

"...NO CLEAR LINE BETWEEN RELIGION AND FLY FISHING":  
ANGLING AND METAPHOR IN THE FICTION OF HEMINGWAY, GORDON,  
AND MACLEAN

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JOSEPH WESLEY JARRETT



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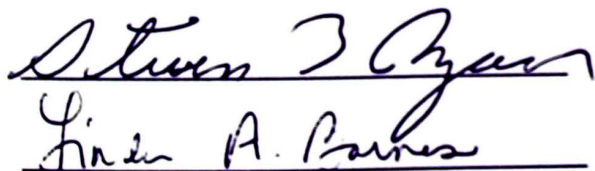
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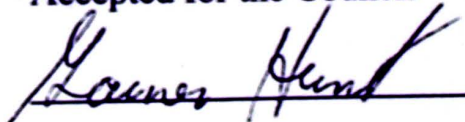
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**“... no clear line between religion and fly fishing”:**

**Angling and Metaphor in the Fiction of Hemingway, Gordon, and Maclean**

**A Thesis**

**Presented for the**

**Master of Arts**

**Degree**

**Austin Peay State University**

**Joseph Wesley Jarrett**

**May 1998**



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## Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
1. Introduction.....	1
2. The American Romantic Angling Tradition.....	15
3. Searching for Connection in Hemingway's Metaphor of Fishing.....	26
4. <u>Aleck Maury</u> : A Critique of the Sportman's Code.....	42
5. "Eventually, all things merge into one. . .".....	52
Works Cited.....	75



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

As a culture forms and evolves, so do its representations of fishing. In the history of the English language, the earliest representation of fishing as something more than food gathering is illustrated by a fragment of an illuminated Anglo-Saxon manuscript dated circa 1000 (Buller 8). This illustration provides a representation of Christ pointing to Peter, who has a rod with fishing line wrapped around it and is holding the rod away from his body while his head, like Botticelli's Birth of Venus, is leaning toward Christ, and the body is twisted toward the fishing rod. In the lower part of the illustration, one of the other disciples, possibly James, continues to fish, not with a net but with a rod and line. At the end of his line, he is playing a fish which has the physical characteristics of an Atlantic salmon. This representation obviously illustrates Jesus recruiting his disciples from the fishermen on the shores of Galilee, but instead of showing nets which were used by the Hebrews at the time of Christ, this illustrator shows the early use of the rod and line to catch a single fish. The practice of fishing at this time by some members of this society had evolved into a symbolic spiritual exercise. The illustrator is trying to reconcile the solitary pleasure of fishing to the communal idea of religious worship. Evident by the contortion of Peter's body, he is torn between his fishing rod and Christ's appeal. The fishing rod represents physical pleasure, and Christ represents spiritual contemplation. At the bottom of the painting at the apex of the inverted triangle formed by the three figures, the illustrator shows the connection of the fish to the natural world the disciples will be leaving in order to fish for men. The illumination illustrates not only the angling technology of the time, but also the connection that fishing has with religious symbols. The illustration displays the dichotomy of the angling experience by showing Christ calling the disciples to become fishers of men as well as the



natural connection these disciples had with the internal spirituality of angling. So within this early illustration, the ground work for the metaphor of angling is introduced as a way to achieve spiritual ends. The transposing of the idea of angling for food to angling for men indicates the beginning of the idea of comparing the act of angling to the creation of language for religious worship.

Approximately five hundred years later, Dame Juliana of Berners, a nun living at the nunnery of St. Albans, would write a book entitled The Boke of St. Albans. Part of this work is the essay "Treatyse of Fysshynge Wyth an Angle," which John McDonald dates about 1450 (9). Although the essay deals primarily with the process of making flies to catch fish, Dame Juliana's style and diction illustrate the connection between the natural world and the religious world of her nunnery. Fishing for her is not the internal struggle of Peter shown in the earlier illustration, but a blending of the solitary aspect of fishing and the communal life of a nunnery. Within the beliefs of Catholicism, the nuns are connected to each other by the dogma of the denial sensual pleasure, especially sexuality, so that they become the spiritual bride of Christ, and this marriage occurs through each nun's contemplation and ritual. Juliana introduces the pleasures of fishing this way:

He [the angler] schall heyr the melodyes melodious of the ermony of bydes. He schall se also the yong swannys and signetes followyng her eryous, duckes, to the cootes, herons, and many other fowllys with ther brodys, wyche me semyt better then all the noyse of houndes and blastes of hornes and other games that hawkers and hunters can make, or els the games fowlers can make. And yf the angler take the fysche, hardly the ys ther no man meryer then he in hys spritites. (149)



By listing the pleasures that she feels in this solitary act of angling, Juliana describes what fishing represents to her.

Dame Juliana contrasts the solitary pleasures of angling with the noise of the aristocratic falconers and hunters. She develops a sense of internal contemplation that is separate from the religious rigors of the nunnery, and the order of emphasis of her description illustrates her sense of spiritual contemplation. The first part of her essay illustrates her connection to the physical world without putting this connection in a religious context. She recognizes first the cyclical nature of death and rebirth in the stream, and the order of Berners listing shows her connection to the air by observing and hearing the birds first, then also to the water by describing the ducks and swans. Dame Juliana illustrates the cycle of rebirth possible by the nurturing of water by showing the waterfowl with their young. The natural world of the water provides the waterfowl a cycle to continue the species, whereas the hunters and falconers leave their world disrupted by breaking the natural cycle of the stream. Later within her essay, Berners will blend this natural scenery with her religious training. She instructs the angler:

And whoever wishes to practice the sport of angling, he must rise early, which thing is profitable in this way. That is to wit: most for the welfare of his soul, for it will cause him to be holy; and for the health of his body, for it will cause him to be well; also for the increase of his goods, for it will make him rich. As to the old English proverb says in this manner: 'Whoever will rise early shall be holy, healthy, and happy.' (McDonald translation 46).

The rigors of a religious order are found in the sport of angling. The early morning meditation for Juliana could occur within setting of the river. Within this meditation, she reproduces the



process of prayer and contemplation that is normally restricted to the nunnery, and this connects her with Christ and the saints within the Great Chain of Being.

As the essay progresses, Dame Juliana connects religion and fishing with the idea of conservation. The connection Berners makes between fishing and religion. The health and happiness of the body is compounded by her proclaiming the idea of control and moderation. Control and moderation not only applies to the physical sense of the land but overflows into the spiritual realm as well. The solitary connection she makes between angling and religion then overflows into her community. She writes:

Also, I charge you, that you break no man's hedges in going about your sport, nor any man's gates without shutting them again. Also you must not use this aforesaid artful sport for covetousness, merely for the increasing or saving your money, but mainly for your enjoyment and to procure the health of your body and, more especially of your soul. (66)

For Juliana, fishing is not only a source of sustaining life in a physical sense, but in a metaphorical sense she suggests the good of the spiritual life of the individual and the community as well.

At the conclusion of her essay, Dame Juliana builds on the idea of conservation and connects the idea directly to the religious aspects of her life. She has connected her love of fishing to the divine love that is part of her being a nun:

Also ye shall not be to ravenous in taking your sayd game as to mouche at one tyme, whche ye maye lyghtly doo if ye doo in every poynt as this present treatyse



shewyth you on every poynt, wyche shoude lyghtly be occasyon to dystoye your owne dysported and other menns also.

Also ye shall besye youreselfe to nourysshe the game in all that ye maye: and to dystoye all suche thynges as ben devoures of it. And all those that done after this rule shall have the blessynge of God and Saynt Petrus, wyche he theyme graunte that wyth his precyous blood he boughte. (Berners 43).

Dame Juliana codifies the metaphor of fishing in this last passage. Fishing enables her to be, within the physical sense, part of the natural world of the stream and through this physical process of angling, she connects with the spirituality of the Catholic idea of the community of saints.

In the Renaissance tradition, Prince Gervase Markham approaches the metaphor of fishing from the perspective of a nobleman with his book entitled Pleasures of Princes published in 1614 (intro ix). In his discussion of the attributes of a Renaissance man, Markham includes a chapter on "The Art of Angling." Born in circa 1568, Markham, as a young man, was a soldier in the Low Countries and Ireland. He was a champion horse breeder and is credited for importing the first Arabian stallion into England for James I. He wrote mainly about horse breeding, but by 1617, the publishers made him promise to write no more on the subject of horse diseases because he had flooded the court with his expertise on horse breeding. Markham continued writing until his death in 1637 (intro x).

Markham introduces "The Art of Angling" as follows.

Since pleasure is a rapture of power in this last age, borne into the hearts of men, and there longeth with such careful guard and attendance, that nothing is more



supreme, or ruleth with greater strength in their affections, and since all now become the sons of pleasure, and every good is measured by the delight it produceth: what work unto men can be most comely, most honest, and giveth the most liberty to divine meditation, and that without all question is the Art of Angling, which having ever been most surely necessary, hath been the sport or the recreation of Gods Saints, of the most holy fathers, and of many worthy and reverend Divines, both dead and at this time breathing. (Markham 101)

Markham, working in Juliana's tradition of fishing as a process that brought one into relationship with the community of the saints, extolls the pleasure that fishing brings into meditation on the divine. Markham differs with Dame Juliana by giving primary emphasis to the idea of human pleasure before the pleasure of fishing. Fishing for Markham becomes the vehicle of relating to his contemporaries the pleasures of his social class.

Markham continues within this chapter to extoll the virtues of angling to his audience of aristocrats. He begins to list the appropriate clothing, equipment, and demeanor required before a person can participate in the act of fishing. Then, Markham shifts his focus from the external elements required to fish into the inward qualities necessary:

Now for the inward qualities of the minde, albe some Writers reduce them into twelve heads, which indeed whosoever interpreteth cannot choose but be very compleat in much perfection, yet I must see them in many more branches. The Art, and most especially whereof, is, that a skillful Angler ought to be a general Scholar, and keen in all liberal Sciences, as a Grammmarian, to know how to write a discourse of his art in true terms, without affectation or prudence. He should have



sweetness of speech, to persuade and entice others to delight in a exercise so much laudable. (115)

The inward qualities of a fisherman to Markham relates directly to the qualities of the aristocracy. He continues his essay by including geometry, geography, and biology to be requirements of fishermen also. The act of fishing becomes secondary for Markham and the primary focus of his writing dictates the aristocratic connection that fishing offers to the appropriate person. At the subconscious level of his discourse, Markham relates the metaphor of fishing to language in the sense that both language and fishing indicate the class level of the participate, and he is requiring knowledge of language in order that one can understand the art of angling. Markham relates to his audience the idea that one needs a classical education to participate in fishing and use this knowledge to create a literature for the sport.

Influenced by the writings of Berners and Markham, Izaak Walton published The Compleat Angler in 1650, which is regarded by many fishing scholars as the “father of fishing literature.” Walton builds on the framework proposed by Berners within her treatise of having a conversation between the venator and the piscator on the virtues of the respective sports. Through the eyes of the piscator, Walton weaves his own literary history of fishing into the conversation. Walton consciously compares the act of fishing to poetry and uses fishing as a way to define the poet. Walton proposes:

Piscator: O Sir, doubt not but that Angling is an art; is it not an art to deceive a Trout with an artificial fly?... Sir, but that Angling is an art, and an art worth your learning: the question is rather, whether you be capable of learning it? For Angling is some what like poetry, men are born so: I mean with inclinations to it,



though both may be heightened by discourse and practice; but he that hopes to be a good Angler must not only bring an inquiring, searching, observing wit, but must bring a large measure of hope and patience, and a love and propensity to the art itself... then no doubt not but Angling will prove to be like virtue, a reward to itself. (Walton 23-24)

For Walton, the process of presenting the fly to the fish becomes a metaphor for the poet presenting the poem to his audience. The question of talent versus practice is answered by Walton by listing the concrete characteristics of a scientific mind combined with the characteristics of an artist's heart. The combination of the passions of the heart with the observations of the mind produces not only a good fisherman, but a poet as well.

