

Poe, Hemingway, and Beyond: Importing and Exporting Short Fiction Prototypes¹

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Here are four scenarios with a great deal in common. In the first, a Frenchman is driven to madness, arson, and suicide by an invisible being camped in his bedroom, draining his water-glass – and his sanity. Next, a European soldier, dying in the Arabian desert, is tormented by a vengeful woman using hypnosis and ventriloquism. Then, a South American bride wastes away for no apparent reason, until, after her death, a furry, blood-sucking creature is discovered inside her feather pillow. Finally, a Japanese amateur scientist, a man obsessed with mirrors, eventually builds – and then traps himself within – a sphere that is one continuous mirror.²

Each of these scenarios is the précis of a short story, and each of these tales is a tribute to Edgar Allan Poe, whose stories of terror and madness – for example, “The Tell-Tale Heart” – are widely known around the world. The Frenchman with the invisible house guest is the narrator of

1. This essay is the slightly revised text of a lecture delivered on August 7, 2003, at the Biennial Conference of the Nordic Association for American Studies, in Trondheim, Norway.

2. Allusions are to the following works: 1) Guy de Maupassant, “The Horla,” in *The Works of Guy de Maupassant: Short Stories* (Roslyn, N.Y.: Black’s Readers Service Co., 1960), 1313-28; 2) August Strindberg, “Simoon,” in *Plays from the Cynical Life* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1983), 137-147; 3) Horacio Quiroga, “The Feather Pillow,” in *The Decapitated Chicken and Other Stories*, trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1976), 5-9; 4) Edogawa Rampo [Hirai Taro], “The Hell of Mirrors,” in *Japanese Tales of Mystery & Imagination* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1956 [21st printing, 1996]), 107-122.

Guy de Maupassant's "The Horla," a story from 1887, modeled on Poe's stories of insane fixation.³ The Arabian mistress of mind-games appears in "Simoon," a one-act drama that August Strindberg wrote in the late 1880s, calling it "a brilliant Edgar-Poe."⁴ Horacio Quiroga, a Uruguayan writer who emulated Poe, invented the scariest of pillows in 1907. As for the man inside the mirrored ball, he was conceived in 1956 by Hirai Taro, father of the Japanese mystery story, who wrote under an interesting pen name. If you listen to his pseudonym – Edogawa Rampo – you hear, and are meant to hear, a Japanese tongue saying "Edgar Allan Poe."

France, Sweden, Uruguay, and Japan. The list could go on. The case for Poe's influence abroad has been made many times, not only in the studies of his seminal influence on Baudelaire and the French Symbolists, but in such books as *Poe in Northlight*, a study of his reception in Scandinavia. Of course, Poe did not invent the horror story, and did not hide his debt to the gothic tale of sensation and the supernatural that so appealed to the Romantics. The subtitle of an early Poe story is "A Tale in Imitation of the German." However, Poe's roots go deeper than the Black Forest, further than the cave of the first story-tellers. It was he who imported, honed, formalized and then gave to the world a version of the short story that returns us, with startling vividness, to the genre's pre-verbal beginnings. That, I believe, is the key to his importance not only as the Columbus of short fiction theory but also as the Rambo, or Rampo, of literary exports.

Part I: The Flame

According to the English psychologist R. L. Gregory, we learn about our environment first through our nerve ends. We learn what helps or hinders wellbeing, and that knowledge is encoded in neural scenarios – I touch a hot flame, my finger recoils, my hand avoids fire. Such scenarios, he

3. Richard Fusco, *Maupassant and the American Short Story: The Influence of Form at the Turn of the Century* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 56.

4. Strindberg used this descriptive term in a letter to Ola Hansson, dated March 9, 1889. See Michael Robinson, ed, *Strindberg's Letters*, vol. I: 1862-1892 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 310.

argues, are the most primitive form of "plot."⁵ Rather than a binary stimulus-and-response mechanism, this is a triadic structure of insertion into the environment, interaction with other agencies, and a positive or negative outcome. Upon this substratum rests one of our primal cognitive strategies for processing experience, a strategy I call *storying*, because it is an active process, a capacity for chunking experience into meaningful units for remembering and transmitting. The triad is endlessly rewritable. One prototype is the recoil scenario I mentioned. It captures a minimal learning curve, from curiosity to experience to adaptation – or to significant failures of adaptation. Another prototype is the instigation-excitation-and-release sequence governing so many biological processes. It is a diastolic rhythm.

