

# “The Marvellous Thing Is That It’s Painless”: The Rhetoric of Anaesthesia in Hemingway’s Texts

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Joyce once beautifully captured the moral malaise of citizens in an Irish town in his short story collection, *Dubliners*. Paralysis is the term which most fully expresses the central motif of the stories:

[Father Flynn] had often said to me: *I am not long for this world*, and I had thought his words idle. Now I knew they were true. Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word *paralysis* [...]. But now it sounded to me like the name of some maleficent and sinful being. It filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work. (1, emphases are original)

Though all the subsequent stories in this collection also, in one way or another, depict the suffocating impasse of paralyzed people,<sup>1</sup> the lines above from “The Sisters,” which contain the single appearance of the word “paralysis” in the volume, elucidate what it is like to be paralytic; thus, introducing the underlying theme of the following stories. However hard he tries “to be nearer to [paralysis],” the boy narrator throughout the story can never distinguish it from death or from Father Flynn’s “stupefied doze” (4). During his futile attempt to comprehend his friend’s death, the boy’s concept of death wanders over the limbo in which death, paralysis, and slumber intersect with each other. The characters in this collection are all trapped in this limbo and are desperately struggling to escape from it in vain.

Though the boy in “The Sisters” is by no means morally corrupted, another example from “Eveline” more appropriately explicates the social malaise of Dublin. Courted by a sailor who wants to leave the city with her and wanting to get out from the paralyzed society and her family, Eveline nevertheless cannot decide whether to go with him or not. Clinging to a railing of the station at the last instance before they get on board the boat, she forever shuts out of her own accord the possibility of escaping to a new life, not because she decided to stay but because she could not decide to go. When she is left behind on the quay, her state of mind is clearly characterized by paralytic non-sensation, completely passive to anything around her:

He rushed beyond the barrier and called to her to follow. He was shouted at to go on but he still called to her. She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition. (34)

Yet, this malaise of the emotional stasis was neither exclusively detected in the city of Dublin nor merely a volatile peculiarity caught in the sensibility of a genius, but was observed all but universally in the first decades of the twentieth century. Rapid industrialization and the extremely high mechanization of society, which had advanced at the turn of the century, brought about the sense of repulsion in the people’s mind against mechano-science; and anaesthesia, a representative technology of the nineteenth century’s high achievement of science, was no longer the target of celebration, but a negative indication that people lived in the corrupt society wandering far away from nature. This retrogressive tendency aspiring to the preindustrialized state is most conspicuously advocated in the works of D. H. Lawrence, whose attack on modern civilization and whose devotion to nature worship and primitivism can be seen in many of his essays and fictions. In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, he conveys the dehumanized and morally modern mind paralyzed because of the influence of technological advancement, attacking severely though rather too simplistically the current of the time. In Clifford’s social circle in Wragby Hall, people discuss the mechanization of the future society, in which “babies would be bred in bottles, and women would be ‘immunized.’” According to Lady

Bennerley, “if the love-business went, something else would take its place. Morphine, perhaps. A little morphine in all the air. It would be wonderfully refreshing for everybody” (74). We can grasp in this passage that Lawrence, who praised highly above all else human communication through bodily contact, is keenly aware of the imminent crisis that technological achievement might disrupt all human relationships. Highly celebrated as it was in the nineteenth century as a goal of modern science, the evaluative view of anaesthesia, or the lack of sensation, as is eloquently expressed in Lawrence’s criticism of modern civilization, gradually through the development of mechanization and the proportional repulsion against it, turned into its opposite — an object of fear, a despicable state of mind, and, as it were, a mode of social disease. Paralysis, or the lack of sensation, in its both literal and figurative senses, is a key to understanding the first half of the twentieth century.

In Lawrence’s conception from the earliest stage of his career, morphine was never a benevolent salvation to relieve a patient from pain, but what trapped him/her into a state of living death — the state in which the patient, unable to accept his/her death, seeks refuge and remains oblivious to the coming of death, satisfied by a comfortable insensibility to pain. He wrote the passage of Mrs. Morel’s deathbed thus: “She thought of the pain, of the morphia, of the next day; hardly ever of the death. That was coming, she knew. She had to submit to it. But she would never entreat it or make friends with it. Blind, with her face shut hard and blind, she was pushed towards the door” (*Sons* 430).

Similar examples are abundant. We should clearly remember that Prufrock’s monologue depicting the lethargic and spiritless quality of the age begins with the passage: “Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherised upon a table” (Eliot 3). Or we can recognize the echo of Lady Bennerley’s opinion about morphine in Fitzgerald’s short story, “The Swimmers”: one of Henry Marston’s “strange speeches” in his delirium (“how all the population of Paris was becoming etherized by cheap gasoline” [497]) never conveys a favorable impression of anaesthesia. These metaphorical uses of anaesthesia suggest that, up to the early twentieth century, this technological achievement of nineteenth century medicine had no longer fascinated people’s minds as a positive benefit that should be enjoyed by every civilized citizen.

Edith Wharton, accordingly, used for her rendering of morally corrupt upper class people in New York a most appropriate metaphor of anaesthetized childbirth, which she also used as the title of the novel — *Twilight Sleep*. Mrs. Manford declares to her expectant daughter-in-law: “Of course there ought to be no Pain . . . nothing but Beauty . . . It ought to be one of the loveliest, most poetic things in the world to have a baby” (18). Absorbed in spiritual healing, philanthropy, beauty treatment, and other leisured-class engagements, Mrs. Manford embodies the age in which people are deprived of their ability to feel sensation, used to the lack of perception, and comfortable in the numbness of their emotional activities.