Then, Walton goes on to relate fishing to the Judeo-Christian history illustrated throughout the Old Testament. Like his contemporary Milton, Walton combines classical mythology of the Greeks with the Judeo-Christian tradition of the Bible to provide an angling history:

Then first, for the antiquity of Angling, of which I shall not say much, but only this: some say it is as ancient as Deucalion's flood; others, that Belus, who was the first inventor of Angling; and some others say, for former times have had their disquisitions about the antiquity of it, that Seth, one of the sons of Adam, taught it to his sons, and that by them it was derived to posterity; others say that he left it engraven on those pillars which he erected, and trusted to preserve the knowledge of the mathematics, music, and the rest of that precious knowledge, and those



useful arts which by God's appointment or allowance and his noble industry were thereby preserved from perishing in Noah's flood. (24)

Walton divides the history of angling into two categories: the classical mythology of the Greeks, and the Judeo-Christian account taken from the Bible. In the latter part of the quotation, Walton makes an ambiguous pronoun reference by introducing a third possibility of the history of angling as being created by "he" that erected the pillars of knowledge that withstood the great flood. Syntactically, the antecedent of the pronoun "he" refers to Seth, which textually means that Seth erected this standard of knowledge that is passed down to the age of Walton.

According to the postcanonical Hebrew myth of Seth, he was rapt away to heaven for forty days. While in heaven, Seth was taught by the angels the "basal precepts of moral law," and the art of language. After returning to the earth, Seth erected the pillars in the land of Sirius (Jackson 377). Walton added to the myth the useful art of angling which he equates with language. From the standpoint of language, Walton proposes that the art of language and fishing was formed by the divine inspiration of God and written into stone by Adam's son Seth. Blending his knowledge of Greek mythology and the Bible, Walton codifies the history of angling into a literary representation of the sport, and ultimately blends angling into a metaphor of language.

After giving a literary history of angling, Walton presents the debate that he builds on throughout his work. Walton asks if "the happiness of man in this world consists more in contemplation or action?" (24). Describing a week in an angler's existence through poetry, prose and song, Walton will conclude that contemplation through the process of fishing leads to a happier existence than that of action. The sentiment rooted within Walton's prose struggles to place the abstraction of art into the form of language by the use of the metaphor of fishing.



Approaching this problem from the aspect of contemplation, Walton's prose becomes abstract, lacking the concreteness needed to convey the artistic implications of the metaphor of angling, but Walton does forge an important relationship between fishing and language and concludes his work by stating, "This is my purpose; and so, 'Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord': and let the blessings of St. Peter's Master be with mine" (158).

Approaching the metaphor of fishing through a concrete conceit in his poem "The Bait," John Donne illustrates the action of fishing as representing the courting process of humans. Written in 1633, seventeen years before the publication of The Compleat Angler, Donne exemplifies the poet as an angler. Donne begins the poem this way:

Come live with me and be my love,

And we will some new pleasures prove,

Of golden sands and crystal brooks,

With silken lines and silver hooks. (1-4)

From the first line, it is evident that the poet is addressing a love interest. Then, Donne builds on this proposal by introducing the angling imagery of "crystal brooks," "silken lines," and "silver hooks."

In the second stanza, the poet and his lover move into the realm of the angler:

There will the river whispering run,

Warmed by thine eyes more than the sun.

And there the enamored fish will stay,

Begging themselves they may betray. (5-8)



The realm in which these two lovers exist exudes a magical enticement that lures the lovers as well as the fish. The look of the poet's lover warms the river as much as the sun enamoring the fish as well as himself. The poet like the fish is begging to be caught by her eyes.

In the third stanza, the poet shifts his conceit of fishing into comparing his lover to the fish in this river. Donne writes:

When thou wilt swim in that live bath,  
Each fish, which every channel hath,  
Will amorously to thee swim,  
Gladder to catch thee, than thou him. (9-12)

The poet shifts his focus to her being part of the aquatic world in which all the fish are smitten by her charm. Like the Greek maenads, the poet's lover swims among the fish, but Donne reverses the attraction onto the poet: he would rather catch her, than she would him. Donne expands the metaphor of fishing introduced in the first stanza into the poet as the fisherman and the lover as the fish.

After establishing the love relationship between the poet and the lover as being the same as the relationship between angler and fish, Donne elaborates the metaphor to list the techniques that anglers use to catch the fish:

Let others freeze with angling reeds,  
And cut their legs with shells and weeds,  
Or treacherously poor fish beset  
With strangling snare or windowy net;



Let coarse bold hands from slimy nest  
 The bedded fish in banks out-wrest,  
 Or curious traitors, sleeve-silk flies,  
 Bewitch poor fishes' wandering eyes. (16-24)

Donne digresses within these two stanzas to give a poetic version of angling history to illustrate the techniques of catching fish, and at the metaphoric level, these techniques apply to the language of love. The first technique of angling introduced is the angler wading among the weeds with the spear waiting to stab his prey, then as the human evolves, he is able to fashion a net to trap his prey. After learning this technology, the angler then is able to reach beneath the banks to grab the unsuspecting fish, and Donne concludes this angling history by illustrating the fly fisherman crafting flies to entice the fish. As a metaphor for the language of courtship, Donne shows language first as a crude attempt by the human to connect with another person by stabbing into unknown waters. Then after this process of language evolves, the human is able to form persuasive arguments through persuasive language to ensnare the other. Then, the next step for Donne in the poem is making the physical connection with the fish to pull it out from the safety of the "slimy nest." This passage relates to courtship language as evolving into "course bold hands" pulling a person from the comfortable protection of the self into the grasp of another. Donne then associates the language of courtship as evolving into the carefully crafted fly that entices the fish to bite without revealing the hook or the angle. This language masks the intention of the user to lure another to connect with him. Stabbing into the unknown waters of communication has evolved into the carefully crafted enticement that manipulates another into communicating, controlled by the one who crafted the fly.



After giving this angling history, Donne concludes:

For thee, thou needest no such deceit,  
 For thou thyself art thine own bait;  
 That fish that is not caught thereby,  
 Alas, is wiser far than I. (25-28)

Donne reverses again the relationship between the angler and the fish in this last stanza. The techniques of language described in the previous stanzas will not work on the poet's lover because she is the bait as well as the fish. The poet with his language cannot entice her with his poetic techniques, for she holds the true connection within herself that lures him into being caught. The poet recognizes the limitations of his language when placed next to the metaphysical connection the lover has with nature and the cosmos. She is the one who understands the universe, and the poet is willing to be placed in her creel.

The obvious connection between Donne and Walton is that Walton was the biographer of Donne, and Walton included, "The Bait," in The Compleat Angler. Although not documented, Walton and Donne probably fished together in the Thames, for both were fishermen. Within the literary tradition of angling, Walton attempts to explain the connection between the angler and the universe as the abstract concept of contemplation through spiritual piety, and Donne through the action of poetry illustrates the metaphysical connection that humans have with nature and each other through language and, at the same time, shows the shortcomings of language. The poet never fully connects with his lover, but through the conceit of angling, the reader can connect with the poet's plight.



Within the English literary history of angling, fishing has evolved from a pictorial representation of a religious experience into a conceit used by poets. As the English language evolved, the representations of fishing became metaphorical in nature. Fishing provided the reader with a metaphor that illustrates a natural connective quality, and at the same time provided a contemplative element as well. The English literary tradition of angling illustrates the separation of the human from the group in order to connect with nature and the spiritual. The interpretations of both the natural and spiritual elements vary throughout the writings, but this tradition provides a base for the connection that will be used by other writers.



## Chapter 2

### The American Romantic Angling Tradition

While England was experiencing the literary Renaissance in the early seventeenth century with writers such as Shakespeare and Donne producing their masterpieces, exploration was occurring in the New World of North America. With the French and Spanish already carving out settlements in the New World, the English attempted to settle the East Coast of America which they called New England. The Jamestown Colony, settled by Captain John Smith, was the first English Colony in the New World. Since survival was the major concern of the inhabitants, the literature produced by these settlers became a functional discourse of survival and salesmanship to the people in England. Consequently, the discourse on fishing followed the same motif of survival and served as a travelogue for prospective settlers. In A Description of New England, Captain John Smith describes the opportunities that the new world supplies for the ambitious person. Smith lists the different types of occupations one might pursue in New England, but he bolsters this selling point by also relating the physical beauty of the countryside along with the freedom of choice one would have in this new settlement:

Now that the carpenter, mason, gardener, tailor, smith, sailor, forgers, or what other, may they not make this a petty recreation, though they fish but an hour in the day, to take more than they eat in a week? Or if they will not eat it because there is so much better choice, yet [they may] sell it or change it with the fishermen or merchants for anything they want. And what sport does yield a more pleasing content and less hurt or charge than angling with a hook and crossing the



sweet air from isle to isle, over the silent streams of a calm sea? Wherein the most curious find pleasure, profit, and content. (89)

In this passage, Smith's major concern is the economic advantages of New England, but when he mentions fishing, he elaborates on the extra benefits of this exercise. Fishing is a recreation for the craftsmen of New England that provides enough fish for a week in one hour, and then they have the choice of eating the fish or trading them for other wares. At the end of the paragraph, Smith breaks from his economic discourse and meditates on the importance of angling. Smith describes the contentment gained from angling with a hook, and the language of his description becomes poetic in the alliterating adjectives of "sweet" and "silent" and the imagery of the calm sea. Concluding that most individuals find "pleasure, profit and content" from angling, Smith reverts to the functional discourse of showing the advantages of settling in New England. With the settling of the New England, American angling literature will grow out of the literary style of the English angling literature, but American angling literature will represent the ideas forming in a newly independent American culture.

As North America became more populated, the literature of the people became more diverse. The majority of the literature written still was a functional discourse, but instead of dealing only with survival and opportunity, the literature dealt with the spiritual condition of the human. Since the majority of the colonies forming in New England were created as an escape from religious persecution, the literature that was produced primarily focused on the particular view of religion the group shared. Nature in these religious discourses was seen as something to be conquered in order to build a "city on the hill" that would be a shining example for the rest of the world. American literature during colonial era primarily dealt with the proper way for the



human to conduct himself in this “city on the hill.” Feeling that they were fulfilling the Biblical prophecy of creating a new kingdom to usher in the second coming of Christ, the settlers created strict guidelines for the people to follow in order to establish this kingdom. As the religious euphoria subsided in the eighteenth century, writers and ministers, such as George Whitfield and Michael Wigglesworth, created a revival atmosphere through their sermons and prose.

As the eighteenth century progressed, the literature that evolved from a functional discourse into a religious discourse presented reasons the colonies should be freed from England. The discourse from the 1750's until the American revolution primarily served the function of debating the issue of revolting against England. But during this time period, there were some writers discussing the attributes of fishing, and this angling discourse mirrored the attitudes of the culture that was breaking ties with England and carving out a new country. William Bartram, in his Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, illustrates through his use of angling the competition for the natural resources in America. Compiled between 1773 and 1777, these journals give a narrative account of Bartram's journey into the frontiers of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. In his account entitled “Home of the Alligator,” Bartram describes in narrative form going in a swamp to fish and encountering an alligator.

He introduces the account this way:

The verges and islets of the lagoon were elegantly embellished with flowering plants and shrubs; the laughing coots with wings half spread were tripping over the little coves hiding themselves in the tufts of grass; young broods of the painted summer teal, skimming the still surface of the waters, and following the watchful



parent unconscious of danger, were frequently surprised by the voracious trout; and he, in turn, as often by the subtle, greedy alligator. (3)

Bartram's account begins in much the same way that Dame Juliana of Berners introduces her essay. Bartram describes the peaceful swamp, the waterfowl skimming along the surface, and the flowering shrubs that frame this beauty; but unlike Berners, Bartram reveals the dark inhabitant of the swamp, the alligator. Waiting to disrupt the peaceful order of nature, the greedy alligator is hidden beneath the contemplative aspects of Bartram's swamp. The flowers, still water, and waterfowl only mask the evil of the alligator lurking in this swamp.

Bartram continues to describe this swamp as he ventures into the midst of it to catch some fish. As he paddles deeper into the swamp to catch more fish, he encounters the alligator. He writes:

I soon despatched him by lodging the contents of my gun in his head, and then proceeded to cleanse and prepare my fish for supper; and accordingly took them out of the boat, laid them down on the sand close to the water, and began to scale them; when, raising my head, I saw before me, through the clear water, the head and shoulders of a very large alligator, moving slowly towards me. I instantly stepped back, when, with a sweep of his tail, he brushed off several of my fish. It was certainly most providential that I looked up at that instant, as the monster would probably, in less than a minute, have seized and dragged me into the river.

(5)

The competition between Bartram and the alligator reveals his attitude towards nature and angling. Whereas angling provided for Berners and Walton a way to separate themselves from



their society so that they contemplate the beauty of nature in order that they may connect with the spiritual community of saints, Bartram uses angling to illustrate the competition for food. The food source at the end of his line forces him to compete instead of contemplate within nature.