Much has been made of the psycho-sexual archetypes at the heart or the gut of Poe's stories, but I believe they rest on even deeper substrata, on the neuro-scenarios and biological rhythms of the sentient organism interacting with its environment and seeking its well-being, however defined. Poe's stories of detection favor the learning-curve scenario, while his tales of terror exhibit the diastolic rhythm of excitation and release. Faced with a short story, readers process the narrative by recognizing its storyness, its rewriting of the primal scenario. In the case of Poe's stories, the prototypes are so boldly apparent in the shape of the text that the reading experience is uncommonly visceral, whether in English or French, Swedish or Japanese. Whatever the translation, the driven character and the ardent reader are, for the span of the tale, as newly exposed as that finger in the fire.

According to William Dean Howells, Mark Twain wrote as if no one had lived before him, as if he were discovering pain and betrayal and hypocrisy and death for the very first time. How naïve, how glorious, how American, thought Howells. How Poe-like, if we consider that, in the tales of terror, civilization dissolves, while in the tales of detection, where observation and logic do create truth, solving the problem means recycling the pattern that constructed the puzzle, yielding cognitive release but also a return to ground zero. The detective stories offer a world that is sane rather than insane, recyclable rather than imploded, but

5. R. L. Gregory, "Psychology: Towards a Science of Fiction," in Margaret Meek, Aidan Warlow, and Griselda Barton, eds., *The Cool Web: The Pattern of Children's Reading* (London: The Bodley Head, 1977), 396.

in the end just as intensely self-reflexive, as iconic, and as hermetically isolated from the hurly-burly and banality of real life. As Twain did in his melancholy old age, Poe did from the very beginning; that is, he read his own mind into the universe, as if he were the first to receive its shock. That stance of the neophyte, which struck Howells as both a liability and a strength, is evident in many classic American protagonists, including one I'll be discussing later, the hero of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* – which I will treat for now as an extended short story. Santiago is a man of great experience and skill, but he lives in a mindless universe, where each dawn is a new deal. All gains can be nullified. “Every day,” he says, “is a *new day*” [italics mine].⁶

Do you hear optimism or despair in that phrase? Every chance is a new hope, but every fear is a new terror. For the short story, that is good news, the very fundament of the genre, but for history, it is a mixed message. A national narrative of endless frontiers is always at ground zero, restarting the learning curve. Call it innocence, optimism, and freedom, or call it naivete, pride, and solipsism. One reason why Poe sells well on the world market is that he encodes, in close proximity to the substratum of storyness, not just the fear of dissolution, but also the aspects of our nature that undermine self-government. Poe is a reminder that, in the human psyche, wisdom and restraint are never constitutional.

Poe and Hemingway have had an impact on world literature that is well documented. The new story I want to try out here has to do with their paired role as innovators whose short stories are prototypes because they are re-founded on the primal bases of storyness. It has to do with their consequent usefulness to a Europe seemingly excluded from, often critical of, but still engaged with, the American experiment. I am not a cultural historian, so I have to tell this story from my own vantage point, which is that of short fiction theory.⁷

6. Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (New York: Scribner, 1952; 1980), 32.

