Recovery from the Great War: Pastoral Space in J.L. Carr's *A Month in the Country* and Ernest Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River"

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No creature loves an empty space;
Their bodies measure out the place.

Andrew Marvell, "Upon Appleton House"

In their respective fictions, both Carr and Hemingway have their protagonists attempt to control the psychological impact of the Great War through specific acts, acts that hold the contraries of permanence and change in a delicate balance. In both *A Month in the Country* and "Big Two-Hearted River" the pastoral frame, as an artistic form or as an angle of vision, provides an opportunity for place making, and the act of place making helps repair the damage done by the war. Nevertheless, the distinction between the two writers—the one British, the other American—is important, as each measures out pastoral space in different terms, and each has his protagonist make his separate peace with the war in different ways. Carr's Tom Birkin finds a home in cultural traditions that restores his faith in himself and in England. Hemingway's Nick Adams is "essentially homeless" (Reynolds, *Young Hemingway* 53), as America will always remain for him "another country" despite his memory of the river of his youth as the great, good place.

Although Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" (1925) is the better known story, the reputation of Carr's *A Month in the Country* (1980) has only increased over the years. The British

novel won the prestigious Guardian Fiction Prize the year it was published, and "it is now one of Penguin's Modern Classics and a New York Review of Books Classic in the US" (Rogers 205). Although the two texts are linked by the subject of the Great War (1914-1918), the gap in time that separates the publication of each is significant. For Hemingway, the Great War belongs to recent memory; for Carr, the experience of this war is mediated by World War II in which he served (Rogers 125-26, 141-45). In Carr's text, English culture is a stable reality throughout centuries of wars, including the Crusades, whereas for Hemingway WWI is the definitive shocking event of modernity, or what the historian George Kennan has called "*the* great seminal catastrophe" of the twentieth century (3). Hemingway thinks of the pastoral in terms of a distinctive American space, whereas Carr sees a pastoral order in English rural life that reflects a measured, multi-layered English past, one that includes a rich artistic tradition.

The curious paradox of the pastoral is that although it attempts to depict an idealized rural space outside of time, it is forced to acknowledge the reality of time, if only to establish its own boundaries (Levin 121). For Carr's Tom Birkin and Hemingway's Nick Adams, the consequences of time are the war's psychological damage, but they find consolation in the boundaries of the enduring English village (Tom) and a sacred river(Nick). What might have served as Hemingway's village, the logging town of Seney, has burned down. Its desolation is the first thing that Nick sees as he gets off the train, but he is convinced that the river is still there.

Here is a crucial difference between Carr and Hemingway in their use of the pastoral. For Carr, the cultural past is never far away, even in an obscure English village. For Hemingway, American history is what happens to Seney—it is erased. Curiously, Carr had spent a year teaching in South Dakota in a small town (Huron) very much like Seney. He recalled his experience in terms that echoes the jolt that Nick experiences when he sees

what has happened to Seney. Although Carr liked the people of Huron and Beadle County, the latter's "historical society" had erased its past: "*Beadle County had no history other than what these people had made for themselves*" (Rogers 106). It was as if Native Americans had never existed in South Dakota, much less their cultural heritage. Yet if Carr is amazed that Huron's only history is a time defined by its white inhabitants, Hemingway sees that traces of a hidden past remain in the rural world, capable of surfacing at any moment.

In *A Month in the Country,* Birkin, a veteran of the Great War and now an old man, recalls a summer in 1920 in which he restored a medieval church painting in a Yorkshire village, Oxgodby. In the process of rescuing the painting from its "lime-washed wall" (Carr 16), Birkin begins to realize that he has discovered a masterpiece, a work of art "anticipating the Breughels by a hundred years" (75). Both the revelation of the painting and his involvement with the village, its agricultural rhythms, and its people cause him to lose his facial tic and his stammer. Although his identification with "place," the unknown artist, and an English literary tradition allow him to keep the impact of the war at bay, there is second perspective in the novel. Carr plays on the various meanings of *vale*: the English vale (the pastoral valley), the biblical "vale of tears," the Latin imperative of *valere*: "farewell" and "fare well," in the sense of "be strong" or "continue well" (Psalms 23: 4; Carr iv, 22, 113, 117). As the various meanings of "vale" suggest, the classical theme of the transience of earthly things is also part of Birkin's memory. Although the summer of 1920 exists in his memory as an idealized space, "a sealed room furnished by the past" (Carr 135), the sense of something gone never to be recovered reverberates throughout the novel. Not surprisingly, A. E. Housman was one of Carr's favorite poets (Rogers 126, 201).

Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" is also a story about memory. It too will be the source of Nick Adams's psychological

recovery from the Great War. Nick returns to a nature that he knew before the war, hoping to re-create a sense of place that he remembers from another time. As Malcolm Cowley has noted, however, Hemingway belongs to a Gothic tradition in American letters. He should be placed in the company of "Poe and Hawthorne and Melville," writers who know that nothing in the American scene remains benevolent (317). Nick's memory of the river, for instance, is seemingly pristine, but his experience in nature is compromised by remembered moments of violence and loss that erupt as Nick is trying to put his life back together on the river.

Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" was first published as a separate two-part story (*Letters* 3 308n1), but he also used it to conclude his modernist short story cycle *In Our Time* (1925), and therein lies its true significance. Hemingway wanted the story to be read within a context that recorded the grim legacy not only of the war but of America's past. Both reflected the violent chaos of "our time." Like Carr, Hemingway plays on the various meanings of a single word: *camp*. In the original 1925 edition, *In Our Time* begins with "Indian Camp," a story that indirectly explores the hidden history of Native Americans. Nick's father, a doctor, wants to introduce his son to the mysteries of childbirth. He takes the young boy along to watch his dad deliver a baby on an Indian reservation, but everything goes horribly wrong. The doctor does a C-section without "anaesthetic" for the Indian mother, and her husband, unable to help her (or to endure her screams) commits suicide (68-69). The horrors of this moment underscore the camp as "a state of exception" outside the "juridical order," a "reservation" where human rights are suspended and only "bare life" exists (Agamben 8, 15). Hemingway reminds us that doctor and son are intruders into a world defined by American history.[1]

[1]Wilburn Williams perceptively observes that Uncle George is an intruder in a quite specific sense. He is the white father of the child that the doctor delivers. The death of the Indian husband then may be due in part to the husband's knowledge of this fact and his inability to do anything about it (50).

The story ends with the young Nick reading the experience in a positive light ("He felt quite sure that he would never die." [70]), but he will later remember the trauma of this experience in the context of the carnage of the Great War.

History again resurfaces in another camp in "The Battler," a story midway through Hemingway's short story cycle. An adolescent, hitch-hiking Nick Adams accidentally comes across a campfire around which sit two people: an aging, battered ex boxer, Ad Francis, suffering from dementia and a "negro" named Bugs (100). Bugs alternately cares for and brutalizes Ad, and Nick again encounters a Gothic, racialized American past. The trauma Nick experiences here is the "camp" as the pastoral plantation turned on its head, the master-slave relationship reversed. Even before "Big Two-Hearted River," previous "camps" remind us that the Great War is not the only site of violence. Although *In Our Time*'s final story, the two-part "Big Two-Hearted River," has Nick making camp by a river, a place of seeming innocence that he remembers in terms of order and rituals, the violence of "Indian Camp" and "The Battler" speak to an American past that is hardly tranquil.

As a post-modernist novel, *A Month in the Country* has a rich intertextuality that includes a veiled reference to Hemingway. Embedded in Nick's memory of the river are skills that he learned from his father about fishing ("Fathers and Sons" 370). Nick's step by step procedure for fishing finds a counterpart in Birkin's meticulous technique in unveiling a painting that has remained hidden for centuries.