Bartram concludes his discourse by personifying this competition within nature by describing the alligator. He writes:

An old champion, who is perhaps absolute sovereign of a little lake or lagoon (when fifty less than himself are obliged to content themselves with swelling and roaring in little coves round about), darts forth from the reedy coverts all at once, on the surface of the waters, in a right line; at first seemingly as rapid as lightning, but gradually more slowly until he arrives at the centre of the lake, when he stops... He acts his part like an Indian chief when rehearsing his feats of war; and then retiring, the exhibition is continued by others who dare to step forth, and strive to excel each other, to gain the attention of the favorite female. (10)

Bartram allegorizes the attitude of America during the time of the Revolutionary War with the alligator representing the "sovereign" reign of England over America. Through his discourse on fishing, Bartram illustrates the early seeds of manifest destiny by describing the chaos within nature as something that a person has to conquer or control. The contemplative enjoyment with which Bartram began changes into the quest for control of the swamp. The primeval alligator mirrors Bartram's actions as a predator, but the alligator ultimately absconds with the fish and controls the chaotic world of the swamp. Bartram uses the metaphor of fishing to illustrate America's struggle for independence in the swamp of the New World, and like Bartram, America



faces the competition from the alligators of England, Spain and France to control the new frontier. As America gains its independence from England, settlers push the boundaries of the country westward. Rising out of the Monroe doctrine, manifest destiny became the prevailing philosophy in America in the early nineteenth century. The idea that Americans were destined to occupy the continent from coast to coast propelled the expansion of the country. Angling in America still retained the functional aspect of providing food for the families of the settlers, but Thomas Jefferson in his journals and Lewis and Clark in their journals recognized the beauty of the streams and rivers but within the texts never viewed fishing as more than a means of sustenance. The need for expanding the nation outweighed the need to make the connection between angling and the well-being of a person. Angling in the early 1800s was viewed in the same way that Bartram used it in his journals: a competition between nature and the human for dominance.

By 1830, the influence of the Romantic movement in Europe had reached America, and these new ideas about the human within nature would change the way writers would use the metaphor of fishing as well. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the most prolific of the early American transcendentalists, would propose a philosophical change in the way Americans viewed nature. Even though he does not use the metaphor of angling in "Nature," the work is germane to the way the metaphor was to be used later in the nineteenth century by Henry David Thoreau. Emerson was concerned with the potential of the human to transcend to a universal connection, or communion, through the metaphor of nature. The appreciation of nature would provide the human the basis to delve into the internal nature of the soul so that the human would be connected with the universal "transparent eye-ball" that is both everything for the human and at



the same time nothing because of the sacrifice of the self for universal communion. Emerson, within this philosophical framework, sees only the natural man's ability to achieve universal communion; he does not emphasize the human's potential for destruction and isolation. This philosophical shift from the attitude of Bartram molded the emergence of American angling literature in the nineteenth century.

Building on the philosophy of Emerson, Henry David Thoreau would develop the metaphor of angling to illustrate the philosophy of the transcendentalists. Epitomizing the philosophy of Emerson, Thoreau left the community for the solitude of nature at Walden pond so that he might connect with the metaphor of the universal "eye-ball" of Emerson. Walden is the first person account of Thoreau as he lives in the midst of nature and discovers the internal connection between himself and Nature. He states:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. (1682-3)

Thoreau wants to live his life deliberately and to the fullest. The isolation from society does not destroy his connection to it, but reaffirms and strengthens the importance of life to Thoreau.

As Thoreau begins to explore this communion with nature, he differs with Emerson on his view of nature. Emerson refuses to recognize the evil or destructive element within human nature, whereas Thoreau acknowledges it, and proposes the solution of simplicity in order to transcend to a higher level of understanding. Thoreau notes:



For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it [nature], whether it is of the devil or of God, and have somewhat hastily concluded that it is the chief end if man here to 'glorify God and enjoy him forever.'

Still we live meanly, like ant; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men; like pygmies we fight with cranes; it is error upon error, and clout upon clout, and our best virtue has for its occasion a superfluous and evitable wretchedness. (1683)

Acknowledging the propensity for meanness in humanity, Thoreau criticizes the state of society in 1846. Thoreau disagrees with the sentiment proposed by Walton in the end of the Compleat Angler that says "this is my purpose; and so 'Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord'" (158). According to Thoreau, this simplistic dismissal of the dichotomy of the human condition creates an uneasiness within most people. Then, Thoreau recognizes the philosophy of nature illustrated by Bartram in pointing out the competition and wretchedness humans project on each other for some false sense of control. Unlike Bartram who accepts this competition as part of America's strength, Thoreau notices the wretched weakness this philosophy places on a society. Thoreau admonishes his readers to simplify their lives in order that they may have the transcendence offered by Emerson.

Echoing the narrative style of Izaak Walton, Thoreau introduces a conversation between the hermit and the poet in the section entitled "Brute Neighbors." Thoreau begins:

Sometimes I had a companion in my fishing, who came through the village to my house from the other side of the town, and the catching of the dinner was as much a social exercise as the eating of it. (1751).



According to the footnote in the Norton anthology, the companion was the poet Ellery Channing, but also accompanying Thoreau was the knowledge of angling literature (1751). The communion of catching and eating the fish alluded to by Thoreau serves not only as a physical act to satisfy companionship and hunger, but a spiritual communion that helps the hermit connect with the world of the poet as well. The hermit begins his speech by wondering what the surrounding world is doing at this particular point in time; then he describes the sounds floating from the village, and concludes his speech by stating:

Only a wood-pecker tapping. O, they swarm...Hark! I hear a rustling of the leaves. Is it some ill-fed village hound yielding to the instinct of the chase? Or the lost pig which is said to be in these woods, whose tracks I saw after the rain? It comes on apace; my sumachs and sweet briers tremble. --Eh, Mr Poet, is it you? How do you like the world to-day? (1751)

This opening echoes the opening of Dame Juliana's treatise; the noise of the hounds, the sweet briers, and noise from the woodpecker flow from the angling literary tradition started by Berners.

Thoreau then answers the question proposed earlier by Walton: who was most happy, the man of contemplation or action? Thoreau allows the poet to answer the hermit by saying:

See those clouds; how they hang! That's the greatest thing I have seen to-day. There's nothing like it in old paintings, nothing like it foreign lands... I thought, as I have my living to get, and have not eaten to-day, that I might go a-fishing. That's the true industry for poets. It is the only trade I have learned. Come, let's along. (1751)



The poet, the person of action, takes the act of fishing and makes a metaphor for creating poetry. The contemplation of the beauty of nature forces the poet into the act of communion, not only for the food from the fish, but in the communion created by expressing the experience through the medium of poetry. Poetry for the poet has become like the catching of a fish for the angler; the solitary act of making a cast into the introspective waters of language and personal experience yields a poem that is the source of communion for society.

On the other hand, the contemplative hermit's introspection through the vehicle of fishing allows the hermit happiness within his own existence. The hermit alone:

Let me see; where was I? Methinks I was nearly in this frame of mind; the world lay about at this angle. Shall I go to heaven or a-fishing? If I should soon bring this mediation to an end, would another so sweet occasion be likely to offer? I was as near being resolved into the essence of things as ever I was in my life.

(1751-2)

The hermit within his contemplation illustrates the metaphor of fishing as an attempt to find order within his universe by the process of angling. Whereas angling inspires poetry for the poet, fishing forces the hermit to consider the "angle" of the universe. The communion the hermit receives from angling is not the communion with society, but the internal communion with the self and the "essence of things." The isolation of the hermit helps him to understand the order angling places on the universe. The order among the rigors of the cast placed against anticipation of connecting with the unknown fish helps the hermit understand the different angles of the universe. The hermit can participate in the act of communion with the poet, but in order to



fully understand the introspection of contemplation, the hermit has to break from the poet so that he may transcend to his level of communion with what he feels as the "essence of things."

Through this use of angling within Walden, the reader is able to recognize Thoreau's struggle with the action of social communion as opposed to the contemplative isolation of introspection. Thoreau has built upon the literary angling tradition of Berners and Walton to illustrate the quandary of the human condition as he perceived it within the scope of the transcendental movement. Fishing for Thoreau has evolved from catching a fish for an evening meal into a metaphor representing the human's state within society. The metaphor illustrates the problems of Thoreau's experience at Walden as well as the reason he withdrew from society. Thoreau built on the angling tradition of the past, but in his use of angling is able to illustrate the problems existing in the American romantic movement.

of midbirth as he watches his father cleanse his hands. After performing the sacrifice, Nick's father feels a sense of elation until he sees the father of the woman that is open, underneath the blanket. The screams of pain from the woman without painkiller caused the Indian father to commit suicide. Witnessing this Nick knows only if dying is hard. As they row across the lake toward home, Nick realizes how hard have just occurred. Hemingway writes: "They were seated in the boat, Nick in the stern, his father rowing. The sun was shining up over the hills. A bass jumped, making a circle in the water. Nick dipped his hand in the water. It felt warm in the sharp chill of the morning. It was an early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father. He felt quite sure that he would never die. (21)"



## Chapter 3

### Searching for Connection in Hemingway's Metaphor of Fishing

In the American literature of the early twentieth century, Ernest Hemingway uses fishing to illustrate the romantic connection that was established by Thoreau, but his characters reveal the isolation that is sometimes hidden by the romantic idealism of Emerson and Thoreau. In his short stories, Hemingway uses the character Nick Adams to illustrate the fragmenting of the twentieth century because of the World War and industrialization. In one of his early short stories, "Indian Camp", Hemingway introduces Nick Adams as a young boy and establishes the connection to the natural world and to fishing that Nick would have to build upon as he matured. Nick, with his father and Uncle George, rows across the lake to visit the Indian Camp because Nick's father, a doctor, is delivering a baby. The Indian woman is having a difficult delivery, and Nick sees the pain of childbirth as he watches his father cleanse his hands. After performing a Caesarian with a jackknife, Nick's father feels a sense of elation until he sees the father of the child dead, with his throat slit open, underneath the blanket. The screams of pain from the difficult childbirth without painkiller caused the Indian father to commit suicide. Witnessing this brutal event, Nick asks only if dying is hard. As they row across the lake toward home, Nick thinks of the events that have just occurred. Hemingway writes:

They were seated in the boat, Nick in the stern, his father rowing. The sun was coming up over the hills. A bass jumped, making a circle in the water. Nick trailed his hand in the water. It felt warm in the sharp chill of the morning.

In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die. (21)



On the surface, this passage seems to illustrate that romantic connection that Nick develops through the perfection of nature. The bass jumping in the lake creates the perfect circle flows from the center to enclose Nick and his father. Nick trails his hand in the water, perhaps through the perfect circle of nature. The circle of a new day is coming above the hills for Nick, and he feels he will never die, but the bitter irony of this scene portrayed by Hemingway is revealed through the innocence of Nick. The reader recognizes that the water is not warm; it is only warmer than the "sharp chill of the morning." The romantic connection that Nick has with nature is undercut by the natural reality. The reader knows that the ring created by the bass will disappear, the water is cold, and Nick will not live forever; but at this one moment in the stern of the boat, Nick is at one with the natural world. This connection, although romantic on the surface, masks the cold isolation beneath the surface for Nick Adams.

Hemingway builds on this view of the world in his story "Now I Lay Me," set in Spain during World War I. Nick relates the experience of the battlefield at night waiting either to attack or be attacked. The story opens with the image of silkworms eating the mulberry leaves above Nick Adams. Hemingway writes:

I myself did not want to sleep because I had been living for a long time with the knowledge that if I ever shut my eyes in the dark and let myself go, my soul would go out of my body. I had been that way for a long time, ever since I had been blown up at night and felt it go out of me and go off and then come back.

(144)



Nick's early assurance of living forever has been replaced with the fear of death. The natural world surrounding Nick now consumes his soul through the horrors of war. To fight off the fear of sleep, Nick states:

I had different ways of occupying myself while I lay awake. I would think of a trout stream I had fished along when I was a boy and fish its whole length very carefully in my mind, fishing very carefully under all the logs, all the turns of the bank, the deep holes and the clear shallow stretches, sometimes catching trout and sometimes losing them. I would stop fishing at noon to eat my lunch, sometimes on a log over the stream, sometimes on a high bank under a tree, and I always ate my lunch very slowly and watched the stream below me while I ate. (144-5)

The only order Nick finds among the disorders of war is within his own mind through fishing. The isolation that he is experiencing is only alleviated by the connection Nick creates in his mind by fishing. The reader recognizes that Nick cannot experience the complete connection with nature in his mind, but for a brief moment, he has achieved a connection with the natural world.

