

Lucyna KRZYŚIAK: Konzept der Ausbildung

zu Teacher Trainer im Rahmen des schweizerischen
Projekts für polnische Oberschullehrer
und seine Auswertung aus der Perspektive
der Teacher Trainer 129

Halina MALEŃCZYK-BOGUSZEWSKA: Theoretische

Grundlagen für das Verstehen fremdsprachiger
Schrifttexte — einige ausgewählte Aspekte 163

Barbara SADOWNIK: Erklärungsansätze und Hypothesen

des Zweit- bzw. Fremdspracherwerbs 177

REVIEWS

Wilhelmi Busch: *Max & Moritz. Eine Bubengeschichte*

*in 7 Streichen. Einfach getextet mit Übungen
und Kommentar von Elżbieta Reymont
und Eugeniusz Tomiczek. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN,
Warszawa/Wrocław 1995* 215

Angelika Lundquist-Mog: *Spielarten. Arbeitsbuch*

*zur deutschen Landeskunde. Berlin/München:
Langenscheidt 1996; Warszawa: „Rea” 1996.*
151 Seiten; 1 Kassette

(Halina Maleńczyk-Boguszevska) 219

Marek Jaroszewski: *Literatur und Geschichte.*

*Studien zu den deutsch-polnischen Wechselbeziehungen
im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Warszawa 1995*
(Więńczyszlaw A. Niemirowski) 227

LUBELSKIE MATERIAŁY NEOLINGWISTYCZNE NR 20, 1996

Steven Carter

California State University, Bakersfield

**„It Was All a Lie Both Ways”:
Krebs's Zero Summer**

Oftentimes the protagonists of Hemingway's short stories are avid readers of texts. In *The Three-Day Blow*, the adolescents Nick and Bill carry on a solemn literary discussion about the relative merits of G.K. Chesterton and George Meredith; the indifferent husband of *Cat in the Rain* buries his nose in a book in order to fend off the demands of his frustrated wife; the father in *A Day's Wait* reads Howard Pyle's *Book of Pirates* out loud to Schatz, the nine-year-old boy who is convinced he is dying; the insular Mrs. Adams in *The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife* is a devotee of *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy (her husband, on the other hand, is „defined” by an unopened pile of medical journals sitting on the floor of his room). And so forth.

Krebs, the deracinated veteran of *Soldier's Home*, is also a bookworm: having returned to Oklahoma following his participation in the First World War, he is in the habit of leaving the house on lazy summer mornings „to walk down town to the library to get a book” (146). In one significant respect, however, Krebs's reading habits differ from those of his aforementioned counterparts in the Hemingway canon: he is also a putative „character” in the book Hemingway assigned to him:

He sat there on the porch reading a book on the war. It was a history and he was reading about all the engagements he had been in. It was the most interesting reading he had ever done.

The problem is, of course, that Krebs cannot „locate“ his soldier-self in his favorite text:

He wished there were more maps. He looked forward with a good feeling to reading all the really good histories when they would come out with good detail maps. Now he was really learning about the war. He had been a good soldier (148).

A classic American fictional archetype, Harold Krebs is the quintessential *missing person* who „exists“, as Harry Levin once wrote, „in a state of suspense between wanderlust and nostalgia“ (4). Krebs’s *ontological* „state of suspense“ is duplicated by a state of *lexical* suspense which Hemingway induces in his readers. This reflexivity or *rapprochement* between text and reader is articulated in twofold fashion, as semiology and as structure.

I

Let me propose as a *point d'appui* *A Simple Inquiry*, a story of the war which Harold Krebs in *Soldier's Home* has left far behind. Both of these stories have one thing in common: they both lend themselves, in part, to semiotic analysis.

Of *A Simple Inquiry*, Gerry Brenner has written:

The map on the pine-board wall, the room's only 'decoration,' signifies that *map-reading* is important to what the men in the hut engage in. The papers on which the major and his clerk work signify that *paper-reading* is also important—as is *book-reading* to the clerk. . . . When the major challenges Pinin's admission that he is in love with a girl. . . . it becomes clear that *letter-reading* is also significant to the officer and his clerk (198-99).

Both *Soldier's Home* and *A Simple Inquiry* contain what Brenner calls „semantic riddles“ which problematize the act of reading and which, therefore, include *as subject matter* the reader's search for meaning. Interestingly, the semantic riddles in both stories are articulated by *the same four signs*: maps, „papers“, books, and letters. The functions of these signs in the two works, however, are diametrically opposed to each other.