An outsider in Oxgodby (a Londoner), Birkin takes great pride in the art of restoration, though it pays little and in the present instance is little appreciated by the local pastor, the reverend J.G. Keach. In the course of that summer, Birkin becomes infatuated with the reverend's young wife, Alice, but his real love that summer is not Alice, nor Lucy Sykes, a young woman of the parish who invites him to tea after his botched attempt at giving a sermon. Alice teases him, as do others, for

having fallen in love with Lucy, and Birkin says "she was right. I'd fallen in love. But not with sweet Lucy Sykes" (Carr 91). Rather, he had become obsessed with "the nameless man who stood where I stood" and whose painting he is in the process of bringing to light. Like Nick's knowledge of fly fishing, Birkin's salvation that summer depends on the integrity of his craft: "Standing up there on the platform before a great work of art, feeling kinship with its creator, cozily knowing that I was a sort of impresario conjuring and teasing back his work after four hundred years of darkness" (Carr 83). To his surprise, however, he discovers who that "nameless man" was, and he is not someone who conveniently fits into the English pastoral tradition. By connecting a figure in the painting falling into Hell with the skeletal remains that he and his archaeologist friend Charles Moon unearth from a grave outside the hallowed grounds of the churchyard, he learns that the artist "was a Muslim. Caught up in some expedition and then became a convert to save his skin! Heavens! Can you imagine the ructions when he turned up in Oxgodby again!" (Carr 127).

The key word here is "again." The artist was English, originally from Oxgodby, who had been captured by the Muslims during the Crusades and converted to that religion "to save his skin." When he was brought back to England, he was branded a heretic and thus placed himself in the painting as one of the damned. He identified himself in the painting by adding a sliver of moon on his forehead. Birkin and Moon identify him by finding a "crescent" moon, a metal necklace, in the rib-cage of the skeleton they dig up from a grave site outside the church's hallowed grounds. That Moon is one of the discoverers points to another delicate irony in the story. As a homosexual, he is even more of a pariah than the Muslim artist—and yet he, Birkin, and the unknown Muslim artist are those very people who help define or reveal the traditions that define the village.

Through the Muslim artist, Carr wants us to recognize parallel moments in history. Just as Birkin and others found themselves

uprooted by the Great War (one day in England, the next in the trenches of France and Belgium), so the artist from Oxgodby was similarly displaced by the Crusades, which, like WWI, turned out to be less of a noble cause than it was promoted as being. Disillusioned by the experience (and not just "to save his skin"), the artist became a Muslim and returned home as an alien. Like so many who had died in the Great War ("Known Only To God" written on their headstones), the artist remains "nameless." Nevertheless, discovering that the artist was a Muslim restores for Birkin a faith in himself. If this Muslim artist could create a great work of art as a pariah, so Birkin in his shell-shocked condition could also become an artist by proxy. The condition of the artist's radical displacement results in Birkin's acceptance of a new, revised cultural legacy. Both artist and critic become part of a heritage, a tradition, to which Birkin, as he is leaving Oxgodby, feels himself to be contributing:

> Whatever else had befallen me those few weeks in the country, I had lived with a very great artist, my secret sharer of the long hours I'd labored in the half-light above the arch. So I turned and climbed the ladder for a last look. And, standing before the great spread of color; I felt the old tingling excitement and a sureness that the time would come when some stranger would stand there too and understand.
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> It would be like someone coming to Malvern, bland Malvern, who is halted by the thought that Edward Elgar walked this road on his way to give music lessons or, looking over to the Clee Hills, reflects that Housman had stood in that place, regretting his land of lost content. And, at such a time, for a few of us there will always be a tugging at the heart—knowing a precious moment gone and we not there.
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> We can ask and ask but can't have again what once seemed ours forever—the way things looked, that church alone in the fields, a bed on the belfry floor, a remembered voice, the touch of a hand, a loved face. They've gone and you can only wait for the pain to pass. (Carr 134-35)

This long passage at the end of the novel not only reflects the pastoral theme of paradise regained after paradise lost (the Great War) but also Birkin's realization that a distinct English tradition (Elgar, Housman) can also include an aesthetic world outside England. In addition, he articulates the novel's

twin pastoral themes, the elegiac sadness for something gone coupled with the awareness that the summer of 1920 had given him something precious.

The passage, too, indicates Carr's rich intertextuality, as though he is writing a gloss on Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Published in 1919, Eliot's essay, like Carr's novel, is also a response to the Great War, the catastrophe that reduced civilization to a waste land. Carr saturates his prose with what T.S. Eliot in 1919 would call a living, organic literary tradition, as "the present moment of the past" serves to give ballast to the present ("Tradition" 44). Throughout the novel, Birkin documents his experience that summer with references to the Modernists (Eliot's essays to Conrad's "secret sharer"), to the Victorians (Thomas Hardy's *Tess* to "It was Tennyson weather" (Carr 50-51, 88), to the Romantics, especially Keats, to the Eighteenth Century (Gray), to, of course, the classics and the Bible, especially Ecclesiastes. Even Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode" seems to hover in the background in that the past cannot be relived, only remembered, and therein lies both the solace and the anguish. Birkin's backward glance, "for one last look," with its echo of a famous line from Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,"—"one longing ling'ring look behind" (88)—describes in microcosm Carr's retrospective "mythical method."