Hemingway concludes his story by returning to the image of the silkworms gnawing. He writes:

They ate steadily, making a dropping in the leaves. I had a new thing to think about and I lay in the dark with my eyes open and I lay in the dark with my eyes open and thought of all the girls I had ever known and what kind of wives they would make. It was a very interesting thing to think about and for a while it killed off trout fishing and interfered with my prayers. Finally, though, I went back to trout fishing because I found that I could remember all the streams and there was



always something new about them, while the girls, after I had thought about them a few times, blurred and I could not call them into my mind and finally they all blurred and I gave up thinking about them almost altogether. (152-3)

The continual gnawing of the silkworms of fear and self doubt force Nick to examine his past life. The forced contemplation of night creates a recollection of Nick's former connections with women. The memory of these girls kills his thought of trout fishing and stops his communion with God. Whereas Berners, Walton, and Thoreau see angling as a bridge between the isolation of the experience to the communion of the sharing of the fish within society, Hemingway sees the connection Nick has with society as something that "kills off trout fishing." The contemplation of the possible connections Nick could have had with these women becomes blurred when he returns to fishing within his mind. The moment of connection that Nick has with the natural world within his mind isolates him from the possibility of connecting with the memories of his past social interactions. By separating the social connection from the spiritual and natural connection within the experience of angling, Hemingway focuses on the isolation of the individual so characteristic of the fishing metaphor.

After Nick returns home from the war, Hemingway shows the psychological wounding of Nick and his search for healing in a fishing story titled "Big Two-Hearted River." Hemingway builds upon the isolation within the metaphor of fishing in the story, but at the same time allows Nick to achieve a connection with his past and with the present. Nick returns home to a scorched landscape hoping to achieve a connection with his world through fishing. Hemingway writes:

Nick looked at the burned-over stretch of hillside, where he had expected to find the scattered houses of the town and then walked down the railroad track to the



bridge over the river. The river was there. It swirled against the log spiles of the bridge. Nick looked down into the clear, brown water colored from the pebbly bottom, and watched the trout keeping themselves steady in the current with wavering fins. As he watched them they changed their positions by quick angles, only to hold steady in the fast water again. Nick watched them a long time. (177)

Nick sees only the burned-over hillside when he steps off the train, which indicates the scars of the war, but he begins to connect with his past as he peers into the river. Nick's world has been scorched, but the trout are still there, facing upstream, holding steady in the current. He focuses on the straight, steady line the trout holds in the current, and Nick longs to be like these trout who are impervious to the burned world above the water. Calmed by the healing of the river, Nick observes the steadiness of trout for a long time.

Gathering his pack and rod, Nick travels into the burned country knowing that "it could not all be burned" (179). With a glimmer of hope, he follows the river into the pine plain. Stopping to smoke, Nick notices a grasshopper crawling up his woolen sock:

They [grasshoppers] were not the big grasshoppers with yellow and black or red and black wings whirring out from their black wing sheathing as they fly up. These were just ordinary hoppers, but all sooty black in color. Nick had wondered about them as he walked, without really thinking about them. Now, as he watched the black hopper that was nibbling at the wool of his sock with its four way lip, he realized that they had all turned black from living in the burned-over land. He realized that the fire must have come the year before, but the



grasshoppers were all black now. He wondered how long they would stay that way. (180)

Like the grasshopper, Nick had been colored by his experience in World War I, but he had survived. The remnants of the fire sooted the grasshopper, but it still could fly. Nick wonders how long the grasshopper will remain scorched, just as he subconsciously wonders how long he will be wounded.

Nick releases the grasshopper to fly away to a charred stump; then he moves into the comfort of the green earth and the healing begins:

Two hundred yards down the hillside the fire line stopped. Then it was sweet fern, growing ankle-high, to walk through, and clumps of jack pines; a long undulating country with frequent rises and descents, sandy underfoot and the country alive again. (180-1)

The green landscape envelops Nick, and he begins to feel alive in the lush ferns. The river has led Nick into the romantic ideal of a forest, but this lushness is not completely healing for Nick.

As Nick begins to ease into the forest, he searches for order in the wildness of the river bottom. After napping, he begins to make camp. Hemingway describes in great detail Nick's leveling the ground for the tent and the making of his bed: "When he had the ground smooth, he spread his three blankets. One he folded double, next to the ground. The other two he spread on top" (183). Like Bartram, who tried to create order in the alligator infested swamp in his account of Florida, Nick Adams orders the forest around him so that he may feel safe: "It had been a hard trip. He was very tired. That was done. He made his camp. He was settled. Nothing could touch him. It was a good place to camp. He was there, in the good place" (184). Nick now is



able to rest; he is able to become part of the green landscape. The soot of the war becomes muted in the greenish hues of the ferns. Nick has left the society of the train station in order that he may have a personal communion with nature. Nick's ritual of making camp prepares him for the communion with the trout the next day. Nick must find order in his disjointed universe by setting a meticulous camp before he is able to connect with the trout fighting the current.

In part II of the "The Big Two-Hearted River," Nick awakens ready to connect with the trout. After he traps the brown grasshoppers that have been renewed by the morning dew for bait, Nick steps into the stream to fish. Placing a grasshopper on his hook, Nick cast the bait into the current. Catching a small trout with his presentation, Nick releases it back into the stream. Making a connection to the natural world, Nick begins the process of communion. Nick wades upstream casting into the dark waters. Hemingway describes the connection:

There was a long tug. Nick struck and the rod came alive and dangerous, bent double, the line tightening, coming out of the water, tightening, all in a heavy, dangerous, steady pull. Nick felt the moment when the leader would break if the strain increased and let the line go. . . .

As he put pressure the line tightened into sudden hardness and beyond the logs a huge trout went high out of the water. As he jumped, Nick lowered the tip of the rod. But he felt, as he dropped the tip to ease the strain, the moment when the strain was too great, the hardness too tight. Of course the leader had broken. There was no mistaking the feeling when spring left the line and it became dry and hard. Then it went slack . . . .



Nick's hand was shaky. He reeled in slowly. The thrill had been too much. He felt, vaguely, a little sick, as though it would be better to sit down.  
(193)

Losing the trout is not what sickens Nick; it is the realization that he is not ready to connect with the trout that is steady in the current. The communion with the trout is broken because Nick cannot complete the introspection needed to be like the trout holding steady in the stream. Nick cannot connect with the vitality of the trout; the life within the trout pumping into his rod constricts within Nick to create a strain that is too great. Ultimately, Nick cannot connect with the thrill of being fully alive within his society.

Finally, Nick is able to have a limited, symbolic union with the trout. He catches a couple of the trout in the river, but these trout were not the trout that exhibited the vitality of the one underneath the log. Nick fishes until he arrives at the point where the river flows into the swamp. After eating his sandwiches, Nick peers into the tangle of the swamp and wishes he had something to read. Reading, for Nick, would be another form of communion. Just as setting up camp prepared Nick for entering the river, reading prepared him for the tangles of the swamp:

Nick did not want to go in there now. He felt a reaction against deep wading with the water deepening up under his armpits, to hook big trout in places impossible to land them. In the swamp the banks were bare, the big cedars came together over head, the sun did not come through, except in patches; in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic. In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure. Nick did not want it. He did not want to go down the stream any farther today. (198)



Nick is not able to fish for the trout in the swamp because the swamp was too dark and deep. The broken connection with the large trout and the lack of reading material stop Nick from proceeding into the swamp of introspection. Reading provides Nick with a connection outside of himself, and at the same time provides an escape from the reality of the tragic swamp. The tragedy for Nick is his inability to connect with the large trout in the swamp, symbolic of his inability to achieve inner discipline of the trout holding fast in the current. Unable to hold fast in the current of his turbulent life, Nick does not want to go deeper into the swamp of society and himself.

Nick cleans the two trout, and "he washed the trout in the stream. When he held them back up in the water they looked like live fish" (199). The limited communion Nick has with these trout becomes ironic because these trout have had their intestines ripped out and are being held by Nick's hand in the current. The only trout Nick can commune with is the trout that has been disemboweled and artificially held by an outside force to fight the current. Like Nick, these trout only appear to be alive. The healing that Nick recognizes through this fishing excursion is partial; he is not able to commune with the vitality of the trout in the swamp; he is not quite ready to accept the harshness of maintaining a straight line into the swamp. He may never be able to have the resolve of the big trout, but Hemingway concludes, "There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp" (199). Nick has healed some of the blackness of the landscape of his life, but he still cannot be the trout fighting the current in a straight line. The metaphor of fishing in this story illustrates the ideal connection the human could achieve through angling, but ultimately shows the failure of the human to complete the perfect circle of universal communion with nature and society.



Building on the limited connection Nick has with the trout in "The Big Two-Hearted River," Hemingway illustrates the problem of not being able to attain the artistic perfection represented by the trout holding steady in the current in his first novel The Sun Also Rises. Jake, the protagonist, like Nick, is wounded by his experience in World War I; Jake's wound renders him impotent not only physically, but spiritually as well. The wounds that Nick suffers keep him from going into the swamp just as Jake's impotence prevents him from connecting with Brett while he is in Paris. Hemingway portrays the early scenes in Paris as a source of fragmentation and isolation for Jake as he attempts to recover from the war. When Bill and Jake escape to Spain to fish, Hemingway expands the images of angling to develop the frustration Jake feels for not living up to an artistic code that would somehow connect him to the world of the trout.

As in the "Big Two-Hearted River," Jake leaves the arid plains of Spain to be surrounded by lush growth of the Pyrenees Mountains. In this landscape, "There was no undergrowth, only the smooth grass, very green and fresh, and the big gray trees well spaced as though it were a park" (179-80). This place is comfortable for Jake because it is open and straight, free from the gloom of the war. In the mountains, Jake and Bill separate so that each may commune with the trout in his own way; Jake chooses to use bait, while Bill uses a fly. When Jake finally arrives at the river to fish, Hemingway again focuses on the trout:

I [Jake] got my rod that was leaning against the tree, took the bait-can and the landing-net, and walked out onto the dam. It was built to provide a head of water for driving logs. The gate was up, and I sat on one of the squared timbers and watched the smooth apron of water before the river tumbled into the falls. In the white water at the foot of the dam it was deep. As I baited up, a trout shot up out



of the white water into the falls and was carried down. Before I could finish baiting, another trout jumped at the falls, making the same lovely arc and disappearing into the water that was thundering down. I put on a good-sized sinker and dropped into the white water close to the edge of the timbers of the dam.

I did not feel the first trout strike. . . . He was a good trout, and I banged his head against the timber so that he quivered out straight then slipped him into my bag. (181)

Jake watches the trout trying to jump the falls so that it can fight the current on upstream. The first trout fails, but there is another in his place that is trying again. Jake admires the lovely arc of the trout breaking free of the current for a moment before it is swept into the white water. The image that Nick admires of the trout holding steady in the "Big Two-Hearted River" is compounded by Hemingway in the novel, by Jake's admiration of the resolve of the trout not to be held back by the current. But Jake, like Nick, is not ready to achieve the complete artistic connection with the trout. Jake could not feel the first strike; he could not connect with the vitality of the trout on the other end of his line. The irony of the situation is that the trout who do not make the leap above the falls are the prey of Jake; he can not catch the ones that break free from the current, only the trapped ones. Even when Jake catches the weaker, smaller trout, it still exhibits the straight line when it quivers in death. The only way that Jake can connect with the trout is to have them trapped in the pool below the falls, starved for food.



After spending the morning fishing, Bill and Jake come together to share their catch. It is when these two come together that Hemingway illustrates Jake's failure to achieve a symbolic union with the trout that broke free from the current. Hemingway writes:

Bill sat down, opened up his bag, laid a big trout on the grass. He took out three more, each one a little bigger than the last, and laid them side by side in the shade from the tree. His face was sweaty and happy.

How are yours?

Smaller.

Let's see them.

They're packed.

They're all about the size of your smallest.

You're not holding out on me?

I wish I were.

Get them all on worms?

Yes.

You lazy bum!

Bill put the trout in the bag and started for the river, swinging the open bag. He was wet from the waist down and I knew he must have been wading the stream.