7. As I must, in some cases, rely on translations, I will use English versions throughout.

Part II: The Chamber

Although Poe went to school briefly in England, he did not know the Paris of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" nor the Italy of "The Cask of Amontillado." Still, he was not provincial. The traditional explanation is that his stories are set in the cities, buildings, and rooms of the imagination, timeless and placeless. Although he borrowed from the Europeans, he famously explained that his terror was "not of Germany, but of the soul."⁸

Today, there are other ways of making him a citizen of the world. Edward S. Cutler says that

the scene of modern [i.e., post-1800] writing is ... not the urban per se, so much as it is the recursive print exchange between urban nodes throughout the United States and Western Europe. The Paris of Poe's criminal fiction thus becomes a kind of virtual Paris, a Paris provided him in media like the *Magasin pittoresque* Consequently, Poe's modern cities, whether Paris or London or New York, become less a space of "modern experience" and more an allegorical extension of the urban print media itself ...⁹

It is more fashionable these days to speak of recursive print exchanges and media constructs than of artistic influence and genre typologies. I value the old language for the sake of its roots, which are perennially regrown. In my view, the future of short fiction theory lies with cognitive science rather than with cultural studies, for it is in studies of how we process information that the newest discoveries will be made about the oldest truths of our species. Most of my work involves text-processing experiments to determine how readers perceive storyness, and what those responses can add to the critic's view of a story – and yes, to the scholar's understanding of its cultural signage. And so I am interested in the old Poe – intensely subjective, arrogantly ingenious – because it is he who was so successfully exported to the artists who copied him. It is he, along with Hemingway, who best explains the world market for an American prototype of short fiction.

Poe was an architect of processing models. Each of his stories repre-

8. Edgar A. Poe, "Preface," *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, vol I, (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1840), 6.

9. Edward S. Cutler, *Recovering the New: Transatlantic Roots of Modernism* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2003), 11-12.

sents, figuratively and often literally, a room that is sealed between first word and last. As such, it behaves like a chamber of the heart, a muscle that expands and expands – until it contracts. The diastolic rhythm. As I mentioned before, this model of instigation, excitation, and release gives a raw, biological thrust to stories of psycho-sensory stimulation. It is the defiant spray of sensibility, controlled by a simple but rigorous organicism, that so entranced Baudelaire, the poet who forwarded Poe to a later generation and who determined, for a very long time, how Europe perceived him. Poe's value to the continental Symbolist and Decadent movements is well known; in Scandinavia, his emphasis on the interior, the subjective, the perverse, the unseen, the diseased, and the aesthetic provided, some forty years after his death, a change from social realism. I'm going to stop for a minute to consider some aspects of the Poe-trade in Denmark, and Sweden.

In 1867, nine of Poe's stories were translated by Robert Watt and published in Denmark. Influenced by Baudelaire, Watt promoted the view of Poe as the victim of a crass society: "... for him America was nothing but an enormous prison through which he hastened frenetically as though he were a creature intended for a different and better world"¹⁰ By 1883, the Danish critic Johannes Jørgensen described Poe's country as "the land where the rule of money and the aversion to beauty were both early and great – the model state of this century's mammonism, the birthplace of dollar-worship, advertising, and humbug"¹¹ Appreciating Poe had the double advantage of depreciating an America viewed as uncivilized.

One Swedish writer speculated that, at his own birth in 1849, he absorbed the ghost of Edgar Allan Poe, who had died in that year. That writer, of course, was Strindberg, who discovered his inner genie some forty years later. Writing to a literary friend, the middle-aged playwright exclaimed, "On the night between Christmas Day and Boxing Day I read Edgar Poe for the first time! And noted it in my diary! I'm astounded."¹² He went on to say, "I think I ought to be able to take Edgar P. a lot fur-

10. Carl L. Anderson, *Poe in Northlight: The Scandinavian Response to His Life and Work* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1973), 16. Anderson is quoting from Watt's preface, "Edgar Poe. Biografiske Notitser," in Edgar Allan Poe, *Phantastiske Fortællinger*, trans. Robert Watt (Copenhagen, 1868), ii.

11. Anderson, 35. He is quoting from an essay by Jørgensen reprinted in *Udvalgte Værker* 6 (Copenhagen, 1915), 61.

12. *Strindberg's Letters*, 300.

ther” and “The next age will belong to E.P.!” His prophesy does seem a harbinger of Modernism, but for now I’d like to focus on his own response to E.P. I’ve already mentioned his one-act play “Simoon,” in which a French soldier is driven crazy in the desert, but Strindberg also adapted a Poe-inspired story by Ola Hansson, who had studied and written about Poe, and to whom Strindberg had addressed that flamboyant letter of annunciation.