To begin with, the military map on the pine-board wall of *A Simple Inquiry* is missing from *Soldier's Home* because, as Krebs discovers to his

chagrin, maps have not yet been included in the freshly-written history books of World War I. In like manner, the „paper-reading“ of *A Simple Inquiry*, which takes up the time of both the major and the adjutant Tonani, comes under erasure in *Soldier's Home*. Krebs's mother implores him over breakfast, „[P]lease don't muss up the paper“, adding that if the morning *Star* is mussed, the (always absent) father will not read it. Then, because his mother also demands his undivided attention, Krebs is obliged to „put down the paper“, thus negating another escape into a world of signs (149-150).

In *A Simple Inquiry*, the busy clerk Tonani is in possession of a „paper-covered“ book (327). On the contrary, the lackadaisical Harold Krebs must look forward to the „really good histories“ of World War I which have yet to be written (148). Balancing these missing definitive histories of the Great War is Krebs's mother's passing reference to the history of another war: the lurid stories told by her father of the American Civil War. We do not know what these stories were, nor, for that matter, do we have any way of knowing if they are true.

The reading habits of the inquisitive major of *A Simple Inquiry* aren't merely restricted to maps and papers: „I read all your letters“, he informs Pinin (329). In contrast, the mail which Krebs's sister Helen brings to the breakfast table in *Soldier's Home* is never opened. Here, too, Krebs (and the reader) are denied access to a text or texts.

The semiotic inversions of *Soldier's Home* also extend to character and setting. Four *dramatis personae* are missing from the story: Krebs's grandfather who fought in the Civil War; his second, unnamed sister; Charley Simmons, the „credit to the community“ held up to Krebs by his mother; and, of course, the „non-committal“ father who spends all of his allotted time in the story at work (151, 146). Omissions and disappearances characterize the story's settings as well. The conspicuous absence of the Rhine River from a photograph taken „on the Rhine“ has been noted by many critics; Krebs declares himself to be AWOL from God's Kingdom, an admission which causes his mother grief; and Krebs's decision not to confront the missing father is accompanied by the antistrophe, „He would miss that one“ (145, 153).

These and the other aforementioned omissions in the story serve to conscript both Krebs and the reader in a quest for missing persons, places

or things. A fresh look at the structure of *Soldier's Home* will also help elucidate the role Hemingway has prepared for the protagonist and the reader in this ongoing quest.

II

Much critical scrutiny has been devoted to Hemingway's intricate strategy of patterning in *Soldier's Home*. Of the "loaded" references to sports in the story, for instance, Robert W. Lewis, Jr., has written,

In this story of a returned Marine veteran of World War I, sport as such seems incidental to what first appears as a casually ironic recounting of the trials of a veteran's readjustment to civilian life. But each detail is loaded, and the few references to sport—to pool, motoring, reading the sporting page of the newspaper, and girls' "indoor baseball" ... form an important pattern of their own in this story about patterns (175).

Kenneth G. Johnston has also noticed the importance of patterns in *Soldier's Home*, pointing out that Krebs himself thinks in terms of patterns (148). According to Johnston, Krebs's chief desire is to attain

a smooth uncomplicated life in a world of patterns and colliding forces. When the patterns or collisions are simple, predictable, and impersonal, such as a game of pool or baseball, he can enjoy the situation. It is the sporting page that he reads at breakfast. But when the situation involves a collision of values, personalities, and attitudes, as in a family quarrel, or a social pattern of conformity, lies, and restraint, as in courtship, he would rather escape into the "cool dark of the pool room" or into a book (79).

Like Lewis, Johnston interprets the patterns of *Soldier's Home* strictly in terms of *repetition*. For Lewis, the story is "written in a wonderfully ironic, carefully modulated style in which Hemingway is in full control of verbal repetition and variations on his theme" (174). For Johnston, the verbal "pattern of repetition" which toolmarks one section of the story "reflects upon the repetitive pattern of the courtship ritual, of the courtship lies" which permeates *Soldier's Home* as a whole (79). Both Lewis and Johnston commit the same error of omission: in pointing to the story's discrete patterns of repetition, they fail to recognize the *anti-patterns* which accompany them. Neither leading critic of *Soldier's Home*, that is to say,

acknowledges the presence of complementarity as the story's pivotal structural device.¹

Johnston sees the following repetitions as cut from whole lexical cloth: *want ... did not want ... want ... did not want ...* In similar fashion, Lewis describes the phrases, *before the war ... after the war ...* in terms of one reiterative system. These interpretations are helpful, but they fail to account for the *anti-patterns* of which the story's narrative refrains are also constituted. These patterns and anti-patterns in *Soldier's Home* are not binary; they are designed, rather, to *share equal billing as fictions*. Put another way, the "patterning" of reality in the story are not strictly repetitive or contradictory, but complementary; as the narrator says of Krebs's dilemma, "It was all a lie both ways" (148).