Carr's description of Alice especially reveals his narrative strategy in *A Month in the Country*. Her beauty is unearthly, as though it belongs in a painting. Birkin compares her to Botticelli's Primavera, comically adding that the "pride of the Uffizi" is "walking abroad in, God help us, Oxgodby!" (Carr 45). Putting Alice within the pastoral frame of Botticelli's *Primavera* echoes Eliot's observation on James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) that in "manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him" ("*Ulysses*" 177). The surprise here is that Carr's use of Eliot's "mythical method" will redefine antiquity

to include an artist outside the Western canon. Birkin has contextualized Alice within a Greek pastoral myth, but the Muslim artist belongs to another mythical order.

Alice's beauty, however, does exist within a distinct English pastoral tradition. Moon is also impressed by Alice's beauty, referring to her as a "gem of purest ray serene hidden away in Oxgodby's unfathomable caves!" (Carr 44). The allusion to Gray's "Elegy" ("Full many a gem of purest ray serene, / The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bare" 53-54) is also significant for the attention it calls to the world of time and mutability. Birkin's narrative perspective, remembering the past from the vantage point of his old age, repeats that theme, as it is expressed in another allusion to Gray's "Elegy." Birkin is recalling his season of "immense content and, if I thought at all, it was that I'd like this to go and on, no-one going, no-one coming, autumn and winter always loitering around the corner, summer's ripeness lasting for ever, nothing disturbing the even tenor of my way (as I think someone may have said before me)" (Carr 61). In addition to Gray's "Elegy," ("They kept the noiseless tenor of their way" 76), Keats's ode "To Autumn" ("all fruit with ripeness to the core" 6) is also part of the passage's intertextuality. Both poems critique the pastoral's "immense content" from the temporal perspective of mortality. The obscure villagers' lives in Gray's poem are never swayed by thoughts of fame or wealth because their poverty ("Chill Penury" 51) precluded such ambition, and the theme of Keats's pastoral ode is that summer's "ripeness" ultimately gives way to winter's icy fingers. Indeed, Carr is always reminding his reader that, in the words of another Keats poem, "Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips / Bidding adieu," is saying "farewell" ("Ode on Melancholy" 22-23). It is this tension between the beauty of the moment and its ephemerality that gives this remarkable novel its real power.

At the novel's end, Birkin returns to his unfaithful wife, Vinny, knowing that she will deceive him again, but that experience exists in future time, outside the pastoral world of his memory

of that summer. Just as the Muslim artist has triumphed over time (his status in the community as pariah) through his painting, so Birkin triumphs over time (his suffering and his wife's infidelities) by participating in the painting's reappearance, its recreation. As he restores the painting, he restores himself to the human community; his continuous allusions to a cultural heritage, no matter how hybrid, is part of the process.

In *A Moveable Feast,* published posthumously in 1964, Hemingway also takes "a backward glance" at the story he wrote for the ending of *In Our Time,* "Big Two-Hearted River." He observes that "the story was about coming back from the war but there was no mention of the war in it" (72). Hemingway scholars, of course, will recognize his "iceberg theory" in this comment, his belief that "if a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them" (*Death in the Afternoon* 192). Beneath the surface of "Big Two-Hearted River" is Nick's awareness that the devastation "over there" is matched by the devastation "over here." Hemingway's description of the decimated logging town of Seney resonates on several levels: "There was no town," thinks Nick, "nothing but the rails and the burned over country. The thirteen saloons that had lined the one street of Seney *had not left a trace*. . . Even the surface had been burned off the ground" (163; emphasis mine). Compare this passage with Moon's belief in *A Month in the Country* that an Anglo-Saxon basilica lies beneath the medieval churchyard, dated, he surmises, "probably 600 . . . 650. Very very early" (Carr 27). The past in Carr's novel is a palimpsest, whereas for Hemingway the American past is erased, wiped seemingly clean, yet what remains is a history not of Anglo-Saxon basilicas but the traces of a hidden violence.