Bearing the same name as the story, “Pariah,” the play is described as a “free dramatization” of Hansson’s story. On stage, two characters engage in a psychological and philosophical struggle as the sunny day turns stormy, ideas collide, and passions rise to an explosive conclusion. The theme is crime and punishment. In a country cottage in Sweden, a boarder who has lived in America for some time claims to have returned to his homeland to collect specimen insects for a museum in the States. Oddities in his behavior arouse the curiosity of his host, an archeologist renting the cottage while he digs in the neighboring fields. The two characters, identified only as Mr. X and Mr. Y, get into a heated discussion over what does and does not constitute a crime, and which crimes should or should not be punished. Noting his guest’s fear of signing his name, the archeologist guesses there is forgery in his past. Cornered, the guest tells his story.

Once upon a time, he had asked a friend to co-sign a bank loan application. The friend had sent a letter of refusal. Angrily, Mr. Y had stared at the page, absently copying the signature over and over on a blank sheet of paper. The next morning, he had walked to the table and, without thinking, written his friend’s name on the loan application. Thus he had become an impromptu forger. “Could it have been my uncivilized self,” he wonders aloud, “the barbarian who doesn’t recognize rules, who while my consciousness slept, stepped forward with his criminal will and his inability to calculate the consequences of an act?”¹³ Later we learn that he served his prison sentence in America, in a place where “your soul ... is put on a starvation diet” and “you’re torn from your environment, demoted from your class, put under the control of inferiors ...” (130). One may think here of the popular view of Poe wandering through the “enor-

13. August Strindberg, “Pariah,” in *Plays from the Cynical Life* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1983), 127.

mous prison" of a soulless America. Note the progression here: the circumstances of Poe's life, as *imagined* by Europeans, are Strindberg's metaphor for barbarism.

Something very like Poe's Imp of the Perverse is the forger's excuse: he was driven by an instinct he couldn't control. Intrigued, the archeologist admits that he himself once killed a man unintentionally. Never apprehended, he dispensed with guilt, judging himself too valuable as a person to be jailed for a mischance. Who, if either, is the real criminal — the impulsive forger or the accidental murderer? In typical Strindberg fashion, the characters jockey for moral, philosophical, and psychological advantage.

In the end, it is the rational and foresighted host, the archeologist, who trumps the emotional and craven forger, telling him, in the play's last word, to get "Out!" Had Poe written the story, no doubt he would have told it from the forger's point of view. However, Strindberg had also read Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and the Poe he admired was more like the digger for buried lore. Just as Poe found a Germany of terror in the soul, Strindberg finds an America of wildness in the psyche. To map it, one must be a Super-mind, an *Überwriter*, a decoder of phantasmagoria. Although Poe was, in real life, boxed in with his demons and shackled by alcoholism, he nevertheless models for his European admirers a heady freedom, a will to explore openly and daringly the disunited states of mind, the subconscious impulses, and the decadent sensibilities that are the frontiers of Modernism in the wasteland of Mammonism.

If Strindberg was, in his overheated fancy, a reimpodiment of Poe's spirit, Maupassant was, in his cool calculation, an apprentice of Poe's craft. As Richard Fusco has said, "Poe's meticulous tracings of a psyche's descent into madness have plenty of grandchildren in Maupassant's canon."¹⁴ In the story called "The Horla," which I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, a man is systematically and irreversibly destroyed, both physically and mentally, by a malignant presence that may be an illusion, or may be a creature more advanced than *homo sapiens*.

"What a glorious day!" are the first words in the narrator's journal, the text of the story. He is living alone but happily in his ancestral home on the banks of the Seine near Rouen. Watching the boats, he waves at a

14. Fusco, 9.

"splendid three-masted Brazilian [ship]" that delights him, but the next day he develops a fever. "It's a [strange] thing," he speculates, "that a mere physical ailment, some disorder in the blood perhaps, the jangling of a nerve thread, a slight congestion, the least disturbance in the functioning of this living machine of ours, so imperfect and so frail, can make a melancholic of the happiest of men and a coward of the bravest."¹⁵ He loses sleep, has horrific dreams, and becomes convinced that an invisible being is close to him, drinking the water at his bedside, eventually kneeling on his chest and squeezing his throat.