[. . .] all her life she had been used to buying off suffering with money, or denying its existence with words, and her moral muscles had become so atrophied that only some great shock would restore their natural strength . . . (261)

Paralysis, stupefaction, twilight sleep, and atrophy — such pathological metaphors are found in abundance in literature representing the undercurrent of the age. Ernest Hemingway was no exception. In the nihilistic milieu of the first decades of the twentieth century, the Lost Generation is a generation keenly aware of the emotional stasis after the great storm having swept across the European Continent. The fear of non-sensation, the fear of a numbing of his perception obsessed him and led him to the description of paralyzed characters in order to distance himself from his contemporaries trapped in the limbo between life and death.

Take “On the Quai at Smyrna” to begin with. As Louis H. Leiter clarifies, this story “dramatizes the gradual numbing of human responses through repeated horrors” (139). The story describes horror and brutality in war through the eyes of a speaker, who tells seven episodes to the narrator. Yet, after commenting that the first three are “strange,” “unimaginable,” and “the worst” (CSS 63), “it is impossible for the speaker’s mind to respond to horror any longer” (Leiter 138). Reaching the bottom, the speaker’s emotional line somehow goes upward from the fourth to the seventh episode: the last four are referred to as “extraordinary,” of man’s

being “a bit above himself,” “surprising,” and “a most pleasant business” (CSS 63-64). This anaesthetization of the soldier is a familiar example of a psychological defense mechanism against horrible experiences that are beyond one’s capacity.

“A Natural History of the Dead,” in a part of which the seventh episode of “On the Quai at Smyrna” is retold, also presents the narrator who attempts to fortify himself with the strategy of posing as a detached observer among numerous dead bodies. By contrasting the crude and unvarnished rendering in presenting dead bodies in the battlefield with the humanist discourse of past naturalists, the story parodies and satirizes such humane attitudes of those who did not participate in war: facing unprecedented brutalities, a human soul could never maintain Christian-oriented sympathy toward those who were injured and dead. As in “On the Quai at Smyrna,” the narrator ostensibly seems to take pleasure in conveying gloomy and dismal spectacles in war, assessing them, for instance, as “it being *amazing* that the human body should be blown into pieces [...]” (CSS 337, emphasis is mine). Once thrown among numerous dead bodies which have been blown apart into bits and fragments, one has to take as detached an attitude as possible to sustain one’s mental stability, shutting out humanist sympathy toward fellow beings under tremendous atrocity; just like a doctor must become insensitive to his/her patient’s pain.

This preference of the practical over the humane attitude in combat is repeated in the struggle between an army surgeon and an artillery officer at the latter half of the story. The doctor is represented as an exemplary figure surviving in the battlefield, and the officer blames him in a dressing post for his doing nothing for a dying soldier with his head “broken as a flower-pot may be broken, although it was all held together by membranes and a skillfully applied bandage now soaked and hardened [...]” The officer first makes a suggestion to “give him an overdose of morphine,” which is answered by the doctor: “Do you think that is the only use I have for morphine? Would you like me to have to operate without morphine? You have a pistol, go out and shoot him yourself.” The officer declares at last: “I will shoot the poor fellow [...]. I am a humane man. I will not let him suffer.” After a fight between the two, blinded by a saucer full of iodine flung at his eyes by the doctor, the officer screams: “You have blinded me! You have blinded me!” The doctor calmly orders a sergeant to hold him tight, saying at the concluding passage: “He is in much pain. Hold him very tight” (CSS 339-41).

The officer is indeed going through the pain that the doctor never feels in his profession, since he is not allowed to feel another’s pain however pained the patient looks and however much his insensibility seems callous and cruel to another’s eyes. Too much detachedness, if not in such a violent situation, might of course result in a serious tragedy as can be seen in the case of Doctor Adams in “Indian Camp”; yet to be deprived of the ability to share pain with another, to be, as it were, a doctor-like observer rather than a positive participant during the war is the only way to save oneself from psychic damage one might receive when confronting unimaginable calamities and brutalities. Morphine should thus be administered not to the dying soldier but to the officer’s mind.

Frederic Henry’s remark that “At the start of the winter came the permanent rain and with the rain came the cholera. But it was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army” (FTA 4) has been considered a typical example of Hemingway’s “hard-boiled” style of narrating events from a distance, yet in view of these repeated dramatizations of the process of gradual numbing of soldiers’ perception, it is highly probable that Frederic also has to detach himself from the stark realities of war to a psychologically safe distance. As Samuel Hynes argues, “in the presence of such multitudes the psychic defense called numbing quickly sets in” (xii). Seven thousand should simply be beyond the capacity of which Frederic can conceive. Here he protects himself from inconceivable brutalities by becoming insensible to the pain of others.

Harold Krebs in “Soldier’s Home” defends himself in a like manner. The omniscient narrator’s remark that Krebs “had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do, easily and naturally” has hitherto been considered as a reference to his courage in war,<sup>2</sup> yet there appears no mention in this story of a word in whatever way related to his bravery. The intention of the above sentence should rather be sought in the defense mechanism employed by soldiers.<sup>3</sup> It is very likely that Krebs had shut out his sense of fear in the face of numerous dead colleagues and his possible death imminent in the situation; otherwise, he might have lost his mental stability under tremendous atrocity that was yet unheard of.

