Utah State University

From the Selected Works of Gene Washington

August, 2018

Lectures on Hemingway

Gene Washington

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/gene_washington/178/
LECTURES ON HEMINGWAY

***

MUTE RESPONDERS

Epitaphers write in the imperative mood with essentially the same message: “stop here and read.” Can this be the message of “Hills Like White Elephants?” Does Hemingway command us to stop and read about the death (or possible death) of a fetus? If there is any support for this possibility, it lies first in the static nature of the story (“stasis”) and emotional response of the reader (“animation”) and secondly in giving “voice” to the unborn child as a “mute responder” (Johnson)—essentially the work of the rhetorical figure apostrophe.

So how does “stasis,” as it affects the reader, appear in “Hills”? How does Hemingway stop, or slow, the reader in order to allow him or her to meditate upon the “presence” and “absence” of the unborn child? Link’s answer draws on linguistic theory, especially that of Halliday. Stasis is essentially the diminution (and often negation) of language’s way of representing temporal succession—that is by means of active (transitive) verbs, aspect (especially present participles) and adverbs of time, “before,” “after” and the like. Aiding this effort are devices like repetition, questions, and the foregrounding of spatial representations by means of nouns and adjectives. The general effect, depicted by absence as well as presence, is verbal and physical stasis: “The man and the girl are trapped in a state of imbalance and disagreement. Both are relegated almost exclusively to the passive (my emphasis) of
‘experiencers,’ rather than the active role of agents” (Link 69); “The text makes its own repetition of evasive maneuvers and prominent inactivity explicit in Jig’s comment that all they do is ‘look at things and try new drinks’…The couple’s few remaining agentive actions outside of dialogue (16 instances) are almost entirely intransitive (10 instances) further emphasizing their inability to affect anything”(70). Unmentioned by Link is the subtle distinction “Hills” makes between lack of movement/movement (stasis and animation) with grammatical aspect. Aspect, unlike tense, is non-deistic. Its meaning does not depend on gaining context (and so meaning) by reference to time external to the time of the speaker. It is, instead, time realized by the “internal temporal constituency” of an utterance (Comrie 3). Perfective and imperfective are the two principle forms of aspect. In the first, time is given a beginning, middle and end. Things start and stop. In the latter, time has no beginning and end. Also one plays on the potential capacity of things (events) to be either perfective or imperfective. Shade, for example, has more potential for being portrayed as perfective (a completed action) than does a shadow. Hemingway follows this representation in “Hills.” “The American and the girl with him sat at a table in the shade (CSS 211); “Come on back in the shade,” he said, “you mustn’t feel that way” (214)“The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees” (213).

It’s possible to say “my shade moved with me” but it sounds a little odd.

With this grammatical distinction, between perfective and imperfective, we can say that the man exhibits more perfective action and attitudes than does Jig. Such qualities make him more rigid, more dogmatic, than the girl. (Consequently, he
is more instrumental, we can say, in slowing down reading time of the reader.) Much
of this is due his repetitive arguments (Link). But it is most apparent in the lack of
present participles ("—g") in the man’s speech; a grammatical form most
responsible for representing exophoric movement. His use of the verb “know"
(repeated nine times) and its cognate “realize” (two times) is also instructive.¹ Here
the intelligible ground is a situation extended in time. With a word like “know” every
point of time in the situation is identical with every other point. Whoever knows, as
the American says he does, knows the same thing at all times. It is impossible for
him to change what he knows and still know. Comrie calls this a “static situation"
(48-49) Its opposite, a dynamic situation, is one which it is impossible not to change
or move in some way. Hemingway gives most of this kind of representation to Jig: “I
was being amused. I was having a fine time…I was trying” (CSS 212). “Being,
amused” “having a fine time” and “trying,” represent temporal phases that gesture at
phases in which she was not “being amused” (Comrie 49-51).

Two other unremarked features of the language of the story, ones that slow
the reading pace, are what text-linguists call “recitation” and “deixis.” Recitation, as
the word suggests, means to cite again. In its original legal context, to recite
essentially meant to cite authorities or written precedents. What has been done, or
said, and recorded in the past becomes a warrant for advocating certain present and
future acts. In a literary context, like “Hills,” the authorial intention of recitation is
to use them as a conduit to enjoin the reader “to stop and think about this ” or “this
is what you should take as the truth.” (Since misrepresentation is a design feature of

¹ Jig uses “know” twice and “realize” once; but only as an ironic echo of the man’s
use of them (CSS 214).
all languages, the reader does not have to accept any of the speaker’s remarks.). In “Hills” Jig and the American arrest the movement of the story by reciting opposing arguments about the same subject, But the arguments of the American are far more legalistic; that is to say positive, even dogmatic. Their essential character rises from his appeal, again like a courtroom lawyer, to precedents. He keeps saying that “he knows” persons who have undergone the operation; that it is perfectly safe and so on. Jig’s opposing view mostly takes the form of questions. As such, it presupposes that certain answers are possible. Her thoughts are on the present and future not the past as a template for the present and the future. She shows herself, in the language of temporal linguistics, to be a “presentist.” For the topic under discussion (the fate of her unborn child) the past is irrelevant, not to say non-existent, erased by present and future concerns. For the man only the past exists as it was for them as a couple. He wants, in fact, to substitute the past for the present by means of an abortion (Le Poidevin 125-37). Representation of the different attitudes towards time appear only in the dialogue between Jig and the man.

ANIMATION, ITS LOSS AND REANIMATION

So how does stasis lead to animation in “Hills”? And what is the nature of such animation? And, as it will turn out, the loss of animation and (sometimes) reanimation? Newstok, under different heads, discusses three different possible “types” of animation by their effects: instruction (something new is learned from reading an epitaph or epitaphic forms of literature and contemplating its meaning); action (one is moved to actually do something different from what one has been doing) and the re-animation of an emotion (one returns to an epitaph, or epitaphic
writing, to re-ignite a previous emotion; for example, the speaker’s motive in Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” for contemplating the epitaphs there and recording his response to them). In a written text like “Hills,” these three overlapping types of possible (but certainly not necessary) animation depend not only the subject and dialogue but also on what linguists call the deistic force of tense—the representation of time as measured and made intelligible by context; or reference from the present time of the speaker to another point in time. Both Jig and the man make references from a ‘here and now” to a past. But they differ on the value of that past.

MUTE RESPONDERS

In order to provide more context for what has been said and what follows we need to discuss more specifically the workings of apostrophe in terms of strategies and intentions. As a “turning away” from linear discourse (a beginning, middle and end plot) one “subverts” the normal expectation of time flowing from the past through the present to the future. One effect of this is the slowing of reading time and the introduction of new information. (This process might be likened to a river opening a new channel. The action diminishes the amount of water in the main channel but it adds to the complexity, and information context, of the system as a whole.) In the Culler and Barbara Johnson way of thinking about apostrophe, briefly mentioned above, the authorial intent is to humanize an “absent, abstract or inanimate” subject. In this there is always an “I” (addressor) and a “you” (the addressee). The “I” “calls” the “you” into the text as a “mute” responder. Such a presence “informs without speech” (Barbara Johnson 191). It is perhaps not too
much of a distension to say that Hemingway often uses this device to address the dead. In “A Natural History of the Dead” where one purpose is to set the record straight on what it is like to be dead. This is also true of “Nobody Ever Dies” but here there is also the ever present need of the fiction writer to “animate” the text with color, human interest and movement. This need is expressed primarily through dialogue constructed from linguistic forms like negation (“no,” “not,” “never,” etc), aspect (imperfective) and questions. An example is the following stretch of dialogue (as argument) between Maria and Enrique in “Nobody Ever Dies.” The subjects “called” into the text to be animated is the dead from the Spanish Civil War:

Please note that Enrique’s reference to fighting (and dying) for “liberty” echoes, with a difference, the “championing of liberty” (Strenum pro virili Libertatis Vindicatorem) of Swift’s self-composed epitaph.

“And we say such things (dying in the war) are justified? That men (their friends) like that should die in failures in a foreign country?”

“There are no foreign countries, Maria, where people speak Spanish. Where you die does not matter if you die for liberty. Anyway, the thing to do is live and not to die. But think of who have died—away from here—and in failures.”

“They did not go to die. They went to fight. The dying is an accident.”

“But the failures. My brother is dead in a failure. Chucho is a failure. Ignacio in a failure.”

“They are just a part. Some things we had to do were impossible....
But in the end. It was not a failure.”

She did not answer and he finished eating (CCS 475)

In order for apostrophe to create animation there must be continual contact between the “I” and the “you,” here between Maria and Enrique (“I”) and the dead (as a second “you”). Otherwise, the text loses its ability to apostrophe and so the ability to designate some subject a mute responder. In the above passage Hemingway’s statement, “She did not answer and he finished eating” breaks the contact with the dead and their role in the text as “mute” responders (Barbara Johnson 191).

How do mute responders appear in “Hills” and what role do they play? The question presupposes the conditions necessary for an “absent, abstract or inanimate” subject to become a responder and how such conditions exclude certain other subjects from achieving that status. The first condition, of course, is that the subject be, at some time, “absent, abstract or inanimate,” not present, concrete and animate. But, given the tendency of language to animate everything, how do we decide what is absent, abstract and inanimate? How do we determine when the subject is absent? Let us assume that the absent and the abstract are what initially appears to lack self-consciousness and autonomy but has the potential to gain them by an authorial fiat. In the initial state the subject appears lacking in the ability to modify behavior (if any), reflect on experiences, or think of itself as both an “I” (subject) and a “it” (object). In the final state, typically at the end of the narration, the subject appears in possession of some, if not all, such qualities. Take, for example, the hills across the Ebro. Let us assume that in their initial appearance that
they are inanimate. They have, being “long and white,” potential qualities of the animate, but they are incapable of movement. But as the story unfolds, they take on a quasi-animacy and presence by Jig’s analogy with white elephants and by her “looking” at them (CSS 211, 212). “Looking,” as an intentional act, establishes contact between Jig and the hills and so adds to their “animation.” In Barbara Johnson’s apostrophic model an “I” (animate, present and concrete) directly addresses a “you” (absent, abstract or inanimate). In other words, there is always dialogue between two different persons or one person talking with him or herself—a situation in which the subject person is represented as both an “I” and a “you.” Using Baudelaire poetry as an example, Culler notes how the author “posits a relationship between two subjects even if the sentence denies the animicity of what is addressed” (141).

In the following passages, in which Jig’s analogy appears, the reader knows who the “I” is. But who is the “you,” the American, Jig herself, or the hills; or, given the ability of “you” to be plural, all three? Certainly there are Culler’s “two subjects,” the hills as “hills” and the hills as “white elephants”:

“They look like white elephants,” she said (CSS 211)

“They're lovely hills,” she said. “They don't really look like white elephants. I just mean the coloring of their skin through the trees” (212)

However, we identify the gap that exists between the “I” and the “you,” we must recognize that new information has entered the text. “The hills can represent, on the one hand, the precious dream of a family relationship, so ardently desired by the
girl, and on the other, the harsh stifling of the dream, manifested in the man’s cold response to her comment about white elephants.” (Nilifer 75) For the gi

Perhaps we should then say that the minimal conditions for an object to become a mute responder are five 1) The subject must initially be absent, abstract and inanimate; 2) An “I” must address a “you”; the “I” must be present as a narrator or character in the story; not the third person author (3) there must be constant contact, whether looking, hearing, touching and the like, between the “I” and the “you.” The “I” must not drop from the attention of the “you.” 4) the subject must be episodic, entering and leaving discourse, but not present as a mute responder during the entire length of the text; 5) As a responder, it must either bring new information into the text or repeat given information in a new way. Such information, in theory, is essential for arriving at a coherent interpretation of the text.