The natural world around Seney has also taken a hit: the grasshoppers have all turned black, Darwin's protective coloration. Nick "wondered how long they would stay that way"

("Big Two-Hearted River" 165), an indirect comment on Nick's own mental condition. Making camp is an act of escaping that condition, an act of creating a home in the wilderness:

> Already there was something mysterious and homelike. Nick was happy as he crawled inside his tent. He had not been unhappy all day. This was different though. Now things were done. There had been this to do. Now it was done. It had been a hard trip. He was very tired. That was done. He had made the camp. He was settled. Nothing could touch him. It was a good place to camp. He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it. (167)

Creating a sense of place, a camp, is set against the unsaid world of the trenches, also temporary shelters. The trenches were a grotesque parody of "home" or the English "garden" (Fussell 233-34); they were, in fact, often mazes that were full of rats, lice, excrement, dead cows, body parts, floods, and liquid mud, and they gave off a stench worse than mustard gas (Hochschild 136-37; Cooperman 74-76; Keegan 177). Moreover, they were the places of appalling violence (Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 39-40) and could metamorphose in an instant into No Man's Land if destroyed by artillery or overrun by opposing troops (Howard 100-101; Remarque 277; Keegan 196), becoming a nightmarish space of malevolent craters, mangled corpses, and dead trees. Hemingway's incremental repetitions—"things were done"—serve to highlight the world of the war in which things were not done, where things fell apart. The "home where he had made it" is a temporary clean, well-lighted place, but it is a space made into a place, a world apart from No Man's Land where space remains placeless, where one got lost.

Unlike Carr's novel, there is no reference to an American literary tradition in "Big Two-Hearted River," nor to any other literary tradition, and yet the author behind Hemingway seems to be Ralph Waldo Emerson. Although he had to memorize two poems by Emerson in high school, there is no evidence that he read Emerson's essays (Reynolds, *Hemingway's Reading* 121-22), yet Emerson's views on language has an uncanny presence in

"Big Two-Hearted River." In his essay "The Poet," Emerson says that the poet "names the thing because he sees it" (271), and because he sees it, he sees its transfigured meaning. After seeing that "the scattered houses of the town" are no longer there, Nick immediately sees that "the river is there," an illustration of Emerson's observation in "Self-Reliance" that "perception is not whimsical, but fatal" (188). We see what we want to see or expect to see or remember having seen. Nick sees the undamaged river next to the erased Seney because he remembers it in the context of another time, and for that reason he expects to see it survive the fire. And when he sees the trout in the stream, he sees them in a specific way: he "watched the trout keeping themselves steady in the current with wavering fins" ("Big Two-Hearted River" 163), a visual detail that indicates Nick's hopes for that day. He wills that his actions will serve to keep himself "steady in the current." His actions illustrate Emerson's remark in "The Poet" that "actions are a kind of words" (263). They become a vocabulary that articulate a process of recovery, step by step. Similarly, "words are also actions," a kind of "symbolic action," vis-a-vis Kenneth Burke, the American philosopher of language who was influenced by Emerson. "Much of what we mean by 'reality,'" notes Burke, "has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems," specifically language (5). In "Big Two-Hearted River," Hemingway's words as narrator put Nick back together through a process of linguistic self-construction.

The poet as "Namer or Language-maker" ("Poet" 271) reflects Emerson's indebtedness to the language of Adam, a theory of language that expressed "a recurrent dream of linguistic perfection: to know the name of a thing and thereby know its nature" (Willard 55-56). Before Babel's verbal confusion, there was a kind of pastoral perfection: a "perfect harmony between word and thing" (Aarsleff 281). Adam mirrored God in that as He created the world through the Word, so "Adams's words, which give that universe its names, . . . make the world available to human consciousness" (Essick 11). By escaping the linguistic

encrustation of conventional usage, the poet, Emerson argued, could restore the fallen world ("renovate nature") by naming things as they are ("Poet" 265), thereby revealing their inner essence or spirit. The question Emerson asks at the beginning of his famous essay on "Nature"—"Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?"—is tied to the theme of language as revelation, language as "power" (35). In his journey from town to meadow to river, Nick tries to answer Emerson's question through re-establishing a relationship with the natural world that he once had. That relationship is Nick's "Golden Age."[2]