But when talking about the war with another soldier, “he fell into the easy pose of the old soldier among other soldiers: that he had been badly, sickeningly frightened all the time.” This act of *lying* causes him critical damage, since to tell that he felt fear in the war is to be stripped of the only protection available whereby he has guarded his right mind. “Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie, and after he had done this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it. A distaste for everything that had happened to him in the war set in because of the lies he had told” (CSS 111-12). The “distaste” which arises here is the belated sensation he ought to have received in combat. By reliving his fear after many months, the armor of imperception, of being paralytic at a critical moment, with which Krebs has enshrouded himself, becomes finally cracked apart. Knowing this danger, he feels an urgent necessity to stop talking about the war, to stop having relations with others, and to crawl back again into his comfortable protection of indifference to everyone and everything around him. He finally switches off all of his nerves so as to receive no more shocking influences.

When he was in town their [girls’] appeal to him was not very strong. He did not like them when he saw them in the Greek’s ice cream parlor. He did not want them themselves really. They were too complicated. There was something else. Vaguely he wanted a girl but he did not want to have to work to get her. He would have liked to have a girl but he did not want to have to spend a long time getting her. He did not want to get into the intrigue and the politics. He did not want to have to do any courting. He did not want to tell any more lies. It wasn’t worth it.

He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences ever again. He wanted to live along [sic] without consequences. (CSS 112-13)

He does not want to have a girlfriend, though he is sometimes sexually aroused when looking at girls (“He did not want them *themselves really*.” “*Vaguely* he wanted a girl [. . .]”); for, if he tried to have, he would undertake all the possibility of being shocked, injured, and mentally damaged, and accepting its “consequences.” Hemingway well knew how painful such consequences were when he returned from the war and received a letter from Agnes von Kurowsky, his nurse and girlfriend in a Milan hospital, to tell him that they should break off the relationship.

We have discussed the psychic self-defense of soldiers to cope with traumatic experiences of war. We shall hereafter discuss two means employed by Hemingway’s characters to bring about intentionally such a paralytic state of mind to avert confronting various emotional stresses — alcohol and self-deceptive illusion. “The Three-Day Blow” is a good example to start with. The first two thirds of the story just describe a room in which Nick, the protagonist of the story, and his friend Bill are drinking alcohol and enjoying conversation about baseball and their favorite writers. The content of their idle talk is totally unrelated to what the story intends to show. Indeed most of the story seems at first meaningless and at best a lengthy recording of young boys’ idle talk except for the last few pages in which we for the first time notice Nick’s hidden distress about his lost love. The ostensibly insignificant conversation, however, has an important role in the story to convey how deeply Nick has been remorseful of his conduct — his jilting Marjorie, the details of which we learn in “The End of Something” placed immediately before “The Three-Day Blow” in *In Our Time*. The long description of his heavy drinking and his seemingly aimless talking, if seen against the background of this recent break up with his girlfriend, suddenly become an account of his attempt to anaesthetize the painful feelings about what he has lost, the attempt to forget about the “Marge business,” with his head occupied by other trivial concerns. But this attempt fails only when Bill takes up the problem; Nick suddenly falls reticent (“Nick said nothing. [. . .] Nick said nothing. [. . .] ‘Sure,’ said Nick. [. . .] ‘Yes,’ said Nick. [. . .] Nick nodded. [. . .] Nick sat quiet [. . .]” [CSS 90]), and Bill, on the contrary, keeps persuading him that Nick did right in breaking it off with her. And we know that Nick’s anaesthetic has completely worn off at this stage.

Nick said nothing. The liquor had all died out of him and left him alone. Bill wasn’t there. He wasn’t sitting in front of the fire or going fishing tomorrow with Bill and his dad or anything. He wasn’t drunk. It was all gone. All he knew was that he had once had Marjorie and that he had lost her. She was gone and he had sent her away. That was all that mattered. He might never see her

again. Probably he never would. It was all gone, finished. (CSS 91)

The “Marge business” suddenly flows into his thoughts, and flushes away everything which they have talked about, every other favorable subject and comfortable intoxication, and even Bill’s existence itself.

Yet, he finds another emotional outlet when the possibility occurs to him that he can resume the relationship with Marjorie. This self-consoling imagination is the second way of anaesthetizing the painful feelings, the way that “made him feel better” (CSS 92). Hemingway well captures the gradual numbing of the pain he has felt:

Nick had not thought about that. It had seemed so absolute. That was a thought. That made him feel better.

.....

He felt happy now. There was not anything that was irrevocable. He might go into town Saturday night. Today was Thursday.

.....

He felt happy. Nothing was finished. Nothing was ever lost. He would go into town on Saturday. He felt lighter, as he had felt before Bill started to talk about it. There was always a way out.

.....

Outside now the Marge business was no longer so tragic. It was not even very important. The wind blew everything like that away.

.....

None of it was important now. The wind blew it out of his head. Still he could always go into town Saturday night. It was a good thing to have in reserve. (CSS 92-93)

The anaesthetic seems successful on the surface. However, the simple repetitive nature of these sentences gives us the impression that he is trying desperately to persuade himself that he *really* feels happy, that the Marge business is *really* not irrevocable, and that they can *really* reunite on Saturday — the impression that, at the bottom of his heart, Nick knows the possibility of resuming the relationship is merely an illusion, just a temporary “way out.” Yet he has to guard his mental stability from coping with too much damage, and the only means to which he can find recourse here is to avert his eyes from the distasteful reality. After all, only to kill pain even without taking appropriate treatment of a wound should still be “a good thing to have in reserve.”