With these conditions in mind we might want to exclude from any list of “genuine” responders in “Hills” ones like the following.

The train. It is inanimate and it brings new information about time in the text. The word “train,” appearing two times, repeats given information. But no one establishes contact with it by “seeing” it. It is, throughout the story absent from the sensory contact, “present” only as a future possibility: “the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes” (CSS 211); “He looked up the tracks but could not see the train” (214).

The shadow: “the shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees” (213). It is inanimate, episodic, sensory and it
conveys, along the “field of grain,” some information about the season of the year.

But, as a third person entity, it is not an addressable “you” and therefore lacks a first person “I” present in the text. Therefore, it cannot be animated and made to respond.

The bead curtain: “Close against the side of the station there was…a curtain, made of strings of bamboo beads…to keep out flies” (211); “The girl looked at the bead curtain, put her hand out and took hold of two of the strings of beads” (213). Here again the subject is inanimate, episodic, and informative insofar as it helps to answer the question “where are we?” Where things are, at any specific time, conveys important information about the relationship between Jig, the “it” (the unborn infant) and the man. The bead curtain may tell us that they are, for example, the only persons separate from everyone else; from the waitress and the persons inside the bar “waiting reasonably” for the train (CSS 214). Are they separate from the others because they have a separate problem? Separation, as a classical rhetorical figure (articulus, paranomasia), is often used to prefigure the introduction of a new problem (Quintilian; Burke). But it can also appear as a variant of apostrophe realized as the interruption of the flow of linear time by new characters fixed, but responding, in their own time.

Now let us turn to what may be (according to our five conditions) genuine mute responders and their possible role in addressing the questions posed earlier: does Jig abort the child? If so, what happens afterwards? Does Hemingway convince us that the “it” reference of the dialogue ("It's just to let the air in" 212) is abortion?
Or is Hemingway engaging, with his characters, in a dialogue a forever mute, inanimate object?

We begin with Culler observation that the effect of apostrophe may be to “constitute the object as subject” and by so doing bring new information into the text (143). “It” as a third person form can, if treated singularly, appear only as an object. Promotion to subject not only requires a syntactical change but also a ontological transformation from inanimate third person entity to a first person animate one. (Shelley’s treatment of the wind in “Ode to the West Wind,” according to Culler and Barbara Anderson, is an example). To be convincing, such transformation would have to involve a reciprocal “re-constitution” between Jig and the “it.” They each animate the other. The child animates Jig into a concerned would-be mother. Jig, in turn, performs the equivalent task of “personifying” a fetus. The task of the man, by contrast, seems to suppress all these changes.

So where do we stand with the consensus problem? The problem that arises from scholars taking opposing views about the fate of an unborn child? Is the “it” an unborn child threatened with death? If it is, then we have some justification for continuing to say that Hemingway is writing an epitaph for it; or, at the very least, drawing on the tradition of epitaph-like writing. We seem, at this point, to have arrived a state of confusion between what is actual (an exophoric sense) and what is only possible. In the scholars mentioned above, Renner, Nilifer and the others, the possible (are the man and Jig talking about a fetus? Will Jig get an abortion?) the possible becomes an actuality. Yes, “it” refers to a fetus and yes Jig gets an abortion? But this seems to go against Hemingway’s intention. Where are
we “told,” perhaps in the same way we are in A Farewell to Arms, that a pregnancy occurs: did Jig or the man feel the fetus “kick”? No. See representation of abortion in play: Jonathan Reynolds “Girls in Trouble” NY Times; p. C6, 11 Mar

HANNAH Arendt: speech/action: appear or hide; infant (in-fans; without speech); does not describe itself as an actor : The Human Condition, 159

***

A SENSE OF THE NEGATIVE:

HEMINGWAY'S WORSHIP OF THE VOID.

Nothing is more real than nothing
(Rien n’est plus réel que rien). Samuel Beckett

The Trilogy.

Of the many scholars writing on Hemingway today, Susan Beegel seems to be the main one that takes nothingness in Hemingway as a valid way to approach his work. In her commentaries, nothingness appears, under various names, as what might be called “effects through the lack of something.” In the Craft of Omission (short title) she is primarily interested in how the “thing left out” strengthens Hemingway fiction. Of the five “categories” of omission she identifies, the fifth is most relevant here. It is the “theme” of “nothing.” “When everything is left out, nothing remains, and like “A Clean Well-Lighted Place,” Hemingway’s archetypal story of ‘nada,’ much of his writing is ultimately about nothing” (92; my emphasis). In a later essay, “That Always Absent
Something Else” (short title), Beegel carries Hemingway’s “theme” of “nothing” into an analysis of “A Natural History of the Dead.” Key issues here are loss (Hemingway’s loss of his parents’ belief in divine creation (75–76), Hemingway’s withdrawal from abstractions (76) and by implication, his perception of a void at the center of everything—but one that causes unpleasant events, war, death, privation, etc., to happen.

Instead of finding evidence of the “absent” other in nature (that is, God), Beegel continues, Hemingway “found nothing, an absence of God in nature, an absence of life in death, an absence of divine concern for human suffering” (“That Always Absent Something Else” 77). She does not cite Hemingway’s letter (1950) letter to E. E. Dorman-O-Gowan but it seems apropos here—especially in Hemingway’s representation of nothing, like time, as a universal presence:

What a bastard you are to decide not to come down here.

...Seeing you again was all I gave a damn about. But am getting to be like the whore who wouldn’t give a fuck for nothing. And this is evidently nothing again. Our well beloved nothing and from who’s or whom’s well?”

(SL 691; my emphasis)

Where does nothing come from, “from who’s or whom’s well?” I want to return to this question below.
Does Hemingway, often or just sometimes, kneel at the altar of the void? Is nothingness a constant presence in his work or are there only episodes (or pockets) of nothingness in it? That the void (or one of its family members) comes as an uninvited guest to the characters in his stories seems obvious. was often an uninvited guest, in the figure of death, at the door of his on his mind seems fairly obvious. One way to respond to such questions is to ask about how his stories end. Do they start from something or nothing and do they end in one or the other; or in some combination? he start from something or from nothing? Or some combination of both?

What I would like to do here is to add an extended footnote to Beegel’s observations. My focus is on “A Clean Well-Lighted Place.” Much of the material for the note is from work done in negative metaphysics. With the exception of passages from Hemingway’s letters, I make slight use of biographical matter. The key concept is “fact,” a state of affairs physically experienced as either “light” or “dark” and cognitively known as either “positive” or “negative.” In this latter mode, they both transmit information about things seen and unseen, the said and the unsaid. I make the claim that Beegel’s “ultimately about nothing” can be seen from the perspective of dark (negative) facts in particular combinations with light (positive) ones. This makes the subject of inquiry essentially ontological. Since Aristotle, questions about what “ultimately” exist, or “support” everything else, fall under that head.

But in order to accompany me on this quest, I ask my reader to suspend whatever disbelief she or he has in the existence of dark (negative) facts; to at least entertain, for a short time, that negative facts are as real as light (positive) facts and that it is right to follow their footprints. In Bjornnson words, “They (negative facts)…are an ontologically
free lunch. Or rather, they are complimentary once the positive facts have earned their place on the menu “(2).

A “Clean Well-Lighted Place” is a shadow play with light and dark facts. In it, Hemingway uses such facts to create “pockets” of nothingness and, perhaps, a situation with “grave universal implications” (Hoffman 174). In this he is following, with a difference, similar shadow plays of writers like Plato (in his allegory of the cave; The Republic 6) and in passages from Shakespeare (for example, A Midsummer Night’s Dream: 5:1 and Richard II: 2:2) and those from the Bible (for example, Job: 24: 17 and Ecclesiastics: 8:13).

The shadow play in “A Clean Well-Lighted Place” begins, and has a comprehensive reach into nothingness, with the scene where the old customer, watched by the waiters, sits in dappled shadows:

They [the waiters] sat together at a table that was close against the wall near the door of the café and looked at the terrace where the tables were all empty except where the old man sat in the shadow of the leaves of the tree that moved slightly in the wind (CSS 288; emphasis mine)

The light is very good and also, now there are shadows of the leaves

(290)

Shadows cast by the leaves of a tree are typically dappled. In this case, they are also moving “slightly.”
So what is involved in the “making” of dappled shadows? To answer that (or appreciate the difficulty of answering it) we first have to put ourselves in the position of the old man sitting in the shadows cast by the leaves. We are alone, drinking. We have lived a long time and have experienced, and observed, many “dark things,” loneliness, fear, despair and the like. Now suppose we begin, looking at the shadows around us, putting together cause and effect: what is producing the shadows and what is their effect, physically as well as emotionally? We look up and note that the wind is moving the leaves and look out toward the “electric light” (CSS 288). We conclude that the light is the source for the shadows. (We observe that there is no moon or stars).

The shadows, we note, are produced by blocked light.—leaves, in this case, being the blocking object. But, since the shadows cast by the leaves, are dappled, we reason that the leaves are blocking only part of the light. We don’t know what species of tree the leaves belong to, but we can hazard the guess, from their size and shape of their shadows, that the “ratio” of dark to light it takes to make a dappled shadow is roughly, 70/30. (The exact ratio would involve the [impossible?] task of counting the number of photons emitted by the street light and subtracting the number of photon that compose the light lying outside, and between, the boundaries of the shadows.)

To continue the “thought experiment” of being the old man on the terrace: we know that shadows have a long history in making intelligible the strategies and intentions of writers. We remember, for example, Plato’s allegory of the cave and
Shakespeare’s “Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more” (Macbeth 5:5) What is the general message in these examples? We reach out a hand to try to touch a shadow. What we feel is only the surface on which the shadow lies. We conclude that a shadow is untouchable and so ungraspable. What substance it has as something does not lie in what it is in itself, but in something else, the surface, it falls on. In this we might be reminded of Dante's lines about the spirits of the dead from the Purgatorio (2: 79-81):

O vain shadows! Except in outward resemblance: three times my hands I reached behind it, they as often returned empty to my breast again (Ohi ombre vane, fuor che ne l'aspetto; tre volte dietro a lei le mani avvinsi e tanto mi tornai con esse al petto. [my translation])

Shadows, we reasonably conclude, are negative facts. Those things that produce them, the electric light, the leaves and the surface they fall on are positive facts. If we can discover a “third” thing (idea, concept, relationship) between them; one that binds them into a unified vision, then we can give, perhaps, the scene a “shadow meaning.”

The old man sitting in the shadows can be said to be experiencing with his senses what C. S. Pierce calls “firstness” (29-76 [The Universal Categories]) It is reality, before and without language; reality via the senses stripped of any possible metaphoric meaning. Something like this was on Hemingway's mind in his words to Bernard Berenson: “There isn’t any symbolism (in The Old Man and The Sea) the sea is the sea. The old man is an old man. The boy is a boy and the fish is a fish. The
shark are all sharks no better and no worse. All the symbolism that people say is shit” ” (SL 780). Should we, as readers, leave it there? Following Hemingway's statement should we conclude that the shadows are shadows, the leaves are leaves, etc., and then go on reading? Or should we go on to the next level, what Pierce calls “secondness”? Here we are in language and the beginnings of abstracting from sensory information; into what Pagnattarro, speaking of “Chi Ti Dice La Patria,” variously calls “shadow meaning” (37, 46) and “shadowy significance” (38). The presence of shadows in fiction, in short, is not just shadows. They also have “shadow meaning.”

At this point we may begin to wish that Hemingway, like Plato in the person of Socrates in the allegory of the cave, would step in to tell us what the "shadow meaning" of the shadows is in “A Clean Well-Lighted Place.”

We don’t have to go far to find readers who tell us what they mean.