Yet at the end of the river is the swamp, a metaphor for both No Man's Land and Nick's inner demons. Here a sense of place, or rather a no-place, points to Hemingway's narrative strategy in the story. The swamp is the unredeemed past, mentioned only once in Part I (in the last paragraph): "The swamp was perfectly quiet" (169). In Part II, it begins to loom larger in Nick's mind, dominating the last seven paragraphs of the story. Part II begins with a new, revised spatial map, for the swamp now replaces Seney, or rather becomes a new metaphor for Seney.

Part II begins with "there was the meadow, the river, and the swamp" (173). The swamp comes last in the sentence, as it does in the story, because it points to an emotional past that cannot be permanently kept at bay. It is also a reminder of how suddenly the Gothic moment can appear in the American scene. When Nick gets off the train he is shocked by what has

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[2]Although Hemingway's Adamic language is the opposite of Walt Whitman's (Matthiessen 517-32), it is just as effective for what he wants to achieve. Whitman's style is a style of amplification, excess that reveals an America of divine plenitude. Hemingway's style, as James Wood has noted, is one of "renunciation" (188). Its deceptive simplicity—stripped of adjectives, clear images turning to metaphor—is a perfect vehicle for expressing not only a world of primal innocence but one without cultural baggage. The river in which the activity of fly fishing takes place is sacred both because of Nick's memory and because it secretly mirrors the river that runs through the garden city in the Book of Revelation (22:1-2).

happened to Seney. The swamp says in essence that Seney was just a momentary blip on the landscape, that nature itself can repeat the devastation of the Great War in which whole "villages had disappeared" at Verdun (Keegan 285). As No Man's Land is a lunar landscape of pockmarked holes, dead trees, and rotting bodies, so the swamp is nature run amok—"solid with cedar trees, their trunks close together, their branches solid. It would not be possible to walk through a swamp like that. Their branches grew so low" (179). The description stands in stark contrast to the "island of pine trees" earlier in the story that provides a haven for Nick as he naps (166). The cedar trees suggest a nature at odds with man's attempt to impose order, for the swamp is space without clear demarcations. The hidden thought in Nick's mind is barbed wire from the Great War: "You would have to keep almost level with the ground to move at all. You could not crash through the branches. That must be why the animals that lived in the swamps were built the way they were, Nick thought" (179-80). The implicit theme is de-evolution, creatures in the trenches adapting themselves to their environment, "built the way they were." They are the grasshoppers that turn black.

Since the swamp is a world without distinct shapes, naming things becomes a problem, just as World War I is another Babel in which language loses its moorings. In Hemingway's satirical "A Natural History of the Dead," the narrator notes the color changes of the corpses from the war. "In Caucasian races," they change "from white to yellow, to yellow-green, to black." (337). Not even race is stable. Indeed, the metamorphosis that occurs in death either erases language as meaning or calls attention to itself as artifice concealing a void. Hemingway's remarks in *Death in the Afternoon* are relevant here: "All stories, if continued far enough, end in death, and he is no true-story teller who would keep that from you" (122). In "Big Two-Hearted River," Hemingway's third person narration sees the world through Nick's eyes at the same time it separates itself from Nick ("Nick

thought"). For Hemingway's storyteller, the swamp is death, the fate that lies at the end of the river; for Nick, the swamp is the memory of the war, those demons that remain and that he will ultimately have to face. In either case, there is no way to avoid the swamp: "There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp" (180). The "could" is misleading, perhaps an attempt on Nick's part to put off the inevitable. The story of your life, "continued far enough," means that you are going to have to "fish the swamp."

