."<sup>662</sup> Moreover, he affirms that they stayed silent for a long time: "My mother did not say anything for a long time, and neither did I."<sup>663</sup> In addition, Eileen only showed little interest in Glen when she was curious to know where he had been for three months and what he planned to do in Douglas,

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<sup>658</sup> Ford, "Communist," 226.

<sup>659</sup> Ford, "Communist," 226.

<sup>660</sup> Ford, "Communist," 227.

<sup>661</sup> Ford, "Communist," 228.

<sup>662</sup> Ford, "Communist," 229.

<sup>663</sup> Ford, "Communist," 229.

Wyoming.<sup>664</sup> As such, the narrator leaves the emotional states of the characters beneath the surface of things.

Unlike his mother, Les felt happy and motivated as it was his first time on an actual hunt: “And I was excited. I had a feeling that something important was about to happen to me, and this would be a day I would always remember.”<sup>665</sup> He felt that he would experience another world while hunting. Hence, like David in “An African Story,” he desired to prove his masculinity through hunting.

Indeed, the story depicts one of the negative impacts of the Vietnam War on American people and their behaviour: massive violence and the people’s fear from its repressions. Glen’s practices and attitudes reveal his violent behaviour and weak personality, which he acquired when he was a soldier in this war. He used to kill different kinds of animals when he was in Vietnam, such as pheasants, ducks, deer, monkeys, and beautiful parrots, “using military guns just for sport.”<sup>666</sup> When the group reached the target area of hunting, Glen declared that “most hunting isn’t even hunting. It’s only shooting.”<sup>667</sup> In fact, Eileen did not like her son to follow Glen as he used to commit things against the law, and she warned him: “Les, Glen’s going to poach here,” .... I just want you to know that, because that’s a crime and the law will get you for it. If you’re a man now, you’re going to have to face the consequences.”<sup>668</sup> Ford’s “Communist,” like “Great Falls,” reflects Ford’s influence by Nietzsche’s existentialist philosophy on the death of God and its effects on people’s behavior. The readers can detect that Glen did not believe in the existence of God and that he permitted himself to do whatever he wanted, as he paid no dues for the moral and traditional values of his society. Thus, the readers can expect that his cruel, violent, and barbaric

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<sup>664</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 229.

<sup>665</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 229.

<sup>666</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 226.

<sup>667</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 233.

<sup>668</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 231.

personality is one of the reasons for his failure to establish a strong love relationship with Eileen.

Furthermore, Glen is described as a wicked man who does not deserve the heroic character. He informed Les that Communists were always in danger, and he showed him the butt of a pistol that he hid under his shorts to protect himself from his political enemies. He explained to Les: “There were people who want to kill me right now ... and I would kill a man myself if I thought I had to.”<sup>669</sup> In reality, similar to Hemingway’s male characters in “An African Story,” Glen was afraid of death, and he was eager to resort to violence to protect himself. Accordingly, the readers can expect that his violent actions during hunting were influenced by his phobia. While telling Glen about the protection method, Les reported to Glen that his father taught him boxing.<sup>670</sup> Hence, the readers learn that these men are confident and strong, and they expect them to be good hunters.

As with David in Hemingway’s “An African Story,” who was fascinated with the elegance and beauty of the old elephant, Les seemed fascinated with the sound and beauty of the geese, as he describes them: “I stood and listened to the high-pitched shouting sound ... a sound that meant great numbers and that made your chest rise and your shoulders tighten with expectancy. It was a sound to make you feel separate from it and everything else, as if you were of no importance in the grand scheme of things.”<sup>671</sup> The repetition of the word “sound” creates auditory imagery that attracts the readers’ attention and stimulates their mental processes so that they can visualize the scene and feel the beauty of the sound and the enormity of the geese. Glen informed Les that there were a “[f]ive thousands.... More than you can believe when you see them.”<sup>672</sup> This detail makes the readers more aware of the strength of the adversary of these hunters. Similar to David in Hemingway’s “An African

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<sup>669</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 232.

<sup>670</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 233.

<sup>671</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 234.

<sup>672</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 234.

Story,” Les expresses his fascination with the prettiness of his enemies after seeing them: “It was such a thing to see, a view I had never seen and have not since.”<sup>673</sup> He also felt that it was essential for them to shoot the geese because he was interested in experiencing the hunting act.<sup>674</sup>

As with Hemingway’s “An African Story,” the hunting battle was bloody and violent. Les was first frightened by hearing the noise of the geese and Glen’s violent shooting at them: “And then I heard the geese again, their voices in unison, louder and shouting, as if the wind had changed again and put all new sounds in the cold air. And then a *boom*.”<sup>675</sup> Unfolding Glen’s enthusiasm, Les states: “Glen looks back at me and his face was distorted and strange. The air around him was full of white rising geese and he seemed to want them all.”<sup>676</sup> The readers become cognizant of the horrifying scenes of hunting. Essentially, comparable to Hemingway’s characters in “An African Story,” Glen was able to test his masculinity through violence and heroism.

In his turn, Les expressed his desire to prove his masculinity by killing as many geese as possible, like Glen: “The air around me vibrated and I could feel the wind from their wings and it seemed to me I could kill as many as the times I could shoot –a hundred or a thousand– and I raised my gun, put the muzzle on the head of a white goose and fired.”<sup>677</sup> In fact, similar to David in “An African Story,” Les was glad to have killed two geese on his first experience of hunting. He became happier when his mother and Glen admired his achievements. Thus, he was proud of his achievements and his unforgettable experience in hunting geese.<sup>678</sup>

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<sup>673</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 234.

<sup>674</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 235.

<sup>675</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 237.

<sup>676</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 237.

<sup>677</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 237.

<sup>678</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 238.

The conversation over the white wounded goose developed into a dispute and ended the relationship between Glen and Eileen forever. His cruelty reached its climax when he insisted on leaving the wounded goose dying on the freezing lake, and he violently prevented Les from bringing it, as Les narrates: "I started to go, but Glen Baxter suddenly grabbed me by my shoulder and pulled me back hard, so hard his fingers made bruises in my skin that I saw later."<sup>679</sup> Glen's heartless reaction towards the wounded goose and his violent action against Les antagonized Eileen, who gave him a cold look and insulted him: "You don't have a heart, Glen ... There's nothing to love in you. You're just a son of a bitch, that's all."<sup>680</sup> In this case, the readers become more curious to know Glen's reaction after she directly ended her relationship with him.

Overwhelmed by feelings of depression and anger, Glen resorted to violence again in his last attempt to prove his masculinity. He started to shoot the wounded goose with his pistol repeatedly like an enraged assassin until he run out of bullets: "...he shot it three times more until the gun was empty and the goose's head was down and it was floating towards the middle of the lake where it was empty and dark blue."<sup>681</sup> After brutally killing the white goose, he turned around to Eileen to tell her: "Now who has a heart?" But she was not there as she had already started back to the car and she had become invisible in the darkness.<sup>682</sup> This indicates that she decided to abandon him forever, as she claimed: "A light can go out in the heart."<sup>683</sup> In this respect, Armengol sustains that "Eileen, opting for moral responsibility rather than violence, realized that there is nothing to love in Baxter."<sup>684</sup> In response to her behaviour, he also expressed his desire to abandon her, as he told Les: "There're limits to everything, right... Your mother's a beautiful woman, but she's not the

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<sup>679</sup> Ford, "Communist," 241.

<sup>680</sup> Ford, "Communist," 241.

<sup>681</sup> Ford, "Communist," 241-242.

<sup>682</sup> Ford, "Communist," 242.

<sup>683</sup> Ford, "Communist," 242.

<sup>684</sup> Armengol, "Gendering Men," 89.

only beautiful woman in Montana.”<sup>685</sup> Les stayed watching the scene silently. His silence translates his shock, predicament, confusion, and astonishment. Thus, if male violence is celebrated in Hemingway’s “An African Story,” in Ford’s “Communist,” it is severely punished because Glen’s cruel behaviour led to the separation of the couple.

Glen continued to behave strangely as he could not resist the feeling of defeat and failure after Eileen’s behaviour. Angrily, he ordered Les to kill him: “Don’t you want to shoot me?” As a response, Les did not act, but he confesses that he really wanted “to hit him, hit him as hard as in the face as I could, and see him on the ground bleeding and crying and pleading for me to stop. Only at that moment he looked scared to me ... and I felt sorry for him, as though he was already a dead man. And I did not end up hitting him at all.”<sup>686</sup> Accordingly, despite the fact that Les was happy to have succeeded in hunting two geese, he did not celebrate violence and heroism as a test of manhood, in contrast to David in Hemingway’s “An African Story.”

When he succeeds in killing the birds, David starts to understand the importance of doing something heroic, and his view of his father and his friend has changed. Unlike Les, David convinces himself that he is becoming a man like his father. So, he is unconsciously moving from a state of adulthood to a state of manhood and that he becomes ready to engage in decisive battles. By the end of the story, despite the fact that he feels pity towards the old elephant, he soon turns his attention to the heroic actions of his father and his friend, Juma, and he experiences the beauty of their heroism.

Seeing that his mother’s relationship was damaged, Les intended to contest what Glen considered a masculine principle, violence. In the last part of “Communist,” Les emerges as a mature man who critically reflects on his hunting experience. It has been an experience that affected the core of his existence. His detached reflection aids him and the

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<sup>685</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 242.

<sup>686</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 242.

readers in deeply understanding his focal story. Les, now forty, appears to have changed his mind about Glen Baxter: “I think now, he was not a bad man, only a man scared of something he’d never seen before— something soft in himself— his life going a way he did not like. A woman with a son.”<sup>687</sup> Les’s declaration that Glen was scared of “something soft in himself” creates ambiguity and forces the readers to think about its meaning. This explains why Les, who identified with Glen, confesses: “I still can feel now how sad and remote the world was to me.”<sup>688</sup> In this respect, Leder remarks that Les “takes on the lonely burden of male responsibility, where violence destroys but compassion risks vulnerability.”<sup>689</sup> Similarly, Armengol purports that Glen as “‘a real’ man is not supposed to show his emotional vulnerability and so he often uses violence as a socially legitimated form of male emotional expressivity.”<sup>690</sup> Therefore, Glen resorted to violence because he was afraid to express his real emotions and “softness,” which are generally associated with women and feminism. Yet, by leaving his emotions submerged in his attempt to prove his masculinity and heroism, he lost the confidence of both his lover and her son.

Additionally, Les thinks that, though his mother tried to look for what was good for both of them, she made a mistake by trying to adjust herself to an adult while “she was on the thin edge of things.”<sup>691</sup> Indeed, his mother introduced him to another world that he had not yet lived in, as he confesses: “what I felt was only that I had somehow been pushed out into the world, into the real life then, the one I hadn’t lived yet.”<sup>692</sup> He also remembers that one night, while they were together on the porch watching geese flying, she told him: “I suppose no one brings you up like your first love. You don’t mind if I say that, do you?”<sup>693</sup>

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<sup>687</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 242.

<sup>688</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 242.

<sup>689</sup> Leder, “Men with Women,” 107.

<sup>690</sup> Armengol, “Gendering Men,” 89.

<sup>691</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 243.

<sup>692</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 243.

<sup>693</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 244.

Her statement suggests that she had lived happily with his father and experienced romantic love. Furthermore, she asked him a question about her own sexuality: “Do you think I’m still very feminine?” I’m thirty-two years old now. You don’t know what means. But do you think I am?”<sup>694</sup> Thus, unlike other female characters in Ford’s stories, her question discloses that she lacked self-confidence in her feminine beauty of body-image, like most women these days, because she came short of establishing a strong love relationship with Glen after the death of her husband. Her question made Les feel, as he states, “the way you feel when you are on a trestle all alone and the train is coming, and you know you have to decide.”<sup>695</sup> Her interest in her sexuality drove the son to abandon her, as he asserts: “I have not heard her voice now in a long, long time.”<sup>696</sup> The story’s open ending encourages the readers to fill in the gaps in their attempt to find more reasons for their separation based on their individual dispositions and background knowledge of American culture.

Therefore, in “Communist,” the first-person narrator recounts the events that happened when he was sixteen, with a focus on the hunting adventure with Glen Baxter and his mother, and how it affected his way of seeing the world of masculinity. After observing the negative effects of Glen’s resort to violence, unlike David in “An African Story,” Les moved away from traditional concepts of masculinity as a test of manhood and heroism, and he also rejected the femininity of postmodernist society.

Thus, like Carver in “Pastoral,” Ford is interested in the theme of masculinity and violence in “Communist,” and he seems to reject the traditional concept of masculinity, which is associated with violence and heroism. Ford’s stories encourage the emergence of new values of masculinity in American society and contribute to the readers’ increasing

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<sup>694</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 243.

<sup>695</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 245.

<sup>696</sup> Ford, “Communist,” 245.



awareness of the destructive effects of man's violent bent on family structure in the postmodern world.

#### **5.4 “The Crittendons’ Interstate Highway”: A non-violent and a Non-Heroic Journey to Florida in Bobbie Ann Mason’s “The Ocean”**

Bobbie Ann Mason's fiction reflects her great concern with the rapid social changes and their dramatic effects on ordinary southern people. In this respect, she focuses on showing how the American people of her state tried to adapt to the newly emerging cultural values, including gender roles, and how they struggled to make sense of themselves and one another during the 1980s. Although she is influenced by Hemingway's thematic concern in his story “An African Story,” like Carver and Ford, she seems to challenge the Hemingwaysque version of violence as a test of manhood and heroism in her adventure story “The Ocean.” The third-person narrator omits key details and implies others to engage the readers in the reconstruction of the story's meaning and make them feel more than they understand the characters' mental states and their predicaments.

The narrator of “The Ocean” starts his story in *media-res* without giving any information about the characters' histories and personalities, as is the case in the aforementioned stories by Hemingway, Carver, and Ford. The story's main theme remains seven-eighths submerged. Generally, Mason's characters struggle to improve their lives and achieve their dreams. As opposed to Hemingway, Mervyn Rothstein notes that Mason confirmed that she was not interested in portraying an alienated hero when she described her character types: “I was sick of reading about the alienated hero. I think where I wind up now is writing about people who are trying to get into the mainstream ...just trying to live their lives the best they can.... Many of my characters are caught up in the myth of progress....”<sup>697</sup>

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<sup>697</sup> Mervyn Rothstein, “Homegrown Fiction: Bobbie Ann Mason Blends Springsteen and Nabokov,” *New York Times Magazine*, 15 May 1988, (Accessed 12 May, 2018), <https://movies2.nytimes.com/books/98/08/09/specials/mason-profile.html>.

Indeed, the narrator of “The Ocean” tells us about the adventure of Bill and Imogene Crittendon, who plan to reach the ocean. He depicts how they struggle to achieve their dream of reaching it in search of change, tranquility, and peace. Yet, given the fact that they cannot leave behind their past and focus on their future, they fall short of achieving their primary goals. The readers can sense that Bill has a masculine character, but the narrator does not put an emphasis on showing his heroism, as does the narrator of “An African Story.”