In order to understand symbolism, a reader must learn that it is a non-superficial representation of an idea or belief that goes beyond what is "seen." Ernest Hemingway's "A Clean Well-Lighted Place" uses symbolism to help convey the theme of Nihilism, the philosophy that there is nothing heavenly to believe in. It discusses that there is no supernatural reason or explanation of how the world is today. Three symbols: the soldier, the café, and the shadows of the leaves, found in Hemingway's short story clearly displays this Nihilistic theme.

(http://www.exampleessays.com/viewpaper/76555.html)
Presumably, the writer of the above would also find symbolism in these shadow passages from “Hills Like White Elephants” and “The Short Happy Life Of Francis Macomber”:

Far away, beyond the river, were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she [Jig] saw the river through the trees (CSS 213; emphasis mine)

Macomber stepped out of the curved opening at the side of the front seat, onto the step [of the car] and down onto the ground. The lion still stood looking majestically and coolly toward this object that his eyes only showed in silhouette, bulking like some super-rhino (CSS 13; emphasis mine).

I mentioned above that Hemingway, with his use of shadows, seems to be following, with difference, in the tradition of shadowiness represented by writers from the Bible, Plato and Shakespeare. What is the difference? It is, one may hazard the opinion, a difference made possible by what Peirce calls “thirdness.” Here we enter the realm of “truthmaking” (Armstrong, Björnsson). True linguistic representations are made, in short, by a triadic relationship between real world objects (firstness), oppositions to them set up by language (secondness) and an interpreting term that mediates between firstness and secondness. Shadows are real world objects. They take on “secondness” by someone representing them as something different from all other possible real world objects. In our story of sitting in dappled shadows (above) the difference between shadows and other mentioned objects (the electric light, leaves, etc.) lies in their immateriality relative to the materiality of other objects. Truthmaking
(thirdness) is what we create by establishing a relationship between the immateriality of shadows and the materiality of the electric light, leaves and every other material objects mentioned by Hemingway.

(Please recall our minimal definition of immateriality is its untouchability under all circumstances. We can never touch shadows themselves, only the surfaces they lie on.)

TO WRITE TRULY

So what is truth in writing? In “What I Like About Hemingway,” Beegel says it is, at least in part, saying what others ignore or refuse to say, especially about war. Saying what “is” is tantamount to denying what to others is a negative fact. It is, as she comments, Hemingway’s “credo.” By finding the truth we have the grounds for “making” the truth. So we should ask what Hemingway’s take on truthmaking is; specifically, what he often describes as the conditions for “to write truly”? And how does it relate to how dappled shadows in “A Clean Well-Lighted Place” make truth in the story? From his letters we learn that a true representation is essentially “getting it straight” with real world objects (facts, states of affairs, etc.). In standard truthmaking theory this has a family resemblance to the Correspondence Theory of Truth. To make truth, as Aristotle has it, one has to say that something “is” when it “is” (exists). To say, conversely, that something “is not” when it does not in fact exist, is also true. Real, material, things, events and the like in an actual world “make” our statements about them true or false (Metaphysics 1011b25). This is the gist of Aristotle's statement that “the fact of the being of a man carries with it the truth (emphasis mine) of the proposition that he is, and the implication is reciprocal: for if a man is, the
proposition wherein we allege that he is true, then he is” (*Categories* 14b, 14-17).

Hemingway never uses, of course, that kind of language. But when he speaks of truth, especially in his letters, he’s not far from the thought of such language—especially with the common phrases, “write truly,” “true and straight,” “one true sentence” and the like (Phillips 23, 21, 28).

Like Aristotle, Locke, C.S Peirce and other common sense thinkers, Hemingway describes all knowledge as being originally via the senses and ending as a linguistic representation of the thing itself. Achieving a true representation lies, in part, in giving the right title to a story. Like a proper name, a title gives being, as a palpable entity, to the named person (SL 229). Being almost blinded by his son left him with his visual ability impaired, and consequently, a diminished capacity for writing: “Being blind even for a little while scares you—especially if you don’t just write out of your head but with all the senses you have on tap” (SL 270); seeing something as it is, and then describing it, means experiencing it with the senses and without symbolic conversion. To Maxwell Perkins, Hemingway attributes success in writing to life experiences: “whatever success I have had has been through writing what I know about” (273). Sense impressions of the material world and an accurate representation of it appear often in his letters. He talks repeatedly about getting it “straight” in his writing; and he criticizes Fitzgerald for not achieving that with his representation of Sarah and Gerald Murphy in *Tender Is The Night*:

It [*Tender Is The Night*] started off with that marvelous description of Sara and Gerald...then you started fooling with
them making them come from things they didn’t come from,
changing them into other people and you can’t do that, Scott.
if you take real people and write about them you cannot
….make them do anything they would not do…You can’t make
one be another (407)

Writing truly, in other words, is not only about getting the facts right about what
was and what now is but also about what might plausibly be based on what is. Here
plausibility and probability go hand in hand. The message is twofold, one negative,
“don’t go beyond what is possible” and one positive, “make sure you include in your
writing not only what is inevitable, like death, but also what is highly likely.”

Writing to Dos Possos about his book 1919, Hemingway tells him “Remember to get
weather in your goddamn book⎯weather is very important” (SL 355). Why is
weather important? From the evidence of the stories, we may surmise that weather-
forms, rain, snow, heat, cold and the like constitute a large part of a typical
Hemingway system of “atmospherics”; weather-forms supply, for example, material
for dialogue (“Three Day Blow,” “Cat In The Rain,” “Out Of Season”) and help to
explain the behavior and emotional state, of characters like Frederic Henry (A
Farewell To Arms) and the narrator of “In Another Country.” Without the presence
of snow and what it makes possible, skiing, neither “Cross Country Snow” nor “An
Alpine Idyll” would exist in their present form.
So how does the above play into Beegel’s “ultimately about nothing”? To answer that we first have to ask how we recognize a negative fact. In essence, it appears as the product of a subtraction, or a series of subtractions, of properties or relations from a positive fact. Subtraction does not bring negative facts into being. They would still exist without it. Subtraction just makes them accessible and “active.” As I mentioned earlier, Blindness, for example, can be seen as a subtraction of sight from the ability to see; deafness as a subtraction of hearing from the ability to hear or blackness as a series of subtractions of all possible colors from an object. In all these examples, especially in the case of blindness and deafness, the production of them as negative facts involves a challenge to “normal function.” Seeing, that is, is a normal function of eyes; blindness, as an absence of that function, challenges that. But please note also that no negative fact would be intelligible without either the existence or expectation of a positive fact. All negative facts are, as it were, “slaves” of their “master” existence or expectation. This is the relationship, it seems fair to say, that runs through all representations of such facts from Rochester’s *Upon Nothing* to Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*.

A shadow is the product of a subtraction of photons from a source of light. A dappled shadow is the product of a subtraction of some photons from the source. Total darkness is the complete subtraction of photons. Insofar as a product can be seen as the result of a process, then we have some justification for saying that the terrace scene in “A Clean Well-Lighted Place” is one stage in a process of negation—a process whose final stage is whatever we want to claim is the import of the words “nada, nada,” etc (CSS 291). In this, Hemingway’s “writing truly” would extend to the significance dappled shadows has as a negative fact. The old customer sits half in and half out of light. Is
Hemingway suggesting that the man, while he is on the terrace, is only half alive? Perhaps then, by his walking away from the dappled shadows, away from their light source, Hemingway is, in effect, robbing the old man of even a half life? (CSS 290). Shadows without a light source equate to total darkness. Extending the reach of this image is the older waiter turning out the electric light in the café (291). No more shadows for the old man or the waiters, either inside or outside the café. Only darkness, a global negative fact like death or the unseen part of an iceberg.

Every day is Ash Wednesday reminding us of our individual death.

Now please imagine Hemingway reading the lines immediately preceding and repeating to himself the statement he wrote to Berenson about symbolism; “There isn’t any symbolism (in The Old Man and The Sea) the sea is the sea.... All the symbolism that people say is shit” (SL 780; Cf. 162). To him a line like “Only darkness, a global negative fact like death” (and others preceding it) would fall under the category named by “all the symbolism that people say is shit.”

Or would they?

So let us for a few lines consider the possibilities, following Hemingway’s dictum, that either 1) the shadows in “Clean Well-Lighted Place” are shadows and nothing more or 2) the symbols can be made into symbols but the symbols would be “shit.” Each of these options depends on our interpretation of the word “all” (“All the symbolism that people say is shit”) In the tradition of negative information that I am following in this essay, “all” is equivalent to “no more.” Once you have declared, for example, that “All men are mortal” you have said, in effect, that “no man is
immortal” (Armstrong 58-59). “All,” entails, by necessity, the negative affair “no-more.” Since Hemingway’s letter to Berenson was in reference to The Old Man And The Sea, we might claim that Hemingway is limiting his remarks to the novel, not to his other works. The novel, as it were, sets an absolute limit to what we can say about symbolism.

But what if “all” as “no more” also refers to all his works? Doesn’t that mean that he is saying in effect, “no more shit (symbols).” Unlike an absolute limit on symbolism making, in the first possibility, here we have the more attractive option of “no more” symbols of a certain kind. And who is he saying it to? Presumably, to all his readers, not just to a few scholars.

No one, it seems fair to say, is going to stop the production of symbols—though there would be a problem in deciding which ones do not fall under Hemingway’s representation. But there is a procedure, I believe, for limiting their production. It essentially involves taking negative information (negative facts, states of affairs, etc) seriously—to attend to shadows as much, and sometimes more, than the bodies (positive facts, states of affairs, etc) that cast them.

Insofar as a symbol (or analogy or metaphor) is unstated in the text (“this is what these shadows mean”) it can be seen as a negative fact. This, I think, is the general case with Hemingway. Unlike Plato, or to a lesser degree Shakespeare, Hemingway does not step into the text and tell us what shadows mean or what symbolic weight a passage like this from A Farewell To Arms has: “…the troops were muddy and wet in their capes…two gray leather cartridge…bulged forward …so that the men…marched as
though they were six months gone with child” (FTA 4; emphasis mine). The symbolism involved in the rain, the mud, or in troops portrayed as pregnant women is “missing information.” Whoever tells us what they symbolize, in effect, supplies us with such information and asks us to take it as “true” information. Pozorski, for example, draws an analogy between elements of the marching troops, Catherine’s still-born infant in A Farewell to Arms, “modernist literature” (78-79); another commentator sees the rain, featured in the passage, as representative of “an undesirable type of fertility” (http://www.gradesaver.com/a-farewell-to-arms/study-guide/section1).

Parody and imitation, as add on extras, would also belong, as a distant relative, to the family of analogy, symbol and the like.

So what is wrong with add-on extras? Aren’t we free to add to the text what we think is “missing information”? No reader is required to accept it as “true”? At least three objections can be made to it. One, dating from the Middle Ages, is that anything “added” to an adequate description of a positive state of affairs violates the law of parsimony—Occam’s Razor. Reducing the categories to an absolute minimum for an adequate description, in theory, makes it easier for a reader (or listener) to process information. Another argument against symbol finding is that the interpreter of a text, following in love with the symbolism, can be influenced by his or her own interpretation to the point of blindness to any other interpretation. Finally, perhaps the strongest argument against add-on information lies in the “power” of symbols as negative information. In Sorenson’s words, negative information, since it cannot be “paraphrased” as positive information, is “more powerful than positive information. Knowing how things are not gives you knowledge of exhaustiveness. If there is any reduction to be achieved, it runs
from positive statements to negative facts. For instance, one reductive strategy is to exploit a kind of double negation; to say that the cat is on the mat is to say that there is no negative fact of the cat not being on the mat” (226-227). This, in essence, is Armstrong’s “all” equates with “no-more,” and Hemingway’s own use of absolutes, like “everyone,” “inevitable” and “all” to refer to the ruin that can come to everyone (SL 222, 226, 227).