In the meadow and the river, Nick is seemingly in control, making camp in the meadow and fishing with skill on the river, and yet in both places there are echoes of death. Although making camp means turning space into place, there is also Freud's repetition-compulsion. Nick's repetition of the words "done" and "do," in Robert Paul Lamb's words, "prevent his mind from panicking" (133). Also, in making coffee "Hopkins's way," his mind flashes back to remember that he and his friends had never seen Hop "again" after a promise to meet on Lake Superior that next summer (168-69). With that memory of loss, the coffee turns "bitter," a "good ending to the story," Nick thinks, but it means that his mind is "starting to work," and that he needs to "choke it" before it dredges up other bad thoughts from the past. Even on the river bad moments return, as he remembers fishermen who kill the fish they throw back because they do not wet their hands first: "Nick had again and again come on dead trout, furry with white fungus, drifted against a rock, or floating belly up in some pool" (176). Death also appears in other guises in the story: a grasshopper hooked, taking "hold of the hook with his front feet, spitting tobacco juice on it," a great tree "uprooted," a large trout with a hook in his jaws (175, 177). Between Part I and II of the story, there is a vignette of the execution of a Chicago gangster, Sam Cardinella, who "*lost control of his sphincter muscle*" (171), a reminder that being in control, even for a tough guy, is always tenuous. Indeed, the vignette that precedes the story depicts the death

of a matador in the enclosed space of the bullring, his mind on fast forward, the world spinning out of control "*as when they speed up a cinematograph film*" (161). At the end of the short story cycle, the vignette that follows "Big Two-Hearted River" depicts the deposed Greek king in a "*garden*" pondering his fate at the hands of the revolutionary committee as his wife prunes "*a rose bush*" (181). The bullring, the scaffold, the garden—they are all spatial images of order in various guises, all attempting to keep death within an ordered frame. In Hemingway, the story "continued far enough" always breaks the frame.

Although shadows of the war sometimes surface in the summer of 1920, Carr's focus is upon a sacred time in the past. Alice Keach sums it up nicely: "'You're happy Mr. Birkin. You're not on edge anymore. Is it because the work is going well?'" (83). Yes, that "work" and everything else that summer, including the lovely Alice, are what gives Birkin the strength to face his life after Eden. Carr's first person narration redefines Hemingway's death as the summer that will never return. He never has Birkin tell us what he returns to after that summer, only that this summer healed him and made it possible for him to endure the life ahead. Hemingway, on the other hand, never lets us forget that the past always haunts the present even when the moment appears to be redemptive. For Hemingway, the future is always defined by death; for Carr, the future can be endured because the past contains a redemptive memory.

In his *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), Paul Fussell generalizes (with the help of Edwin Panofsky) that the "Latin tag *Et in arcadia ego*" has a special meaning for English writers, meaning not "'And I have dwelt in Arcadia too,'" but "'even in Arcadia I, Death, hold sway'" (245-46).[3] In the case of Carr, the

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[3]In *The Great War and Modern Memory,* Paul Fussell has argued that English writers saw the war through the lens of an English literary pastoral tradition, as a form of refuge amidst the carnage (231-69). Written after Fussell's study, *A Month in the Country* illustrates Fussell's generalization only in part; in Carr's novel, the English literary tradition is subsumed within a larger cultural heritage.

reverse is true. Although the death of "our Perce" leads to Birkin's angry outburst against God and the "bastards" who started the war, these moments do not ultimately mar the even tenor of that summer (88-89). In contrast, for Hemingway's Nick there is no even tenor of his day in nature.[4] Hemingway's past is not Carr's continuous cultural traditions that give ballast to the present. Rather it contains the hidden presence of menace, a theme, one could argue, that defines almost all of Hemingway's fiction.

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[4]In this sense Hemingway is like J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Richard Wright and others who understood how suddenly the shriek of a train could disrupt the pastoral landscape, or how quickly that landscape could be "altered" by a radical change or disturbance (qtd. in Marx 14; Cooper 129, Buell 13). For example, a shocking disruption of the pastoral landscape appears in de Crevecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782): "Leisurely" walking along in a calm forest, "attentively examining some peculiar plants which I had collected," de Crevecoeur's amateur botanist and farmer, James, is startled by the sudden appearance of a black slave in chains in a cage hoisted above the ground, his eyes eaten out by "large birds of prey," his flesh crawling with insects, condemned to die a horrible death because he struck his overseer. "I found myself suddenly arrested by the power of affright and terror," James says, as the pastoral scene dissolves into Gothic nightmare (*Letters* 177-79).

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