Dream? Hallucination? Sexual fantasy? Hypnotic suggestion? Any or all are possibilities. The narrator goes to Paris, where he sees a demonstration of Mesmerism. Home again, he sinks into madness, yet continues to look for answers. At last he reads in a scientific journal that, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, a strange madness made people think they were being tormented by "vampires of some kind ..." (1324). Remembering the Brazilian ship he had hailed, the narrator is convinced that one of those beings was on board, saw him, and jumped ashore. He names it "The Horla."

Determined to strike back, the narrator traps the Horla in his room, locks the iron shutters, and sets the house afire – forgetting that his servants are inside. A murderer now, albeit an accidental one, he realizes that "The Horla" is a superior being that cannot die before its time. The narrator's last words are, "I must kill myself, now" (1328). "The Horla" embodies man's fear of "premature destruction," the very outcome the narrator himself brings about. Fear of death begets what it dreads. Unfolding at a leisurely pace, rich in the details of French geography and society, this story is nevertheless, as Strindberg would say, "a brilliant Edgar-Poe."

However, the frightening image is not a barbarous North America, but a mysterious South America, nest of an unknown menace, an organism that invades human space yet cannot be detected. In this story there is a prescient dash of xenophobia, even, it is tempting to say, an unconscious prefiguring of a whole series of alien invasions – immigrants, diseases, terrorists – threatening not only the Old World but the New, arriving by boat or by plane, building hidden cells, spreading fear like a virus. Like the Poe tales that inspired it, "The Horla" is located in the country of fear in the year of anytime, including today.

15. Maupassant, 1314.

In romanticized portraits deriving from Baudelaire, Poe is sometimes viewed as a European manqué – a would-be aristocrat in a land of plebeians. Yet, in the end, he is understood best in relation to Americans like Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, who knew all about the ills of mankind, and yet believed in the power of enlightened reason, given scope and opportunity. Poe – like Hawthorne and Melville in their different ways – ran his own test on this theory. He learned that compulsive behavior is repetitive, unteachable, anti-social. By no means does he represent, in himself or in his art, the American character. Like so many artists in his native land before and since, he was – or appears to be – at odds with its putative ethos of hope and common sense. Nevertheless, he is useful to those viewing America from outside, to readers who are dubious about so much space and so much might in the hands of so much youth, historically speaking. To the curious, the worried, or the envious, he may seem not so much decadent as prophetic, signaling the force of untutored impulse and stubborn insularity in the American psyche. On the other hand, the artists who have learned from him may have seen a different label on the package, one that warns simply: “ACTIVE INGREDIENT – PURE SHORT-STORYNESS.”

Part III: The Rod

So much has been written about the expatriate community in the Paris of the Twenties, and especially about Ernest Hemingway's revolutionary prose style and its contribution to Modernism, that, again, I am skirting a very old story, indeed. My focus, however, is on Hemingway in relation to Poe as an American export.

At times, Hemingway, too, was dissociated from his country. Writing of Hemingway's reception in Germany in Roger Asselineau's collection of essays, *Hemingway in Europe*, Helmut Papajewski notes that “Hemingway was not in the first place regarded so much as an American but as an artist.”¹⁶ His paratactic style is reflected, for example, in the stories of Hein-

16. Helmut Papajewski, “The Critical Reception of Hemingway's Works in Germany Since 1920,” in Roger Asselineau, ed., *The Literary Reputation of Hemingway in Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 76.

rich Böll (83). The Swedish critic, Sten Selander, paraphrased here by Lars Åhnebrink, found that Hemingway's "sober and effective style with its somewhat calculated simplicity had a French ring."¹⁷ And, according to Sigmund Skard, those famous kernalized sentences were reminiscent of Norwegian "spoken dialects with their traditions back to saga and folk tales."¹⁸ Nevertheless, like Poe, Hemingway is a revelation to Europe. With his Midwestern origins, fixation on masculinity, and flamboyant persona, he seems a far cry from his neurasthenic predecessor, and yet each could be seen as detachable from his country, an American export not "made in America" but in some pit of the soul.