So it appears that we are left with dealing with Hemingway’s own use of negative facts. It seems the only way to be on sound ground with them. Only they, internal to the text, are not add-ons. I have tried to give some hints how Hemingway’s strategies with negative facts work as shadows in “A Clean Well-Lighted Place.” Perhaps the best way is to attend to them as process, not product. This would mean taking negation as phases in time tending toward, but not necessarily reaching, an “ultimate nothing.” In terms of syntax, one would expect to find here the participial form (“-ing”) dominant over a completed state one (“-ed”); and sometimes a state of affairs represented as a negative process set in opposition to a positive one. Writing to Dos Passos about the reciprocal relationship between church and state Hemingway comments that “…it is very possible that tearing down is more important than building up” (SL 375). In the letter to E. E. Dorman-O’Gowan (quoted above) Hemingway implies that “ultimate nothing” can form the terminal point of a negative process which starts from a person refusing to perform an action (SL 691)

But this is tricky business. How shadows work, how they are formed and the like, are harder to understand than the leaves that cast them. Under what conditions, for example, do trees not cast shadows? When you place a leaf in darkness with the exact
dimensions of the leaf why does the leaf disappear from view while still being there?!
We know it is there because we can reach our hand into the darkness and touch it.

One thing seems fairly certain, at least to me. It is that negative facts can be as informative in “A Clean Well-Lighted Place” as positive ones. In this belief one thinks of how one arrives as negative numbers by using natural numbers to subtract from zero. A negative process is a deceleration of a positive one. In the case of “A Clean Well-Lighted Place,” the deceleration picks up maximum speed by subtracting away from zero to a Paternoster void of belief.

“FROM WHO’S OR WHOM’S WELL”?

From what source, or sources did Hemingway obtain negative facts? Facts that can easily create the style, and sometimes the substance, of what he describes to E. E Dorman-O’Gowan as “our well beloved nothing” (quoted above, SL 691)? Language, obviously, is one source. No language can function without negatives, “no,” “never,” etc. and near-negatives like “empty,” “insomnia” etc., and all the literature Hemingway had read and thought about makes heavy use of negation—especially Shakespeare and Turgenev (Reynolds 181, 194). But just as likely is the third source of history, “the age” and its personal effect on him; the wounds of war, head injuries, headaches, depression and the death of friends (SL 723). On 4 January 1951 he wrote to Mizener “Best luck for what looks like as bad a year as we have seen” (718); to Edmund Wilson he wrote “we live in a time of such violence, false witness, inaccuracy, calumnies and lies for profit I am going to spend the rest of my life trying to be just” (737) Writing to Mrs Paul Pfeifer (2 August 1937) he has this to say about “our generation” and recent history’s effect on creating his disbelief in the next life:
You have always led such a fine life, giving such a just proportion to this world and to the next one, that the ones of our generation who have to make our own decisions and mistakes must seem, rightly very often silly. I’ve temporarily I hope, lost all confidence in the next one. It seems to have no importance at all….It seemed as though the world were in such a bad way and certain things so necessary to do that to think about any personal future was simply very egoistic (SL 461)

But it can be argued that it was the horrors of the age, and the recognition of human fallibility (especially his own), that gave him great strength as a writer. Kafka’s assessment of his own time and its effect on his writing seem apropos here—especially the phrase, “absorbed the negative element of the age”:

I have brought nothing with me of what life requires, so far as I know, but only the universal human weakness. With this—in this respect it is [a] gigantic strength—I have vigorously absorbed the negative element of the age in which I live, an age that is, of course, very close to me, which I have no right ever to fight against, but as it were, a right to represent (qtd Medin).

Strength from nothingness? The idea seems bizarre. But if we think of nothingness as giving a writer “a right to represent” then we are not far from Hemingway's justification for taking war, death, the breakup of human relationships and the like as his major subjects.

NOTES
Hemingway tells us that the old man sits in “the shadow of the leaves of the tree made against the electric light” (CSS 288). This, with additional information about the street light that “shone on the brass number on his [soldier’s] collar” (288) makes the electric light, as the only light-source of the shadows, somewhat problematic. Perhaps both the “electric light” and the street light are sources? Adding to the ambiguity is the author telling us that the leaves make a shadow “against” the electric light. If so, then what we are seeing there, is not, strictly speaking, a shadow. It’s a silhouette of the leaves—in the fashion of the passages where the lion shows its “silhouette” in “The Short Happy Life Of Francis Macomber” (13, 14; on the difference between a shadow and a silhouette please see Sorenson 26-30).

I am indebted to professors Molly Hysell and Jan Bakker, very reluctant apostles of negative metaphysics, for their oppositional help with this note.

There is, admittedly, some irony in Hemingway’s statement that all symbolism is shit; however we want to interpret it. For symbols and analogies abound in his descriptions of writing, his own and others: “Writers are forged in injustice as a sword is forged” (GHA 71); “I try always to do the thing [achieve plain speech in writing] by three cushion shots rather than by words or direct statement” (SL 301).

Meyers sees an influence of Gongora, especially his poem, “Mientras por compatir con tu cabello,” on the nada passage that ends “A Clean Well-Lighted Place.” Both Hemingway and Gongora leave the reader with “…no tangible thing, but a palpable and overwhelming sensation of nothingness” (3).
In his biography of Hemingway, Meyers says that the theme of “In Another Country” is nada (198).

In the language of this essay, “a palpable...nothingness” is equivalent to negative facts in an inactive state. In order to “activate” them, make them into positive (“palpable) facts they have to be negated. This operation, negating a negation, is, in essence, the claim Hemingway makes when he says he writes on an hitherto unrepresented subject:

...everything has been written except those things nobody wrote about. So I write them” (SL 785).

You have to take what is not palpable and make it completely palpable and also have it seem normal and so that it can become a part of the experience of the person who reads it (SL 837).

As it’s a thing [bullfighting] that nobody knows about in English I’d like to take it first from altogether outside...then go all the way inside….It might be interesting to people because nobody knows anything about it. (SL 236)

In sum, to negate a negative fact is to make (activate) a positive fact—one that’s “palpable” and “normal” (cf. Sorenson 226-227; Horn 296-308 [“double negation”]).

WORKS CITED


Scribner's Sons, 1981.


Medin, Daniel. Review: Reiner Stach’s, Kafka. Die Jahre der Erkenntnis. TLS (April


A Thought Experiment
Does Hemingway, always or only occasionally, kneel at the altar of the void?

Witness of the prosecution; witness for the defence?

Most people (especially philosophers) are more interested in something than in nothing. To them, any question we can raise about nothing (nothingness) is unanswerable. Several reasons can be given for this. One, dating back to Aristotle, is that all arguments must start from existential premises: nothing can come from nothing. Another one, one made famous by Descartes, is that in order to explain any given phenomenon (any something) one must one demonstrate the capacity of what came before it to cause its being—or its destruction. If I know that I exist, then I also know that other things potentially exist. If I know that avalanches can act a certain way, then I also know that they have the capacity to destroy trees in their path. On this reading nothing lacks not only any reality but also any possibility of being something real, materially or psychologically.

If we re-direct our conversation from nothing to negation a different picture seems Anto emerge. It seems (at least for most people) that we can live comfortably without ever thinking of nothing, or one of its family members, “absence,” “empty,” etc. as something that should interest us. But with negation such comfort is harder to achieve. Without understanding some form of the negative (especially “not” or “never”) we would be unable to process information conveyed by the Ten Commandments (though shalt not kill, etc) or general prohibitions (“Do not walk on the grass”; “do not open until Christmas, etc) and without the ability to negate a proposition Parmenides would not have been able to issue his injunction against taking an interest in nothing. Negative thinking also seems to make certain kinds of computations easier (and faster?) than positive
thinking. Recall Tom Stoppard’s play on probability in his Rosencrantz and
Ruiildenstern Are Dead. He has the probability of heads coming up, from the coin
being tossed, not by counting the times heads does come up, but rather by the
times tails does not. The total absence of tails then gives the audience a
probability factor as to the fate of the two characters—one that they are unaware
of.

And what is the procedure of the caricaturist? By eliminating certain facial
characteristics from a portrait of the person, and exaggerating others, does he not
sometimes make it easier to recognize that person?

Writing to Sherwood Anderson, 23 May 1025, Hemingway, apologizing to
Anderson about his criticism of Anderson’s Many Marriages, says that “All criticism is
shit anyway. Nobody knows anything about it but yourself…professional critics make me
sick, camp following eunochs [sic] of literature” (SL162). Much later, 13 September
1952, writing to Bernard Berenson: “There isn’t any symbolism (in The Old Man and
The Sea) the sea is the sea. The old man is an old man. The boy is a boy and the fish
is a fish. The shark are all sharks no better and no worse. All the symbolism that
people say is shit” ” (SL 780). Then he goes on to say, in an enigmatic comment, that
“What goes beyond is what you see beyond when you know. A writer should know
too much.”” (SL 780).

Obviously, Hemingway was no fan of literary critics. The question is why.
Why was he so vehement in his rejection of commentary on his works? We might
minimally conclude from statements like these (and others) that Hemingway 1) disliked literary criticism and especially that of his own works; 2) that hunting for symbols in his work and others was just so much “shit”; and 3) that “a writer should know too much” which is seeing what goes on “beyond when you know” [what goes beyond]. Only writers, not readers and certainly not professional critics, can truly see what goes on “beyond” in a literary text.

So, we might ask. What is this “beyond?” And why does he characterize all criticism and symbol hunting as “shit?” So is there a way to avoid writing shit about Hemingway and seeing beyond what’s going on there? A reasonable answer to the second part of the question is no. Only Hemingway, and by extension all fiction writers, can see what’s going on “beyond” in their writing. There is, however, a glimmer of hope for the first part: the possible avoidance of shit when writing on Hemingway. This way, in short, is taking the way Susan Beegel opens up in her remark that

Nothingness: training for the expected? Coping with the unexpected?

Pele: Hawaiian goddess of fire and volcanoes: destroyer and creator.

What kind of function does nothing (“no thing”) have in discourse? What can we make it have? Can nothing ever replace something? Please consider these text-specimens of “nothing”:
1) Doing nothing is very hard to do…you never know when you’re finished.

Actor Leslie Nielsen

2) Why is there something and not nothing. Martin Heidegger.

3) When everything is left out, nothing remains, and like “A Clean Well-Lighted Place,” Hemingway’s archetypal story of ‘nada,’ much of his writing is ultimately about nothing. Susan Beegel.

What follows is a tentative exploration of the implications, for a literary critic, of #3; reading Hemingway’s “A Clean Well Lighted Place.” The whole is composed of a series of “thought experiments” on what a “nothing” reading of the Hemingway story would differ (if at all) from a positive, or “non-nothing,” one. Items #1 and #2 are here primarily to establish some syntactical and functional constraints on “nothing.” Our initial assumption is that there is a boundary between “nothing” and “something” in our consciousness which we use to prevent the meaning of either one to “leak” into the other. Without such a boundary there would be no way, in principle, to distinguish when “nothing” is “on” (active) or “off” (inactive) in the story.

REFERRING, IDENTIFYING, CHARACTERIZING

In all the above specimens, please note, we seem to be witnessing writers making “nothing,” with the aids of the copula “is” and an object, serve three functions: to refer, to identify and to characterize. The overall structure of each utterance is the expected (to an English speaker) subject:verb:object. Within it occur the acts of referring, identifying and characterizing. In 1) “Doing nothing” refers to and identifies the subject of the utterance. “You’re never…finished” characterizes the object. In 2)
ut rather as Something salient in both linguistic and (presumably) pre-linguistic consciousness. Obviously, the question can be answered in a number of ways. Sartre and Rochester, for example, use Something and Nothing, in combination, to compare and contrast one thing with another. The Nothing as Something for Heideger is a doorway to a puzzle about Being; for Swift Nothing is way of exposing the nonsense modern writers create. For an academic publishing an article, or book, on Nothing may lead to tenure and promotion.