Right from the outset of the story, the narrator draws the readers’ attention to Bill’s masculinity by assigning him a menial job, that of a retired farmer, and by showing his capacity for driving and knowing all the roads in his town. After selling their cows and their farm and giving their household to their children, the Crittendons buy a new camper and decide to make a journey to Florida for the reason that they want to see the world, especially the ocean. Consequently, in comparison to Carver’s “Pastoral,” Mason’s characters believe in the spiritual strength of the wilderness, especially the water, to heal their psychological wounds by connecting them to their past. Accordingly, Wilhelm maintains: “In journeying to Florida, where earlier explorers sought the fountain of youth, he [Bill] seeks a return to that youthful state of freedom and excitement.”<sup>698</sup> Actually, Bill wants to prove his masculinity by assuming responsibility for this difficult voyage. He longs to see the ocean so as to remember his old happy days when he was enjoying youth and freedom.

Certainly, the story’s title refers specifically to the target place that Bill and Imogene want to arrive at on their journey along the east coast of Florida. Wilhelm notes that it “becomes a metaphor for the confusion in the journey through life.”<sup>699</sup> The readers learn right from the opening sentences that the old couple encounter difficulties in achieving their goal by comparing the interstate to an ocean: “The interstate highway was like the ocean . . . . Mirages of heat were shining in the distance like whitecaps, and now and then Bill lost

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<sup>698</sup> Wilhelm, *Bobbie Ann Mason*, 37.

<sup>699</sup> Wilhelm, *Bobbie Ann Mason*, 35.

himself in his memories of the sea. He hummed happily. Driving the fancy camper made Bill feel like a big shot.”<sup>700</sup> By using a simile in the first sentence, the narrator incites the readers’ imagination and forces them to fill in the gaps regarding the characters’ true intentions. At the surface level, the readers can infer that while travelling, the interstate highway becomes like an ocean because Bill and Imogene are lost and cannot find the route easily. In this respect, the narrator reports: “Finding the interstate had been a problem for Bill and Imogene Crittendon. Not trusting the toll roads, they had blazed a trail to Nashville.”<sup>701</sup> Hence, the narrator implies that in their retirement, the Crittendons travel in an unmarked direction in the hope of searching for a new direction in their lives as well. At a deeper level, this simile also suggests that when Bill and Imogene become older and adrift, they start to feel isolated and alienated from their society. As a result, like a sailor, they must define their own routes after their lives have become confused and meaningless.

As with the characters in Hemingway’s “An African Story,” Mason’s characters in “The Ocean” show strong patience to find the destination to Florida. In their search for the interstate to Florida, Imogene yells to a stranger: “Which ways 65!”<sup>702</sup> Reading the sentence in its context, the readers can comprehend that the couple are looking for the proper way to Florida. However, linking the story to its deeper meaning, the readers can assume that the old couple are seeking an easier and happier way of life. Accordingly, Wilhelm clarifies: “This query contains a significant pun since Imogene and Bill Crittendon are seeking not only the proper interstate to Florida but also a route that will allow them to reach old age with dignity and meaning.”<sup>703</sup> Wilhelm also notes that the Crittendons are “seeking the maturity of vision that retirement is supposed to bring.”<sup>704</sup> This means that the Crittendons

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<sup>700</sup> Bobbie Ann Mason, “The Ocean,” *Shiloh and Other Stories*, (New York: The Modern Library, 1982), 148.

<sup>701</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 148.

<sup>702</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 148.

<sup>703</sup> Wilhelm, *Bobbie Ann Mason*, 35.

<sup>704</sup> Wilhelm, “Making over or Making off,” 80.

want to establish new identities and enjoy their old age by discovering the world around them.

As opposed to Hemingway's characters in "An African Story," Bill does not consider violence a test of manhood. For example, the narrator describes Bill's reaction when he encounters dead animals on the road: "Between Plains and the Florida border, Bill counted five dead animals—a possum, a groundhog, a cat, a dog and one unidentifiable mass of hide and gristle. He tried to slow down."<sup>705</sup> The fact that he is slowing down suggests that Bill is a non-violent man. Another scene that reveals his hatred of violence occurs during his sleep in the campground. Unlike in Hemingway's "An African Story," where the characters shoot the old elephants with their guns without being afraid of the consequences, Bill's hearing of the sounds of guns in his nightmares awakens him sometimes at night: "He still heard the sounds of the guns. They woke him sometimes at night. And he would occasionally catch himself somewhere, standing as though in a trance, still passing ammunition to the gunners, rhythmically passing shell after shell."<sup>706</sup> In this scene, the narrator draws the readers' attention to the violent battles that occurred when Bill was a war veteran. His behaviour implies that he does not have the same courage and he does not celebrate his heroism as Hemingway's characters in "An African Story." Thus, Mason deviates from Hemingway's traditional conception of male violence as a test of masculinity and heroism.

In comparison to Ford, Mason relies on historical events to uncover her characters' social situations and draw attention to Bill's masculinity. By demonstrating his knowledge and understanding of politics, Bill discloses his masculinity. Historically, the United States signed the Mutual Defence Treaty (1955–1979) with Taiwan, but President Jimmy Carter broke it and gave Taiwan away. And so Bill opens a discussion about this issue with his wife and tells her: "And so the United States has a treaty with Taiwan, to protect them from the

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<sup>705</sup> Mason, "The Ocean," 155.

<sup>706</sup> Mason, "The Ocean," 153.

Communists.”<sup>707</sup> In her turn, she finishes his speech: “And so we broke the treaty.”<sup>708</sup> Bill is also dissatisfied with Carter’s decision to “be buddies with the communists,” abandon the true Chinese government in Taiwan and involve the country in a war.<sup>709</sup> Besides, he affirms that President Jimmy Carter “gave Taiwan away, just like he did with the Panama Canal.”<sup>710</sup> Actually, as Louise Chipley Slavicek notes, the Panama Canal provided a vital linkage between the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, but since Carter gave it away, this linkage has been broken. The conservative opponents considered the agreement a spineless “giveaway” of US property. After years of negotiations for a new Panama Canal treaty, Carter signed the Panama Canal Treaty between the United States and Panama on September 7, 1977. The treaty recognized Panama as the territorial sovereign in the Canal Zone but gave the United States the right to continue controlling the canal until December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1999.<sup>711</sup>

The narrator’s reference to these historical events is significant to the construction of the story’s deeper meaning. Based on their background knowledge of American foreign policy during the 1980s and the memorized events of the story, the readers are prompted to interpret it. By analogy, these historical events are closely connected to the Crittendons’ social situation. After leaving their house and their farm, they became rootless and alienated from their community. In other words, they break with their past and start a new lifestyle. Accordingly, Wilhelm views: “Like the Taiwanese, he [Bill] and Imogene are exiles far from home. The breach in relations between Taiwan and the United States is analogous to their break with the past.”<sup>712</sup> In this case, the readers become curious to know whether the Crittendons will be able to break with their past and succeed in building a new life.

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<sup>707</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 152.

<sup>708</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 152.

<sup>709</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 152.

<sup>710</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 152.

<sup>711</sup> Louise Chipley Slavicek, *Jimmy Carter*, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2014), 58.

<sup>712</sup> Wilhelm, *Bobbie Ann Mason*, 36.

In spite of the fact that the narrator makes the readers feel that Bill and Imogene enjoy their journey to Florida, he explicitly articulates that their past events haunt it. Imogene has expected to begin a new lifestyle before her travel, but she has not been persuaded to leave her farm: “I always heard when you retired you could start all over again at the beginning. . . . But my nerves are in too bad a shape.”<sup>713</sup> She says this statement over and over. She cried at the sale and when she gave away all her belonging to her children Judy, Bob, and Sissy.<sup>714</sup> Moreover, Imogene starts complaining when she misses her Mama and her cows: “We’re further south . . . I don’t hardly know what to do with myself. Without Mama to feed and watch over.”<sup>715</sup> In addition to her insomnia, Imogene’s feeling of loneliness affects her body physically, as she expresses: “I get these headaches and I’ve got this hurtin’. And I can’t taste.”<sup>716</sup> She keeps reminding Bill of their past experiences, which spoils his journey: “Imogene made him nervous, bringing up the past.”<sup>717</sup> Her continuous weeping leads him to think that they might as well have stayed at home.<sup>718</sup> Yet, he does not show any kind of violence against her as he is experiencing the same psychological dilemma. These descriptions of the characters’ dilemmas using visual images prompt the readers to imagine their feelings of loneliness, alienation, depression, and sadness.

The narrator also demonstrates that Bill suffers from alienation and spiritual emptiness in many scenes. For example, in the campground, he feels the need to speak to a person who murmurs a faint hello to him: “For a moment, Bill felt a desire to stop and have a conversation, a desire he felt only rarely.”<sup>719</sup> Another example, in his room on the campground, he expresses his feelings of boredom and alienation by telling his wife: “the

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<sup>713</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 149.

<sup>714</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 149.

<sup>715</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 153.

<sup>716</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 158.

<sup>717</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 157.

<sup>718</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 158.

<sup>719</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 152.

day is getting longer ...looking out the window.”<sup>720</sup> Besides, his missing of his animals is shown through his expressions of love for the dogs he meets with other people. Yet, he is attracted to the dog that is called Ishmael. In explaining this fact, Wilhelm maintains that “by giving the dog this inauspicious name, Mason links Bill with a long tradition of outcasts and wanderers.” Bill wants to prove his masculinity by travelling like his elders, “the pilgrims,” in order to solve his problems and see the ocean once more.<sup>721</sup> The readers learn that the new camper cannot emotionally replace their old farm and animals because they have been living there for a long time, as Imogene acknowledges: “We’ve been tied down on a farm all this time.”<sup>722</sup> Furthermore, when Bill fails to distinguish between the Plains and the White House, the narrator tells the readers that “things are more complicated now. Bill hated complications.”<sup>723</sup> This suggests that because Bill used to live a simple life, he cannot adapt himself to the new, complicated world of the city, which has changed due to modernization and development in the postmodern era.

Upon their arrival in Florida, the Crittendons enjoy the new place, and they are happy to have finally arrived. Even when Bill has a strong passion to see the ocean in order to prove his masculinity, he does not find anything special about it. Furthermore, as they examine the Atlantic Ocean from their high perches in the camper, Imogene expresses her astonishment by questioning Bill: “Is this what you brought me here to see?” Then, she confirms: “It all looks the same.”<sup>724</sup> In addition, Bill does not express any feelings of happiness at having seen the ocean again: “Bill was silent as they got out and locked the van. He dropped his keys in the sand, he was so nervous.”<sup>725</sup> While roving over the rolling sea, he observes: “It was the same water, carried around by time, that he had sailed, but it was bluer than he

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<sup>720</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 153.

<sup>721</sup> Wilhelm, *Bobbie Ann Mason*, 37.

<sup>722</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 156.

<sup>723</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 154.

<sup>724</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 164.

<sup>725</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 164.

remembered.”<sup>726</sup> Thus, the narrator alludes to the fact that Bill does not feel the difference between the past and the present.

Unfortunately, seeing the ocean again does not make Bill remember those happy days, but instead, he recalls “the feeling of looking out over that expanse, fearing the sound of the Japanese planes, taking comfort at the sight of the big battleship and its family of destroyers. He had seen a kamikaze dive into a destroyer. The explosion was like a silent movie that played in his head endlessly, like reruns of *McHale’s Navy*.”<sup>727</sup> The narrator refers again to historical events to explain Bill’s psychological trauma. In this scene, Bill remembers his old days when he was a soldier during World War II. According to Iser, for the reader “who is not fully conversant with all the elements of the repertoire in our example, there will obviously be gaps which will then prevent the theme from achieving its full significance.”<sup>728</sup> In other words, readers who are not familiar with the repertoire cannot fully apprehend the meaning of the story. However, by describing the battle using concrete words and visual images, and by making an allusion to a movie about a destructive war, the narrator provokes the readers’ imaginations so that they can visualize the scene according to their individual dispositions and background knowledge of American culture. In so doing, they can sense Bill’s feelings of fear, melancholy, depression, and hopelessness.

Furthermore, while gazing out at battleships and destroyers riding on the horizon, the narrator discloses Bill’s mental confusion by noting: “He could not tell if they were coming or going, or whose they were.”<sup>729</sup> Such an ending indicates that the couple are far from achieving the tranquillity and peace they have been expecting for so long. The story’s ending resembles that of Carver and Ford because the narrator does not celebrate Bill’s masculinity and heroism. Instead, he expresses the characters’ failure to move on and change their

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<sup>726</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 164.

<sup>727</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 164.

<sup>728</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 145.

<sup>729</sup> Mason, “The Ocean,” 164.



lifestyle as they cannot break with their past. Actually, this open ending gives the readers more opportunities to contribute to the construction of the story's meaning and creates certain emotional effects on them.

Therefore, in "The Ocean," the narrator recounts the adventures of an elderly married couple who abandon their farm and belongings in order to change their way of life. Bill wants to prove his masculinity by keeping his promise to reach the ocean in search of an imagined tranquillity and peace. Although the Crittendons enjoy travelling in their new camper, their past events haunt their journey and they start to feel the need for community and their communal way of life. When the couple reaches the ocean, Bill feels that he is lost and cannot distinguish between the past and the present; he fails to keep focused on his initial goal because he cannot forget his wartime experiences in the ocean. Like Carver and Ford, Mason portrays a non-heroic and non-violent male character. Thus, she also questions Hemingway's traditional conception of male violence as a test of masculinity and heroism.

The comparative study of Hemingway's "An African Story," Carver's "Pastoral," Ford's "Communist," and Mason's "The Ocean" reveals that these minimalist writers do help open up possibilities for new alternative values and patterns of cultural concepts of masculinity and violence. They all question Hemingway's conception of violence as a test of manhood and heroism. Through their reliance on minimalist techniques, including omission, implication, and imagery, these writers can inspire readers to build up mental images to understand and feel the characters' mental states and form different perspectives as far as the issues of masculinity and violence are concerned. Unlike Hemingway, these minimalist writers are not interested in portraying a hero who acts according to Hemingway's "code hero" when seeking to achieve his goals and face death. They are in a position to make readers feel that Hemingway's traditional conception of the code hero no longer appeals to the lives of postmodern Americans. Their stories, "Pastoral,"

“Communist,” and “The Ocean,” depict the lives of ordinary people beset by social and cultural changes and where the male protagonists avoid resorting to violence as a test of masculinity and heroism. Although they struggle to realize their dreams and achieve their goals, they all fail. They still live in a complicated and meaningless world despite the appearance of new traditional and cultural values.