*The Sun Also Rises* is almost a catalog of paralyzed people helplessly trapped in an idle and unproductive atmosphere of the age and living a life of Joycean limbo. They simply cannot escape from the situation, and also do not attempt to escape from the present situation. Robert Cohn, to illustrate, deeply absorbed in a fantastic novel of “splendid imaginary amorous adventures,” persists in going to the place in which the novel is set, but he “can’t get started,” only to complain that he “can’t stand it to think [his] life is going so fast and [he is] not really living it” (17-18). His desire to flee from reality most eloquently explicates the nature of post World War I expatriates: they can never be satisfied by the status quo and are endlessly seeking refuge in one country after another. Francis, about to be deserted by Cohn, complains to Jake of her situation, yet does not ask any advice or help: “‘And of course there isn’t anything I [Jake] can do.’ ‘No. Just don’t let him [Cohn] know I [Francis] talked to you. I know what he wants’” (55). Even in the face of such an unpleasant reality, any means to prevent the reality is totally beyond her conception.

These characters in paralysis invariably find recourse in alcohol and improbable and self-deceptive imaginations as Nick in “The Three-Day Blow” did to avert his eyes from the pain in his heart: anaesthetization without treatment. Jake Barnes is no different, yet in his case, the wound itself is represented as a form of paralysis — a paraplegic genital inflicted in the war. Paralysis itself is the cause of pain for him, and to get rid of the pain he repeatedly recurses to heavy drinking as almost every character in the novel does. Jake and Brett Ashley love each other, but they cannot consummate their love because of Jake’s impotence. Unable to

live away from each other because of their affection, and at the same time unable to live together because of the wound, they can go nowhere except just wandering through the dark streets of Paris riding in a taxicab, not knowing what to do about their aroused sexual desire. The quotation below follows Jake's attempt to commit some sexual act that is rejected by Brett:

"Isn't there anything we can do about it?"

She was sitting up now. My arm was around her and she was leaning back against me, and we were quite calm. She was looking into my eyes with that way she had of looking that made you wonder whether she really saw out of her own eyes. They would look on and on after every one else's eyes in the world would have stopped looking. She looked as though there were nothing on earth she would not look at like that, and really she was afraid of so many things.

"And there's not a damn thing we could do," I said. (34)

There is always nothing they can do about their relationship. Caught by his carnal needs toward Brett, possessed by the desire aroused by her presence, Jake desperately seeks in vain whatever way he can ease the desire while he is poignantly aware of the difficulty preventing them from achieving ordinary sexual intercourse. Brett, on the contrary, is rather calm in her attitude, or at least not provoked by sexual desire as Jake is. The situation is, in short, under her control, and it is Jake who is objectified by her gaze, the gaze invested with the peculiar features of being ever-continuing ("[Her eyes] would look on and on after every one else's eyes in the world would have stopped looking") and horrifyingly impartial ("She looked as though there were nothing on earth she would not look at like that") eyes. Jake thus turns into "nobody" to her, for he is sexually impotent; he continues to be "nobody" ever after, for there is no possibility for him to be cured.

Shortly after the conversation above, Jake leaves Brett in a cafe and goes back home. To avert his eyes from the failure to consummate his sexual desire, he deals with the trivialities of daily life, such as reading letters and newspapers, or keeping the record of expenses, yet, in the middle of the trivialities, flashes of thought sometimes slip into his mind to remind him of the relationship with Brett ("There was a crest on the announcement. Like the Zizi the Greek duke. [...] Brett had a title, too. Lady Ashley. To hell with Brett. To hell with you, Lady Ashley"), and the wound he suffers ("[The mirror of a big armoire] was a typically French way to furnish a room. Practical, too, I suppose. Of all the ways to be wounded. I suppose it was funny"). In spite of his effort to fall asleep, his "head started to work." In this "old grievance," he broods over a fantastic idea to console his misfortune, to imagine that he was never in trouble: "Probably I never would have had any trouble if I hadn't run into Brett when they shipped me to England" (38-39).

Brett, at first glance, lives a self-indulgent life, following her unchecked desire; yet, she is also locked in a paralyzing situation when she says "I'm not going to be one of these bitches that ruins children" (247). On being asked by a young bullfighter Pedro Romero to marry him, she takes flight from the only possibility of escaping from the life of drinking and promiscuity in a way not unlike Joyce's Eveline. At the novel's ending when Brett and Jake talk about the outcome of her affair with Romero, despite that she suggests four times that she does not want to talk about the affair with Romero ("[...] let's not talk about it. Let's never talk about it." "Oh, let's not talk about it." "Don't let's ever talk about it. Please don't let's ever talk about it." "But, oh, Jake, please let's never talk about it" [245-47]), she constantly and immediately returns to the subject by her own will. And she declares: "I'm going back to Mike. [...] He's so damned nice and he's so awful. He's my sort of thing" (247). Mike, who is her ex-fiancé and was deserted when she went away with Romero, is another figure who indulges in heavy drinking and aimless talking. She is completely trapped by this vicious circle of paralyzing malaise in the age. Everything forces her to return to the old group of culturally dislocated expatriates.