In short, Nothing, like the Hawaiian goddess of volcanoes and fire (Pele) can be, depending on one’s purpose at a specific time, both a creator and a destroyer. One can employ it as an approach to a puzzle; one can use it to attack someone (or some thing). It can, as in Genesis, be the foundation of a cosmological story.

But what can Nothing be for a literary critic? Here, following hints from the Hemingway scholar, Susan Beegel, I would like to perform a what I like to think is a “thought experiment” with Nothing on Hemingway’s short story, “A Clean Well Lighted Place.” Is it Something to one person but Nothing to another? Is it a question that should not be asked? The question is prompted by, not only the vast literature on Nothingness and its family member Negation, but also Doing nothing (“no-thing”) is hard, it seems fair to say, because one is never sure when he or she is finished. Processing negative information, “the seems harder , as many philosophers (Heidegger, Sartre, Aristotle and others), poets and writers (Rochester, Swift, Shakespeare) have been Doing nothing, it seems fair to say, is hard because you never know when you’re finished. This seems to describe the trap Heideger It’s not surprising that persons interested in language and its relationship to thinking (and place in our consciousness) have long been interested in
nothingness. Nothingness, as negation (or more generally privation) permeates language with terms like “not,” “never,” “absence,” etc. For the name of every object that engages our senses, especially seeing and hearing, there is seemingly a term for the lack of a sense impression: blindness and deafness, for example, for seeing and hearing. More cognitive concepts, “full,” “happy” or “present” have corresponding negative terms, “empty,” “unhappy” and “absent.” Without a sense of nothingness there would be no logic (especially Aristotelian logic); John Wilmot (Lord Rochester) couldn’t have written his poem “Upon Nothing” (1680); nor could the modern school of “negative metaphysics” have come into being without belief in negative facts (Russell, Armstrong, Sorenson, etc.)— nor a treatise, like that of Seife, on the zero.

ADDENDA

Dante’s shadow; Purgatorio II, 74-77.; Plato’s cave. See Sorenson, Seeing Dark Things, p. 115

"rionnach maoin " Gaelic WORD for "the shadows cast on the moor by cumulus clouds" "Economist p. 80 May 26, 2012.

Corialanus: "such a nature, tickled with good success, disdains the shadow which he treads on at noon. "no shadow at noon; dominates a dimished shadow; cf. Donne First Anniversary 1, 145, and lecture upon the shadow;

"ADUMBRATE" to shade in Latin; use of darkness imaking a point w/ songs Music of the night n Phantom of the Opera; presented 4 mar Kued.
"The Christian communities created what any thrusting institution needs—the sense of a future on earth touched by the shadow of eternity." Peter Brown, "A Tale of Two Bishops and a Brilliant Saint" pp. 29-32; Diane Johnson, "The Storyteller and the Kid," modern writers writing in "the shade." "the shadow of Hemingway" p. 38; both articles in March 8, 2012, NY Rev Bks,

HOLLYWOOD AS "THE capital city of shadows, and it is shadows that rule the world....just as the shadows take up no space, so the people in this have no time. Even truth...is a shadow. The laws of truth are proclaimed from the capital of shadows."

Navy Seal describes proper application of camouflage: "When painting the skin, it's important to appear the opposite of how a human being looks. Make the dark becomes light and the light become dark. That means making sure the parts of the face that form shadows (where the eyes sink in, etc.) become light green and the features that shine (forehead, cheeks, nose, brow and chin) become dark green." NY Times, May 9, 2011, p.C4 (my emphasis)

Shane Weller: A Taste for the Negative. London: Legenda, 2005; PR 6003 F282 Z883:

Change Title: “A Sense Of The Negative: Hemingway’s Worship of the Void.

Change title again: “H Modes of Presentation: Failure of presentation becomes a mode of presentation” Weller p. 77; paradox: absolute inadequency adaquent for a presentation 7 8; distinction bet freedom and nature; role of the “I” spectator or actor, pl 79

Plug in Moderism: see A Taste of the Negative: (Shane Weller)p.7
“No symbols where none entended” Beckett Addenda to Watt 95; Negating Thought: 95;
Failure to negate body and mind 96; absolute value decides negating; location of value
death and silence, 96;

Value of shadows vs value of casting body

‘Death promises to produce value by negating the embodiment of its absence” 101;
liberation from the female body; narration art of masculine dying; “endless dying” equals
the impossibility of a possibility (die Möglichkeit der schlechthinnigen Unmöglichkeit);
not just one possibility but that possibility which is one’s ownmost”

Harry in Snows: not alive enough to die; key terms, identity, difference, resemblance
103; “production” of value, identity, etc.

SAMUEL GUTTENPLAN: objects of Metaphor.

***

____________________

STORYTELLING:

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN EXISTENTS AND
NON-EXISTENTS

Some Unfinished Thought Runs

Thought-runs. One step forward, one back, one to the side, slightly askew.
Nothing certain, nothing finished. Mini thought-experiments on a common topic. An
I invite the reader to "piece out our imperfections with your thoughts" (Prologue, Henry V).¹

I invite the reader to imagine h/h-self playing a game similar to what one plays with Lego Bricks. Thought-runs can be assembled and connected in many ways, to construct such objects as vehicles, buildings, and even working robots. Anything constructed can then be taken apart again, and the pieces used to make other objects. For better access to topics here, going back and forth through the text, all thoughts-runs are numbered.

All thought-runs, please note, derive their meanings from the three principal uses of the verb "to be" ("is/are/was"): namely, to represent the subject (or topic) as existing, (existence), in s specific location (space) and duration (time) (please see Kahn)

Many of the following runs are reactions to previous statements about storytelling, literary theories and aspects of language.

1. In a recent article in The New Yorker James Wood claims that "A struggle is often going on in a novel, between present and past, instance and form, free will and determinism, secular expansion and religious contraction."¹ I would like to add to this some thought runs what can be called the struggle in storytelling (in all forms of fiction) between what exists and what does not (later to be discussed, in part, as positive and negative facts). This approach has a family resemblance to Wood's contrast between "instances" (day by day secular events, sleeping, eating, paying taxes and so on) and "form" (or revelation, intuition, the transcendent, etc.) In my
representation positive facts loosely correspond to Wood's instances and non-existents (negative facts) of form.

I start with the claim, which I hope is not too obvious, that all storytellers possess mental representations. They are basic to storytelling, not to be explained in terms of anything else. The emphasis then is not so much as the semantics of language, but on what is going on in the mind. Storytellers "think of something, the existent." But they also "think of that which is thought to exist but often does not, the non-existent."

I suggest we add to our file of beliefs one in the non-existent, or that which is thought to exist but often does not. We not only find what exists interesting we also find what does not just as interesting. Both are usually necessary in creating a character for a story or recording a story. As an example consider the cases of Sherlock Holmes versus that of Vladimir Putin of Russia (2014---). Holmes is a created character. Putin is a recorded, and recordable, one. He has objectivity and extra-mentality. Holmes, I think you will agree, does not exist, he has no actual location in time or space. He is not
objective. He is in some way only in the mind. He cannot be seen in the flesh, photographed or be touched. Putin, like the Empire State Building, is a specific existent. He acts, if you will, as an anchor and beacon for our thoughts. We can think about him under different guises and still be thinking about him and not some one else, such as Barack Obama.

Yet we can think of Holmes as possessing certain qualities: such as
* Male
* Middle age
* Detective
* Friend (to Watson)
* Intelligent
* Younger brother to Mycroft (seven years older).
* Famous
* Etc.

I have neither the space or will establish the definitive differences between what exist and what do not: between Putin and Holmes. But a partial account might include the following by how what seem to be common qualities that converge and diverge (or how they are similar and how they are dissimilar):

Convergence:

* Both Putin and Holmes are mental representations. We can think about them.

* We can think what Putin and Holmes have done, or are going to do, without them actually have. We may misjudge them.
We can predicate certain qualities of each. Each is a male, of a certain age, is famous, one is single, one is married and so on.

Divergence:

We cannot refer to Putin and Holmes in the same way with the same language. We cannot say "Putin and Holmes exist" that both have objectivity, or "extra-mental reality" in space and time. We can only say that of Putin.

Only Putin a recorded and recordable history; recorded kindred, and so on.

There is something truthful, or common-sensible, about the qualities and actors of Putin that allows us not to question his existence. Ourselves, others and Putin share common constraints. We cannot accurately predict what will happen on 17 September 2015; we can't sail off to the moon on our own.

My chief concern here, after a few thought-runs on negation and negative facts, is with non-existent characters and how they converge and diverge from existing ones. In order to do that I have to employ a concept of non-existence somewhat different what I have sketched out above—the standard one in analytic philosophy and semantics. I will keep the notion that existence and non-existence are mental representations of storytellers. But I will say that existence and non-existence come, not as binary constructs, but as triadic, ones capable of converging on and diverging from each other.
Existence. This is the existence (enjoyed?) by Putin, myself and those unfortunate few now reading this. The storyteller and h/h reader.


Only possible some unknown time in the future: say the complete disappearance of all videos, movies, texts, memory of Holmes and Putin.

The convergence and/or divergence of Existence and Non-Existence.

I said above, following Kahn, that "is/is not" (or any form, verbal or nominal of "to be/bit to be") presupposes three properties of existence, existence and non-existence themselves location non-location (not findable) and duration/atemporal.

I say that there is fictional existence and fictional I will claim that storytelling (or fiction in general) contains characters that exhibit different degrees (or levels) of non-existence.

For here on out things become more problematic to certain readers. My hope, however, is that they provide a few beachheads, however shallow and narrow, for further exploration into the interior of this vast continent.

1b: How is it possible for both negative and positive facts to be in the same place? To appear in the same clause, sentence, text? Isn't that a contradiction? As an answer to these questions I invite the reader to consider Kant in his discussion of the nature of time: "Time is not a concept, since otherwise it would merely conform to formal logical analysis (and therefore, to the principle of non-contradiction). However, time makes it possible to deviate from the principle of non-contradiction:
indeed, it is possible to say that A and non-A are in the same spatial location if one
considers them in dif
erent times, and a sufficient alteration between states were to occur" (Critique of
Pure Reason; A32/B48).

As an example of how negative and positive facts can occur in the same place
please consider the Hindu (Sanskrit) expression: "Tat Twam Asi" (You Are That). The
expression serves as a starting point, in the Advaita school, for discussing the nature of
the Self ("Atman"). In a different school, the Vishishtadvaita, it appears as a negative
fact: “Sa atmaa-tat tvam asi” or “Atman, thou art not that." The times of their
appearances (as positive and then negative facts) are different (see the Upanisads 6.8.7).

1c: "Negate something and observe what you are doing. Do you perhaps
inwardly shake your head? And if you do, is this process more deserving of our
interest than, say, that of writing a sign of negation in a sentence? Do you now know
the essence of negation?"

"Negation, one might say, is a gesture of exclusion, of rejection. But such a
gesture is used in a great va ri ety of ways!" (Wittgenstein #547-550 Philosophical
Investigations)

1d. Non fui, fui, non sum, non curo (I was not; I was; I am not; I do not care). An
expression attributed to the Greek philosopher Epicurus. Please notice the triple
negatives.
2. Other facts: These are facts produced (generated) by combing positive and negative facts. They represent, in Peirce’s terminology, a process called "thirdness" (see #9, 22, 24 below). The effect is essentially to transform the nature of both positive and negative facts, often into something both strange and wonderful. The analogy here can be to a family made up of father, mother, child—where the child represents the new, or later, third thing. These claims presuppose, of course, that one thing, separated from two other things, cannot produce a third thing of a certain quality. Aristotle expresses this idea by saying that "a being who is "self-sufficient is no part of a city, and so is either a beast or a god, not a man" (Politics, 1253a27). Being apart from citizens of a state the self-sufficient person cannot be creative in h/h-self or the source of creativity in others. H/s neither adds anything to the life of the city by his presence nor takes anything away by h/h absence.