Hence, the study of these short stories enlarges the readers’ minds with one of the most important conceptions—co-existence. The stories make the readers rethink their minds and adopt what is most suitable for humanity and civilizations in order to avoid the emotional rupture, especially between family members and couples. The studied aspects become more important, especially when they are compared from varying historical contexts: modernism and postmodernism. Therefore, readers will grow personally and emotionally alongside the characters and gradually learn how to evaluate socio-cultural and political values existing in their societies and how to live in the new emerging societies by challenging traditional views of male power.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

**Marital Dissatisfaction and Miscommunication in Ernest**

**Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain," Raymond Carver's "The Student's  
Wife," Richard Ford's "The Womanizer," and Bobbie Ann Mason's  
"The Retreat"**

In their short fiction, Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason depict the social disillusionment and economic crisis of American society during their times. In this last chapter, there is a shift of attention from the isolated individual to the individual as he or she exists in the most basic of human relationships as a part of the collective whole. It is common knowledge that the family is the nucleus of what is generally good in humanity. It provides its individuals with values of emotional warmth, trust, psychological stability, and authority. However, at the same time, with the adaptation of new values and traditions in American society in modernism and postmodernism, the family has become the site of strife, tension, violence, infidelity, marital dissatisfaction, depression, disillusionment, and alienation. Thus, it is no coincidence that the idea of family is central to the short fiction of Hemingway, Carver, Ford, and Mason, who are most concerned with presenting the psychological suffering of its individuals.

Indeed, in addition to his portrayal of masculinity, violence, and heroism, Hemingway has long been known for his themes ranging from love, sex, marital dissatisfaction, and miscommunication in his “marriage group” stories. Likewise, with the

revival of the realist American short story at the hand of the Minimalist Movement's writers, the depiction of family life, especially the emotional rupture between its members, failing marriage, and miscommunication due to social, political, and economic problems, has become the most important preoccupation in Carver, Ford, and Mason's short fiction.

Iser gives great importance to representations of reality because they intensify readers' engagement and involvement within the literary text.<sup>730</sup> Moreover, he considers love the most "intense" of evidential experiences in life that are characterized by certainty and one of "the central topics of staging in literature."<sup>731</sup> Accordingly, the depiction of family life— especially its emotional issues such as love, sex, and marriage— is supposed to evoke affecting emotions in readers and allow a deeper understanding of the story's meaning. Consequently, the writer forces the readers to re-read, as Ronald Barthes puts it, "not only the real text, but a plural text; the same and new."<sup>732</sup> Readers are compelled to fill in the gaps left by authors based on their individual dispositions and literary experiences as related to their social classes, political ideologies, and economic status. In doing so, they naturally experience a greater grasp of the cultural context. They can also relate their individual life experiences to the characters' experiences and learn how to evaluate their behaviour in the light of these new experiences.

In this chapter, there is a comparison of Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain," Carver's "The Students' Wife," Ford's "The Womanizer," and Mason's "The Retreat." It aims to establish Hemingway's influence with regard to family issues, including marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication. Generally, these issues lead to the emotional rupture between family members and the characters' feelings of alienation, depression, and disappointment. The chapter intends to show how these writers portray this subject of marital

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<sup>730</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 53.

<sup>731</sup> Iser, "Do I Write for an Audience?" 313.

<sup>732</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris, edition de Seuil, 1970), 16.

dissatisfaction and miscommunication through a brand of their surface realism in the selected stories to implied readers. It also shows readers' responses to the evoked emotions and the writers' viewpoints about American family life and the world around them. Therefore, the primary purpose is to look at these texts from the perspective of readers who have to cooperate with the text in order to generate the implied meaning, share the characters' sensory experiences, and learn about family life in American society. The similarities and differences between the writers' stories will certainly disclose the gist of the motoring principle of the changes in American family life from modernism to postmodernism.

### **6.1 "I Want a Cat": 'The Girl's' Marital Dissatisfaction in Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain"**

Iser sees the literary text as a part of the world, or external reality, as something that is given or pre-given rather than supplied. In ordinary experience "the given empirical object" operates as a constraint on any characterization of it; whereas in literary experiences, objects are created by the mental images we form, images that endow the "non given ...with presence."<sup>733</sup> It means that, once they are activated, the readers' mental processes can imagine objects which have aesthetic and emotional effects on readers. In his "marriage group" stories, Hemingway endeavours to represent the external reality of American society. He depicts post-war American couples and conveys his true emotions in order to make the readers more aware of the breakup of the American family and its impact on society.

The stories portray a string of failed loves, miscommunication, and dissatisfaction in female-male relationships. F. Carlene Brennen reports that Hemingway's biographers mention that he produced this story as a tribute to his wife, Hadley. When she became pregnant, he wrote "Cat in the Rain," which was based on an incident that took place in Rapallo in 1923. Similar to the American woman in "Cat in the Rain," Hadley expressed her

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<sup>733</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 137.

desire to have a cat when she saw a stray kitten that had been hiding under a table in the rain: “I want a cat .... I want a cat. I want a cat now. If I can’t have long hair or any fun I can have a cat.”<sup>734</sup> The third-person narrator of “Cat in the Rain” starts his story in *media-res*. The characters emerge fully developed without describing their histories, personalities, and marriage problems.

Reading this story, John V. Hagopian highlights that “Hemingway succeeded in rendering an immensely poignant human experience with all the poetry that pure prose can achieve. The simple language and brittle style simultaneously conceal and reveal a powerful emotional situation without the least trace of sentimentality. The delicacy and accuracy of the achievement are magnificent.”<sup>735</sup> Thus, by leaving gaps and relying on imagery, symbolism, and ironies, the narrator is able to involve the readers in the reconstruction of the story’s meaning and make them feel the evoked emotions of human beings’ psychological suffering, the one which is principally caused by marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication, such as disappointment, alienation, isolation, hopelessness, and depression.

In fact, the story’s main theme is implied in its title. Contextually, it refers to the cat, which is seen by the American woman under the table seeking protection from the rain. Yet, metaphorically, it refers to the woman’s need for protection and compassion, and her feeling of isolation as she identifies with this cat and senses a special desire to get it. Besides, right from the outset of the story, the narrator informs the readers that his characters are isolated from the outside world: “THERE WERE only two AMERICANS stopping at the hotel. They did not know any of the people they passed on the stairs on their way to and from their

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<sup>734</sup> F. Carlene Brennen, *Hemingway’s Cats: An Illustrated Biography*, (Sarasota: Pineapple P, 2006), 12.

<sup>735</sup> John V. Hagopian, “Symmetry in ‘Cat in the Rain’,” *College English* 24, no. 3 (1962): 222, (Accessed 9 June, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.2307/373291>.

room.”<sup>736</sup> The characters’ social situation increases the readers’ awareness of their feeling of alienation, as they are alienated from the outside world and from each other. Furthermore, he provides the readers with a symbolic setting that draws their attention to the story’s theme:

Their room was on the second floor facing the sea. It also faced the public garden and the war monument. There were big palms and green benches in the public garden. In the good weather there was always an artist with his easel. Artists liked the way the palms grew and the bright colors of the hotels facing the gardens and the sea ... It was raining ... The sea broke in a long line in the rain and slipped back down the beach to come up and break again in a long line in the rain ... Across the square in the doorway of the café a waiter stood looking out at the empty square.<sup>737</sup>

The narrator’s use of concrete words and visual images stimulates the readers’ mental processes so that they can sense the sensory experiences. Iser notes that as “the reader uses different perspectives offered by the text in order to relate the patterns and the “schematised views” to one another, he sets the work in motion and this process results ultimately in the awakening of responses within himself.”<sup>738</sup> An analysis of the linguistic features and figures of speech of this text allows the readers to understand and create an aesthetic response. First, the couple’s hotel room faces the sea, which stands for romantic love. Yet, the image of the sea, while it is raining, alludes to the couple’s unstable emotions and marital conflicts.

Thus, the readers can expect that these characters are no longer enjoying romantic love. Second, the war monument reminds the readers of the death, prompting them to infer how it stands for the American couple’s death of love. M. Joseph Flora emphasizes that Hemingway’s “marriage group” stories deplore “the death of love in the modern world.”<sup>739</sup> Third, the hotel room also faces the public garden, with its big palms and green benches. The beautiful colors of the green garden in a rainy weather represent rebirth and revival. This

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<sup>736</sup> Ernest Hemingway, “Cat in the Rain,” in *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 167.

<sup>737</sup> Hemingway, “Cat in the Rain,” 167.

<sup>738</sup> Iser, “The Reading Process,” 280.

<sup>739</sup> M. Joseph Flora, *Ernest Hemingway: A Study of the Short Fiction*, (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 34–35.



imagery activates the readers' mental faculties so that they can assume that the couple's primary goal in coming to this hotel is to search for peace and the rejuvenation of their love. Fourth, the image of the man looking at the empty square implies the couple's feeling of spiritual emptiness and loss of hope. By making a connection between their alienation and this last image, the readers can understand that the couple is also suffering from spiritual alienation and lack of communication.

Hence, the accumulation of these images together evokes in the readers a mixture of emotions. According to Hagopian's interpretation of this setting, this story deals with a marriage crisis that "involve[s] the lack of fertility, which is symbolically foreshadowed by the public garden (fertility), dominated by the war monument (death)."<sup>740</sup> According to him, the couple's marital problems stem from their inability to conceive. Furthermore, Warren Bennet thinks that "Cat in the Rain" is one of Hemingway's stories of "marital dissatisfaction" and a prime example of his figure of the 'iceberg' principle since its theme is seven-eighths submerged.<sup>741</sup> The readers can anticipate that this couple suffers from marital conflicts due to the death of their love relationship, fertility problems, and miscommunication.

By interpreting the characters' behaviours and gestures, the readers learn that they are suffering from miscommunication and emotional rupture. When the wife looks out the window, she sees a poor kitty crushed under one of the dripping green tables.<sup>742</sup> The wife feels that she is a female and thinks that the cat is "trying to make herself so compact" that she will not be dripped on.<sup>743</sup> The wife subconsciously identifies herself with the cat because, comparable to the cat, she feels homeless and needs to be provided a place of acceptance

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<sup>740</sup> Hagopian, "Symmetry in 'Cat in the Rain,'" 230.

<sup>741</sup> Warren Bennet, "The Poor Kitty and the Pardone and the Tortoise-shell Cat in 'Cat in the Rain,'" in *New Critical Approaches to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, ed. Jackson J. Benson, (Durham: Duke UP, 1990), 245.

<sup>742</sup> Hemingway, "Cat in the Rain," 167.

<sup>743</sup> Hemingway, "Cat in the Rain," 167.

and comfort.<sup>744</sup> The husband's behaviour with his wife implies much about the dynamics of their love relationship. When the wife decides to go out to get the cat, her husband just offers help and goes on reading, "lying propped up with the two pillows at the foot of the bed."<sup>745</sup> His gestures disclose his selfish and self-centered personality because he does not try to satisfy his wife's desires.

The narrator directs the readers' attention to the wife's feeling of spiritual emptiness by showing her attraction to the hotel-keeper, who is an old and very tall man. The narrator reports her attraction to him on her way to get the cat: "The wife liked him. She liked the deadly serious way he received any complaints. She liked his dignity. She liked the way he wanted to serve her. She liked the way he felt about being a hotel-keeper. She liked his old, heavy face and big hands. Liking him she opened the door and looked out. It was raining harder."<sup>746</sup> The repetition of the verb "to like" with its different forms in these sentences creates auditory imagery that activates the readers' mental processes so that they can build mental images and feel the woman's emotional state while reconstructing an aesthetic object. Regarding this point, Hagopian suggests that "... the great attraction of man is indicated by the repetition of *she liked*... More immediately, he rises when her husband remained supine; he expresses himself with a gesture of masculine service that her husband had denied her."<sup>747</sup> The narrator gradually describes what she likes in the old man, starting with certain qualities of his personality (his kindness and dignity) and moving to his masculinity (his old, heavy face and big hands).

By informing the readers that "it was raining harder," the narrator implies the woman's desire to have sex with the old man in order to realize her dream of conceiving a child. This suggests that her husband may be impotent and that the issue of fertility is a core

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<sup>744</sup> Bennet, "The Poor Kitty," 252.

<sup>745</sup> Hemingway, "Cat in the Rain," 167–168.

<sup>746</sup> Hemingway, "Cat in the Rain," 168.

<sup>747</sup> Hagopian, "Symmetry in 'Cat in the Rain,'" 221.

cause of their marital dissatisfaction. When the “American girl” passes by the padrone’s office, he bows from his desk.<sup>748</sup> The narrator describes her specific experience: “Something felt very small and tight inside the girl. The padrone made her feel very small and at the same time really important. She had a momentary feeling of being of supreme importance.”<sup>749</sup> Hence, seeing the padrone again makes “the American girl” more conscious of her femininity, sexuality, and value.

Moreover, the narrator focuses on revealing the husband’s rude behaviour towards his wife to remind the readers with the theme of marital dissatisfaction. Unfortunately, when she enters her room, she sits next to her husband, who shows little interest in communicating with her as he only stops reading his book to inquire if she finds the cat or not.<sup>750</sup> In this respect, Gabreila Tucan explains that “the marital group” further proves “the characters’ lack of communication and their inability to express feelings in the intensity of private moments when emotions are persistently restrained.”<sup>751</sup> This scene confirms that they have lost the ability to communicate their emotions to each other.

In reaction to her husband’s coldness, the wife unconsciously identifies herself with the cat and starts expressing her emotional hunger implicitly: “I wanted it so much,”... “I don’t know why I wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty. It isn’t any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain.”<sup>752</sup> The American wife feels pity for the poor kitty because the cat seems to mirror her marital situation. In contrast, the wife is homeless and deprived of love and protection while living with a heartless and self-centred man. In explaining the woman’s emotional identification with the cat, Tucan maintains that in Hemingway’s “marital group”

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<sup>748</sup> Hemingway, “Cat in the Rain,” 169.

<sup>749</sup> Hemingway, “Cat in the Rain,” 169.

<sup>750</sup> Hemingway, “Cat in the Rain,” 169.

<sup>751</sup> Gabreila Tucan, “Ernest Hemingway’s ‘Marriage Group’ Short Stories: Cognitive Features and the Reader’s Mind,” in *Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Hungarian Society for the Study of English*, eds. Veronika Ruttkay and Bálint Gárdos, (Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2014),429.

<sup>752</sup> Hemingway, “Cat in the Rain,” 169.

stories, such as “Cat in the Rain,” the characters’ awareness of their failed marriage leads them to search for a substitute for their wives or husbands: “In such stories, the characters are confronted with unsettling dilemmas in dramatic situations whereas their failed relationships yield a variety of emotional effects that only raise the awareness of discrepancy between their “real” life and their troubling experience of love. Thus, the dejected characters in the “marriage group” often find different substitutes to fill the agonizing gaps in their love affairs, such a cat in ‘Cat in the Rain’....”<sup>753</sup>

Since the American woman is experiencing spiritual emptiness and the death of love, she is looking for a substitute for her husband. Yet, he continues reading without making any gesture or saying anything, as the narrator states: “George was reading again.”<sup>754</sup> His insistence on reading his book intensifies his wife’s feelings of depression and alienation. The narrator creates a sense of menace when he reports the wife’s reaction after she fails to communicate her real emotions to her husband: “She laid the mirror down on the dresser and went over to the window and looked out. It was getting dark.”<sup>755</sup> The image of the woman looking out while it is getting dark refers to her feelings of hopelessness, sadness, depression, and alienation. As a result, she starts interiorizing her many wants and desires: “I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel ... I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her... I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair out in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes.”<sup>756</sup> In the quoted commentary, the wife articulates her emotional and material needs. She wants to feel her femininity by changing her hairstyle. Furthermore, her desire to have a kitty expresses her craving to have a baby to sit on her lap. Gerry Brenner asserts that “underlying the behaviour

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<sup>753</sup> Tucan, “Ernest Hemingway’s ‘Marriage Group’ Short Stories,” 429.