Note, for example, the manner in which Hemingway depicts the worlds of war and peace in *Soldier's Home* as being at once identical and

¹ Complementarity describes a system or systems—physical, epistemological, or otherwise—of mutually interdependent and irreconcilable relations. As a scientific way of knowing, it denies strictly classical notions of contradiction, either-or, and binary (or digital) oppositions. According to H.H. Pattee,

[Complementarity] requires the simultaneous articulation of two, formally incompatible, modes of description. The source of this requirement lies in the subject-object duality, or in the distinction between the image and the event, the knower and the known ... however one may choose to express this basic distinction. The essence of the concept of complementarity is *not* in the recognition of this subject-object distinction, which is common to almost all epistemologies, but in the apparently paradoxical articulation of the two modes of knowing. (Italics added.)

Pattee elaborates on what is meant by the "paradoxical articulation of ... two modes of knowing":

[T]his duality of descriptive modes and their incompatibility should not be thought of as a contradiction in any sense. In fact, there is none since the two modes of perception are formally disjoint [sic] and contradiction can only occur within a single formal system (192-193).

In thumbnail terms, complementarity is "[a] recognition of an inescapable duality at the heart of things" (Gleick 40). This is not, however, as simple as it sounds. When the mathematician Arkady Plonitsky refers to "the double nature of light", where "one must manage classically incompatible systems of representation *without resolving their incompatibility*", he is also describing complementarity (italics added) (6). "The process also produces", Plonitsky adds, "specifically as *writing*, new economies of interpretation, history, theory, or literature" (205). One such "economist" is, I wish to suggest, Ernest Hemingway.

oppositional, with Harold Krebs trapped in a sort of ontological twilight zone in between. It is certainly true that Krebs's experience then (in France and Germany) and now (at home) is characterized by doublings: as many critics have noted, in a college photo taken before the War he and his fraternity brothers wear „exactly the same height and style collar”, while as an ex-soldier he admires the „round Dutch collars” worn by local girls (145, 147). On the other hand, even though his father's car is also doubled—the narrator refers to it as „still the same car” as before the War—Krebs's association with it past and future is strictly oppositional (147). While his parents are now willing to let him „take [the car] out in the evenings”, he was not allowed to do so before enlisting in the Marines (149).

Krebs's romantic interests before and after the War are also depicted in oppositional terms. While the German girls in a War photo „are not beautiful”, his home town is replete with „so many good-looking young girls” whom Krebs „liked to look at” (146, 147). Nonetheless, when Krebs contemplates the „complicated world” of the pretty girls of his home town, he unconsciously uses the terms routinely used by historians to describe the Great War. For both soldier and scholars, conflicts between nations and town girls amount to the same thing: „already defined alliances and shifting feuds” (147). When Krebs attends a dance, he „fell into the easy pose of the old soldier among other soldiers” (146). Elsewhere, he reflects that „it was all right to pose as though you had to have a girl”, a trick he learned *in the army* (147). When Krebs lies about the horrors of warfare to friends, he „acquired the nausea in regard to experience that is the result of untruth or exaggeration”, a feeling which is reprised during the story's terrible last scene, when, upon lying to his mother about loving her, he „felt sick and vaguely nauseated” (152).

Consider, too, the acute interest of Krebs's male acquaintances in second-hand stories of helpless German women chained to machine guns in the Argonne forest. Interestingly, when Krebs's „quite unimportant” lies do not measure up to this sensational scuttlebutt, his friends lose interest in both them and in Krebs himself (146). As we have seen, these lurid stories *may* be matched in sensationalism by Krebs's grandfather's tales of the Civil War, tales which—in Krebs's mother's view—reveal the

weakness of men, even as the tales from the Argonne woods reveal women as the weaker sex.