Fishing poles, toreador swords, big-game rifles, harpoons – these are the rods that are not staffs, not comforts, but instruments of control, skill, aggression, denial, and suppression. I'll forego the Freudian dimension in favor of the Absurdist. In a world without a moral design, but only a kaleidoscope of good and bad luck that eventually goes dark and resolves into *nada*, in such a world the only learning curves that have meaning are precise, short, and repeatable sequences of actions – like choreography in a bullring – that formalize engagement with threat at close quarters. This is the Hemingway prototype of the primal scenario. From disciplined nerves come dignity and survival.

Or perhaps numbness and evasion? The famous "code" of the Hemingway hero is an adaptation to ground zero, as defined by Existentialism. It is also a version of the primal scenario underlying the short story – insertion, interaction, and outcome. Whereas, in his tales of terror, Poe projected his fears by exacerbating the initiating stimulus, using up his characters in the process, Hemingway repressed *his* fears by ritualizing the interactive phase, stylizing his characters' behavior. No one who has read "The Big Two-Hearted River" can forget the careful steps by which Nick Adams, troubled by war-time traumas he cannot allow himself to think about, sets up his fishing camp in the northern woods almost as if staking his tent and making his fire were purgative rituals. He remembers an argument with his friend Hopkins: to boil, or not to boil, the coffee. This is the question, no less meditative than Hamlet's. It is a serio-comic dilemma that hallows unstated values – camaraderie, basic

17. Lars Åhnebrink, "Hemingway in Sweden," in *LRHE*, 158.

18. Sigmund Skard, "Hemingway in Norway," in *LRHE*, 145.

sensory pleasure – while reminding us of their transience. Poe trusted language to express his visions, but for a writer convinced that words are easily perverted, language itself must be staked out carefully. It must be wrestled, word by word, with dedication and skill, from the purity of silence. Hemingway is often Poe's opposite, but each of these writers, in his own way, re-founded the short story on its preverbal base.

While many European readers initially found Hemingway immoral, flat, and simplistic, he appealed to those who were disenchanted with systems of belief, whether social, political, or religious.¹⁹ He appealed, in some degree, to Albert Camus. I am not arguing for a direct connection, although there may be a "latent implicit" influence, to use Rolf Lundén's term.²⁰ Rather, I'd like to suggest some resonances with Camus' short stories, and one in particular, called "The Silent Men." The protagonist is a forty-year-old master barrel-maker, Yvars, whose handicraft is becoming obsolete and whose body is growing old. On the day after a failed labor strike, he and a handful of employees go grudgingly back to work. The boss, who had been fairly well liked in the past, has hurt the men's pride by dismissing their claims. They refuse to speak to him. Even after he tries to communicate, promising to aid them in future, the laborers feel they have nothing to say to him.

Later in the day, the boss's young daughter falls ill. Concerned, the workmen gather for news, but later, when the boss passes through the shop to say "good-bye" for the day, no one responds. "When it occurred to Yvars that someone ought to call him, the door had already closed."²¹ The story ends with Yvars at home, watching the peaceful evening sky and sea, holding his wife's hand, obviously troubled but stating that it was the boss's "own fault" that communication broke down. Wishfully, he concludes that, if he and his wife were "young again, ... they would have gone away, across the sea" (84).

It is a story about the damage done to human aspirations and decencies by the vagaries of economic change, creeping mortality, class tension, and pride. Set in a gritty harbor town on the Mediterranean, this is a

19. Papajewski, 74-75.

20. Rolf Lundén, "The Impact of the American Short Story on Swedish Literature," in manuscript form, by courtesy of the author.