<sup>754</sup> Hemingway, “Cat in the Rain,” 169.

<sup>755</sup> Hemingway, “Cat in the Rain,” 169.

<sup>756</sup> Hemingway, “Cat in the Rain,” 169–170.

of the American wife in “Cat” is the easy-to-come-by lexical crux, ‘maternal instincts’: her wish for the cat in the rain is a substitute for the domestic maternity she longs for.”<sup>757</sup> Moreover, Bethea sustains: “The woman’s desire for a cat suggests a greater yearning for a baby, yet the coordination, which becomes annoyingly childlike, characterizes her as unready for such responsibility. She appears unaware of her deeper desire ....”<sup>758</sup> Indeed, the repetition of the verb “to want” creates auditory imagery that stimulates the readers to feel the wife’s emotional needs and her insistence on having a brighter life. Interestingly, Hagopian elucidates that “the sum total of the wants that do reach consciousness amounts to motherhood, a home with family, an end to the strictly companionate marriage with George.”<sup>759</sup> Given her current marital situation, the view that the wife’s longing for a child may suggest her longing for companionship, attention, love, and a sense of belonging is highly supported.

Despite the fact that the wife desires to live a comfortable lifestyle and enjoy living in a family with solid emotional ties, her husband does not share the same ideas. It seems also that George, like his wife, does not understand his desires deeply. Therefore, instead of trying to communicate with her and understand her needs, he snaps: “Oh, shut up and get something to read.”<sup>760</sup> The fact that he stops his wife suggests to the readers that he gets angry and anxious to the extent that he is unable to listen to her many desires and wants. His behaviour indicates that he is also depressed and emotionally needy. Instead of trying to revive his love relationship with his wife, he resorts to the reading act so as to distance himself from the real world he is living in. His behaviour reinforces the idea that this couple suffers from miscommunication and alienation.

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<sup>757</sup> Gerry Brenner, “From ‘SepiJingan’ to ‘The Mother of a Queen’”: Hemingway’s Three Epistemologic Formulas for Short Fiction,” in *New Critical Approaches to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, ed. Jackson J. Benson, (Durham: Duke UP, 1990), 161–162.

<sup>758</sup> Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility*, 31.

<sup>759</sup> Hagopian, “Symmetry in ‘Cat in the Rain,’” 221.

<sup>760</sup> Hemingway, “Cat in the Rain,” 170.

The narrator also relies on the imagery of the weather and the darkness to imply the wife's response to her husband's rude behaviour. He states: "His wife was looking out of the window. It was quiet dark now and still raining in the palm trees."<sup>761</sup> The imagery of the darkness denotes the wife's mental and emotional state. By saying that it is getting quite darker, the narrator evokes the idea that her feelings of hopelessness and depression are intensifying. Since the image of the rain symbolizes fertility, he implies the wife's craving for a baby in the hope of changing her lifestyle and saving her marriage as indicated in her speech: "Anyway, I want a cat," she said, "I want a cat. I want a cat now. If I can't have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat."<sup>762</sup> Her insistence on having a cat increases the readers' awareness of her emotional needs.

Furthermore, the readers become more aware of the selfish and rude personality of her husband for the reason that he does not care about her speech: "George was not listening. He was reading his book. His wife looked out of the window where light had come on in the square."<sup>763</sup> This scene creates a menacing atmosphere and ambiguity, and it suggests that there is something imminent beneath George's silence. The fact that he continues his reading without saying anything to his wife indicates that he has started distancing himself from her and that she fails to convince him to change their lifestyle. She says nothing, but she just looks out of the window and sees light instead of darkness. Because the light represents the beginning of a new day, readers can expect the couple to spend the entire night discussing their problem without finding a solution. This reflects their difficulty in communicating their ideas and emotional needs due to the wide gap separating them. Beyond its literal meaning of "the light," the readers may understand that the wife still has hope despite all the difficulties she encounters with her husband.

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<sup>761</sup> Hemingway, "Cat in the Rain," 170.

<sup>762</sup> Hemingway, "Cat in the Rain," 170.

<sup>763</sup> Hemingway, "Cat in the Rain," 170.

Essentially, the characters' silences have become their voices since they cannot communicate their emotions and ideas. In fact, Cassandre Meunier argues that Hemingway is well known for his experimentation with silence, not only because he considers it "a part of a reality [he] wanted to render as truly as possible, but also because the use of this technique would strengthen the narrative."<sup>764</sup> It also prompts the readers to think about the reasons behind the characters' silences and experience the aesthetic object because they sense the degree of the characters' depression, hopelessness, and marital dissatisfaction.

At the end of the story, the hotel-keeper sends a big tortoise-shell with his maid to the American wife; as the narrator describes in these last lines: "She held a big tortoise-shell cat pressed tight against her and swung down against her body. "Excuse me," she said, "the padrone asked me to bring this for the Signora."<sup>765</sup> This open ending prompts the readers to raise questions, such as: What will be the reaction of the wife when she receives this tortoise-shell from the old man whom she had a crush on? And what does the big tortoise-shell represent in this story? Unsurprisingly, the readers do not anticipate the woman's happiness while receiving this gift because she insists on having a kitty and not a big tortoise-shell. Bennet retains that the story's ending is ironic for the reason that the American wife does not fulfill her desire because she is interested in having a kitty and not a big tortoise-shell. Metonymically, she wants a "padrone," with his attractive body and personality, incarnated in a man of her own generation.<sup>766</sup> The readers can anticipate that such an ironic ending will intensify the American wife's feelings of hopelessness, despair, and alienation because her imagined spring would never come as long as she is living with a man who is experiencing the dilemma of modernism with its devastating changes at all levels.

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<sup>764</sup> Cassandre Meunier, "The Values of Silence in 'Fifty Grand,' 'A Day's Wait,' and 'Nobody Ever Dies,'" *Journal of the Short Story in English*, No. 49 (Autumn 2007), (Accessed 29 April, 2010), <http://jsse.revues.org/index749.html>.

<sup>765</sup> Hemingway, "Cat in the Rain," 170.

<sup>766</sup> Bennet, "The Poor Kitty," 256.

Therefore, in “Cat in the Rain,” Hemingway depicts an American couple suffering from miscommunication and marital dissatisfaction. Although the narrator does not state their problem explicitly, he gives readers plenty of clues to help them infer that the American woman has become emotionally needy. Moreover, the wife’s craving to have a child, which is symbolized by her great desire to have a cat, indicates that marital dissatisfaction is caused by her lack of love, protection, and companionship since she is living with a self-centred and selfish man. Because they are involved in the construction of the story’s meaning, the readers consciously compare their life experiences with those of the story’s couple and evaluate their love relationships with their partners. They can also learn that modernism has negative effects on American family life as it leads to alienation, miscommunication, depression, and family dissolution.

## **6.2 Insomnia and the Absence of Love in Raymond Carver’s “The Student’s Wife”**

During Ronald Reagan’s presidency (1981–1989), the social and economic crisis greatly affected American family life and led to the widespread of many social vices, such as poverty, divorce, alcoholism, and depression. As stressed earlier, and like most of his characters, Carver experienced these vices, and he was motivated to depict the dreary lives of his people and underline their emotional truth. In reality, no one fails to notice Carver’s obsession with love stories. As Nessel aptly notes, “[t]he issue of love and its absence and the bearing of love absence on marriage and individual identity” is the most prevalent constant which arises in Carver’s stories.<sup>767</sup> Indeed, almost all of his stories deal with the emotional rupture between family members that leads to marital dissatisfaction, miscommunication, and violence. In an interview with Pope and McElhinny, Carver acknowledged his influenced by Hemingway’s “marital group” stories. He signalled out “Cat in the Rain” as one of his favourite stories by noting: “There is a story called ‘Cat in

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<sup>767</sup> Nessel, *The Stories of Raymond Carver*, 9.



the Rain,' which is one of my favorite short stories. Nothing much happens, but you know that the relationship between the husband and the wife is going bad."<sup>768</sup> Carver's influence by "Cat in the Rain" is manifested in his stories from his early collection, especially in his story "The Student's Wife."

As with Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain," nothing much happens at the surface level of "The Student's Wife," but the readers feel that the relationship between the couples is going badly. According to Iser, "textual segments" are presented without explicit indications of the relationships between them in a literary text, as opposed to a non-literary text. As a result, it is the responsibility of the reader to close and fill in the "gaps."<sup>769</sup> The third-person narrator starts his story without mentioning anything about the characters' histories or their personalities. Although the narrator does not clarify the origin of this couple's marital conflict, he gives plenty of clues and implies others to prompt the readers to detect it. The title is explicitly ironic and, therefore, it establishes the perspective of the narrator which can interact with the perspective of the character. This interaction, according to Iser, "spurs the reader on to build up syntheses which eventually individualize the aesthetic object."<sup>770</sup> In fact, the title points out that the wife, Nan, is the central character of this story. According to Saltzman, it "demotes the main character to an appendage of her husband's inadequacies."<sup>771</sup> The readers can expect that, because the husband is occupied with his studies and job, he does not devote enough time to communicating with his wife. Hence, they can detect that Nan's insomnia is caused by her feelings about her husband's alienation.

Furthermore, right from the first paragraph, the readers can learn much about the dynamics of Mike and Nan's love relationship. In fact, in his interview with Pope and McElhinny, Carver acknowledges his admiration of "Cat in the Rain" and mentions that the

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<sup>768</sup> Pope and McElhinny, "Raymond Carver Speaking (1982)," 17.

<sup>769</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 184.

<sup>770</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 118.

<sup>771</sup> Saltzman, *Understanding Raymond Carver*, 50.

scene of George while reading attracts his attention: "...and there is a detail that sticks to my head he's lying on a bed reading a book, but his head's at the foot of the bed, and his feet are at the headboard. It's a wonderful story. It's a very simple told story. It's marvelous."<sup>772</sup> Carver's fascination with the male character of "Cat in the Rain" is manifested in his choice of a male character that resembles George in several personal qualities such as his carelessness, selfishness, and self-confidence. Indeed, the narrator opens his story with the following scene: "He had been reading to her from Rilke, a poet he admired, when she fell asleep with her head on his pillow.... He never looked away from the page when he read... It was a rich voice that spilled her into a dream of caravans just setting out from walled cities and bearded men in robes."<sup>773</sup> By starting his sentences with the pronoun "he," which refers to Mike, the narrator makes the readers feel that the man is dominating the relationship at home and that he is a self-confident man. Moreover, Mike is quite willing to read for pleasure, much like George in "Cat in the Rain." The fact of not looking at his wife and not explaining anything reveals that he is not interested in communicating his ideas, feelings, and emotions to please her, but rather, he is reading to satisfy his emotional desires.

More importantly, Nan's dream tells us much about her psychological dilemma. Accordingly, Bethea maintains that "the constant repetition of *he* and, more obviously, the dream of leaving an enclosed city suggest Nan's sense of imprisonment and need for more psychological or emotional space."<sup>774</sup> Hence, this opening paragraph prompts the readers to think that there is something imminent beneath the surface of the characters' behaviours.

The narrator demonstrates that Nun is having insomnia and is trying to attract her husband's attention to communicate with her and talk to her. As stressed earlier in Carver's stories, McClintock-Walsh admits that the characters' physical hunger alludes to their deeper

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<sup>772</sup> Pope and McElhinny, "Raymond Carver Speaking (1982)," 17.

<sup>773</sup> Raymond Carver, "The Student's Wife," in *Will You Please Be Quiet Please?* (New York: Random House, 1976), 122.

<sup>774</sup> Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility*, 60.

spiritual hunger.<sup>775</sup> Thus, Nan's demand to eat implies both her physical and spiritual hunger. The wife's happiness in being served by her husband, even after several attempts, confirms for the readers that she is emotionally needy and wants him to take care of her. Hence, similar to the characters in "Cathedral," Nan's sensory experience is an attempt to deaden her inner pain.

The readers become more aware of the couple's miscommunication in the scene when Nan tries to force her husband to communicate with her while he shows little interest in listening to her dream. In describing her dream, the narrator states: "She saw both of them staying someplace overnight at some little hotel without their kids. There were an older couple who wanted to take them for a ride in their motorboat where they had just one seat in the boat. Indeed, she was the one who squeezed in the back of the boat. She continues: "It was so narrow it hurt my legs, and I was afraid the water was going to come in over the sides. Then I woke up."<sup>776</sup> Nan's dream reveals that she is insecure in her love relationship. By scarfying a spot for her husband on the boat, the narrator implies that Nan also scarifies herself for her husband and her children in her real life. Her dream of being injured in her leg in a confined space alludes to the effects of isolation and imprisonment on her body parts. As a matter of fact, her dream reveals much about her personality and her psychological pains. However, Mike's response to her dream is so cool: "that's some dream," he managed to say and felt so drowsily that he should say something more."<sup>777</sup> This scene confirms to the readers that he is a rude and emotionless husband. It also provokes the readers' empathy for Nan, who is experiencing an emotional crisis.

The couple's marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication are also manifested in Nan's attempt to remind her husband about that romantic life during their early years of

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<sup>775</sup> McClintock-Walsh, "Spirituality in 'Cathedral.'"

<sup>776</sup> Carver, "The Student's Wife," 124.

<sup>777</sup> Carver, "The Student's Wife," 124.

marriage. She tells him about the Tilton River, which they visited a month or two after their marriage: “Do you remember that time we stayed overnight on the *Tilton River*, Mike? When you caught that big fish the next morning?” She placed her hand on his shoulder. ““Do you remember that?” she said. She did.”<sup>778</sup> Nan’s speech indicates that she craves to live again that romantic love, and she struggles to find interesting subjects to prompt her husband to talk to her. Although she reminds him of “one of the best times they’d ever had,” Mike does not respond to her attempt to break the silence, and he just pretends to listen.<sup>779</sup> Hence, by consciously comparing the characters’ present state of marriage to this ideal of a wonderful weekend that they had years ago when they were just out of school, the readers can detect that the wife implicitly expresses dissatisfaction, asserting that they cannot relive that romantic love relationship.

The narrator also increases the readers’ awareness of the fact that the wife’s insomnia is caused by a lack of communication and physical dissatisfaction. Feeling depressed, Nan continues her game of trying to attract her husband to touch her body parts and talk to her. The narrator objectively reports their conversation: ““Well, I wish you’d rub my legs and talk to me. My shoulders hurt, too. But my legs especially.’ He turned over and began rubbing her legs, then fell asleep again with his hand on her hip ... ‘I wish you’d rub me all over,’ she said ... ‘My legs and arms both hurt tonight’.”<sup>780</sup> This description, using concrete words and visual images, activates readers’ faculties in the hope of imagining the scene. Her insistence on having her husband touches her body parts to lift the pain translates her craving for emotional warmth and sexual satisfaction.