(182-3)

On the other hand, Bill achieves the communion with the trout that have pushed their way up the current. With the artistic rhythms of the fly rod, Bill became part of the world of the trout. Like the dam stopped the smaller trout from breaking free from the current and going further



upstream, Jake can not wade into the current to cast to the large trout. The psychological wounding turns Jake into a lazy bum unable to heal his wound and participate fully in society. Jake limits himself to bait fishing and the only connection he can develop is with the people who, like himself, can not break free from the current and achieve total communion with society and nature. Because of the war, he cannot be like Bill who wades into the current with the fly rod and finds a symbolic connection with those larger trout of the swamp.

In his story "On Writing," Hemingway expands his metaphor of angling created within his works to represent the problem of the writing process. Just as Nick and Jake never fully commune with the trout in the current, the fiction created by an author never fully achieves the straight, perfect line of writing:

Nick had one good trout. He did not care about getting many trout. Now the stream was swallow and wide. There were trees along both banks. The trees of the left bank made short shadows on the current in the forenoon sun. (233)

Opening with Nick already achieving the one good trout, Hemingway turns his attention to a discussion of books:

All the books. He and Bill had fun with the books in the old days. They all started with a fake premise. Like fox hunting. Bill Bird's dentist in Paris said, in fly fishing you pit your intelligence against that of the fish. (233-234)

Nick makes the connection between fishing and the creative process of writing. For Hemingway, the fox hunting represented the hoopla that grabs a reader's attention, but like the hounds in Berners essay, they drown out the sounds of nature and break the communion process. Fishing, on the other hand, connects the writer to the intelligence of the reader. The trout will only strike



the fly if it is presented as a natural occurrence, so the perceptive reader will only commune with a work if it imitates a natural occurrence. For the writer, the difficulty occurs in trying to recreate a natural response within a reader and not just create fox hunting noise, which is nothing but sentimentality.

Just as Hemingway's characters struggle for complete communion, the writer struggles for complete communion with the reader. Hemingway struggles to achieve the perfection of the good trout in his writing. He states, "Writing about anything actual was bad. It always killed it. The only writing that was any good was what you made up, what you imagined" (237). In writing about actual experiences, the writer, merely copying, kills it; but since writing comes from experience, the vicious irony occurs in trying to make something up. In making something up, the writer runs the risk of using tricks, like the fox hounds. Nick longs to be a good writer, but he knows, "there were so many tricks" (239). Hemingway struggles to create that perfect piece of prose, devoid of tricks.

Then, Hemingway compares writing to the process of painting:

He wanted to write like Cezanne painted.

Cezanne started with all the tricks. Then he broke the whole thing down and built the real thing. It was hell to do. He was the greatest. The greatest for always. It wasn't a cult. He, Nick, wanted to write about country so it would be there like Cezanne had done it in painting. You had to do it from inside yourself. There wasn't any trick. Nobody had ever written about country like that. He felt almost holy about it. It was deadly serious. (239)



Struggling to make that pure connection between the writer, his work, and the reader, Hemingway feels that Cezanne achieves the pure line of the trout. The only connection that is without tricks is within the artist; the difficulty for the writer comes from the process of extracting the work from within himself.

Finally, Nick achieves the total communion with the large trout of the swamp by fishing the way Cezanne would paint. Nick communes through the eyes of Cezanne with the large trout:

Nick, seeing how Cezanne would do the stretch of river and the swamp, stood up and stepped down into the stream. The water was cold and actual. He waded across the stream, moving in the picture. He kneeled down in the gravel on the bank and reached down into the trout sack. It lay in the stream where he dragged it across the shallows, his back out of water, threading between rocks toward the deep current.

He was too big to eat, Nick said. (240)

When Nick is finally able to fish for the big trout, he can not complete the communion process of partaking of the trout's body. Within the metaphor of writing, Hemingway can not complete the connection between the writer, work, and reader. After he achieves the depth of a complete story, a straight line unwavering in the current, Hemingway is unable to free it from his own head. The brutal irony Hemingway illustrates about the writing process is codified through the image of the rabbit in the end of the story. Nick leaves the stream in a hurry; "he was holding something in his head" (240). Nick cuts his leader where it had tangled in the branches, and as he walks up the trail, he sees a rabbit dying with two ticks behind its ears. Nick pulls them off and wonders if it will survive and where it obtained the ticks. "Probably the ticks had attached



themselves to it as it crouched in the grass. Maybe after it had been dancing in the open" (241). The rabbit, like Nick, had gone far into the open from the apparent safety of the ferns and grass. Hemingway closes the story by repeating, "He was holding something in his head" (241). The brutal irony of the writing process is that Nick cannot write like he feels Cezanne painted; his wound keeps him from the full communion with the perfect line of the big trout. Within the metaphor of fishing, Hemingway illustrates the problem of expressing the isolation of the twentieth century. Within the metaphor itself, Hemingway's characters are connected somewhat, but Hemingway's use of the metaphor never achieves the transcendent goal of Emerson. The metaphor of fishing as it relates to the writing process illustrates the problem of twentieth century writers: can a writer achieve a connection beyond the flawed nature of humanity and achieve communion through the limitations of language? For Hemingway, the metaphor of fishing illustrates these problems and the only communion achieved is within the mind of the angling artist.



## Chapter 4

### Aleck Maury: A Critique of the Sportman's Code

In Caroline Gordon's retelling of her father's experiences in Aleck Maury, Sportsman, published in 1934 (Gordon 289), she critiques the problems of the sportsman's code established by Gervase Markham and expanded within the characters of Nick Adams and Jake Barnes in the writings of Hemingway. Gordon writes the novel from the point of view of Aleck Maury, who relates his experiences as if he was telling a first-person story, sitting by a camp fire. The narrative voice is an adult looking back and relating his experiences in somewhat of a chronological order. The only character that is fully developed is the character of Aleck Maury. The other characters seem to float in and out of his memory without much development. For example, Dick, Aleck's son, is only mentioned twice in the novel, the first time is just after his birth, then thirteen years later at the time of his accidental death. Other minor characters flow out of Aleck's memory, like a familiar townspeople that everyone should know, but these characters lack complete development and only serve as mirrors to Aleck's world view.

As if to playing off the dichotomy between the hunter and the angler established by Berners in her essay, Gordon introduces the sporting life of Aleck Maury as he is preparing to go on a fox hunt with father, uncles, and other gentlemen from the surrounding plantations. The melee of the hounds, men, and horses creates the same confusion Berners noted in 1450, but Aleck Maury sees this event as a chance to join the community of his father's aristocratic world. As a boy searching for a connection with his father, Aleck strives to become a Latin scholar to win his father's approval:



I attempt to recover still other seasons of my childhood, particularly the time between my eighth and eleventh years. It comes back to me, this period, always as early fall and against the same background...

My father has undertaken my education-- I have just begun reading the Aeneid. I imagine my father's methods of teaching would horrify modern pedagogues. He made no attempt to lead me gently along the path of learning. It was clearly understood that it was he who was doing the favor, not I. Indeed his manner constantly implied that he would concern himself with me only as long as I came up to a certain level. I could not tell when I was doing well but I knew when I was in danger of falling beneath his notice by a cool impatience, almost scorn, that crept into his manner. (14-15)

The classical code of conduct established by Aleck's father applied not only to language, but to nature of fox hunting as well.

For Aleck's father, the point of fox hunting was not capturing the fox, but the chase. Trying to be part of this society, Aleck developed a plan to capture the favorite fox-- Old Red. Memorizing the route of the fox, Aleck positioned Old Whiskey, seasoned veteran of the hounds but who could not keep up on a long chase, under the rail fence that Old Red was sure to jump:

Whiskey was a black racing streak across the field. He was on the fox. One bite just over the breast bone and he stood proudly straddle of him, victor at last over Old Red!

I had a queer feeling when I saw Old Red's brush held up. It didn't seem possible that he'd never give us another run. I had done what I did out of mischief



more than anything else... And now he would never give us another run.... We got the worst licking either of us had in our lives. (47-48)

The deviation from the code of the fox hunt caused Aleck to receive a whipping. Like his Latin training, Aleck had failed to maintain the level acceptable to the community of his father. The only connection Aleck would have with his father was by achieving the standard of conduct exhibited through classical language and fox hunting. This code was the credo of the gentleman farmer prevalent at the turn of the century and was stamped into Aleck's psyche at an early age.

But as Aleck matured, he began to develop a connection to the natural world through angling and redefine his father's sportsman's code. He started by fishing with bait, like Nick Adams, but progressed into the art of fly fishing. Like the narrator in Berners essay, Cecil Morrison, an English gentlemen of Aleck's town "did not ride to hounds," and Aleck paid little attention to him (50). But one day when Aleck went fishing at his favorite fishing hole, he discovers the connection between art and nature through the vehicle of fly fishing:

The tall Englishman stood with his back to us, knee-deep in the water that swirled just below the Blue Hole. As we stood there watching, wondering who it was that had invaded our fishing grounds, his arm shot out and a beautiful scarlet fly dropped on the water not three feet from my astonished eyes. I had barely had time to recognize the man as Cecil Morrison when he retrieved his line and cast again. This time his objective was an overhanging rock at the side of the pool. The line slid smoothly in between the rock and the water. There was a moment during which I held my breath and then the water boiled as a big one rushed forward. . . . Although humorous on the surface, this passage reveals the lack



I smile now, remembering the crudeness of the contrivance and yet that September afternoon was one of the most important days in my life; it was the first time I ever cast a fly. (50-51)

Like Berners, Walton, and Markham, Aleck discovered the connection involved in the process of fly fishing. The contemplation achieved by the rhythms of the sport would provide Aleck with an escape from the tumultuous times in his life. In the first half of the novel, Caroline Gordon establishes the connection Aleck strives for within the natural world through angling. Aleck is more successful in his connection with the pure line of the trout than Hemingway's Nick Adams, but throughout the later parts of the novel, Gordon begins to criticize the problem of isolating oneself from society in order to commune with the trout.

After the birth of Aleck's son, Dick, Gordon reveals the lack of connection Aleck has with his family. Uncomfortable with how to treat his new son, Aleck ponders:

Then I looked into his eyes and was amazed. I had never held a new-born baby in my arms before but I had seen plenty of new-born things, colts, calves, baby rabbits, young foxes; they stagger to their feet the first day and look about them. But this little creature's gaze was deep and withdrawn; he seemed to be fathoms deep in sleep. (127)

Comparing his infant son to various animals, Aleck cannot connect to the blank stare of his son. More at ease within the realm of nature, Aleck thinks his son is retarded. Unable to talk to his wife Molly about his fears, Aleck continually checks the crib for signs of intelligence. Finally when he sees Dick reach for a gold chain, Aleck exclaims, "Molly, Molly, come quick. The baby's got good sense!" (128). Although humorous on the surface, this passage reveals the lack



of connection Aleck experiences within the realm of his family. He cannot articulate his fears to his wife, and he does not understand why his child cannot be trained in the manner of a hunting dog or farm animal. The code of nature that has become ingrained within Aleck prohibits him from becoming connected with his family and ultimately his society.

Although the birth of Dick brought Aleck into the family somewhat, Gordon primarily focuses on the outdoor exploits of Aleck. Dick becomes a background character until his death at the age of thirteen. Like his father, Aleck continues within this code until the death of Dick. After Dick's drowning, the problem of lack of communication magnifies in Aleck's relationship with Molly. Aleck can verbalize the events of his son's death to Molly, but he cannot provide the emotional connection for Molly needed to heal the pain of the loss. Unable to verbalize the emotional loss of a son, Aleck can only return to the code of the fly fishermen developed in his youth. Aleck thinks back to his conversations with Colonel Wyndham about fly fishing:

It is long ago and many things have gone through my head since then but I hear his voice as if it were yesterday, I can remember even the little turns of his speech: 'It is all in the wrist. A young angler, of course, tries to do everything by main strength. I always make them put a book under their arm. They have to use their wrist then. . .'

'The art of fly casting is to place the fly before the trout or the bass, keeping him in complete ignorance of yourself, your rod and line. That is all there is to it.' He would say this and chuckle faintly, knowing how very much more there was. Or he would musingly: 'Delicacy and accuracy. Those are the prime requisites. You've got to drop your fly on the water softly. The fish can



tell the difference. . . It is the hackle that gives life. . .’ And he would hold his hand up and move it in the dim light so that I could observe the precise action.