2a. Hemingway's story, *Hills like White Elephants* generates its novelty with a thirdness made up of Jig, the American the unborn child.

3. Most persons, I suspect, would agree that positive facts exist. But the case is different with negative facts. Do they, in reality, *exist as facts*? Is there any evidence that they do? Or they simply linguistic forms, "no," "nothing," "loss" and the like that have no referent (unlike positive facts) in extra-linguistic reality?

4 Before going on to present the case for negative facts let me say a word or two about the etymology and uses of "fact" and how this plays into what I will say later in this essay. The word originates, of course, in the Latin "facere" "to do, to act, to make" (infinitive form) and "factum" (past participle) "acted, done, made." I take this to give me warrant to say that "fact" presupposes, in an arrow-of-time fashion, a
"before" and an "after. Before something has been "done or made" it was in the process of "doing, making and acting." This suggests, at least to me, that a fact can be seen as the effect of some prior cause, condition or solution to a problem. In this context the problem is essentially that of fictive representation. How can I make the facts of this text (plays, stories, novels, poems) salient? What facts should be included and what facts excluded? How can I make, in Conrad's words the reader "hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see that—and no more, and it is everything" (Preface).

5. Should we then say that a fact, at the "factum" stage, has the feel of embodying a nascent past and fixed and present reality? Facts, negative and positive, are what they are now because of what they were in the past. They have a history. But this does not mean that that history will continue in the future. Clearly, what is factual today may not be tomorrow. Slavery of black Africans is no longer a fact in the USA. But slavery was once a positive, but never a negative, fact. Only positive facts change or disappear. Negative facts never change or disappear. Like the presuppositions of a sentence, what makes sentence true, negative facts are "stable" under questions and negation (please see Wikipedia entry under "presupposition").

6. If negative and positive facts show the effects of some prior cause, condition or problem, then we can also speculate that they both cause and condition, in themselves, other things to be done or made. "I am," Falstaff says, "both witty in myself and a cause of wit in others."
In sum: the way we view time underlies what we mean by "fact." What we sense around us now (apart from hallucinating them) are facts insofar as they are sensed by others. Our children, as well as other living kin, are then a fact. But the unborn, those born after our own personal death, are non-facts, outside of time. But they can become the subject of what philosophers call a "counterfactual thought experiment," of "what if...? What if mankind perishes in the next decade (or sooner) because of global warming or some deadly pandemic? What would happen to our values, disvalues and traditions?

7. Two claims that have been made about negative facts are that they exist and that they are more "exhaustive" than positive facts—that is, they are more powerful, and more untamed, than positive facts:

Knowing how things are not gives you knowledge of exhaustiveness.

If there is any reduction to be achieved, it runs from positive facts to negative facts. For instance, one reductive strategy is to exploit a kind of double negation, to say that the cat is on the mat is to say that there is no negative fact of the cat not being on the mat (227).

Sorenson prefaces the above by referring to Bertrand Russell’s labors to "paraphrase negative true facts as being indirectly about positive facts. But eventually he gave up and admitted that there are negative facts" (226-227). Russell had originally thought, if negative facts could be eliminated, that the world could be described solely using positive facts. But, years later at Harvard University, he
forced himself to confess that such an elimination could not be done. The admission nearly caused a riot.

8 The reader will perhaps agree with me, especially if s/h is a writing teacher, that one of the main problems with negative facts is their abundance. One is pulled in two different ways. One feels obliged to gather and take into account all relevant materials and perspectives on negative facts. But we are also obliged to render the mass of material into a coherent object of thought and judgment—especially is we are writers and teachers of writing.

9. Once we establish the fact that negative facts exist, or, at a minimum assume that they exist, samples of how they appear in texts, how do we go on to demonstrate their uses in writing and reading? When, where and how do we use them in our own storytelling? I suspect that there is no one method that would work in all cases. Nor, in some cases, one that would work for any student or writing teacher. But there is a procedural theory, C. S. Peirce’s Theory of Signs (or semantics), to which I invite the reader to give serious thought. Peirce, arguably one of the greatest thinkers in American letters, claimed that "it has never been in my power to study anything, mathematics, ethics, metaphysics, gravitation, thermodynamics, optics, chemistry, comparative anatomy, astronomy, psychology, phonetics, economics, the history of science, whist, men and women, wine metrology, except as a study of semiotic" (Semiotics and Significs 85-86).
10. But, before going on to that I would like to bring into the picture a few more perspectives on, and questions about, negative facts—and their interactions with positive facts—all toward the end of being creative.

Do negative facts exist? If so, how, and for what purpose, do they exist?

Perhaps Laurence Horn gives the most authoritative, certainly the most comprehensive, account of linguistic negation and arguments against the existence of negative facts. After spending 34 (45-79) pages describing how various groups of thinkers, for example, Parmenides, Plato, Strawson, and Katz, have struggled to eliminate negative facts, Horn grudgingly admits that it cannot be done. Like gravity, taxes or the magnetic field of the earth, they are part of our linguistic descriptions of the world. Horn observes, in passing, that God Himself, in six of the Ten Commandments ("thou shall not...") seems to believe in negative facts.

Horn's summary of failed attempts to eliminate negation and negative facts goes, in part:

We have seen negation survive enough attempts at liquidation—negation as positive difference, negation as incompatibility, negation as dissimilarity, negation as true disbelief, negation as the affirmation of a negative predicate, negation as falsity—to qualify as the Rasputin of the propositional calculus (59).

We can add to this Sigwart's and Gale's statements about the difference between the affirmative predication of a subject and negative predication:
*Only a finite number of predicates can be affirmed of every subject, while an incalculable number can be denied (Sigwart 119; emph mine).

*Every positive fact or event seems to carry on its back an infinite number

of negative fleas (Gale 2; emph mine).

11. For an elegant argument for the existence of negative facts and their relationship with positive facts, one should also consult Bjornssan's "If You Believe in Positive Facts, You Should Believe in Negative Facts." Bjornssan's basic claim is that negative facts, along with positive facts, are the "internal" constituents of all objects and their properties. Negative facts "occur no additional cost" in giving an account of objects of and their properties. Moreover, by acknowledging the existence of negative facts, one does not need any "third thing" (which might lead to an infinite regress) to identify how objects stand to "natural or expected properties."

It is important to note here that later on in a discussion of character and h/h textual context that negative facts have "causal efficacy." The lack of certain expected properties, in short, causes things to happen in storytelling: "We think that people die from lack of oxygen, that they have accidents caused by inattention, and that they fail an exam for lack of sleep (Bjornssan 18; emph mine).

12. What motivates a storyteller? Is it, as Horace observes, a combination of giving instruction (utile) and pleasure (dulce) to the reader or listener? Or is there, from the writer/speaker's perspective, a monetary motive or desire for fame? In all this, it seems fair to say, there is the need to avoid failure. But with the proliferation
of creative writing course, and the subsequent increase in submissions for
publication, since World War II, there are far more failures than successes. *The
Sewanee Review*, for example, publishes, on the average, two out of every 234
submissions. With other publications the submission to publishing rate is even
disparate (McGurl 33-37).

If you believe in storytelling, then you believe in negative facts. They are as
much, sometimes more, the stuff of stories as positive facts. One purpose here is to
suggest ways negative and positive facts must interact in telling a story that not only
makes sense, but makes a story *interesting*. Taking "lost" as a negative fact we find a
prominent literary critic writing:

Getting *lost* appears to be a major theme in European Literature. From
Odysseus' long *detour* home, to Dante's midlife *crisis* in the *selva oscura*,
to the *abandoned* children of the Brothers Grimm, it
would seem that the *straight way* is rarely the best way to *make an
interesting story.*" (Benfey 40.

13. Are representations of things missing, or absences, sometimes (most of the
time?) more interesting than things present? For an image of an absence, see Georges
Léoncne's picture of a family looking at a nail where the Mona Lisa had hung in the
Louvre. A museum guard gestures at the nail. Recall that the Mona Lisa went missing,
for two years, in 1911. One can view the picture at:
https://www.google.com/search?q=Georges%20L%C3%A9onnec&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-
In the foreword to his book Gekoski tells the story of Kafka and Max Brod’s visit to the Louvre in 1911. The pair traveled from Milan to Paris and had joined a crowd squeezed in a room containing the Mona Lisa. With great effort they pushed their way to where the painting had hung. They had not come to see the painting. They had come to see its absence. The painting had been stolen a week earlier.

"There is, after all, something wearying predictable and banal, about knowing things" Gekoski says (13)—I would add being in the presence of something for a certain amount of time.
On the subject of Kafka and negative facts please consider a characterization of himself as a writer of the "negative element of his age":

I have brought nothing with me of what life requires, so far as I know, but only the universal human weakness. With this in this respect it is [a gigantic strength] I have vigorously absorbed the negative element of the age in which I live, an age that is, of course, very close to me, which I have no right ever to fight against, but as it were, a right to represent

(Rev. Reiner Stach's Kafka's Die Jahre die Jahr der Erkenntnis TLS, April 24, 2009: 7)

14. If trained in a certain way, one might see this essay as (perhaps loosely) belonging to a class of studies Aristotle calls "the need to know," Brandom "making things explicit" and C. S. Pierce "How to make our thoughts clear." Each of these thinkers attempts to answer the question, "why is a human need to make things more explicit and more clear and how do they go about meeting this need?" Here my question, one seeking a more modest answer, is why do we need negative facts in order to create stories, especially interesting ones? Why not just rely on positive facts? A quick, and incomplete, answer is that without negative facts there would be no drama, novelty, mystery or closure in our stories.

It seems fair to say then no story, or even the possibility of one, can composed entirely of positive facts. But with characters like God (Milton's Paradise Lost) or Swift's Houyhnhnms there seems to be hints at what a perfectly positive character might look
like. But even this is questionable. How do Milton and Swift describe these characters? By using negative facts of course—by what properties they lack as much as by what they have.

Paradoxes are examples of these effects. Here are a few as Zen Koans:

1. Shuzan held out his short staff and said: 'If you call this a short staff, you oppose its reality. If you do not call it a short staff, you ignore the fact. Now what do you wish to call this”?

Commentary by a Zen Master:

Holding out the short staff/He gave an order of life or death

*Positive and negative interwoven.*

2. Joshu asked the teacher Nansen. 'What is the true way? Nansen answered, 'Everyday way is the true way.' Joshu asked, 'Can I study it'? Nansen said, 'The more you study the further from the Way.' Joshu replied, 'If I don't study it, how can I know it'? Nansen answered, 'The Way does not belong to things seen nor to things unseen. It does not belong to things known, nor to things unknown. Do not seek it, study, or name it. To find yourself on it, open yourself wide as the sky.

3. A surefire cure for the hiccups: 'Run around the house three times without thinking of the word 'wolf.' " (Hofstadter 252-254).

15. Counterfactual Thought-Experiment: In an attempt to understand the significance of something philosophers often engage in a counterfactual thought-experiment. With this one imagines the absence of the something: what if, for
example, computers had been invented and used? What would have changed? Or, take the thought experiment of Samuel Scheffler, he imagines the annihilation of the human race after our own personal death (*Death and the Afterlife*). How would this affect our behavior, thinking, emotions?