At the end of the novel, however, Jake is at least aware of this claustrophobic binding force that holds him and his friends, of the situation in which they continue to wander and from which they can never escape. Brett and Jake ride in a taxicab, as they did in Paris at the beginning of the novel as quoted earlier. However, the power relationship between Jake and Brett is completely reversed: in this case, it is Jake who controls the situation. The famous last passage is thus:

"Oh, Jake," Brett said, "we could have had such a damned good time together."

Ahead was a mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic. He raised his baton. The car slowed suddenly pressing Brett against me.

“Yes,” I said. “Isn’t it pretty to think so?” (251)

Here Jake clearly refuses to indulge in the same fantastic and self-deceptive idea with Brett, the idea that is “pretty to think.” To imagine that they “could have had such a damned good time together” might console and anaesthetize their hurt feelings, yet to picture the *if* in which they can consummate their love is merely an imagination. Jake, by articulating the possibility in the form of a negative question, suggests the unproductive result of such an attempt to avert their eyes from the harsh reality.

In 1931, Hemingway rendered “the study in pain” from his experience of a car accident and the subsequent hospitalization: “The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio.”<sup>4</sup> The story is about three persons — Cayetano Ruiz, the gambler who is shot twice in the abdomen and brought to the hospital; Sister Cecilia, the nun who takes care of patients in the hospital; and Frazer, the writer from whose point of view the story is told. Cayetano is described as a highly courageous and persevering figure in that he never tells who shot him to the detective sergeant asking questions about the incident, and that he never cries when suffering severe pain in the course of the medical treatment and afterward. Sister Cecilia highly praises this silent endurance of the patient:

He was so uncomplaining she said and he was very bad now. He had peritonitis and they thought he could not live. Poor Cayetano, she said. He had such beautiful hands and such a fine face and he never complains. The odor, now, was really terrific. He would point toward his nose with one finger and smile and shake his head, she said. He felt badly about the odor. It embarrassed him, Sister Cecilia said. Oh, he was such a fine patient. He always smiled. (CSS 357)

Even in this critical moment, he “never complains” about pain, and, what is more, is “embarrassed” by his inability to maintain decency. Frazer, on the contrary, cannot endure his pain (both physical and psychological) without the consolation of listening to the radio possibly to distract his consciousness away from the harsh reality of the present condition of his wound. For Frazer, the radio is the anaesthetic — or to borrow the words used in the story, “the opium” — a means to escape from the painful situation. Though the radio does not work well during the day, “all night it worked beautifully and when one station stopped you could go farther west and pick up another” (CSS 358). In this manner, by picturing people in distant places far away from the hospital, he tries to avert his eyes from his wound in the leg, from which to completely recover it will take “A long, long time” (CSS 357). When Frazer’s nerves go bad, he increasingly depends on listening to the radio not to think about his plight: “Mr. Frazer had been through this all before. The only thing which was new to him was the radio. He played it all night long, turned so low he could barely hear it, and he was learning to listen to it without thinking” (CSS 363). This obsession with the radio reminds us of Clifford in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, who is absorbed in the radio to make up for the lost communication with his friends.<sup>5</sup> Like many characters of other Hemingway’s stories as discussed above, he completely relies on illusions that the radio creates in his mind, and these illusions are the last resort for him to escape from the reality (another familiar method of escape in Hemingway’s texts — alcohol is of course frequently mentioned throughout the story).

Sister Cecilia also cannot directly confront the reality and takes recourse in praying to God. Even when a football team with the name of “Our Lady,” Notre Dame, is to play a match, she cannot listen to the radio broadcast for she would “be too excited” and remains in the chapel to pray “For Our Lady,” namely, for the victory of the team (CSS 359). In the opinion of one of the “friends of he who wounded” Cayetano — one of the Mexicans whom the police send to the hospital so that Cayetano has some visitors — “Religion is the opium of the poor;”<sup>6</sup> and thus Sister Cecilia seems to him “a little crazy” (CSS 361-62). If not crazy, she is at least a person who indulges in the opium, recurses to the anaesthetic without facing reality.

As most critics agree, Cayetano exemplifies the so-called code-hero.<sup>7</sup> He is depicted as independent of self-deceptive illusions unlike Frazer and Sister Cecilia or other paralytic characters in Hemingway’s stories. In the case of Jake Barnes, who also has a paralyzed bodily part like Cayetano, his paraplegic genital requires him to take whatever means to ease the pain in his life; while in the case of Cayetano, with the leg paralyzed,

he nevertheless needs no anaesthetical flight from the distressing situation. Unlike Frazer, he can endure his pain without the radio or any other form of consolation — without, in a word, opium.

When Frazer meets Cayetano coming into his room in a wheelchair, the former asks the latter, “What about the pain? [. . .] She tells me you never made a sound.” Cayetano is humble enough to insist that it is because there are “So many people in the ward” that he did not give a shout. He states that “If [he] had a private room and a radio [he] would be crying and yelling all night long” (CSS 364-65).<sup>8</sup> What is shown in this conversation is not only Cayetano’s silent fortitude but his humility not to be proud about his spiritual strength. He pretends that he is ranked with ordinary people and tries to expose and emphasize his weakness, yet this very condescending blame on himself, if seen from the eyes of an actually weaker person, is naturally shifted onto the weaker — in this case, onto Frazer. Cayetano even calls himself “the victim of illusions” by which he means his absorption in the gamble: knowing that he is “completely without luck,” he never stops to be “a professional gambler” and does just “Continue, slowly, and wait for luck to change” (CSS 365-66). Yet, given this calm understanding of his own way of living, “the victim of illusions” is the name not suitable for Cayetano but what should be attributed rather to Frazer who always imagines daily lives of strangers in strange places in the radio.