21. Albert Camus, "The Silent Men," in *Exile and the Kingdom*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1991 [*L'exil et le Royaume*, 1957]), 82.

threatened, but not a chaotic or inhumane world. The workers are angry with their employer, yet happy to be at work. A hammer strikes iron, a saw plows through wood, and “[t]he scent of burning shavings beg[ins] to fill the shop. Yvars, who was planing and fitting the staves cut out by Esposito, recognized the old scent and his heart relaxed somewhat. All were working in silence, but a warmth, a life was gradually beginning to reawaken in the shop” (72). This is the buzz of male solidarity, of various skills fitting together like the staves of a barrel.

During the lunch-break, Yvars shares his bread with Saïd, the one Arab worker, while the man with the Spanish name, Esposito, lights a small fire, heats some sweetened coffee that was a gift from his grocer, and then pours the liquid repeatedly into a mustard jar that is “passed from hand to hand” (77). At the end of this ritual, “Eposito drank the rest of the coffee right from the burning pot, smacking his lips and swearing” (77-78). While the moment may be suggestive of Hemingway, it is not reflective of him, so far as I know. I have singled it out for its shared emphasis on the abiding warmth of the simplest human rituals, which inevitably yearn back to primitive engagements with the social and natural environment.

As the author of “The Silent Men” could have seen in Hemingway’s work, the absence of words implies the imminence of speech. The short story, in its brevity and density, is the form of narrative most tenuously yet aggressively won back from silence, whether that void is the denial of false language or the prelude to new language. Both Poe and Hemingway restarted the evolution of the short story – not *from* ground zero, but in relation *to* it. In the process, they offered both an acknowledgment and a critique of American newness in the world. As if for the first time, their characters must learn, for themselves and their generation, what fire does to fingers. Poe offered Europe an aesthetic of introversion against a perceived background of bluster and aggrandizement, while Hemingway provided an aesthetic of reticence against a looming foreground of progressivism and power.

Part IV: The Logo

We are now in the new millennium. Here is a quotation from a middle-class American woman who recently spent a year in Kosovo and whose journal was published in 2003. Describing her homeland, she says, “[W]e are an island, cut off from the rest of the world not so much by geography as by complacency, by a lack of curiosity, by arrogance, perhaps.”²² I often hear these sentiments from my colleagues, both at home and abroad, but the person I am quoting is Paula Huntley, the wife of an American lawyer serving on a commission to help build a modern legal system in Kosovo.

In September of 2000, Huntley and her husband arrived in the devastated city of Prishtina, learning firsthand about the suffering caused by “ethnic cleansing.” To occupy herself in a useful way, Huntley taught English as a second language to a group of war-ravaged but eager, hopeful, and affectionate students. Discovering a lone copy of Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* in a local bookstore, she founded the Hemingway Book Club of Kosovo, which is also the title of her memoir.

The Old Man and the Sea is a novella, but in technique and effect it is closer to the short story than to the novel, and Huntley stressed its unifying elements. She thought the simple syntax and diction would be ideal for non-native speakers of English, and she thought her long-suffering students would identify with Santiago, the simple old man who battled a giant fish and lost everything except his courage and self-respect. Besides, they had already heard of this author. Asked to identify him, a student promptly says, “‘He was a very good writer, famous everywhere, even in Kosovo’” (105). Huntley concludes that her students, “like the rest of the world, have been caught up in the mystique of Hemingway the famous writer, the adventurer, the man of action” (105). Her job is to acquaint them with the “real” Hemingway – or maybe the Hemingway that is right for them?

I cannot imagine the teacher of literature who would not admire this woman’s ideals, her generosity, her heartfelt respect for her students. She encourages them to equate Santiago’s courage and endurance with their own suffering and survival under the scourge of Milosevic. “‘You know,’” she tells her class, “‘if Hemingway had been alive in 1998 and

22. Paula Huntley, *The Hemingway Book Club of Kosovo* (New York: Putnam, 2003), 158.

1999, I'm quite sure he would have come to Kosovo.... He would have respected the way you never gave up hope, even when things seemed hopeless'" (106). The discussion moves on, but something has changed: "[w]e are all happily aware that we've added Ernest Hemingway to our group" (106).