16. There is, as far as I know, no way to define, or strictly classify, negative facts. But there is perhaps, a way to exemplify them—in such a way as to make them useful. Let me suggest we seriously consider Wittgenstein’s "family-resemblance" (*Familienähnlichkeit*) account of words. Instead of generalizing about alleged foundational units of words, he claims that ‘family resemblance’ is a more suitable analogy for the means of connecting particular uses of the same word. There is no reason to look, as we have done traditionally—and dogmatically—for one, essential core in which the meaning of a word is located and which is, therefore, common to all uses of that word. We should, instead, travel with the word's uses through “a complicated network of similarities, overlapping and criss-crossing” (*Philosophical Investigations* #66). Family resemblance also serves to exhibit the lack of boundaries and the distance from exactness that that all words exhibit.

With this we have warrant to say that words that presuppose things not seen or heard, things that lack some natural or expected property, give us information about negative facts. Sartre phrases this in terms of our expectations: "It is evident that non-being always appears within the limits of a human expectation" (7).

Common words here include "lost" (unable to find one’s way), "failure" (lack of success), "forget" (un-remembering), "absence" (out of sight and hearing), "lying" (absence of truth). In addition to these nominal forms ("nothingness" and "nothing"
Negative forming affixes like "un-," "-less" and "dis-" are capable of transforming a positive fact into a negative one.

17. Negative information as punctuation: Examples here include ..., ***, —, white spaces (in a text), a blank page, as in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Ellipses occur often in Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub* and *Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*. *Ellipsis* is the name of a literary magazine published by Westminster College, Salt Lake City, Utah. A particularly interest example of *** is the F*** word. In the August 30, 2013 edition of the *TLS* (p. 28) there is a longish discussion of the publication history of the word. Here we are referred, among other things, to Rufus Lodge’s study, *F**k: An irreverent history of the F-word* (The Friday Project).

Is, then, our expectation of what should and can be there, but is missing, a suitable working definition of negative information. Perhaps.

18. Alan Turing: Turing is commemorated in Manchester’s Sackville Gardens, UK, as "father of Computer Science, Mathematician, Logician, Wartime Code-breaker, Victim of Prejudice." Turing’s *negative theorem*—that some functions are uncomputable—entails that certain behaviors would be scientifically inexplicable if they were ever to occur. Some behaviors would be inexplicable, not because they would be absolutely impossible, but because they would take more time than our 14 billion-year-old universe can accommodate (Please see Leslie Valiant, *Probably Approximately Correct: Nature’s algorithms for learning and prospering in a complex world* (UK: Basic Books 2013).
Is this the case with the struggle in storytelling and fiction between negative and positive facts? To view this more clearly one has to think of "struggle" as an inexplicable behavior.

19. It seems prudent to remind the reader that stories are literary artifacts. Telling, writing or listening to a story is a phenomenon of processing linguistic data within an interpretative framework. Thus, it is worthwhile to examine how stories create points of emphasis and importance through precise patterns in their grammatical structure. Here the interpretative framework is the "entanglement" of negative and positive facts as they are expressed in language. This presupposes that "negative" and "positive" can be taken simply as words that create meaning by forming relationships and patterns with other words—but do not necessarily refer to extra-textual items, events, things, whatever.

I will, therefore, have nothing to say here about the age-old controversy of the supposed relationship between "verba" (words) and "res" (things) (See Howell: 238-245). Are there both negative and positive facts in nature? Only positive facts? Is nature, or any of its properties, a fact? Or perhaps a "condition": "In the world of nature, there are no negative conditions, but only positive conditions. The only way whereby one can not be in one place is for one to be at some other place" (Burke 295).

20. Dark energy: Since we are concerned here with the transactions between positive and negative facts in storytelling is there anything (in heaven or on earth) that might serve us as a controlling analogy for such transactions? Let us pause for a
moment and consider what physicists call "dark energy." Statements by the Nobel Laureate in physics, Steven Weinberg, give us some hints (86-87). In summary form, A as B, these statements go:

1. Take a story as cosmologists used to take the "speed" of the universe and as they take it now. "It had been naturally supposed that the expansion of the universe was slowing down, due to the gravitational attraction of the galaxies for each other, just as a stone thrown upward slows its rise under the influence of the earth’s gravity... in 1998 two astronomers showed that the universe is not slowing down at all but speeding up."

2. The cause of the speeding up of the universe is dark energy. It is producing "a sort of antigravity pushing the galaxies apart."

3. Is this something like what negative facts do to positive facts in a story? If this analogy holds, then what story name should we give to this "pushing apart" and the "war" between gravity and antigravity?

If any given story can be said to contain both gravitational (positive) and antigravitational (negative) forces, then it seems fair to ask "what is happening in the space between them"? As one possible answer to that let me turn this discussion over to my lord the second Earl of Rochester (John Wilmot) and the poem "Upon Nothing" (1689). I quote here only portions of it:

Nothing! thou Elder Brother ev'n to Shade,
That hadst a Being ere the World was made,
And (well fixt) art alone, of Ending not afraid.

Great Negative! how vainly would the Wise
Enquire, define, distinguish, teach, devise,
Didst thou not stand to point their dull philosophies?

Is, or is not, the Two great Ends of Fate,
And, true or false, the Subject of Debate,
That perfect or destroy the vast Designs of Fate;

When they have rack'd the Politician's Breast,
Within thy Bosom most securely rest,
And, when reduced to thee, are least unsafe and best?

Three salient issues emerge here from the space between the negative and the positive. One, of course, is linear time. Nothing precedes something—the story of *Genesis* comes to mind. A second one is the negative as the telling of lies, especially by politicians. The third one is the linguistic, and epistemological, dualism of "is" and "is not." This last has perhaps the most comprehensive reach in human affairs. What is the truth, what not? What to do next, what not—in short, Hamlet's dilemma.

21. No doubt the reader possesses a lot of knowledge about how lying can propel a story. Or how the absence of lies, at certain times and places, can cause a story to go flat. I think particularly of TV series, for example, "House of Cards" and
"Breaking Bad" and characters like Iago, Machiavelli's prince, the lying informants of Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came."

Here is John Cheever's take on the matter of lying and its role in storytelling:

As for lying, it seems to me that falsehood is a critical element in fiction. Part of the thrill of being told a story is the chance of being hoodwinked or taken. Nabokov is a master at this. The telling of lies is a sort of sleight of hand that displays our deepest feelings about life. John Cheever.


22. Now let me turn to Peirce and his Theory of Signs and how it would treat negative facts, not just to create a story, but an interesting one. The word "interest" comes, of course, from the convergence of the Latin "inter" ("between") and "to be" ("esse"): "It is between us," "between you, me and the fence post," and so on. The infrastructure of the word is then (if we want to use some mathematical terminological) minimally composed of two constants and one variable, namely, whatever is between (at least) two constant extremes—in the case of storytelling the storyteller:story:audience.

Peirce's Theory of Signs has three parts. One Peircean scholar, Albert Alkin, calls these parts, respectively, "the sign vehicle," "the object," and "the interpretant." ("Interpretant" is a coinage of Peirce). What follows is what might be called a
"translation" of these parts into the realm of negative facts. My hope is that it will, at least, whet the appetite of readers—especially creative writing teachers—to learn more about how they might use the Theory in their pedagogy. To that end I list at the end of this essay sources they can consult.

THE SIGN-VEHICLE

Negative biased words, "lost," "blind," "lying," "absence" and the like do not signify an object in all its aspects—only those that allow an interpretation of the object to take place. 'Blind,' for example, does not tell us everything about eyes, (their color, shape, and so on) but only that they lack sight, a property they would have naturally.

Similarly with "absence." Say I expect to meet you for coffee at the Straw Ibis at 10:00 A. M. today. I arrive and you are not there. Your absence negates my expectation of your presence.

THE OBJECT

The sign-vehicle is the negative-biassed word and its object is anything that is "lost," "blind," or "absent." The object "determines" the word. That is, it imposes certain 'constraints' on what the word can signify in order to represent the object.

Again, a word like "blind" cannot represent everything about
the object. But it must represent some "characteristic" of the object that renders it intelligible, capable of an interpretation.

THE INTERPRETANT

The object "determines" the interpretant by focusing our understanding on certain features of the relationship between the word and its object.

"Smoke," for example, determines our knowledge of fire, its object. If one does not interpret the presence of smoke as a sign of fire, then obviously h/s cannot come to an understanding of their relationship.

The constraint that negative biased words, "blind," "lost," "absent" and so forth cannot signify "all" features of its object, means that the un-signified features are positive facts about the object. "Blind" can only signify that something that would naturally occur in eyes is missing. The size, shape, color of eyes ("large," "round," "brown"), for example, signify properties we expect to find in eyes. As positive-biased words, they signify positive facts about the object (please see Aristotle on "privation," [steresis]. Metaphysics 8:9).

23. An issue some readers might want to engage in (one anticipated in Aristotle's account of privation) is the possible existence of a negative fact as the end, or annihilation, of all positive facts. Sorenson's representation (above) of negation as being "exhaustive" of positive information is one example. But what
about all the positive facts about the universe vanishing? Should we then call this state a negative fact? Certainly scientists tell us that the end of the universe has a high probability of happening:

Near the end of 'The Tempest..'Prospero breaks his staff and declares, 'Our revels now are ended. These our actors, as I foretold you, were all spirits and are melted into air, into thin air.' The latest word from physics is that something like that ending may be in store for the universe. In this case, the role of Prospero is played by the Higgs field, an invisible ocean of energy that permeates space (Overbye D1, D3).

This "not all" constraint will be an important part of what I have to say later about the creative power of negative facts in storytelling. Added to this is the stress Peirce’s theory puts on causation, how negative biased words, their object and interpretation exist in a web of cause and effect.

24. Just as the "not all" constraint applies to negative facts and their object, so does the constraint apply to what’s going on here. There are not enough thought-runs in heaven or on earth to explain completely how negative facts figure in storytelling. But as Pushkin observes about loving women, "you can love them all, but at least you must try."

So let us try, following the three-part scheme of Peirce, to identify how negative facts go toward creating character, plot, and endings in stories. (Other uses of negative facts, ones that commonly appear in storytelling, are the subject of a larger study).
"Character," as we all perhaps know, comes from the Greek character ("engraved"; "marked") through the Latin "an engraving instrument." The OED lists 17 different varieties, and projections, of this "engraved" core meaning. Most literary scholars, as we might expect, commonly use this meaning of the word as a starting point for their answer to "what is character?" (For example, Burke; Livingston; McGovern; see also Wikipedia and The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entries under "Character").

None, however, focuses on negative facts as part of the distinguishing marks of a character. (Indeed it seems fair to say most critics would answer, if asked, that such facts do not exist.). In the process of creating stories, as I hope from what has gone before here demonstrates, positive and negative facts, cooperate with each other. If you use positive facts to tell your stories, then you must also use negative ones. If a character composed completely of negative could exist (it cannot), then the very possibility of telling a story could not exist.

Now please recall that negative facts have causation efficacy. Because of what they are, they cause other things to happen—because we are deaf, we cannot hear; because we cannot hear, we have a different relationship with the un-deaf. In the Peircean theory of signs, this appears as a two-way cause and effect between the negative biased-word, the object, and our interpretation of the object, specifically, the storyteller's motive with it.

Peirce, a professed Aristotelian, borrows heavily from the philosopher's account of "privation" (steresis). The "not all" constraint (discussed above) of signs is an obvious borrowing. A road sign cannot "tell" the traveler everything about the
road. Smoke cannot represent everything about the fire. In Aristotle, this "not all" takes the form of change in a object. Objects change their properties because of their potentiality, the capacity to become something different. Whatever is alive has the potential to die. One may exhibit signs of dying, but the signs, in themselves, cannot tell us all the causes for dying.