After the conversation with Cayetano, Frazer realizes that he is dependent on “the opium,” by which to avert his eyes from the reality. As we can infer, it is because of this realization that he suddenly begins to fix his eyes on other patients staying in the same ward and lists the condition of their wounds:

In that ward there was a rodeo rider who had come out of the chutes on Midnight on a hot dusty afternoon with the big crowd watching, and now, with a broken back, was going to learn to work in leather and to cane chairs when he got well enough to leave the hospital. There was a carpenter who had fallen with a scaffolding and broken both ankles and both wrists. He had lit like a cat but without a cat’s resiliency. They could fix him up so that he could work again but it would take a long time. There was a boy from a farm, about sixteen years old, with a broken leg that had been badly set and was to be rebroken. There was Cayetano Ruiz, a small-town gambler with a paralyzed leg” (CSS 366).

The conditions of his fellow inmates here enumerated being apparently severer than that of Frazer, his attempt to describe them in detail shows his acute realization that there exist people suffering in a more depressing situation: they either have difficulty in returning to the former jobs because of their injuries, or have to go through still more painful ordeals to recover their health completely.

Frazer’s awareness of this abundance of sufferers around him leads his thought to the social situation of the age even though “Usually he avoided thinking all he could.” His almost philosophical meditation reads thus:

Religion is the opium of the people. He believed that, that dyspeptic little joint-keeper. Yes, and music is the opium of the people. Old mount-to-the-head hadn’t thought of that. And now economics is the opium of the people; along with patriotism the opium of the people in Italy and Germany. What about sexual intercourse; was that an opium of the people? Of some of the people. Of some of the best of the people. But drink was a sovereign opium of the people, oh, an excellent opium. Although some prefer the radio, another opium of the people, a cheap one he had just been using. Along with these went gambling, an opium of the people if there ever was one, one of the oldest. Ambition was another, an opium of the people, along with a belief in any new form of government. What you wanted was the minimum of government, always less government. Liberty, what we believed in, now the name of a MacFadden publication. We believed in that although they had not found a new name for it yet. But what was the real one? What was the real, the actual, opium of the people? He knew it very well. It was gone just a little way around the corner in that well-lighted part of his mind that was there after two or more drinks in the evening; that he knew was there (it was not really there of course). What was it? He knew very well. What was it? Of course; bread was the opium of the people. Would he remember that and would it make sense in the daylight? Bread is the opium of the people. (CSS 367)



In this grand philosophical reverie, the list of opiums includes most forms of human consolation and support for life. Frazer seems to argue that almost everyone in the age has been paralyzed by opiums of various forms, that no one really sees anything in the world without relying on whatever means of mitigation to absorb the direct shock of undiluted reality. Considering morally trapped citizens numbed by the social order, he realizes that if he were to evade this trap of opiums, he would never have any consolation in the daily course of living. Totally at a loss what to do once he acquired this dismal world view, he seeks desperately for any opinion from the Mexican, who told him that religion is the opium of the people, only in vain.

“Listen,” said Mr. Frazer. “Why should the people be operated on without an anæsthetic?”

“I do not understand.”

“Why are not all the opiums of the people good? What do you want to do with the people?”

“They should be rescued from ignorance.”

“Don’t talk nonsense. Education is an opium of the people. You ought to know that. You’ve had a little.” (CSS 367-68)

People who are “operated on without an anæsthetic” means those who are living without depending on fake consolation to alleviate the painful sensation, someone who is like Cayetano. In Frazer’s newly acquired philosophy, to live is to endure the pain.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, Frazer’s attack on the social institution of education and the fact that he repeatedly borrows from Marx the expression, “the opium of the people” (actually one of the Mexicans who visit Cayetano uses the expression first), lead us to see him as a Marxist, yet he is never in accord with Marxist theory of the time.<sup>10</sup>

Revolution, Mr. Frazer thought, is no opium. Revolution is a catharsis; an ecstasy which can only be prolonged by tyranny. The opiums are for before and for after. He was thinking well, a little too well. (CSS 368)

In his view, a political system silently dominates people by way of numbing their sensation to deprive them of the power of resistance, giving them various modes of consolation to avert their eyes from problems of the social order. However, the opiums are also “after” the revolution. According to Frazer, thus, whether or not a revolution breaks out, whether or not it succeeds in overthrowing the system, the world will never change its fundamental structure, continuing to anaesthetize people. He is thus not going to go through personal revolution, for, when the sound of Cucaracha, a revolutionary song played by Mexicans, stops, he is going to return to his pet opium: “Then he would have a little spot of the giant killer and play the radio, you could play the radio so that you could hardly hear it” (CSS 368). Despite that he could reach the profound understanding of life, he could choose the comfortable place deeply immersed with the opium.