Nan further intensifies the readers’ empathy for her when she implies to her husband that she has started losing confidence in her beauty and physical appearance by saying:

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<sup>778</sup> Carver, “The Student’s Wife,” 124.

<sup>779</sup> Carver, “The Student’s Wife,” 125.

<sup>780</sup> Carver, “The Student’s Wife,” 126.

“Growing pains, huh?’ ‘Oh God, yes,’ she said... ‘When I was ten or eleven years old I was as big then as I am now. You should’ve seen me! I grew so fast in those days my legs and arms hurt me all the time...’<sup>781</sup> She wants her husband to observe her physical changes and feel her pains, but he remains very cold. Without saying anything, he just turns his pillow over to the cooler side and pretends to sleep.<sup>782</sup> Consequently, the readers have to fill in the gaps to understand the reasons for the husband’s behaviour.

When she gets very depressed after she fails in soliciting her husband’s response, like the American woman in “Cat in the Rain,” Nan starts rattling off a series of desires and wants explicitly in her last attempt to find a solution to her marital problem: “I like good foods.... I like good books and magazines, riding on trains at night, and those times I flew in an airplane...and I like sex ... I like to have friends ... I’d like to have nice clothes all the time...I’d like us both just to live a good honest life without having to worry about money and bills ....”<sup>783</sup> Indeed, many similarities exist between Hemingway’s and Carver’s texts in this quoted passage. In fact, this passage is read as an intertextual allusion to the passage in Hemingway’s “Cat in the Rain” by Bethea in his book *Technique and Sensibility in the Fiction and Poetry of Raymond Carver*.<sup>784</sup> Similar to “Cat in the Rain,” the repetition of the verb “to like” creates auditory imagery that increases the readers’ imagination and impacts their emotions. The woman’s insistence on having both material and emotional needs indicates that she is deprived of these necessities and that she is undergoing a dreary existence.

In fact, both the American wife and Nan suffer from alienation, isolation, and depression, which are caused mainly by miscommunication and the death of love with their husbands. Indeed, both women crave a brighter life that can be full of love, happiness, and

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<sup>781</sup> Carver, “The Student’s Wife,” 126.

<sup>782</sup> Carver, “The Student’s Wife,” 127.

<sup>783</sup> Carver, “The Student’s Wife,” 127.

<sup>784</sup> Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility*, 60.

wealth. Yet, unlike the American woman who concentrates more on emotional needs by longing to build a family with children, Nan, who already has children, craves more material needs and a larger social milieu.

After enumerating her many wants, Nan wants Mike to inform her about his likes and dislikes, but he does not fulfill his promise, and he does not try to comfort her. Hence, just like George in “Cat in the Rain,” he cannot communicate his ideas and orders her to stop speaking and leave him alone before falling asleep.<sup>785</sup> Hence, in both stories, the male characters experience a meaningless life, depression, and despair to the extent that they lose their ability to communicate their wants and desires. In fact, their wives show greater awareness of their marital dissatisfaction.

The narrator also focuses on describing Nan’s many gestures and activities to imply her psychological suffering, which culminated in her crying when her husband did not answer her: “She turned onto her stomach and began crying, her head off the pillow, her mouth against the sheet. She cried.”<sup>786</sup> By the end of the story, the narrator relies on symbolism to suggest Nan’s emotional state and compels the readers to provide a deeper understanding of its meaning. Bethea suggests that Nan shows greater awareness than Hemingway’s American young woman. He thinks that in terms of emotional impact, the conclusion of Carver’s story ‘surpasses’ that of Hemingway’s because “Cat in the Rain” ends with a cool irony as the young girl is sent a tortoiseshell instead of the cat she desires to have. The readers can detect that no one can understand her wants and desires.

However, in Carver’s “The Student’s Wife,” the readers can easily “witness Nan’s agony with excruciating and moving clarity” and can feel her emotional growth.<sup>787</sup> When it begins to be light outside, she gets up and looks out of her window. The narrator puts more

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<sup>785</sup> Carver, “The Student’s Wife,” 128.

<sup>786</sup> Carver, “The Student’s Wife,” 130.

<sup>787</sup> Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility*, 61.

emphasis on the natural images she is watching: “The cloudless sky over the hills was beginning to turn white....The sky grew whiter, the light expanding rapidly up from behind the hills...she had seen few sunrises in her life and those when she was little. She knew that none of them had been like this. Not in pictures she had seen nor in any book she had read had she learned a sunrise was so terrible as this.”<sup>788</sup> The narrator’s use of concrete words and visual images provokes the readers’ imagination so that they can feel and comprehend Nan’s mental state.

After spending the night trying to combat insomnia busying herself with several activities, Nan looks at nature and puts more emphasis on its whiteness. As the sky grows whiter, she feels that it is the first time in her life that she has seen a depressive sunrise, which she describes as “so terrible.” The whiteness of the dawn is symbolic because it means that Nan is beginning to understand the world around her and she is able to build a new image of reality. Metaphorically, it refers to her ability to realize the reality of her marital life, which has been unambiguous for her. In this respect, Bethea illuminates that ““The Student’s Wife”” associates light imagery with both awareness and the terrifying sterility and constriction of the protagonist’s life, but there is little or no hope for freedom.”<sup>789</sup> In other words, he associates the whiteness of the dawn with the increasing clarity with which she starts to view the sickly nature of her life and her inability to free herself from the tyranny of her husband. Depending on their individual life experiences, the readers can provide varying interpretations of Nan’s emotional response to the sunrise.

Furthermore, the narrator creates menace and suspense by denoting to the readers that the student’s wife will never be independent from her husband’s tyranny. He shows some of the husband’s personal qualities through his way of sleeping: “He was knotted up

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<sup>788</sup> Carver, “The Student’s Wife,” 130–131.

<sup>789</sup> Bethea, *Technique and Sensibility*, 62.

in the center of the bed, the covers bunched over his shoulders, his head half under the pillow. He looked desperate in his heavy sleep, his arms flung out across her side of the bed, his jaws clenched.”<sup>790</sup> Clearly, comparable to George in “Cat in the Rain,” Mike’s way of sleeping indicates that he is a self-centered man who imposes his authority on his wife. By noting that Mike looks desperate in his heavy sleep, the narrator suggests that, like his wife, Mike also suffers from emotional depression and loneliness. By leaving gaps, he forces the readers to imagine the scene and try to find out the real reasons for Mike’s feeling of marital dissatisfaction.

The narrator refers again to the imagery of light to imply Nan’s realization of her miserable life with her husband: “As she looked, the room grew very light and the pale sheets whitened grossly before her eyes.”<sup>791</sup> Nan’s feelings of hopelessness and depression are intensified when she sees her husband’s way of sleeping. As a reaction, she gets down on her knees, puts her hands on the bed, and prays to God to help them: “‘God.’ she said. ‘God, will you help us, God?’ she said.”<sup>792</sup> Alan Wilde views that, because Nan fails to get her freedom, she could do nothing but pray for change.<sup>793</sup> Evidently, in contrast to the American woman in “Cat in the Rain,” the student’s wife seems more aware of the sterility of her marriage, and she expresses more courage and faith in order to save her marriage.

The reference to the light imagery can also suggest that Nan has a glimmer of hope that one day her marital problem will be solved in the future if she can free herself from the tyranny of her husband. Iser asserts that readers are given opportunities to learn something from the literary text by noting: “This gives him the chance to have an experience in the way George Bernard Shaw once described it: ‘You have learnt something. That always feels at

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<sup>790</sup> Carver, “The Student’s Wife,” 131.

<sup>791</sup> Carver, “The Student’s Wife,” 131.

<sup>792</sup> Carver, “The Student’s Wife,” 131.

<sup>793</sup> Alan Wilde, *Middle Grounds: Studies in Contemporary American Fiction*, (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1987), 62.



first as if you had lost something.’ Reading reflects the structure of experience to the extent that we must suspend the ideas and attitudes that shape our own personality before we can experience the unfamiliar world of the literary text.”<sup>794</sup> Readers are expected to learn about the dynamics of love relationships and marital life in the twentieth century. While reading, they compare them to their own life experiences and grow intellectually and emotionally alongside the characters.

Therefore, the comparative study of “Cat in the Rain” and “The Student’s Wife” demonstrates that both stories aim to uncover one of the most important human problems that encounter people in the modern era: marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication. The similarities between these two stories are more important than the differences, and this reinforces the idea that Carver is influenced by Hemingway’s depiction of marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication in his marriage group stories. Although nothing happens at the surface level in both stories, the narrators omit key details and imply others, and use symbolism and imagery to convey their theme and make the readers feel more than they understand the characters’ emotional states, such as alienation, loneliness, depression, miscommunication, marital dissatisfaction, and hopelessness. In both stories, the wives express their suffering from both material and emotional needs because they are living with self-centered and selfish men. However, unlike the American woman, Nan shows great awareness of her marital life, and she is more interested in having more material needs and a larger social milieu. Thus, Carver’s society has become more materialistic than Hemingway’s, and this has accentuated the psychological suffering of its individuals.

### **6.3 “You ‘Re Nothing”: Broken Hearts, Loneliness and Miscommunication in Richard Ford’s “The Womanizer”**

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<sup>794</sup> Iser, “The Reading Process,” 296.

Like Ernest Hemingway and his contemporary minimalist ‘neo-realist’ writers, Richard Ford deals, in his collections of short stories, with family issues such as love, marriage, and divorce. He also uncovers their effects on children, as well as men and women. In fact, Ford’s book’s title, *Women with Men*, which reverses at the title level Hemingway’s *Men without Women*, has attracted the attention of several critics and scholars and has engendered substantial discussion about the role of women in the American family in Ford’s fiction as opposed to Hemingway’s. It contains three interconnected stories –“Jealous,” “The Womanizer,” and “Occidentals”–which all deal with themes of failing marriage, miscommunication, divorce, and alienation.

In praising Ford’s *Women with Men*, Michael Gorra claims that “Ford has throughout his work acknowledged the central importance that women and marriage have in the lives of men.”<sup>795</sup> Moreover, Edward Quinn asserts that “strong women characters in the stories ultimately exist only to mark the shifts in sensibility of one or other troubled male. Despite the promise of the volume’s title, then, we do not get women with men, no communion of spirits, but a sense of self-absorbed men moving around, against or through women.”<sup>796</sup> Thus, unlike in Hemingway’s stories, Ford’s love relationships are dominated by women instead of men.

As with Hemingway’s “Cat in the Rain,” Ford’s “The Womanizer” is one of his best stories set in Europe. At the surface level, “The womanizer” centers around the failing marriage of Austin and his wife, Barbara, and his failing love relationship with Joséphine Belliard, whom he meets in Paris. At a deeper level, it follows the development of Austin

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<sup>795</sup> Michael Gorra, “Evasive Maneuvers,” Rev. of *Women with Men*, by Richard Ford, *The New Times Book Review* (July 13, 1997), (Accessed 14 July, 2015), <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/07/13/reviews/970713.13gorrat.htm>.

<sup>796</sup> Edward Quinn, “Postmodernism,” in *A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms, Second Edition*, (Facts On File, 2006), *Bloom’s Literature*, (Accessed 20 July, 2020), [online.infobase.com/Auth/Index?aid=19863&itemid=WE54&articleId=36707](http://online.infobase.com/Auth/Index?aid=19863&itemid=WE54&articleId=36707).

from a state of unconsciousness to a state of consciousness about relationships between human beings, especially between men and women. The third-person narrator starts his story in *media-res* without introducing the characters' histories, physical descriptions, and personalities. Likewise, he relies on the story's title, setting, gaps, implications, and silences to reveal the characters' emotional states and make the readers feel their predicament and psychological sufferings.

Right from the beginning of the story, the readers feel that there is something imminent beneath the narrator's total negligence of Austin and Barbara's life together as a married couple. Furthermore, he increases the readers' suspense by shedding light on Austin's love for Joséphine before disclosing any information about Austin's marital life. Such a gap implies the couple's emotional alienation foreshadowing their physical alienation and uncovering much about their emotional rupture years ago. In fact, the story's title prompts the readers to raise the question: Who is the womanizer? Through the reading process, the readers learn that it is Barbara who accuses her husband of being a womanizer when she decides to quit him by telling him: "... you're also a womanizer and you're a creep. And I don't want to be married to any of those things anymore. So."<sup>797</sup> Thus, the title denotes that Austin's personality, as a disengaged passive romantic, is one of the causes of the failure of his love relationships with both Barbara and Joséphine.

The narrator initiates the story's conflict by describing the development of Austin and Joséphine's relationship while dating each other. On his voyage to Paris, Austin, a forty-four-year-old businessman, married with no children, meets Joséphine, who is a sub-editor at a publishing house. This French woman is in her thirties. She has a child called Léo, and she is in the midst of divorcing her husband because he published a scandalous book in which he described her body parts indelicately and put her infidelity on display in sensational

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<sup>797</sup> Richard Ford, "The Womanizer," in *Men With Women: Three Stories*, (New York: Knopf, 1997), 37.

details.<sup>798</sup> By starting with Austin's betrayal of Barbara, the narrator suggests that this event is one of the most significant causes of the couple's marital dissatisfaction. So, in contrast to Hemingway in "Cat in the Rain," Ford focuses on showing how betrayal can destroy love relationships in contemporary society. In fact, the narrator creates suspense by omitting the main goal of Austin's attempt to approach Joséphine and her reluctance to accept him. Actually, Austin begins to learn about French female culture from his contact with Joséphine, and this makes the readers more aware of his preferences as a man.

After learning more about Joséphine's personal life, Austin believes she is more complicated than he expected; she is responsible for her child, and she is lonely because she has had no relationship with her parents since they moved to America years ago. He thinks that sharing an unexpected intimacy could strengthen both of their grips on life.<sup>799</sup> When he has the occasion to take her home in his car, Austin starts to express his emotions to the bemused and more sophisticated Joséphine. The narrator reports the scene: "I'd like to make you happy somehow" he said in a sincere voice, and waited while Joséphine said nothing. She did not remove her hand, but neither did she answer. It was as if what he'd said didn't mean anything, or that possibly she wasn't even listening to him."<sup>800</sup> Her response indicates that she is not interested in him as a man. When he expresses directly his likeness to her, she reacts unexpectedly in a cold voice, as if she is addressing a cab driver who says something inappropriate: "You are married. You have a wife. You live far away. In two days, three days, I don't know, you will leave. So. For what do you like me?"<sup>801</sup> Joséphine clearly does not understand his intentions, and she is not ready to enter into a love relationship with a married man.

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<sup>798</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 3.

<sup>799</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 3.

<sup>800</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 7.

<sup>801</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 8.