(178)

Within this artistic discourse on the fly fishing code, the subtle irony emerges with respect to Aleck; he can not use delicacy and accuracy in discussing the death of his son to Molly. The code in which he strives for connection to wild nature cannot be transposed into the world of Aleck’s family. Like the inexperienced angler in Donne’s poem “The Bait” who strives for a connection with a female through the delicacy of language, Aleck still is inexperienced within the language of the home and family. Gordon craftily illustrates the lack of control Aleck has over the sphere of his family by emphasizing the need for the book under the arm of the caster. It is only when the angler has a piece of writing under his arm that he is able to make the delicate and accurate connection with nature. If he is able to control language under his arm, then he should be able to transpose this control into the world outside the stream. The mastery of casting and language provide the angler with the reward of a perfect presentation to the fish and within language, the achievement of the artistic code developed by the writer among the complexities of language. But within Gordon’s use of the metaphor, Aleck cannot achieve this mastery of language within the social sphere of his family.

After contemplating Colonel Wyndam’s remarks, Aleck returns to fish the West Fork. Aleck is driven by the need to connect with the natural world to experience healing:

Shifting myself in my chair, I wondered if it were too late to go out to West Fork.

For weeks now I had been going there every afternoon casting. I had taken

Colonel Wyndham at his word. The book, Percy’s Reliques, there was not



anything else in the house thick enough; it had gone with me every afternoon til recently. I did not need it any longer. My wrist had suddenly grown flexible. I could cast forty feet now and make the fly hit the water first every time. (182)

By having the book under his arm, Aleck can fish with a delicate touch and be accurate as well. After he has been conditioned by the book under his arm, Aleck's cast became a natural part of himself. Gordon relates this metaphor to language use by revealing to the reader that the only language Aleck masters is that of Percy's Reliques. The archaic language of this 1765 collection of ancient English poetry, ballads, sonnets, and historical songs illustrates the disconnection between Aleck and the world outside the stream. Although this book helps him achieve a perfect cast, the language contained within the book does not help him communicate with Molly about the loss of their son. Like the language of the ballads and sonnets contained within Percy's Reliques, which portray the natural lyrical tradition of England within a controlled format, Aleck's cast portrays his connection to the pastoral elements of the stream. Ultimately, the book is under his arm, not in his head; it is only a means to achieve an artistic code of a fly fisherman, not a living language to achieve a connection with a world outside the stream.

Aleck takes a job as a Professor of Latin and Greek at Poplar Bluff. Aleck teaches for several years at the academy at Poplar Bluff, until the school begins restructuring the curriculum and has no need for a classical scholar. The classical code of Aleck's life isolates him further from the rest of the world as he grows older. It is in this time period that Molly dies, leaving Aleck alone and dejected:

I [Aleck] had been a solemn, not very lively child and as a man I had been beset at intervals all my life by some vague apparently unfounded fear. Molly, steeled by



her fatalism always to expect the worst, had laughed at this trait in my nature.

'You're the greatest coward, I've ever known. . . ' I knew now what it was I always feared: that this elation, this delight by which I lived might go from me. . .

Well, it had gone and it might never come again. . . It was not a thing to be trapped, delight, it came or went of its own will. . .

The clear-headness was gone. I felt old and tired. (224)

Fearing that the delight found within his connection with nature might disappear, Aleck faces his own mortality. Molly recognizes the cowardly escapism of Aleck; she knows his communion within the code of fly fishing only serves the purpose of helping Aleck escape the fear of his own mortality. The irony of the situation is that when Aleck learns of Molly's death, all he ponders is his own mortality. The connection that made him feel alive within the nature of the stream has become fleeting as well. Aleck can no longer escape reality by retreating into the introspective world the stream symbolizes.

Left with the realization that the code he had developed within nature fades as well, Aleck awakens the next morning with a plan:

I had a plan. It was not much but it was something to hang on to and in my new, humble frame of mind I was genuinely grateful for it.

I would go somewhere--I didn't know just where yet--and live quietly and engage in the breeding of fish. (225)

Now that Aleck realizes the insufficient connection within the artistic code of the sportsman within nature, he develops a plan to control nature. By means of this image, Gordon reveals the pathetic state of Aleck trying to control the nature of a pond. Aleck desperately wants to



recreate the connection that he achieved by placing the perfect cast on the water like Colonel Wyndham, but the irony of the situation is that without his family, Aleck cannot achieve his connection. The artistic code that isolated him from communicating with his family no longer means anything because his family is gone. Aleck did not realize that his connection with nature was possible because of his family ties, which he ignored. The new connection becomes ludicrous as he builds insect traps above the pond with a funnel underneath to feed the trapped fish underneath. The romantic ideal of Aleck standing in the stream executing the perfect cast has regressed into a pathetic old man tending to a pond of lazy catfish. Gordon criticizes the individual who begins the communion process of isolating one's self from the societal group so that he may commune with nature, but never allows himself to rejoin the group. The cowardly act, according to Gordon, is embracing the natural code of the stream that connects oneself to nature, and staying within that connection, and not bringing that connective engagement back into the realm of the societal bonds of the family.

After trying to order the delight of connection with nature through the fishing operation, Aleck attempts to return to the code of the angler. Gordon writes:

It was all over, as dead as cold mutton. My feeding traps, my shelters, my carp pen, all the devices I had taken such pains with. I wondered only how they could have held me so long. Well, let anybody have them that would. They had served my purpose but now I was through with them. The spell that had been on me was gone, suddenly, while I watched that fellow battling his bass or when I got again the feel of a rod in my hand. No matter. . . It was over and done with. I was going to fish again and fish hard. (256)



Aleck is now able to participate again in the delight of communing with nature, but he is alone. He recognizes "this Indian summer could not last" (256). His brief rebirth in the latter part of his life only heightens the pathos of his isolation. Finally, Aleck's daughter tries to establish some type of communication with her father by trying to find a place for them that is near a fishing location. As Sally, Aleck's daughter, and her husband, Steve, try to find a place for Aleck, Caroline Gordon reveals the cowardice of Aleck. As the remaining part of his family sits inside a restaurant looking for a place to live where they might be together as a family, Aleck walks outside and boards a bus to Caney Fork so that he may fish alone. The broken communion with his family is the last image Gordon leaves the reader with in the novel. The reader does not know if Aleck achieves any delight along Caney Fork, but the fact he does not even tell his daughter that he is leaving illustrates the pathetic lack of connection with family bonds. The striving for fulfillment within nature ultimately separates Aleck from the love of his family which ironically helps him achieve this delight. Although unlike Nick Adams, Aleck pushes farther into the swamp and attempt to connect with the larger fish of Caney Fork, but this action isolates him from the family structure. The healing quality of the communion with nature does not heal Aleck's wounds; it only serves to wound again and separate Aleck from his remaining family. Ultimately, Gordon's novel is an implicit criticism of the artistic code of Hemingway because the striving for the perfect line of the artist only serves to separate the artist from the outside world of society.



## Chapter 5

**“Eventually, all things merge into one. . .”**

Using the metaphor of the angler as found in the works of Hemingway and Gordon, Norman Maclean expands the metaphor to include angling as a symbol of language in his novella A River Runs Through It, published in 1976. Maclean chronicles the life of a Scottish Presbyterian family living on the banks of the Blackfoot River in Montana during the early part of the twentieth century. The story is narrated by Norman, the older brother. Maclean uses the father, a Presbyterian minister, to establish the religious subtext of the language of fly fishing as it relates to communication as a whole. Borrowing from the tradition established by Berners and Walton, Maclean connects fly fishing and religion in the first sentence of the novella: “In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing” (1). Although Hemingway and Gordon defined the metaphor of fishing apart from the context of religion, Maclean defines the metaphor of fishing within the language of religion. Whereas the communion through angling indicated by Hemingway and Gordon deals with a spiritual connection perceived by the characters of the respective works and operates without the formal definitions of religion, Maclean’s prose draws from the connections established by Berners and Walton to define fly fishing as a metaphor for language. The religious form of communion is defined symbolically as a person breaking connection with the group so that he or she might examine the self and accept the wine and the bread for completion of the self. After this, a person may rejoin the group with a stronger connection with the whole because of the remembrance of a shared experience. In other words, because each person in the group symbolically isolates himself from the group, the bonds of the group are made stronger because each person is connected by the shared symbol of



the bread and the wine. The group is made stronger by the shared experience of the symbology of the event; the sharing of the memory of Christ's death isolates the individual in the ritual, but the connection occurs because each person in the group shares the memory of one event. By applying this interpretation to the metaphor of angling, the isolation from the group becomes the individual act of fishing and the reconnection with the whole becomes the sharing of the fish itself with the group. This connection is not based only on sharing the meal but the sharing of the experiences of catching the fish which over time develops into memories, stories, and eventually literature. So when Maclean introduces the blurred line between religion and fly fishing, he establishes the religious subtext of the work.

Building upon the Biblical tradition of language established in John 1:1, which states that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," Maclean begins to connect the language of religion to the act of fly fishing. The idea that language has been since the beginning and is God and it is the human's responsibility to connect with God through the art of language becomes the early training of Paul and Norman on the banks of the Big Blackfoot in Montana. Their father trains them in The Westminster Shorter Catechism before the boys receive training in fly fishing. Also the father directly links the writings of John to his discourse on fly fishing to his sons by telling "us about Christ's disciples being fishermen, and we were left to assume, as my brother and I did, that all first-class fisherman on the Sea of Galilee were fly fishermen and that John, the favorite, was a dry-fly fisherman" (1). Maclean alludes to the story of Christ calling his disciples from the shores of Galilee to become fishers of men, but like the early illuminated Anglo-Saxon manuscript, the boys imagine the disciples as being fly fishermen instead of using nets. This passage begins to build the religious



subtext of the work. Also Maclean has the father, through reading of the catechism, ask the same question that Walton asks in his work-- "What is the chief end of man?"-- as the boys learn to cast the fly (1). Whereas Walton's reply "that the chief end of man was to glorify God and love him forever" satisfies the sons as they learn to fly fish, Walton's question is not fully answered until the boys mature into manhood. The philosophical question of man's purpose plagues the consciousness of us all, and for Maclean, the question is developed and understood through the metaphor of fly fishing. By means of the metaphor, Maclean merges the religious connotations of angling with the secular view of the metaphor to establish a connection between humans, the natural world, and the spiritual world outside of the self.

Norman's introduction into the world of fly fishing comes from his father's Calvinistic background. This background defines the "damn mess" of humanity and offers Norman a basis for redemption through fly fishing. Using the conventions of fly fishing, the father instructs:

... if you never picked up a fly rod before, you will soon find it factually and theologically true, that a man by nature is a damn mess. . . .

Well, until man is redeemed he will always take a fly rod too far back, just as a natural man always overswings with an ax or golf club and loses all his power somewhere in the air; only with a rod it's worse because the fly often comes so far back it gets caught behind in a bush or rock. . . .

Then, since it is natural for man to try to attain power without recovering grace, he whips the line back and forth making it whistle each way, and sometimes even snapping the fly from the leader, but the power that was going to transport the little fly across the river somehow gets diverted into building a bird's



nest of line, leader, and fly that falls from out of the air into the water about ten feet from the fishermen. . . .

. . . Power comes not from power everywhere, but from knowing where to put it on.

'Remember', as my father kept saying, 'it is art that is performed on a four count rhythm between ten and two o'clock.'

My father was very sure about certain matters pertaining to the universe.

To him, all good things-- trout as well as eternal salvation-- come by grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy. (3-5)

The Calvinistic state of humanity as a "damn mess" can only be redeemed through the art of controlled power. The easy grace of the angler's cast comes from the internally measured four count rhythm that is learned through self denial and patience, which ultimately leads to the reward of the trout; and eternal salvation comes from the measured relationship between the individual and his internal rhythm of connection between humanity and the supernatural within the universe. This artistic relationship does not come easily, for it is the human's desire to force himself upon the universe so that he may control and define what is art or connection outside the self within nature and the universe; but this force, as within the cast, only leaves the human's efforts in a tangled pile of line within the rhythms of the universe. In other words, the human wants to control the connection that is established between nature and humanity so that he may understand the future, but by using ritual to exert power or control on the future only tangles the spiritual connections in the universe. Placing this metaphor in relationship to language, Maclean argues that the human needs to have the measured control or ritual in communication to connect



with other humans. The artistic connection occurring through the controlled written line of the author and his work is analogous to the "unwavering line" of Hemingway's prose. The Calvinistic teaching style of Norman's father early in the novella illustrates the problem faced by Hemingway and his writing. The "damn mess" of human existence creates the struggle for the perfect line of communication that is only achieved by adherence to an artistic code. Within the religious convention of communion, the separation of the human from the group in order to achieve a supernatural connection within the universe becomes problematic: one must suffer as Christ has suffered in order to achieve redemption with the universe. It is this pain of separation that fascinates Norman as he begins to focus on the personality of his brother, Paul, within the novella.