In fact, it is Mrs. Krebs's contempt for men which helps explain why Krebs's male friends are so fascinated by the notion of German women in chains. For it turns out that American men are *also* chained, not to machine guns, but to patriarchal custom. Depicted by the titillated young men as slaves in war, the women of *Soldier's Home* are also depicted as masters in peacetime. Krebs's sister insists that she can „pitch better than lots of the boys”; his mother is fond of reminding him „how weak men are”; and Krebs himself acknowledges his mother's power when he says, „I'll bet you made him”, referring to his father's decision to let him drive the car.

We have no way of knowing, however, whether or not young Helen is boasting or telling the truth; we cannot know if Krebs's mother is right, since she obviously has many axes to grind, among them her religious beliefs; nor will we ever learn if Krebs wins his bet, since the father never appears in the story. Once again, the oppositional positives and negatives of war and peace in *Soldier's Home* double as complementary, or what Edwin J. Barton has dubbed „competing” fictions (73).

In *Soldier's Home*, these fictions take the supreme form of emotional blackmail. In response to the prodding of his favorite sister Helen, Krebs declares that he will love her „always.” But when he waffles about watching her play indoor baseball, she accuses him of making up a fiction: „Aw, Hare, you don't love me” (150). This fiction comes to life a moment later, when his mother takes over, as it were, for Helen:

„Don't you love your mother, dear boy?”
„No”, Krebs said.

If Krebs's waffling disappoints his sister, his plain talk shatters the mother. Here, however, and in complementary fashion, the truth becomes a fiction again: „I didn't mean I didn't love you” (152).

Krebs's fatal flaw, here and elsewhere, is his failure to understand the story's central irony: he is, in fact, *living in a text*, one which he cannot „read”, even as the other texts in *Soldier's Home* are „missing” for him and for the reader. Krebs's own observation early on, „The world they

[e.g., the town girls] were in was not the world he was in", rests on a false premise which reflects his binary habit of mind throughout the story, namely that the world of innocence is false and the world of experience is real (148). It is precisely because Krebs is unaware that his *idée reçue* of a dichotomy between fact and fiction is *itself* a falsehood that the reader must, as John Unterecker says of W.B. Yeats's *Lapis Lazuli*, "bolt together [the form] into final shape" (258). In doing so, he is thereby conscripted by Hemingway's narratology into conjoining semiology and structure into what Leonard Shlain calls "a seamless alloy with no beginning and no end"—e.g., a lexical complementary system (242).

It is the lack of a conventional "end", in fact, which makes of Krebs's (and the reader's) quest for finality, while doomed, certainly not without meaning. He is still, in Harry Levin's phrase, living in a state of suspense. Caught up in this ontological limbo, Krebs, we are told, will pull up stakes once again and head for Kansas City to find a job (perhaps). The best the reader is allowed to say of Krebs is, therefore, the worst that his mother has already said of him: unlike the Charley Simmonses of the world, Krebs has not, in the idiom of yet another deracinated Hemingway character, "settled into something."²

WORKS CITED

- Barton, Edwin J.: *The Story as It Should Be: Epistemological Uncertainty in Hemingway's 'Cat in the Rain.'* "The Hemingway Review" 14 (Fall, 1994), 72-78.
- Brenner, Gerry: *A Semiotic Inquiry into Hemingway's A Simple Enquiry.* In *Hemingway's Neglected Short Fiction: New Perspectives.* Ed. Susan Beegeel. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1989, 195-207.
- Gleick, James: *Chaos: Making a New Science.* New York: Viking, 1987.
- Hemingway, Ernest: *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway.* New York: Scribners, 1938.
- Johnston, Kenneth G.: *The Tip of the Iceberg: Hemingway and the Short Story.* Greenwood, Fla. The Penkeville Publishing Co. 1987.
- Levin, Harry: *The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville.* New York: Random House, 1958.
- Lewis, Robert W. Jr.: *Hemingway's Concept of Sport and Soldier's Home.* *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: Critical Essays.* Ed. Jackson J. Benson. Durham: Duke UP, 1975, 170-180.
- Pattee, H.H.: *The Complementarity Principle in Biological and Social Structures.* "Journal of Biological and Social Structures". April 1978, 191-200.
- Shlain, Leonard: *Art and Physics: Parallel Visions in Space, Time, and Light.* New York: William Morrow, 1991.
- Unterecker, John: *A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats.* New York: The Noonday Press, 1959

² See *The Sea Change: The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, pp. 397-401.