With some nudging, her students decode the symbols: the sea is the world and the fish is one's goal-in-life. Huntley records that "[w]e talk about our own 'big fish,' what each of us would like to do with our lives" (108). One student wants to become an English teacher, another a gynecologist, another a computer expert, another a physics professor. They will all have to overcome huge obstacles, she reflects, just like the old man struggling to bring his fish to market, and some of them will fail. The analogy clicks into place. Knowing that her urban students haven't had much experience with raw nature, and ignoring the fact that Santiago is already a professional, already defined by the skill and wisdom his struggle will dignify, she is happy to substitute a list of job categories – and the prize of self-fulfillment – for whatever the fish meant to Hemingway.

To encourage her students, Huntley promises to show them the movie version of the book, saying "'We'll actually *see* what happens'" (119). It is as if the novella were an advertisement for the film. The viewing experience draws an audience together, and what Huntley is aiming for is a putative community. Recall her pleasure when Hemingway joins "our group." Her goal is a club of honorary Santiagos. This may be one form of American Studies abroad, but in fact it is a way of re-Americanizing Hemingway. Whether she intended to or not, she wound up using *The Old Man and the Sea* to export a kind of pre-fabricated, support-group humanism that is prevalent in the States today.

As it happens, Huntley's previous career was in marketing, and it is not unlikely that her instincts for matching products to consumers had something to do with her way of packaging Hemingway for this particular audience. It was the most natural thing in the world for her to launch the club by designing a logo, for which she chose the most obvious image in the world – a marlin. On the other hand, her pages are full of modest disclaimers, honest doubts, and cultural sensitivity. The persona is straightforward, with a pumped-up, middle-brow decency. The rapid-fire prose is chatty and conventional, tagged every so often with a reflexive question

to demonstrate thoughtfulness. In other words, it is a book straight from the heart of well-educated, well-meaning America. It shows how an internationally-known American writer was “produced” for a foreign audience, but also how that experience was *re-produced* – via Huntley’s book – for the American market in travel writing and “feel-good” memoir.

Before leaving for Kosovo, Huntley knew what she ought to gain from her experience abroad: namely, “a greater tolerance for ambiguity, a greater respect for differences, some clearer understanding of my own capacity for change” (4). Admirable goals, of course, but they are generic, trendy, and touted in advance, and therefore they represent a cognitive strategy of co-option, one that is at odds with the strategy of storytelling, where the primal scenario is a learning-curve of insertion, interaction, and a plus-or-minus outcome that always contains the potential for its opposite. Huntley admits that she is uncertain and afraid, with a great deal to learn, but she starts her journey very far from ground zero – and she takes Papa with her. Like many forms of American cultural exports, *her Hemingway* is accessible, warranted, and immediately gratifying.

This is not the Hemingway who, like Poe before him, re-invented the short story by stylizing the line between fear and control. Writing about the American temperament, Charles L. Sanford says that “[w]ithout a tragic sense of limitations, Americans have tended to dwell at opposite poles of buoyant optimism and stark despair, naïve faith and utter cynicism, arrogant pride and complete self-doubt.”²³ That description was written in 1961, forty years before the catastrophe of September 11, 2001. It points forward, but it also looks back, recalling, rather uncannily, the manic dualities within Poe’s four walls, the hot coffee and cold luck in Hemingway’s arena, and the short story’s own affinity for the fresh rudiments of storyness rather than the old tragedies or new therapies with their predictable outcomes.

Even at its most world-weary, even when it denies or deconstructs its own meaning, each story re-enacts a primal poke at experience. The outcome is in doubt. Therein lies what is regenerative about the short story, what is most American about the form, even as its offerings are re-imag-

23. Charles L. Sanford, *The Quest for Paradise: Europe and the American Moral Imagination* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 253.

ined by Europe. What was it that Poe and Hemingway, those seminal practitioners, exported to the world? It was a powerful reconnection with primal scenarios. When American cultural ambassadors prepackage that influence in contemporary wrappings, it is not a fair trade. The chamber has become the stage-set for a horror movie, and the rod has morphed into the logo for a club. I dread a future in which Poe and Hemingway are the marketable brand names for narrative products recycled abroad as slogans and icons. Who, if not you and I, can rewrite this ending?