Because of a prolific literary career in the 1920s, Hemingway could keep some distance from the lethargic social milieu after World War I. Since the publication of *In Our Time* in 1925, he had published three books and two short story collections in less than five years. However, the 1930s was for him a decade of creative slump; while extremely active in his real life, going on safari or absorbed in bullfighting, nevertheless (or therefore?) the 30s, except for a short story collection, *Winner Take Nothing*, produced in book form only *Death in the Afternoon*, *Green Hills of Africa*, and *To Have and Have Not*, none of which has been much celebrated either by critics or readers in general. In this period of literary sterility, writing about paralytic characters naturally means to take a critical attitude toward himself. In the previous decade, he might have been in the middle of the social stagnancy surrounded by paralytic contemporaries, yet he transcended such lifeless inertness by writing about them; whereas now he himself could be ranked along with those paralytic for he could not write enough to be exempt from being charged with moral stasis. It is at this time that he wrote “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” which depicts most harshly the non-sensation of the protagonist.

The story is certainly Hemingway’s purgatorial rendering of his own paralytic situation, centering on a man’s sense of pain in the past and now. Harry, the protagonist, dying of gangrene yet without pain, is a paradigmatic character who has gone numb in wealthy laziness. The first lines of the story indicate that the central theme is insensibility to pain:

“The marvellous thing is that it’s painless,” he said. “That’s how you know when it starts.”

“Is it really?”

“Absolutely. I’m awfully sorry about the odor, though. That must bother you.” (CSS 39)

We cannot overlook the stark contrast between the passage above and Cayetano enduring his pain yet being embarrassed by the odor. Painless yet reeking Harry on the one hand, and painful and reeking Cayetano on the other; these two characters created at the beginning and the height of Hemingway’s infertile period are placed at the opposite extremes. Cayetano is a vigorous character who recovers from the injuries from which everyone thinks he dies; while Harry is an effete character who yields to the approaching death without any attempt to resist it. Harry is a typical character who is trapped by the paralytic malaise of the age.

So now it was all over, he thought. So now he would never have a chance to finish it. So this was the way it ended, in a bickering over a drink. Since the gangrene started in his right leg he had no pain and with the pain the horror had gone and all he felt now was a great tiredness and anger that this was the end of it. For this, that now was coming, he had very little curiosity. For years it had obsessed him; but now it meant nothing in itself. It was strange how easy being tired enough made it. (CSS 40-41)

Here, it is clear that the lack of pain is correlated with “being tired enough” — being in the Joycean limbo between life and death, in which even death no longer interests him. In this situation, he, like many of Hemingway’s characters, recurses to drinking, drinking in order to kill sensation. To Helen’s admonition, “Darling, please don’t drink that. We have to do everything we can,” he replies “You do it [...]. I’m tired” (CSS 41). This is a typical example of anaesthesia without treatment abundantly found in many of Hemingway’s stories.

The italic parts of the story are concerned with Harry’s reminiscences he has saved to write, and it is curious that many of the episodes displayed one after another without much logical connection are about his painful experiences of the past and brutalities inflicted upon other people. A notable example of this in the first italic section is Barker’s bombing of a leave train:

*But he had never written a line of that, nor of that cold, bright Christmas day with the mountains showing across the plain that Barker had flown across the lines to bomb the Austrian officers’ leave train, machine-gunning them as they scattered and ran. He remembered Barker afterwards coming into the mess and starting to tell about it. And how quiet it got and then somebody saying, “You bloody murderous bastard.”* (CSS 42, emphases are original)

Like the speaker in “On the Quai at Smyrna,” Barker’s perception of other people’s pain has been completely numbed as he has observed many atrocities during the war.

Harry’s paralysis, however, is not due to the self-defense system which protects the mind. His gradual loss of perception is conveyed in the often quoted passage as follows:

He had destroyed his talent by not using it, by betrayals of himself and what he believed in, by drinking so much that he *blunted the edge of his perceptions*, by laziness, by sloth, and by snobbery, by pride and by prejudice, by hook and by crook. (CSS 45, emphasis is mine)

Harry’s paralysis is, in short, caused by not writing. By not using his sensory nerves, his ability to feel pain has been unwittingly destroyed. As Nick Adams, Hemingway’s semi-autobiographical character, claims in “Fathers and Sons” (“He had gotten rid of many things by writing them” [CSS 371]), to write is the only means to escape from the emotional stasis caused by some traumatic event, yet, nevertheless, Harry has renounced the will to write leading an idle life with rich people who have enough money to sustain his life. In the face of his imminent death, he feels belatedly the need to write, the need to purge his deadlock situation in which he has been lying comfortably for so many years. This acute need emerges most keenly at the end of the second italic part.

*But he had always thought that he would write it finally. There was so much to write. He had seen the world change; not just the events; although he had seen many of them and had watched the people, but he had seen the subtler change and he could remember how the people were at*

*different time. He had been in it and he had watched it and it was his duty to write of it; but now he never would.* (CSS 49, emphases are original)

The expression of his belated feeling of remorse for not writing what he should have written constantly appears throughout the story, but he no longer has any means to write down what should be written. Though he exclaims, “I want to write” after the quotation above, Helen does not let him. We see here the structure of a sexually inverted “The Yellow Wall Paper,” in which the desire of the male protagonist to write is restricted and repressed by a woman character who attends to him.

The most important part of the story comes before the often quoted sequence as a central image: Harry’s illusion of rising upward toward the snow covered top of Kilimanjaro. Before his imagined salvation, we see a triad of two sections and an italic part interposed between them in which the central motif of the story is clearly presented.