Both Norman and Paul were taught this Calvinistic code of fly fishing by their father as boys, but as they grew older, it is Paul who breaks from the teachings of the father. As it is described by Norman, the connection that Paul is able to achieve through fishing is magical. Norman and Paul both love to fly fish, but as they mature, Maclean illustrates the dichotomy between the two brothers as Norman pursues education in the east, and Paul remains in Montana as a journalist so that he may be able to fish. Norman, though living apart, remains true to the code of his father, but Paul breaks the measured rhythm of the father, and develops his own rhythm of casting. Norman views this connection that Paul develops with the universe as romantic and magical. Like Aleck Maury, Paul relates to the world best through fishing. Within the world of the trout stream, Norman describes Paul:

Below him was the multitudinous river, and, where the rock had parted it around him, big-grained vapor rose. The mini-molecules of water left in the wake of his



line made momentary loops of gossamer, disappearing so rapidly in the rising big-grained vapor that they had to be retained in memory to be visualized as loops.

The spray emanating from him was finer-grained still and enclosed him in a halo of himself. The halo of himself was always there and always disappearing, as if he were candlelight flickering about three inches from himself. The images of himself and his line kept disappearing into the rising vapors of the river, which continually circled to the tops of the cliffs, where, after becoming a wreath in the wind, they became rays of the sun. (22)

Within the world of the river, Paul is magically transformed into a supernatural being. Paul is able through the rhythm of his casts to become a spirit in the eyes of Norman. While casting, Paul connects with the water to the point that he becomes like the mist floating above the water; he has transcended the physical world and become part of the ephemeral, romantic world of the supernatural. Within this context, Paul has achieved the romantic ideal of universal connection proposed by Emerson.

As an observer, Norman recognizes the fruition of his father's Calvinistic artistic code, but as he describes the balance of power and grace in Paul, he indicates the irony of the lack of power and grace Paul has outside the natural world of the stream:

My brother's wet clothes made it easy to see his strength. Most great casters I have known were big men over six feet, the added height certainly making it easier to get more line in the air in a bigger arc. My brother was only five feet ten, but he had fished so many years his body had become partly shaped by his casting. He was thirty-two now, at the height of his power, and he could put all



his body and soul into a four-and-a-half-ounce magic totem pole. Long ago he had gone far beyond my father's wrist casting, although his right wrist was always so important that it had become larger than his left. His right arm, which our father had kept tied to the side to emphasize the wrist, shot out of his shirt as if it were engineered, and it, too, was larger than his left arm. His wet shirt bulged and came unbuttoned with his pivoting shoulders and hips. It was also not hard to see why he was a street fighter, especially since he was committed to getting in the first punch with his right hand. (23-24)

The irony occurs at the last of this passage: Norman has described the balance of power and grace that Paul has within the surroundings of the river, but this balance is destroyed among the world of the back-alley saloons. Paul's body, which has been shaped by casting and the world of the river, allows him to become a better street fighter. The romantic ideal that Norman sees in the river casting ultimately reminds him of the dark side of the romantic character who is unable to connect with other humans. Because Paul develops such a heightened sense of connection through his art of casting, he attempts to control the world outside the stream. Like Hemingway's characters who attempt to connect with the "unwavering line" of the trout facing upstream, Paul connects through this artistic code of the balance of power and grace with the fly rod, but he is powerless with respect to the injustice of the bars and brothels of Helena. Forced by his profession as a journalist to encounter the horror and injustice of society, Paul struggles to understand it through the medium of language. In other words by attempting to relate a story, Paul must come to terms with the "truth" or reality of the event. When Paul places the romantic ideal of the balance of a trout stream into the reality of human existence of the city, he is forced



to the level of a street fighter. Paul uses the ritual of fly fishing to achieve a supernatural connection in the stream, but when he uses the ritual of communication outside the natural world, Paul becomes like Nick Adams, unable to change society. The horror of the moment in losing a card game or brawling in the streets of Helena can only be healed in the beauty of the stream. The brutality of human existence is filtered through the eyes of Norman as he observes the struggle of Paul. The perfection of engagement that Paul has within the world of the stream cannot be achieved within the cynical world of a detached reporter. When Paul recollects a story for the newspaper, he is forced to commune with the reality of it, so he resorts to beating his fist against the world outside the stream.

With respect to the religious context, Paul has moved outside the world of the rigors and ritual of religion and into the world of spirituality that is based on a connection outside the self. Paul has built upon the ritual taught by the father but redefined his own rhythm that is somehow outside the ritual of religion. Maclean writes:

Rhythm was just as important as color [ of the canyon] and just as complicated. It was one rhythm superimposed upon another, our father's four-count of the line and wrist being still the base rhythm. But superimposed upon it was the piston two count of his arm and the long overriding four count of the completed figure eight of his reversed loop.

The canyon was glorified by rhythms and colors. (24)

Maclean through the eyes of Paul redefines the answer that Walton gives to the question "What is the chief end of man?". By developing his own sense of connection to the universe by building upon the teachings of his father, Paul glorifies the canyon surrounding him. The



sanctuary of the river resounds with the spiritual connection made by Paul. The completion of the introspective phase of communion process is completed by Paul's redefining the religious dogma of casting taught by his father. Norman is in awe of this solitary achievement of transcendence, but later as he meditates on the molecules of water and Paul's casting in his dreams that night, the phone of reality rings telling Norman to bail his brother out of jail for beating up a restaurant owner who would not serve Paul's half-breed Indian girlfriend. The spiritual connection of the process of communion is not completed within the social sphere of Paul's world because he cannot change the brutality of his society, and thus he becomes part of the brutality.

When Norman arrives at the station to bail Paul out of jail, the desk sergeant relates the story of how Paul had been drinking too much, and he had knocked two teeth from the bigoted restaurant owner. As Norman peers into the cell at his brother, he observes:

Wanting to see him in perspective when I saw him, I stood still until I could see the woman in bib overalls [Paul's girlfriend] marveling at his shadow casting. Then I opened the door to the room where they toss the drunks until the can walk a crack in the floor.... He was standing in front of the window, but he could not have been looking out of it, because there was a heavy screen between the bars, and he could not have seen me because his enlarged casting hand was over his face. Were it not for the lasting compassion I felt for his hand, I might have doubted afterwards that I had seen him. (27)

The romantic vision that Norman has of his brother as fisherman almost disappears in the midst of the drunk tank, but even in the jailhouse, Norman marvels at Paul's shadow casting and his



enlarged casting hand. The use of the fishing metaphors in this passage becomes very ironic as the metaphor illustrates the lack of connection with society that Paul has at this moment. The shadow casting within the dark jail is fruitless because the heavy screen blocks the light, therefore limiting shadows, and the enlarged hand of Paul becomes a double-edged irony for Norman because the casting hand of a fly fisherman would be slightly larger because of the repetitive casting, but in Paul's case the hand is enlarged as well because he has violently struck another human. Maclean tempers his romanticism within this scene by showing the dichotomy of the connection that Paul has with the natural world of the stream and the brutality of the connection that Paul has with the world outside the stream. It is not that Paul tries to withdraw from society, as Aleck Maury does, but that Paul's attempts at connection outside the stream become as ludicrous as shadow casting in jail and beating someone with your casting hand until it is swollen and sore. As the Norman leaves with Paul from the jail, the desk sergeant says, "Why don't you all go fishing"(29). This statement reaffirms the connection that Paul needs to have in order that he may be somehow emotionally healed.

Norman continues to illustrate the awe he has for the connection that Paul achieves within the world of the river. Both brothers heed the desk sergeant's advice and retreat into the world of trout fishing, where Norman continues to look to Paul for advice in the realm of fishing. When the brothers are at the stream, Norman continues to fish the open water of the center of the stream because he is fearful of losing his flies to the overhanging branches. Paul fishes the edges of the river underneath the branches where the large trout wait in the shade. Paul berates Norman for fishing the safe section of the river and catching only the small trout, and he encourages him to



fish the edges so that Norman may experience connection with the big trout. As Norman begins to fish the edges, he hooks a big trout:

The air was filled with dead leaves and green berries from the osiers, but their branches held. As the big brown went up the bush, he tied a different knot on every branch he passed. He wove that bush into a basket with square knots, bowlines, and double half hitches.

The body and spirit suffer no more sudden visitation than that of losing a big fish, since, after all, there must be some slight transition between life and death. But, with a big fish, one moment the world is nuclear and the next it has disappeared. That's all. It has gone. The fish has gone and you are extinct, except for four and a half ounces of stick to which is tied some line and a semitransparent thread of catgut to which is tied a little curved piece of Swedish steel to which is tied a part of feather from a chicken's neck.

I don't even know which way he went. As far as I know, he may have gone right on up the bush and disappeared into thin air.

. . . Even Moses could have not trembled more when his bush blew up on him. Finally, I untied my line from the leader and left the rest of the mess in the willows.

Poets talk about "spots of time," but it is really fishermen who experience eternity compressed into a moment. No one can tell what a spot of time is until suddenly the whole world is a fish and the fish is gone. I shall remember that son of a bitch forever. (48-49)



When Norman leaves the security of the middle, he experiences a connection stamped on his psyche forever. Just as Paul fishes on the fringes of the stream, he also operates on the fringes of his society. For on the fringes, Paul searches for a connection with the people who are driven to the edges of society. In this search, Paul understands the pain that is caused by the elusive connection that is heightened because of the difficulty in achieving it. The larger fish lie under the protection of the overhanging branches, just as the deeper connection with other humans is often hidden in the shadows at the edge of society. When Norman drifts to the edges of society to rescue his brother from jail, he realizes the deeper connection he has with his brother.

When Norman fishes the fringes, he begins to understand Paul's world. The elusive connection that Paul understands is discovered by Norman when he loses the big trout. Through this encounter, Norman understands the depth of connection Paul has with the river. The risk he has to take in order to catch the larger trout enhances the experience, but the tangle of the brush also frustrates Norman when the fish strikes. By comparing Norman's encounter with the big fish to his relationship to Paul, the irony of the situation emerges. At this point in the novella, Norman does not know that he will lose his brother in a backstreet brawl, but through this encounter, he realizes the tangled relationship he has with his brother will connect them for a moment, but ultimately separate them in the end. The intensity of the connection becomes like the brown trout leaping into the bushes to free itself, leaving the fisherman with only his bare equipment. The fisherman has the memory of the experience of the trout, but the truth is revealed by the fisherman holding only his rod and snapped line. The moment is gone, but the fishing equipment serves as the truth that this moment exists.

Paul's death. The intensity of the relationship comes from the tangle of Paul's life.



Maclean heightens this incident to the spiritual level of connection when he relates the experience to the "body and spirit" and as the "transition between life and death." Although the act of angling itself follows the religious paradigm of communion, Maclean differentiates between the religious idea of communion and the spiritual idea of communion by including the factor of risk. The angler fishing the middle of the stream connects with smaller trout just as following the prescribed ritual of communion will produce a satisfyin but limited connection with a religious dogma, but the essence of the spiritual connection comes from venturing to the edges. In other words, spiritual connection only occurs when a person ventures away from the prescribed dogma of religion and risks something of the self, whether it is faith, emotion, or trust in another creature or person. The comfortable ritual of communion does not require an individual to give of the self, just as fishing the middle of the stream does not require much effort; but when the individual moves closer to the edge of human relationships, this is when the risk causes the deeper connection to occur, and the line between body and spirit is blurred within the individual and to the sight of others as well.

The losing of the fish is equated to the relationship Norman has with Paul. As he wades toward the bush, Maclean places a religious connotation on the experience. He relates the bush with the tangled leader to the burning bush that Moses saw in the desert. In the story of Moses, the bush was a revelation of God telling Moses that he was to be a leader of his people out of bondage to the Egyptians, but Maclean uses this bush to explain the spiritual connection he had in the moment with the fish, and the intensity of the moment had left him trembling. Even though Norman does not know at this moment that he will lose his brother, the experience foreshadows Paul's death. The intensity of the relationship comes from the tangles of Paul's life,



but in Norman's eyes, he is like the trout that transcends the boundary between the physical and the spiritual, as well as life and death. Like Moses, Norman has a spiritual experience from the bush with the tangled line dangling from it, but instead having an affirmation from the experience as Moses had, Norman is left with trembling hands, unsure of the future. This experience has brought Norman to the level of Paul, but the intensity of the connection that is broken by the large trout leaves Norman with the image of the "mess in the willows." The image of the mess in the willows undermines the romanticism of the situation. When Norman rises up to the romantic level of Paul, he is left with a "mess" of emotions.