Austin and Joséphine's failure to communicate their true emotions is clearly evidenced in their last meeting while having dinner together at night before he decides to return home. The narrator draws the readers' attention to the dramatic event that takes place when they are sitting together without talking much. He describes Austin's curiosity to hear something from Joséphine that he can remember forever and makes him happy: "He waited. He thought Joséphine might say something, something ironic or clever or cold or merely commonplace, something that would break her little rule of silence...and perhaps have the last good word, one that would leave them both puzzled and tantalized..."<sup>802</sup> The couple's silence suggests that they are confused.

However, he makes the last attempt to settle the situation with Joséphine by expressing his true emotions and explaining his viewpoints: "... we could be lovers. We're interested in each other ... This is real life. I like you. You like me. All I've wanted to do is take advantage of that in some way that makes you glad, that puts a smile on your face."<sup>803</sup> Thus, in contrast to the American couple in "Cat in the Rain," the male character in "The Womanizer" seems more open-minded and expressive, while the woman is the silent character. As a reaction to his speech, Joséphine affirms to him that she is not strong enough to have something with him for the time being because "[i]t is still very confusing for [her] now."<sup>804</sup> Obviously, the characters attempt to build a love relationship, but they are not strongly interested in getting married. This couple's love relationship illustrates how postmodern individuals have become interested in satisfying their immediate emotional needs because they avoid engaging seriously in marital life.

Austin's reminiscence of this happy trip with his wife to Paris prompts the readers to suggest that they love each other, but things have changed now since he does not justify why

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<sup>802</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 19.

<sup>803</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 19.

<sup>804</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 20.

she did not accompany him this time. His psychological pressures are intensified when Barbara decides to abandon him because, like Nan in Carver's "The Student's Wife," she has become more aware of her marital problems and her real needs as she feels that she is being emotionally marginalized by him. The narrator does not explicitly explain the real causes of Austin and Barbara's marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication, but rather, he implies that there is something beneath the surface of things during their phone conversation. At the beginning of their conversation, Barbara brightly expresses her love and happiness to meet him at home: "Me. And the house. And the plants and the windows. The cars. Your life. We're all waiting with big smiles on our faces."<sup>805</sup> He also draws the readers' attention to Barbara's feeling of betrayal when she starts to inquire about the woman who accompanies her husband to the restaurant. While trying to calm her, Austin answers her: "Just a woman I met..." "She's married. She has a baby. It's just *la vie moderne*."<sup>806</sup> Suddenly, Barbara's voice and tone have changed, and she starts a serious argument. Barbara, like the American woman in "Cat in the Rain," feels marginalized by her husband and begins expressing her emotional needs: "Do you think,"... "that you might just possibly have taken me for granted tonight?"<sup>807</sup> There is a silence after her question. Austin feels sorry that Barbara thinks that he is taking her for granted, despite the fact that he loves her.<sup>808</sup>

In fact, the narrator relies on visual images to activate the readers' mental processes so that they can imagine the dramatic scene and feel Austin's emotional states of depression and disappointment as a response to his wife's conversation: "He looked grainy, displeased, the light beside his bed harsh, intrusive, his champagne glass empty, the night he'd just spent unsuccessful, unpromising, vaguely humiliating. He looked like he was on drugs."<sup>809</sup> Hence,

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<sup>805</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 23.

<sup>806</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 23.

<sup>807</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 24.

<sup>808</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 24.

<sup>809</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 25.

the narrator stimulates the readers' curiosity to know what will happen when they meet at home.

The tension between Austin and Barbara is intensified on the first night he returns home. In fact, she first does her best to orchestrate a happy homecoming and to erase that uncomfortable memory; she wears a new spring dress and cooks him his favourite dishes. While lying side by side, they try to find something to say to each other. However, they fail to solve this problem of communication, as the narrator declares: "Each knew the other's mind was seeking it; an upbeat, forward-sounding subject that conjured away the past couple or maybe it was three years, which hadn't been so wonderful between the two of them—a time of wandering for Austin and patience from Barbara."<sup>810</sup> Furthermore, when Barbara feels that Austin is not listening to her, she stays silent and changes her position in bed as a reaction to his negligence. Austin settles himself helplessly into sleep, yet like Ford's male characters, he is overwhelmed by feelings that he has not pleased Barbara very much. He thinks that he is not only a man who probably pleases no one very much, but also one who does not feel happy in his own life as nothing pleases him at all.<sup>811</sup> Austin's self-knowledge and thinking indicate that he has a pessimistic vision of life. His ambiguous emotional state provokes the readers' curiosity and imagination to fill in the gaps based on their life experiences.

In fact, Austin and Barbara's marital relationship reaches its end when she starts expressing her dissatisfaction. They start arguing after a long silence, as they stay in a restaurant the evening following the day of his arrival when both of them become too drunk. In reality, Barbara accuses him of being a selfish and self-centred man as he does not care about her needs: "What *is* true, though, Martin, and what's worse—about you, anyway—is

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<sup>810</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 28.

<sup>811</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 30.

that you take *yourself* for granted.”<sup>812</sup> She thinks that Austin’s travel to a foreign country has changed his mentality and his personality so that he has become unreachable to her as she cannot communicate easily with him.<sup>813</sup> Barbara has long felt that her husband has changed, but it is only now that she has become strong and courageous enough to express her emotional states, seeking a decisive solution to her miserable life. Interestingly, the tension reaches its peak when Barbara confidently insults him and accuses him of being a womaniser and an asshole. She confronts him with her decision that she cannot continue her life with him.<sup>814</sup> As such, like Nan in Carver’s “The Student’s Wife,” Barbara represents a good example of postmodern women who search for their liberty and freedom if they fail to establish a strong love relationship with their husbands.

Depressed, he realizes that he does not like to leave his wife because his love for her is so strong. Yet, he also feels that their separation is inevitable and destined to happen, whatever the reasons and the outcomes.<sup>815</sup> This dramatic scene decides Austin’s emotional states: “FOR TWO DAYS Austin took long, exhausting walks in completely arbitrary directions....And unhappily he kept passing the same streets and movie theatre..., as if he continually walked in a circle.”<sup>816</sup> The fact of walking aimlessly indicates that Austin is lost psychologically as well as physically in France’s streets. The readers can imagine his movements and feel his emotional state of depression, loss, and unhappiness.

In fact, after the traumatic event with Barbara, Austin tries to change his mood and find happiness by approaching Joséphine while in Paris. The narrator draws the readers’ attention to Austin and Josephine’s confusion and misunderstanding, which anticipate the failure of their love relationship. When Austin arrives at Joséphine’s apartment, he wants

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<sup>812</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 35.

<sup>813</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 36.

<sup>814</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 37.

<sup>815</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 41.

<sup>816</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 48.



her to sense that they can build a stronger love relationship by openly confronting her: “There’s something important between us, I think,” ... “Important enough to bring me back across an ocean and to leave my wife and to face the chance that I’ll be alone here.”<sup>817</sup> Austin’s expression indicates that he is planning to start a new life with her. However, she accuses him of being unconscious of what he is saying: “You are very fatigued, I think.”<sup>818</sup> Obviously, Austin is forcing himself on her. He believes that he wants to experience new ways of life with Joséphine, but he can never love her the way he loves Barbara.<sup>819</sup> Thus, the readers can detect that Austin experiences an emotional emptiness and lives in a world of dreams and expectations.

The event of losing sight of Léo in the park when he takes him to play there stimulates the readers’ empathy for Austin because he engages in self-blame and thinks that he is an awful and careless man. He brings suffering to the lives of innocent people and those who trust him.<sup>820</sup> While going back home with Joséphine after leaving the police office, Austin makes his last attempt to show love for her, but like Barbara, she rejects his plans and expresses her real emotions angrily: “You are a fool;” ... “I hate you. You don’t know anything. You don’t know who you are”.... “You’re nothing.”<sup>821</sup> Furthermore, she devalues him by looking at him bitterly and saying: “Who are you?”[...] “Who do you think you are? You’re nothing.”<sup>822</sup> What is more, she smiles at him with a cruel and confident smile and affirms to him: “I don’t care what happens to you. You are dead. I don’t see you.”<sup>823</sup> Feeling disappointed, Austin promises her that she will not see him again: “I’ll make sure you don’t

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<sup>817</sup>Ford, “The Womanizer,” 61.

<sup>818</sup>Ford, “The Womanizer,” 61.

<sup>819</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 70.

<sup>820</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 74.

<sup>821</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 77.

<sup>822</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 77.

<sup>823</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 78.

have to see me again.”<sup>824</sup> Hence, this last conversation ends their relationship forever because Austin has forced himself on her.

In the coming days, Austin starts evaluating the events that have happened to him with both Barbara and Joséphine. For several nights, he is overwhelmed by a defeating fear that Barbara would die soon, or that she had died, which deprived him of sleep in his small *risqué* apartment. These feelings make him more conscious of the loss of something very important in his life.<sup>825</sup> Austin cannot specify what this “something” is, but he thinks that it may be connected to Barbara and his life.<sup>826</sup> The narrator objectively reports: “So that he began to think of his life, in those succeeding days, almost entirely in terms of what was wrong with him, of his problem, his failure—in particular his failure as a husband, but also in terms of his unhappiness, his predicament, his ruin, which he wanted to repair.”<sup>827</sup> In fact, Austin recognizes that all his dreams would have been fulfilled if he stayed with his wife, Barbara, and that he has to do his best to regain her trust.

As for Joséphine, he already knew that he was attracted to her, but he could not love her or decide to live with her for so long: “Behind Joséphine, of course, was nothing—no fabric or mystery, no secrets, nothing he had curiosity for now.”<sup>828</sup> His experience leads him to detect that they can never be happy together. Hence, the readers deduce that, like Ford’s male characters, he is experiencing new sensations as he moves from a state of unconsciousness to a state of consciousness and understanding of his own personality and life.

The narrator leaves his story with an open ending just as in Hemingway’s “Cat in the Rain” because he does not tell the readers about how Austin will manage to solve his marital

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<sup>824</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 77.

<sup>825</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 78.

<sup>826</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 78.

<sup>827</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 78.

<sup>828</sup> Ford, “The Womanizer,” 89.

problem. Indeed, in the last paragraph, he engages the readers in the construction of the story's meaning by ending with Austin's ontological questions. Before he drifts to sleep and as he is overwhelmed again by the fear that Barbara may be dying, he wonders what is possible between human beings. Similar to Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain," the thing that really defeats affection is the husband's endemic inability to look outside of himself. Consequently, the emotional and material needs and sanctity, the preferences and dislikes of his wife are completely ignored, causing the failure of their marriage. The narrator reports Austin's thoughts about how a person can rebuild a strong relationship with others despite the harm he may have caused them: "How he can regulate life. How could you regulate life, do little harm and still be attached to others? ... he wondered if being *fixed* could be a misunderstanding, and, as Barbara had said ..., if he had changed slightly, somehow altered the important linkages that guaranteed his happiness and become detached, unreachable. Could you *become* that? Was it something you controlled, or a matter of your character, or a change to which you were only a victim?"<sup>829</sup> In this quoted passage, the narrator summarizes Austin's philosophy of life. He questions how a change in his behaviour can impact his love relationship with his wife, if this change is controlled or not, and to what extent this change can affect his happiness in life and his relationships with other human beings.

Therefore, the readers can learn the complexity of human relationships from Austin's experience in life. Relationships can be damaged if one person feels that another person has changed or has taken himself for granted while neglecting others' needs. That attraction or love on one side can never last forever. Indeed, in an interview with Ned Stuckey-French, Richard Ford claims that "The Womanizer," along with the other two stories in the same collection, has "at the end some calamitous event that is a somewhat hyperbolized version

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<sup>829</sup> Ford, "The Womanizer," 79.

of modern life.”<sup>830</sup> In the same interview, he classifies this story under realistic fiction, which is greatly associated with the saying: “Pay closer attention to what you’re doing, or bad things will result.”<sup>831</sup> Because Austin does not pay attention to what he is doing, he cannot realize his dreams of a happy life and success, as he ends up suffering from some sort of solipsism. Because the characters belong to different places, France and America, the theme of solipsism becomes quite in place.

All in all, in comparison to Hemingway’s “Cat in the Rain” and Carver’s “The Student’s Wife,” Ford’s “The Womanizer” deals with the theme of marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication between couples. The narrator omits key details and implies others, leading the readers to understand the causes and consequences of Austin’s behavior and change in his marital life with Barbara, who finally discovers that he loves her more than any other woman, especially after his experience with Joséphine, who does not show any interest in him because she has lost confidence in men. Thus, the most important problem with Austin and these women is their inability to bridge the loneliness and communicate and connect with one another. Indeed, Barbara’s response to Austin uncovers that divorce in postmodern American society has become one of the best solutions for women to regain their dignity and freedom from the tyranny of their husbands. Hence, postmodern women have become more aware of their marital problems, and they are able to take decisive decisions in their lives. Because of the activation of their mental processes, the readers grow intellectually with Austin. The latter moves on from a state of unconsciousness to a state of consciousness about the relationship between human beings and life.

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<sup>830</sup> Richard Ford and Ned Stuckey-French, “An Interview with Richard Ford,” in *Speaking of the Short Story: Interviews with Contemporary Writers*, eds. Farhat Iftekharuddin, Mary Rohrberger, and Maurice Lee, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997): 107-122, Rpt. in *Short Story Criticism* by Jelena O, ed., Krstovic ( 143), ( Detroit, Gale, 2010), *Literature Resource Center*, (Accessed 8 Dec., 2015), <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420102661&v=2.1&u=crrl&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=ecbde035276725165bd3cebe58653809>.

<sup>831</sup> Ford and Stuckey-French, “An Interview with Richard Ford.”

#### **6.4 “The Preacher’s Wife: A Paradise or a Hell”: The Wife’s Insanity and Marital Dissatisfaction in Bobbie Ann Mason’s “The Retreat”**

Like her contemporaries, Bobbie Ann Mason showed a keen interest in family life, especially male-female relationships, which were vassalized by drastic cultural changes in western Kentucky. Indeed, marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication between couples dominated family life when women started to integrate into the new emerging society, which underwent considerable changes in different fields during the 1980s. Similar to the narrators of Hemingway’s “Cat in the Rain,” Carver’s “The Student’s Wife,” and Ford’s “The Womanizer,” the narrator of Mason’s “The Retreat” emphasizes the fragility of modern marriage between members of the lower class. By relying on the techniques of omission, implication, and symbolism, he makes the readers feel the emotional state of the wife, Georgeann, who is unsatisfied with her husband, Shelby Pickett, a preacher. The story is a critique of the effects of social and cultural changes on family life.

The story’s title, “The Retreat,” is symbolic in that it refers to the characters’ search for spiritual renewal. Its narrator starts the story in *media-res* without informing us about the characters’ histories and personalities. At the surface level, the story’s plot seems simple; however, he provides enough clues to allow the readers to understand its deeper meaning by interpreting the characters’ behaviors, speeches, and actions. Right from the opening paragraph, he creates suspense by recounting a turning point event in the story. Like Nan in “The Student’s Wife,” Georgeann feels lonely and disappointed, though she is leaving with her husband and two children. Because Georgeann has lost interest in her husband’s duties as she has put off packing for the annual church retreat, Shelby feels that his wife has

changed.<sup>832</sup> Indeed, the narrator's starting his story with the couple's argument over the retreat implies the story's main theme of marital miscommunication and dissatisfaction.