All right. Now he would not care for death. One thing he had always dreaded was the pain. He could stand pain as well as any man, until it went on too long, and wore him out, but here he had something that had hurt frightfully and just when he had felt it breaking him, the pain had stopped. (CSS 53)

At first, he has been afraid of suffering pain rather than death, and in the face of his actual death, “the pain had stopped” as he has wished. However, the primary reason for him to dread pain is that it wears him out, and, as we have seen, at this stage he has already been worn out enough to lose interest in his own life. In short, his painless death reflects that he has already been dead since he lost his sensation.

The last italic part immediately following the quotation above stands in clear contrast to Harry’s death, conveying a most extreme example of painful death.

*He remembered long ago when Williamson, the bombing officer, had been hit by a stick bomb some one in a German patrol had thrown as he was coming in through the wire that night and, screaming, had begged every one to kill him. He was a fat man, very brave, and a good officer, although addicted to fantastic shows. But that night he was caught in the wire, with a flare lighting him up and his bowels spilled out into the wire, so when they brought him in, alive, they had to cut him loose. Shoot me, Harry. For Christ sake shoot me. They had had an argument one time about our Lord never sending you anything you could not bear and some one’s theory had been that meant that at a certain time the pain passed you out automatically. But he had always remembered Williamson, that night. Nothing passed out Williamson until he gave him all his morphine tablets that he had always saved to use himself and then they did not work right away.* (CSS 53, emphases are original)

This kind of violent death is also frequently seen in Hemingway’s texts. In such texts, pain is represented as a test of manhood for those who are facing their imminent death. Looking at these two modes of death, Harry’s and Williamson’s, we can conclude that pain is linked to life itself, the evidence that one is certainly alive, and the essential sensation one has to cling to. Witnessing this dreadful dying of a fellow soldier, he afterwards becomes fearful about suffering such prolonged pain at his death, and prematurely keeps administering morphine of alcohol and self-deception. Killing pain completely and losing sensation, he has lost his proof of life and especially as a writer, been dead for a long time before his actual death.

After the reminiscence about Williamson, sensing that death is coming closer to him, he speaks abruptly to Helen: “You know the only thing I’ve never lost is curiosity” (CSS 54). But as we have already seen a few pages earlier, “For [his death] [...] he had very little curiosity. For years it had obsessed him; but now it meant nothing in itself” because of “being tired enough.” Then it should be appropriate to suppose that his sudden insistence of retaining curiosity is caused by his belated realization that he has already died, by a remorseful illusion that he is still alive, and above all else by his wish to survive and write all he has saved for a long time.

By writing Harry’s painless death, and by projecting his own literary fruitlessness into the fictional character, which, certainly for a writer like Hemingway, requires a painful effort and self-examination, he did

attempt to purge his sterile paralysis and retrieve his once fruitful creativity. Very much lamentable is the fact that even after this literary attempt to resurge as a prolific writer he could never be as productive as in those miraculous years of the 1920s.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellman (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p.83.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Azevedo. "Harold Krebs, the boy 'who had been a good soldier' and 'had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do, easily and naturally,' is able to retain his integrity during the war" (102).

<sup>3</sup> It is richly suggestive that Krebs Friend, from whom the protagonist's name was borrowed and whom Hemingway met in Chicago after the war, was "a badly shell-shocked vet" (Reynolds, *Paris* 189).

<sup>4</sup> In his letter to Ivan Kashkin, August 19, 1935, Hemingway explains how he conceived the story: "The only trouble, to me, is that it ends with me as Mr. Frazer out in Billings Montana with right arm broken so badly the back of my hand hung down against the back of my shoulder. It takes five months to fix it and then is paralyzed. I try to write with my left hand and can't. Finally the musculo-spiral nerve regenerates and I can lift my wrist after five months. But in the meantime one is discouraged. I remember the study in pain and the discouragement, the people in the hospital and the rest of it and write a story *Gambler, Nun and Radio*" (*SL* 418, emphasis is original).

<sup>5</sup> "Connie was a good deal alone now, fewer people came to Wragby. Clifford no longer wanted them. He had turned against even the cronies. He was queer. He preferred the radio, which he had installed at some expense, with a good deal of success at last. He could sometimes get Madrid or Frankfurt, even there in the uneasy Midlands" (110).

<sup>6</sup> To this sentiment, Frazer answers that "I thought marijuana was the opium of the poor" (*CSS* 362). This matter-of-fact opinion exhibits a striking contrast to his philosophical reverie which he later cultivates about "the opium of the people." We can infer from this that he has gone through some transformation in his evaluation of anaesthesia.

Another importance of this sequence is that this Mexican will not drink alcohol for "it mounts to [his] head" (*CSS* 361). His will to keep his head clear means that he regards alcohol also as the opium.

<sup>7</sup> As a rare exception, Earl Rovit condemns Cayetano as an "inadequate father image" (70).

<sup>8</sup> It is curious that "a radio" is mentioned here. Cayetano possibly notices that any form of consolation leads to weakening the power to endure pain.

<sup>9</sup> A similar expression is found in *To Have and Have Not*. Meditating on the difficult situation into which he and Richard Gordon are driven, Professor MacWalsey says to himself that "why must all the operations in life be performed without an anaesthetic?" (221). We can thus surmise that the comparison of life to an operation without anaesthesia is at least to a certain extent shared by the author himself.

<sup>10</sup> About Marxism, see Edward Stone, "Hemingway's Mr. Frazer: From Revolution to Radio."

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