After Norman has this experience, he abruptly moves forward in time and speaks of this event with hindsight. The gap of time illustrates that Norman as narrator equates the experience with memory, and the interpretation of both becomes as valid as the exact moment of time. Maclean comments on this experience as a "spot of time" which is taken from Wordsworth's Prelude: Book Twelfth. Wordsworth writes:

There are in our existence spots of time,  
That with distinct pre-eminence retain  
A renovating virtue, whence, depressed  
By false opinion and contentious thought,  
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,  
In trivial occupations, and the round  
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds  
Are nourished and invisibly repaired; (208-215)



By bringing Wordsworth into the text, Maclean reveals the romantic perspective of the experience of losing something tremendous. The word "spots" has a double meaning in the text; at a literal level, "spots" refer to the spots of a big brown trout which became impressed into Norman's memory. Then at a metaphorical level as it relates to Wordsworth, "spots" refers to the memory of experience which becomes the impetus for poetry. Wordsworth states in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility" (1351). Maclean redefines the idea of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility and applies it to the experience of fishing. Maclean understands that poets talk about the concept of "spots of time," but it is the fisherman who understands the relationship between memory, story, and literature. The angler is able to condense the intensity of the fishing experience into memory, then later recollect the experience in a story, and eventually form the experience into literature. This "spot of time" for Norman connects him with the romantic ideal of Paul for the moment, but the recollection of the moment creates a supernatural connection in the imagination as well. The mundane existence of a human is enhanced by the recollection of the experience, and the mind is nourished and repaired by the memory, according to Wordsworth, but Maclean tempers the romanticism of the experience by stating, "No one can tell what a spot of time is until suddenly the whole world is a fish and the fish is gone" (49). The memory of the fish remains just as the memory of Paul remains, but the experience itself is gone. The connection gained through the intensity of the emotion of the moment imprints the psyche with the memory of the experience forever. The memory and story of Paul renews the spirit of Norman much like the religious act of communion renews the soul of the participant, but the paradox remains: ritual used as a substitute for reality. The words of the



story both connect us as humans and at the same time isolate us because the story denies the reality of the moment.

Maclean continues to struggle with this paradox in the portrayal of Paul. As the novella progresses, Paul continues to isolate himself from the "norm" of society and retreat further into the gambling and brothels of Helena, but at the same time, Norman is able to view the intense connection Paul has with the world of the stream. This behavior on the part of Paul continues until Norman thinks that Paul has deserted his family. After a failed fishing excursion with the Norman and his brother-in-law, Neal, Paul decides to fish once again with their father. After sharing a meal with the family, Paul leaves to gamble all night in Missoula. Norman worries that he will not make it back in time for the morning fishing trip, but Paul returns early enough to prepare breakfast for the family. Influenced immensely by the code of his father, Paul "was, no matter what, never late for work or fishing" (89).

Paul and Norman are reunited with their father for one last fishing trip, and this trip would be the culmination of the classical Calvinistic code the father had taught the boys in their youth. As the experiences of life and fishing had matured the boys, this trip would be the culmination of the spiritual connection that Paul had with the world of the stream, and this connection is understood by his father. Whereas the father achieved spiritual connection through the words of God, Paul achieves his spiritual connection in intimate contact with the water and the boulders of the stream. When the father and sons arrive, they look down into the world of the stream. Maclean writes:

The flat ended suddenly and the river was down a steep bank, blinking silver through the trees and then turning to blue by comparing itself to a red and green



cliff. It was another world to see and feel, and another world of rocks. The boulders on the flat were shaped by the last ice age only eighteen or twenty thousand years ago, but the red and green Precambrian rocks beside the blue water were almost from the basement of the world and time. (91)

The father and sons enter into the spiritual world of the stream that has always been there. This world was formed as the Precambrian rocks were formed in the beginning of time, unlike the flat rocks outside the stream created by the last ice age. As they arrive at the side of the stream, the father comments, "Some [rocks] had raindrops on them" (92). The father is enamored by the idea that "he was standing in ancient rain spattering on mud before it became rocks" (92). The stability of the creation of the world affirms the connection that humanity has with the natural world that leads us into the spiritual world. The connection that each person has with this spiritual world is different, but the concreteness of the boulders ground the ever changing spirituality of the water-- always changing and always the same. Both the father and the sons are connected by the swirling currents of water, but the boulders provide markers of understanding as they wade into the "basement of the world and time" (91). The father's vehicle for the metaphor of rocks will be the words of God as interpreted through the religious context of the Bible, but Paul's vehicle for the metaphor are the words within language itself. Paul understands that there is a spiritual connection outside the boundaries of language, and this connection occurs by realizing that language exists. The father chooses to interpret the same idea from the context of God giving the words.

Norman as a contemplative observer views the connection that his father and brother have across their respective worlds. Paul and Norman fish together in the big water, and their father



decides to fish the smaller water alone. Paul and Norman share the experience of catching fish as well as the knowledge of how to catch them. Norman is able to share the knowledge of the right insect to catch the trout, and he has, in that moment, achieved the same level of angling as Paul because it is Paul who asks for his advice on what the fish are taking. After realizing the fish are feeding on Bunyan bugs, Paul wades into the big water to fish alone. Norman retreats from the water to find his father, and finds him reading the New Testament in Greek. The conversation that occurs between Norman and his father embodies the connection that the father has with the words of God and the connection the father has with Paul. Norman's father explains:

'In the part I was reading it says the Word was in the beginning, and that's right. I used to think water was first, but if you listen carefully you will hear that the words are underneath the water.'

'That's because you are a preacher first and then a fisherman,' I told him.

'If you ask Paul, he will tell you that the words are formed out of water.'

'No,' my father said, 'you are not listening carefully. The water runs over the words. Paul will tell you the same thing.' (104)

The Calvinistic code that the father had set for Paul has meshed with the artistic code of Paul. The line between religion and fly fishing that begins the novella has blurred into a discussion of language by the end of the novella. Whereas Paul's father follows the Platonic idea of the truth hidden underneath the artifice of language, Norman argues that Paul's idea of truth comes from the ineffability of his spiritual connection with the water itself. Within the religious context, water is viewed as the Holy Spirit, so Norman assumes Paul's view of language comes from the water or inspiration. The father corrects Norman's assumption that the "word" comes from



inspiration and indicates that words come from underneath the water. Paul and his father both recognize the ideal written underneath the water. The true spirituality does not come from the ritual aspects of communion by finding meaning within the fluidity of inspiration, but it comes from a recognition of a truth that is written on the boulders of time. The Platonic idea of truth illustrated by the words of God from the father blends with the Platonic ideal of nature that Paul has with the words of the stream. In other words, both Paul and the father believe that inspiration or the water is not the beginning of language, but language comes from placing the concreteness of the boulders of Truth against the subjective spirituality of water. The spiritual connection of the water can only be understood by Paul and the father by placing it against the rigidity of the boulders which have been there since the beginning of time. The idea of the word becoming well flesh is illustrated by the relationship between the boulders and the water. The water or the spirit has always existed, but the understanding or connection with the spirit can only occur by it becoming flesh or concrete. Since spirituality can only be expressed within the boundaries of the senses, the only static connection is the rocks or language itself. *underneath the boulders.*

After this discussion with the father, Norman turns once again to view Paul's romantic connection with the world of the stream. Paul hooks a large trout and through this connection is completely immersed in the water of the stream. At this point, Paul has become one with the stream. The father appreciates the ideal that Paul represents as he fights the trout like a "roman" gladiator (108). Just as the father had immersed himself in words of God from reading the New Testament in Greek, Paul immerses himself in the romantic ideal of nature. This romantic baptism of Paul merges into the religious connection the father has with the universe. The "spots of time" of Wordsworth connects the trinity of the father and sons in this moment. This



moment becomes analogous to language itself as the fluidity of the moment is carved on the boulders of memory. This "spot of time" will provide Norman with an understanding of the demise of Paul the next May.

The gap of time between the last fishing trip in the spring to the death of Paul the next year is left out of the novella. Paul's death "occurs" in the same paragraph as the conclusion of the fishing trip. The narrative structure is indicative of the importance of the "spot of time" for Maclean. Paul remains the romantic hero even in his death for all of the bones are broken in his right hand as he pounds against the men who beat him with the butt of a revolver. The romantic code of Paul has ironically separated him from the world in which he was so spiritually connected. The father's classical code suffers in the death of Paul because in his walking as well as his sense of purpose he "could not shuffle in a straight line . . ." (111). The only solace he can find is that Paul died fighting. The father's Calvinistic code provides him comfort, but not understanding. The only way he can connect with Paul is through the fluidity of memory, and the truth of the memory can only be measured against the words underneath the boulders.

As time progresses, both Norman and the father talk about Paul, but the truth of his death remains hidden. The father asks Norman:

'You like to tell true stories, don't you?' he asked, and I answered, 'Yes, I like to tell stories that are true.'

Then he asked, 'After you have finished your true stories sometime, why don't you make up a story and the people to go with it?'

'Only then will you understand what happened and why. (112-113)



The progression from experience to memory, then to story, and eventually to literature comes to fruition within this passage. The "spot of time" of Paul's existence can only be understood by discovering the narrative truth that is codified through the recollection of the experiences of the father and Norman. The truth of the moment can never be reproduced, but the truth imprinted by the moment into memory is like the words underneath the stones from the basement of time. The reality of the moment after the passage of time is like the currents of the river, but the moment, retrieved through recollection, can achieve a spiritual truth when it is approached through the construct of language which is fiction. According to the father, when Norman places the experiences of Paul into language, he has fully understood or connected with Paul and discovered the truth.

After discussing the memory of Paul with his father, Norman as narrator jumps to the end of his life to discuss the relation of memory to literature in the conclusion of his novella. The line between religion and fly fishing, ritual and spirituality, language and isolation is merged into one in the last passage of the novella. Maclean writes:

Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some the words are theirs.

I am haunted by waters. (113)

Maclean, as did the writings of Dame Juliana of Berners in 1450, used the metaphor of fishing as a way to achieve a spiritual connection to the universe through the use of language. The collective experiences and perceptions of all humans eventually merge into "one," which is



language. The river represents the always changing perceptions of the world when placed in the form of language. The continual flux of water is much like our experiences: the myriad of our thoughts, emotions, and feelings of a moment can only be grasped by placing them against the substance of language. The religious as well as classical subtext of language is merged within this river. The idea that in the beginning was the Word and that this word was truth blends into the metaphor of the river and the rocks. When the word becomes flesh, it has been limited by the boundaries of the senses. The word can only be expressed by placing it against the perceptions of the senses, which are never static, but the word itself is static like the boulders in the stream. The idea that this world and words was created by a great flood or divine intervention becomes as vague as trying to find the source of a river. This quest is problematic because a river is a circle always perpetuating itself. The origin of language cannot be found because at some point a human recognizes that language is there because it exists; in other words, by using language to explain the origin of language, one faces the same challenge as finding the source of a river. But in the metaphor used by Maclean, he places the words under the rocks indicating that there is a truth or a connection between everything in the river of human perception. By trying to tell the true story of Paul, Norman could create an interpretation of what actually occurred, which is the "spots of time" or the "timeless raindrops" of the words underneath the rocks. The pronoun "theirs" in the last passage becomes the culmination of the process of transmuting experience into literature. The religious communion and the secular communication occurring through the metaphor of fishing combines into a connection with the author and reader. The sharing of the word becomes a connection with the past through the fluidity of the river of language. The progression from ritual to spiritual occurs by transcending the ritual use of words and achieving



the narrative truth of a story. The words of Maclean and all of the other authors that have used the metaphor of fishing have merged into a spiritual connection based in the truth of their language. The metaphor encompasses the literary angling tradition of the past and has provided the reader with an interpretation of the words to connect with the future uses of the metaphor. Even though there is a connection within the enclosed metaphor of fishing, the irony of language still exists: words cannot replace objects; words only represent objects. The flux of human perception can only be explained by putting it in terms of stories such as these have been, and are. The idea of being haunted by waters illustrates the paradox of language. The truth that Maclean tries to achieve by the classical ideal of the father and the romantic ideal of Paul is ultimately interpreted by the perceptions of the reader, so representations of fishing change with each interpretation of the metaphor. The metaphor explains the progression of the ritual uses of the constructs of language into spirituality, but at the same time, it leaves the reader isolated in the search for the meaning of the metaphor; therefore, the waters continue to haunt us.



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