In a flashback, the narrator recounts some past events that highlight that the couple have long enjoyed a happy life together. He tells the readers that Georgeann's mother "warned her about the disadvantages of marrying with a preacher."<sup>833</sup> As opposed to her mother, Georgeann did not refuse to marry him because she admired his personality, and she thought that she could cope with the situation.<sup>834</sup> As a matter of fact, at the beginning of their marital life, the couple fought together to improve their economic and social conditions. Because Shelby's wage is too low, he decided to work in a trade after attending a night school. On the other hand, Georgeann supported her husband by working at Krogers,<sup>835</sup> especially when they had two children, Tamara and Jason. Furthermore, differences between the personalities of Shelby and Georgeann did not impact their marital life. They worked together in harmony and supported each other during the early years of their marriage.

In addition, the narrator draws the readers' attention to the turning events in the couple's marital life when Georgeann starts to feel that she wants more freedom in her relationship with her husband. The narrator's recounting of the preparation for this year's retreat and its event makes the readers sense the shift in the couple's marital life and Georgeann's dissatisfaction with her marriage. While Shelby is looking forward to the retreat and is talking about it as if he is a little boy anticipating a summer camp, his wife is not as enthusiastic this time.<sup>836</sup> Yet, she starts hating herself as a preacher's wife because she feels

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<sup>832</sup> Bobbie Ann Mason, "The Retreat," in *Midnight Magic: Selected Short Stories of Bobbie Ann Mason*, (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1982, New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1998), 37.

<sup>833</sup> Mason, "The Retreat," 37.

<sup>834</sup> Mason, "The Retreat," 37–38.

<sup>835</sup> Mason, "The Retreat," 37.

<sup>836</sup> Mason, "The Retreat," 37.

that her life is restricted to the religious and familial duties without having a chance to enjoy many other things that have emerged in her town.

The main characters' viewpoints regarding the importance of the retreat are reflected in their behaviors during its days. Shelby, who has a positive attitude towards the retreat, is able to achieve his goals, as the narrator notes: "After the first day, Shelby's spirit seems renewed. He talks and laughs with old acquaintances, and during social hours, he seems cheerful and relaxed. He already has fifty ideas for new sermons, he tells Georgeann happily."<sup>837</sup> Thus, his happiness and optimism indicate that the retreat has a symbolic significance for his life as a whole because he is a preacher.

In contrast to her husband, Georgeann devalues the significance of the retreats because she thinks that they do not offer any substantial insights.<sup>838</sup> On this point, Champion retains that "Georgeann compares the retreats to a contaminated environment, understanding that the closed-minded thinking is indeed contagious."<sup>839</sup> This idea is reflected in her question to the other women during the "marriage enhancement" workshop: "What do you do if you're just simply mismatched?"<sup>840</sup> The women's disapproval of her opinion makes the readers feel that they are infected with the narrow-mindedness that is becoming increasingly widespread during the organized retreats.

Moreover, while the other preachers' wives talk about their happy lives with their husbands, she asks them a question that implies her dissatisfaction with her life as a preacher's wife: "What do you do if the man you're married to? This is just a hypothetical question?—say he's the cream of creation and all, and he's sweet as can be, but he turns out to be the wrong one for you?"<sup>841</sup> Her unexpected question surprises the other eleven

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<sup>837</sup> Mason, "The Retreat," 48.

<sup>838</sup> Mason, "The Retreat," 50.

<sup>839</sup> Champion, "Bobbie Ann Mason's (Open-ended) Marriages."

<sup>840</sup> Mason, "The Retreat," 50.

<sup>841</sup> Mason, "The Retreat," 50.

ministers' wives, who stay silent, looking at her. While interpreting her speech, the readers become more conscious of her self-blame and marital dissatisfaction.

Indeed, the narrator facilitates the readers' trust that Georgeann, like most women in Mason's stories, wants to renew her life path. As noted by Morphew: "Mason's women simply want breathing space in their relationships with their men. Sometimes only divorce, always initiated by the women, will provide the degree of change these women seek but sometimes their assertiveness merely aims for a change of pace?"<sup>842</sup> However, as opposed to female characters in Mason's stories, Georgeann does not resort to divorce as a solution to her marital problem.

As is the case in the stories of Hemingway, Carver, and Ford, the narrator of "The Retreat" denotes Georgeann's psychological dilemma through the use of symbols. Compared to the American woman in "Cat in the Rain," who feels pity for the cat under the rain, Georgeann feels pity for the sick hen, and she states to her: "'Perk up,' ... You look like you've got a low blood."<sup>843</sup> Georgeann identifies herself with the hen as both of them need protection and emotional warmth, and both of them have low blood and are infected with contagious skin bugs. Her psychological dilemma resembles that of the sick hen that cannot stand on its feet as the narrator describes twice: "When Georgeann feeds the chickens, she notices that the sick hen is unable to get up on its feet"<sup>844</sup>; "[Georgeann] sees that the sick hen has flopped outside again and can't get up on her feet."<sup>845</sup> The narrator's reliance on the technique of repetition stimulates the readers' imagination and engages them in the construction of the story's deeper meaning.

Indeed, the hen's physical inability to fly refers metaphorically to Georgeann's inability to divorce her husband and move beyond the social constraints because she wants

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<sup>842</sup> Morphew, "Downhome Feminists," 42.

<sup>843</sup> Mason, "The Retreat," 42.

<sup>844</sup> Mason, "The Retreat," 43.

<sup>845</sup> Mason, "The Retreat," 48.



to remain a respected person in her community. On the other hand, she desires to forge a new identity by freeing herself from social responsibilities as a preacher's wife and adapting to the newly emerging feminist vision. However, as Champion points out, "she is unwilling to relinquish socially imposed nuptial responsibilities and assert her individuality."<sup>846</sup> Although Georgeann is not willing to accept her unhappy marriage, unlike most women in Mason's stories, she cannot leave her husband because she has little education and she does not have a job outside of the work she is doing with him.

Additionally, the narrator relies on other symbols to make the readers more aware of Georgeann's mental state. On the day of the retreat, while she walks by the lake, she observes the seagulls flying. Using concrete words and visual images, the narrator objectively describes this scene: "She watches seagulls flying over the water. It amazes her that seagulls have flown this far inland, as though they were looking for something, the source of all that water. They are above the water, flying away from her."<sup>847</sup> As water generally symbolizes rebirth and life, the image of the seagulls flying over it and Georgeann's interpretation of their aim refers to her search for a better life, similar to the seagulls. Nevertheless, the fact of flying away from her refers, metaphorically, to the loss of hope of enjoying a better life. As a matter of fact, as opposed to the seagulls, Georgeann realizes that she cannot move on in her life as long as she is living with a preacher.

Besides, the narrator puts more emphasis on Georgeann's mental state by using the weather symbol. In fact, the change of the weather while watching the seagulls decides Georgeann's mood: "The sky changes as she watches, puffy clouds thinning out into threads, a jet contrail intersecting them and spreading, like something melting: an icicle. The sun

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<sup>846</sup> Champion, "Bobbie Ann Mason's (Open-ended) Marriages."

<sup>847</sup> Mason, "The Retreat," 51.

pops out.”<sup>848</sup> This description, using concrete words and a series of images, refers metaphorically to Georgeann’s complicated problems and her fear of the unknown future.

Through the use of the aforementioned symbols, the narrator creates certain emotional effects on the readers and conveys the psychological dilemma of Georgeann. In reality, the image of the seagulls, the weather, and her observation of family members arguing over who gets to use an inner tube first spoil her walking near the seaside: “Georgeann feels a stiffening inside her. Instead of letting go, loosening up, relaxing, she is tightening up. But this means that she is growing stronger.”<sup>849</sup> Hence, her experience strengthens her personality as she becomes more aware of her emotional dilemma and her marital dissatisfaction. On the other hand, the readers grow emotionally attached to her and feel her depression, confusion, and loss of hope.

The couple’s marital crisis reaches its peak when Shelby discovers that his wife has gone to the basement. Shocked, Shelby treats “her like a mental state.”<sup>850</sup> He thinks that she has lost her mind by indulging in such games where she has spent a lot of money and time. When she tries to explain to him her new feelings while playing the game, he blames her for forgetting that she is a preacher’s wife: “You forget everything but who you are?”<sup>851</sup> However, as with any woman of Mason’s characters, Georgeann is able to confront her husband and treat him as insane: “Your mind leaves your body.”<sup>852</sup> The couple’s argument in this scene demonstrates to the readers that everyone is not satisfied with the behaviour and personality of the other and that they struggle to stay together to preserve their social status in their community.

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<sup>848</sup> Mason, “The Retreat,” 51.

<sup>849</sup> Mason, “The Retreat,” 51.

<sup>850</sup> Mason, “The Retreat,” 53.

<sup>851</sup> Mason, “The Retreat,” 53.

<sup>852</sup> Mason, “The Retreat,” 53.

Yet, unlike George in “Cat in the Rain,” who is not affected by his wife’s speech, Shelby feels depressed after hearing his wife’s speech, and he questions her while driving home: “What can I do to make you happy?”<sup>853</sup> His question allows the readers to expect the degree of the couple’s miscommunication. It also shows that compared to Austin in “The Womanizer,” Shelby does not know how to make his wife happy and he cannot understand why she has changed. Furthermore, because she feels depressed and oriented, she slowly answers him: “I’ll let you know when I can get it figured out ... Just let me work on it.”<sup>854</sup> Her speech propels the readers to raise questions, such as: why is she reluctant to answer him? Why does she not take the opportunity to express her wants and desires? And what lies beneath the surface of her silence?

Additionally, the narrator directs the readers’ attention to the characters’ miscommunication by referring to their silence while driving home along the road: “Shelby lets her alone. They drive home in silence.”<sup>855</sup> Like in “Cat in the Rain,” the characters’ silence in Mason’s “The Retreat” indicates their psychological pain and their inability to express their emotions due to the emotional rupture. However, in contrast to the American woman who enumerates all her material and emotional needs, Georgeann just states: “I was happy when I was playing that game.”<sup>856</sup> Hence, unlike the American woman, she wants to enjoy more material needs and cope with the new developments.

As with Hemingway’s “Cat in the Rain,” the narrator of “The Retreat” leaves his story with an open ending to give the readers more opportunities to contribute to the construction of its deeper meaning. When Georgeann goes again to the henhouse, she observes that the sick hen is still alive, but she does not move from the corner under the

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<sup>853</sup> Mason, “The Retreat,” 53.

<sup>854</sup> Mason, “The Retreat,” 53.

<sup>855</sup> Mason, “The Retreat,” 53.

<sup>856</sup> Mason, “The Retreat,” 53.

roost.<sup>857</sup> Indeed, the sick hen image refers metaphorically to Georgeann, who is still alive, but is psychologically sick. In fact, she could not move on in her life and realize her dream of freeing herself from the tyranny of her husband and her religious and social duties. Nevertheless, Georgeann does not feel pity for the sick hen as she used to, and she decides to kill it, as the narrator describes: “she holds its body down, pressing its wings. The chicken does not struggle. When the ax crashes down blindly on its neck, Georgeann feels nothing, only that she has done her duty.”<sup>858</sup> Certainly, her actions surprise the readers and increase their curiosity to find out the metaphoric meaning of this ambiguous ending. Accordingly, they will try to find answers to questions such as: what does the action of killing the sick chicken mean in relation to Georgeann’s marital life? What will be the consequences of this action on her, psychologically? Depending on the memorized events of the story, their individual dispositions, and literary readings, the readers can provide different interpretations of the last action.

The readers can infer that she ceases to struggle in order to free herself from her husband. Thus, she decides to stay in her unhappy marriage because she believes in doing her duty to preserve her family and her reputation in society. To support this view, Morphew thinks that by killing the sick chicken, Georgeann, who feels disoriented or sick, “disposes of her own will, weak though it may be. With no support, emotional or financial, Georgeann has nowhere else to go and she will stay in her unhappy marriage.”<sup>859</sup> He also believes that her actions indicate that she has become a dutiful and obedient wife, capable of regaining the trust and love of both her husband and mother.<sup>860</sup>

On the other hand, Wilhelm claims that Georgeann’s action indicates that she decides to leave her husband: “... in an action that is reminiscent of traditional rituals of sacrifice,

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<sup>857</sup> Mason, “The Retreat,” 54.

<sup>858</sup> Mason, “The Retreat,” 55.

<sup>859</sup> Morphew, “Downhome Feminists,” 43.

<sup>860</sup> Morphew, “Downhome Feminists,” 43.

Georgeann chops off the head of a sick chicken.... She has decided to abandon her respectable role as preacher's wife in order to pursue a new identity."<sup>861</sup> According to him, Georgeann fails to solve her problem and decides to put an end to her unhappy marriage by leaving her husband. What is more important, Mason, like Hemingway, succeeds in raising different interpretations of her open ending and inciting the readers' and critics' imaginations.

Therefore, in comparison to Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain," Carver's "The Student's Wife," and Ford's "The Womanizer," Mason's "The Retreat" deals with the issue of marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication between a married couple. Through the techniques of omission, implication, and symbolism, the narrator succeeds in stimulating the readers' imagination so that they can contribute to the reconstruction of the story's meaning. They can also feel the characters' emotional states, including their depression, hopelessness, and confusion. As in Hemingway's story, the female character is too weak to change the direction of her life, though she wants to absorb a feminist vision. Because she lacks emotional and financial support, she cannot make an appropriate decision. The story invokes an emotional impact on the readers who have already experienced or might experience her marital life.

The comparative study of Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain," Carver's "The Student's Wife," Ford's "The Womanizer," and Mason's "The Retreat" shows that these stories exhibit similarities as well as differences. Indeed, all of them deal with the issue of family life and the emotional rupture between married couples who experience miscommunication and marital dissatisfaction. The narrators rely on minimalist techniques, including omission of important details and the stories' endings, implications, symbolism, and imagery, in order to engage the readers so that they can imagine the scenes and interpret the stories' deeper

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<sup>861</sup> Wilhelm, "Private Rituals," 279.

meanings. The characters' speeches, silences, and behaviours tell us more about their psychological sufferings, including hopelessness, depression, confusion, and fear of the future. In all the stories, the female characters reveal their dissatisfaction with their self-centred and selfish husbands, who do not care about their emotional and material needs.

Moreover, the emotional impact created in the endings of the minimalist stories surpasses that in Hemingway's, as the readers become more aware of the character's self-growth. Restricted by their social and cultural values of conservatism, modernist women generally suffer silently, showing no reaction. Unlike in Hemingway's story, the women in postmodernist stories demonstrate great awareness of their marital dissatisfaction, which is clearly shown in their miscommunications and their silences. Although they attempt to free themselves from their husbands' tyranny and adopt a feminist vision and the new cultural values that have emerged in their society, the women in the stories by Carver, Ford, and Mason fail to achieve their goals. Indeed, the stories provide a critique of cultural aspects of American society during the last decades of the twentieth century, especially the emotional rupture between couples, miscommunication, and the failure of human communication.

Thus, the minimalist writers' concern with failing marriages and miscommunication, like Hemingway, underlines that the minimalist style, with its distinct characteristics, services in outlining family troubles and human predicaments. It also engages readers in the reconstruction of the text's meanings through stimulating text-reader interaction. Their concentration on this theme stems from their great interest in criticizing American social reality. Still, they do this without providing solutions to the problems. This theme evokes in readers a consistent emotional impact and makes them more aware of marital life in American society and its related issues. The readers learn from the characters' failures and their struggles how to realize their dreams of a better life. They share with them their sensory experiences as they achieve an aesthetic object.



## GENERAL CONCLUSION

This doctoral dissertation has dealt with Ernest Hemingway's legacy to the Minimalist Movement and his influence on the short fiction of its leading figures. The findings from this study that contrasts twenty selected short stories in five chapters have proven Hemingway's stylistic and thematic influence on selected short stories by Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, and Bobbie Ann Mason. Indeed, text processing is an important phase in Iser's theory. It allows interaction between the text and its reader through imagination, and the second and third chapters of this dissertation have made known those aspects of poetic language and narrative techniques inspired by minimalist writers from Hemingway's style to produce maximum effects on prospective readers and boost imagination. I have demonstrated that these minimalist writers imitate Hemingway's terse style, through the use of imagery and repetition techniques in their stories to achieve specific goals. In the compared stories, all the story-tellers depend on the economy of language and the direct treatment of the thing, as well as the creation of symbolism through language. Like



Hemingway, the minimalist writers' concern is to bring into play stylistic techniques for condensing the emotionally affective part in fiction writing. The writers' terse styles, together with their heavy reliance on concrete words and straightforward sentences, defy straightforward interpretations, for the implicit sounds more significant than the explicit.

Although they are considered 'neo-realists,' Carver, Ford, and Mason do apply traditional symbolism, like Hemingway. They also use pronoun repetitions and emphatic words. Such techniques prompt readers to define sentence structures and decide the author's word choices and categories. They play a crucial role in generating effects which arise from the writers' emphasis on certain emotions and clarifications of given ideas. Reflected in the extra-textual elements of each story, these technical applications allow such writers to create maximum effects on would-be readers and enhance their awareness of American social reality as it is.

Additionally, these writers draw on the narrative techniques of implication, omission, and epiphany to manage the text-reader interaction. I have demonstrated that omission and implication techniques impact the thematic, narrative, syntactic, and descriptive engagements. The writers in question operate these interrelated narrative devices in such a way that they provide readers with more opportunities to partake in the reconstruction of deeper meanings. They fill in the gaps and interpret the characters' speeches, dialogues, silences, and gestures. Although Carver and Mason are influenced by Hemingway's "Theory of Omission," they do not—unlike him—provide enough clues within the texts, making the interpretation process a demanding task, given the existence of mysteries in their stories.

Furthermore, though these writers use such techniques to extremely impress potential readers, the degree of their emotional impact on readers varies. In fact, the emotional impact created by the minimalist stories of Carver, Ford, and Mason, especially in the endings of their stories and the epiphanic moments, surpasses that of Hemingway's, as the readers

become more and more aware of the characters' self-growth. Nevertheless, unlike with Hemingway's stories, the characters' submerged emotions in the minimalist stories remain unknown to readers. These minimalist writers focus on leaving things out to suggest something bleaker. By avoiding their characters' existential trails, they leave readers with no explanation for why the characters act the way they do, or why they are unable to act at all when confronted with major problems.

Moreover, with the activation of their mental processes, readers can share in almost each story the characters' sensory experiences, grasp the social reality, and understand the socio-economic and cultural changes that emerged in American society and shaped the writers' viewpoints about different issues. I have concluded that these poetic and narrative techniques play an integral role in the minimalist style, increasing the readers' desire for literary texts to uncover the socio-political reality of American during the 1970s to 1990s and recognize the extratextual elements that shape the texts. The primary aim of these minimalist writers in adapting these techniques lies in their willingness to convey the emotional truth to their readers. They help them feel more than understand or cognate the meanings of the stories, allowing for self-growth and understanding of the world around them.

In the last three chapters, I have shown that, like Hemingway, these minimalist writers deal with predominant themes that produce strong emotional effects on their implied readers. They endeavour to convey the emotional truth about humanity and reveal much about the negative effects of modernisation and technology on American society in the twentieth century.

Hemingway was a pioneer of what is called "existential realism." His stories resist straightforward interpretation, in which what is left unsaid is more important than what is stated. In this connection, I have shown that the minimalist writers are influenced by

existentialism in the selected stories that evoke strong emotions about human beings, such as the feelings of alienation and existential depression. They are showcased in the characters' feelings of nihilism, nothingness, and loneliness, which tell us much about the reality of American society in the twentieth century and human beings' predicament in general. Using minimalist techniques of omission, implication, and figures of speech, these writers increase the readers' engagement with texts for the sake of not only apprehending human's inevitable destiny but also feeling and imagining the characters' lives in the world of nothingness and nihilism. Like Hemingway and Carver, Ford thinks that art, rather than religion, is the best method to provide consolation and redemption where life has become void of meaning in the realm of nothingness.

In all the stories, the characters' silences imply the limits of their world. Such writers depict in their stories the impact of people's feelings of alienation and existential depression, not just to illustrate them, but also to inspire readers to investigate the emotional intensity and find a more meaningful existence than the one offered by twentieth-century American consumer culture.

Furthermore, the comparison between Hemingway's heroic concepts of masculinity and violence and those of the minimalist writers has revealed that the latter courageously engage with the theme of masculinity and violence in the selected stories. They offer possibilities for new alternative values and patterns of cultural concepts of masculinity. They all question Hemingway's conception of violence as a test of manhood and heroism. Thus, unlike Hemingway, they are not concerned with portraying a hero, as this notion is no longer appropriate to their postmodern world. They are more interested in depicting the dreary lives of the lower and lower-middle classes who struggle to live a happy, simple life with minimal means.

Moreover, I have demonstrated that, like Hemingway, these minimalist writers give special importance to family relationships, especially the issue of marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication between couples. However, Hemingway's treatment of an emotionally sterile marriage is superior to Carver's, Ford's, and Mason's. Female characters in minimalist stories show greater awareness than Hemingway's. They adopt a feminist vision, and show more strength to change their lifestyle while seeking more freedom and self-empowerment. They are more aware of their marital problems and seek divorce as a means of resolving them. They are eager to leave everything behind in pursuit of freedom, liberty, and happiness. The compared stories provide a critique of the effects of modernization and social and cultural changes on American families in the twentieth century.

The compared stories in these last three chapters, in general, tell of human predicament and provide a picture of American society whose members suffered from the effects of cultural and social changes following the twentieth century's two world wars. Although nothing happens at surface level, the writers' reliance on techniques of imagery, implication, omission, and figures of speech increases reader awareness of the characters' psychological predicament. It also enlarges their understanding of the world around them as they grow intellectually and emotionally. They are also supposed to develop different perspectives on the studied issues and consciously compare them to their societies. As they interact with the texts throughout the process of reading, the compared themes are likely to evoke strong emotions in readers and make them more cognizant of both American cultural values and societal problems and their own problems.

The readers are compelled to rethink their viewpoints regarding gender issues, family life, and marriage, and critically channel a way to better understand postmodernism. Hence, they gradually learn how to evaluate socio-cultural and political values existing in their

societies and how to live in the new emerging societies by accepting or challenging the writers' viewpoints.

Therefore, the findings of the research have substantiated the assertion that the comparative study of the selected short stories outlines important similarities more than differences in the studied aspects. These findings speak how Hemingway's legacy to the American Minimalist Movement resides in his method of conveying the emotional truth to his readers, using stylistic and narrative techniques such as imagery, repetition, omission, implication, and epiphany. Thematically, I have inferred that the minimalist short story did not shift its concerns from Hemingway's time to Carver's, Ford's, and Mason's. These writers are interested in the themes that characterize Hemingway's writing, including alienation and existential depression, masculinity, violence, marital dissatisfaction and miscommunication. Hence, the findings have proven that the minimalist style is not really "new" because the adapted aspects of Hemingway's writing by Carver, Ford, and Mason, though they are not necessary his creation, are of paramount importance to the foundation of the Minimalist Movement. They are also considered among its basic characteristics stylistically and thematically as well.

More interestingly, the minimalist techniques offer these writers more opportunities to evoke emotional truths about human beings and humanity in readers. They criticize the effects of socio-economic and cultural changes in American society on its individuals and family levels. These preoccupations are effective in increasing readers' imagination and their involvement in the reconstruction of the deeper meanings of the stories. Hence, though they read less, they become maximal readers because of the activation of their mental processes. Accordingly, their desire to read is expected to grow more and more as they discover by themselves the reality of the world around them and learn how to make their lives seem more meaningful. Thus, the research findings have emphasized that American literary minimalism

exerted a noticeable change in the direction of American literature in the twentieth century. It has a high capacity for evoking in the readers the emotional truth of American life under the rubric of consumerism and high capitalism. Although the focus is put on the similarities, the conclusion highlights the differences between Hemingway's minimalism and contemporary minimalism.

The findings of this research pave the path for upcoming researchers who are interested in focusing on aspects of short story writing and how these aspects communicate messages or themes in contrast with novels or films. They also provide a basis for further research for those who are concerned to answer the debate about whether minimalism is deeply rooted in modernism in fiction as well as in visual arts. Arguably, there is a connection between the two literary movements.

Similarly, Hemingway's legacy to the Minimalist Movement can open the door for the study of the legacy of other writers like Anton Chekhov to American literary minimalism by comparing his works to those of the minimalist writers. Besides, the minimalist short story with its cultural content can be an inspiring source for the study of American culture in the twentieth century. It succeeds in squeezing several significant cultural traits and discloses much about American ways of life from modernism to postmodernism.

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## **Le Résumé:**

La présente recherche vise à établir l'influence d'Ernest Hemingway sur les styles minimalistes de Raymond Carver, Richard Ford et Bobbie Ann Mason, tant sur les techniques que sur les thèmes. Ce faisant, il fournit un argument solide quant à l'importance de son héritage pour la fondation du mouvement minimaliste. Pour atteindre cet objectif, le travail compare vingt une sélections de vingt nouvelles histoires courtes appartenant à différents recueils de ces écrivains. L'on utilise le cadre théorique mis par la Théorie de la Réception de Wolfgang Iser. L'héritage d'Ernest Hemingway au mouvement minimaliste réside principalement dans sa méthode d'évocation de la vérité émotionnelle aux lecteurs implicites. La question principale de la recherche est la suivante: quels sont les aspects de son style, les techniques narratives et les thèmes associés à son «Iceberg Théorie » et adaptés avec succès par Carver, Ford et Mason dans les nouvelles sélectionnées pour obtenir les mêmes effets sur les lecteurs implicites? Les résultats de la recherche ont atteint les objectifs prédéterminés en montrant que ces écrivains minimalistes adoptent la méthode d'Hemingway pour évoquer la vérité émotionnelle aux lecteurs en s'appuyant sur le langage poétique (imagerie et répétition) et les techniques narratives (implication, omission et épiphanie). Il est également révélé que ces écrivains, comme Hemingway, traitent les thèmes qui sont très efficaces pour produire de forts effets émotionnels, illustrant beaucoup de choses sur la désillusion de la société américaine du vingtième siècle, y compris l'aliénation et la dépression existentielle ; la masculinité et la violence ; l'insatisfaction conjugale et les problèmes de communication. Les similitudes entre ces écrivains sont cependant plus importantes que les différences. À cet égard, il est clair qu'Hemingway a contribué dans une plus large mesure au développement du mouvement

minimaliste américain. Tentant de redynamiser la mission sociale de la littérature et sa capacité à impacter les individus et les institutions sociales, ce mouvement a acquis une position particulière dans le canon littéraire.

**Les mots clés:** Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, Bobbie Ann Mason, l'héritage d'Hemingway, influence, Mouvement Minimaliste, le genre de la nouvelle, La Théorie de la Reception de Wolfgang Iser.

## ملخص

يتناول البحث مسألة الإرث الفكري لحركة الأسلوب التبسيطي عند إرنست همنغواي. ويسعى إلى إثبات مساهمته في النهوض بأسلوب التبسيط في قصص الخيال الأمريكية. ويبيّن ميل هذا الأسلوب بكتاب بارزين، أمثال رايموند كارفر، وريتشارد فورد، و بوبي آن ماسون. بلوغاً لهذه الغاية، اعتمدنا في هذه الدراسة على مقارنة وتحليل عشرين قصة قصيرة كلها منتقاة من قصص متنوعة لهؤلاء الكُتّاب ضمن إطار نظرية التلقي لفولفغانغ ايزر، القائمة على الشكّل والمحتوى جميعاً. وقد جاء التساؤل الرئيسي للبحث كما يلي: إذا كان إرث إرنست همنغواي الفكري لحركة الأسلوب التبسيطي يكمن أساساً في استحضر الحقيقة العاطفية للقراء الضمنيين، فما هي جوانب أسلوبه وتقنياته السردية والمواضيع المرتبطة بـ "نظرية الجبل الجليدي" والتي تم تكيفها وتنفيذها بنجاح من قبل كارفر وفورد و ماسون في القصص المختارة لتحقيق نفس التأثير على القراء الضمنيين؟ تشير نتائج البحث أنّ كُتّاب الأسلوب التبسيطي تبناوا طريقة همنغواي لجذب العاطفة الحقيقية للقراء، من خلال اعتمادهم على اللغة الشاعرية (الصور و التكرار) و تقنيات السرد (التضمين والحذف ولحظة الالهام). ويبدو أنّ هؤلاء الأدباء قد طوّعوا المواضيع التي تقوى على استثارة العواطف وكشف القناع عن وجوه خيبة المجتمع الأمريكي في القرن العشرين، التي تضمنت الغربة والإكتئاب، والهيمنة الذكورية والعنف، والنفور الزوجي وسوء الفهم. وقد كان التشابه بين هؤلاء الأدباء أكبر شأنًا من الاختلاف بينهم. وقد كان التشابه بين هؤلاء الأدباء أكبر شأنًا من الاختلاف بينهم. وجليّ أنّ همنغواي كانت له اليد الطولى في النهوض بحركة أسلوب التبسيط التي حلّت أخصّ محلّ في الشريعة الأدبية. إذ رامت إعادة إحياء رسالة أدب القوم وإظهار قوة حسن موقعها في الناس أفراداً وجماعات ومؤسسات.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** إرنستهمنغواي، رايموندكارفر، ريتشارد فورد ، بوبي آن ماسون، إرث همنغواي ، نظرية التلقي لفولفغانغ إيزر، حركة أسلوب التبسيط، نمط القصة القصيرة، التأثير أو الميل أو الوقع.