Peirce does not relate an object's potentiality to character. But I would argue that it is a vital part of creating a character. And it would add that negative facts are a crucial kind of potentiality.

25. The presence of an absence. Most Hemingway scholars say that the dialogue between Jig and the American ("Hills Like White Elephants") concerns Jig's unborn child. In the story, we remember, the unborn child is an "it." It lacks a name, a specific gender, weight and so on. Yet it plays an important role in the role. It become, in Peircean terms, a "sign" of the relationship between the American and Jig. Hemingway has, in effect, imbued the child with a stronger causal efficacy than either one of the two other characters.

Homer tells us that Odysseus is absent from Ithaca for almost 20 years. Does this make a difference in what is present at Ithaca? Of course. Suitors gather around Penelope. She weaves and unwraps a "web." Argos, Odysseus' hunting dog, abandoned, is misused and mistreated. Can we then say that Odysseus' absence causes things to happen that would not have happened had he stayed at home? Had he been present? Certainly Odysseus' presence at Ithaca could have caused things to happen there. But they would have been different from what happened during his absence.
Absence and presence then cause different things to happen and for them to take a textual representation. But why does Homer seem to put more weight on Odysseus' absence than his presence in Ithaca? I suggest it opens up a space of what can be called in-betweeness, the space occupied by Odysseus' journey (and the events therein) between Ithaca and the Trojan war. Please think of what happens in this "space." There is not only the journey (and its dangers) home, but also the encounters, among others, with Circe, the Lotus Eaters, Aeolus and the Cyclops.

26. Dark Energy: According to the Nobel Laureate in physics, Steven Weinberg, dark energy comprises "three-quarters of the total energy in the universe."

27. Implication. A sentence can say (sometimes more) by what it implies as what it boldly states.

28. Aristotle, according to Ross, suggests that "negation is not the rejection of a previous affirmation, negation is the rejection (and affirmation the acceptance) of a suggested connection" (see Metaphysics 1017: 3a). On this reading we might want to say that Homer intends for the reader to see Odysseus' long absence as the break between his private (Ithaca) and public (Troy) life—as a family man and as a warrior. Unlike any other character in the story, Odysseus lives in, and journeys between, two different realms of existence. What if Odysseus had not gone off to Troy?

29. Kafka's "Metamorphosis," recall, Gregor Samsa develops as a character by having (certain normal human properties) to lacking them, into a state of double
negation, a "nothing, nothing" ("ungeheures Ungeziefer"), and finally death and silence.

Here negative conditions destroy a positive outcome. Does this mean that every paradox involve negation? Of course. But paradoxes must also bring negation into contact with positive conditions. There must be a transaction between them. The transaction is recursive. Recursive lies, in this case, in the capacity of language to destroy, or at least "abuse," itself (cf. Wittgenstein "philosophy is a battle against the

30. ...irony [is] the infinite absolute negativity. It is negativity, because it only negates; it is infinite, because it does not negate this or that phenomenon; it is absolute, because that by virtue of which it negates is a higher something that still is not. The irony established nothing, because that which is to be established lies behind it.... Irony is a qualification of subjectivity. In irony, the subject is negatively free, since the actuality that is supposed to give the subject content is not there. He is free from the constraint in which the given actuality holds the subject, but he is negatively free and as such is suspended, because there is nothing that holds him. But this very freedom, this suspension, gives the ironist a certain enthusiasm, because he becomes intoxicated, so to speak, in the infinity of possibilities.... But if irony is a qualification of subjectivity, then it must manifest itself the first time subjectivity makes its appearance in world history. Irony is, namely, the first and most abstract qualification of subjectivity. This points to the historical turning point
where subjectivity made its appearance for the first time, and with this we have come to Socrates.... For him, the whole given actuality had entirely lost its validity; he had become alien to the actuality of the whole substantial world. This is one side of irony, but on the other hand he used irony as he destroyed Greek culture. His conduct toward it was at all times ironic; he was ignorant and knew nothing but was continually seeking information from others; yet as he let the existing go on existing, it foundered. He kept on using this tactic until the very last, as was especially evident when he was accused. But his fervor in this service consumed him, and in the end irony overwhelmed; he became dizzy, and everything lost its reality

(Kierkegaard, p 262)

31. *Vulgus vult decipi.* "The people like to be deceived." Truth and lying. In theory, telling the truth would mean, minimally, telling what things really are. Lying, by contrast, telling what things are really not. (This is called, after Aristotle, the correspondence theory of truth; see also John Caputo: *Truth*; Simon Blackburn's *Truth, a Guide for the Perplexed*; Bernard Williams *Truth and Truthfulness*). Here, obviously, the relationship between the language we use and what it refers to is crucial. If we say "I saw a unicorn in my garden last week," we make the claim that unicorns exist, are "real."

"wolf" one informs the one with the hiccups not to think of the word "wolf." The speaker says to the listener not to say "wolf." Only if the listener is stone-deaf does h/s not hear the word "wolf." This, of course, would make it impossible for h/h to cure the hiccups. A cure is additionally impossible if h/s hears and consequently thinks, "wolf."
So what does Cinderella have to do with all this? First, being an interesting story, it has lasted a long time and told and re-told in many different languages. Secondly, by taking salient part of it, character (or agent), class, locations and so on, one can allow it to represent these parts in any other actual and possible stories. Thirdly, its infrastructure is essentially a web of interactions between negative and positive facts. An approach to such interactions is by way of Bjornssons' "fact/object/property" triad and Aristotle's account of "privation."

Anyone who thinks that there are positive facts constituted by objects and properties and who takes objects and properties seriously will allow that not all objects have all properties. Objects differ with respect to what properties they have, and properties differ with respect to the objects that have them.

That is the very reason to take fact-object-property ontology seriously (Bjornsson 8).

Please notice here that Bjornssan mainly speaks about "difference," object a may differ from object b, property c from property d, and so on. Or, to put it another way, object a may either have (positive fact) or lack (negative fact) property a, b and so on. What neither object can have or lack are all properties. Cinderella, taken as a object, cannot have all the properties of a servant or princess. To go to the ball we must lack some of the properties of a servant (her costuming, hair style, mode of transportation etc.) take on other properties of a princess. The linear movement in time of the story is from lacking to having.
bewitching of our intelligence by means of our language"; Philosophical Investigations #109).

Do paradoxes have a point? Of course, to overcome, or transcend, dualistic thinking. I return to this under the heading Thirdness (below). To understand, and use, the interactions between negative and positive facts, one must have knowledge of the "third things" that develop from such interactions.

31. Adjectives and Negative Facts: The well-known poet and classical scholar, Anne Carson, has this say about the nature and function of adjectives: "What is an adjective? Nouns name the world. Verbs activate names. Adjectives come from somewhere else. The word adjective (epitheton in Greek) is itself an adjective meaning "placed on top," "added," "appended," "imported," "foreign." Adjectives seem fairly innocent additions but look again. These small important mechanisms are in charge of attaching everything in the world to its place of particularity. They are the latches of being" (Autobiography of Red).

From this description we can infer that adjectives have the power to alter the gaze of the reader. To attach an adjective to a noun is to direct the gaze "down" to a specific location in being. To remove an adjective from a noun (or leave the noun without an adjective) is to direct the reader's gaze upwards. We might otherwise refer to these effects of the gravitational pull of nouns. With adjectives one, in general, increases the pull; by withholding adjectives decreases it. Later in her book Carson says this is essentially what the Greek poet, Stesichoros, does. The lightness of his verses are, she says, a result of leaving many (not all) nouns "unadjectived."

Many Romantic poets, we notice, similar leave many nouns unadjectived to create
an atmosphere of lightness, lift, a "near to heaven" tone. One thinks here, for example, of Shelley’s *To a Skylark* and Keats' *Ode to Autumn*.

I would add that what is true of adjectives, in the Carsonian sense, is also true of adverbs. Some increase the "weight" of verbs; others decrease, even, free them from weight.

Many adjectives and adverbs have a negative bias: "merciless/mercilessly," "restless/restlessly," "unfeeling/unfeelingsly" and they, in combination with positive-biased adjectives and adverbs, can create a heavy, somber, atmosphere: Please take note of Conrad's description of a ship in a storm: "The ship began to dip into a southwest swell, and the softly luminous sky of low latitudes took on a harder sheen from day to day above our heads: it arched high above the ship vibrating and pale, like an immense dome of steel, resonant with the deep voice of freshening gales. The sunshine gleamed cold on the white curls of black waves. Before the strong breath of westerly squalls the ship, with reduced sail, lay slowly over, obstinate and yielding. She drove to and fro in the unceasing endeavour to fight her way through the invisible violence of the winds: she pitched headlong into dark smooth hollows; she struggled upwards over the snowy ridges of great running seas; she rolled, restless, from side to side, like a thing in pain. Enduring and valiant, she answered to the call of men; and her slim spars waving for ever in abrupt semicircles, seemed to beckon in vain for help towards the stormy sky... Sails blew adrift. Things broke loose. Cold and wet, we were washed about the deck while trying to repair damages. The ship tossed about, shaken furiously, like a toy in the hand of a lunatic. Just at sunset there was a rush to shorten sail before the menace of a sombre hail cloud. The hard gust of wind came brutal like the blow of a fist. The ship relieved of her
canvas in time received it pluckily: she yielded reluctantly to the *violent* onset; then
coming up with a stately and irresistible motion, brought her spars to windward in the
teeth of the screeching squall. Out of the *abyssal darkness* of the *black cloud* overhead
white hail streamed on her, rattled on the rigging, leaped in handfuls off the yards,
rebounded on the deck—round and gleaming in the *murky* turmoil like a shower of
pearls. It passed away. For a moment a livid sun shot horizontally the last rays of sinister
light between the hills of steep, rolling waves. Then a wild night rushed in—stamped out
in a great howl that *dismal remnant* of a stormy day.

There was no sleep on board that night. Most seamen remember in their life one
or two such nights of a culminating gale. Nothing seems left of the whole universe but
darkness, clamour, fury—and the ship. And like the last vestige of a *shattered* creation
she drifts, bearing an *anguished remnant* of sinful mankind, through the distress, tumult,
and pain of an *avenging* terror. No one slept in the forecastle.

Please notice, by the criteria of Aristotle's *privation* one easily creates negative
adjectives and adverbs by subtracting, or adding, certain qualities from or to positive
facts:

Subtract light and you can get "dark," "murky," "somber," etc.

Subtract heat and you get "cold," "freeze,"

Add water (some other liquid) and you get "wet."

32. Value and the struggle between positive and negative facts as an example of
Graham Law. So what does the law say and how does it say it: In short form it says
that "bad money will drive out good money."
"Good" money is money that shows little difference between its nominal value (the face value of the coin) and its commodity value (the value of the metal of which it is made, often other precious metals, nickel or copper). On the other hand, "bad" money is money that has a commodity value considerably lower than its face value and is in circulation along with good money, where both forms are required to be accepted at equal value as legal tender. In the market for used cares (lemon automobiles) (analogous to bad currency) will drive out the good cars. The problem is one of asymmetry of information. Sellers have a strong financial incentive to pass all used cars off as "good" cars, especially lemons. This makes it difficult to buy a good car at a fair price, as the buyer risks overpaying for a lemon. The result is that buyers will only pay the fair price of a lemon, so at least they reduce the risk of overpaying. High-quality cars tend to be pushed out of the market, because there is no good way to establish that they really are worth more. Certified pre-owned programs are an attempt to mitigate this problem by providing a warranty and other guarantees of quality. 'The Market for Lemons' is a work that examines this problem in more detail. Some also use an explanation of Gresham's Law as The more efficient you become, the less effective you get'; i.e. 'when you try to go on the cheap, you will stop selling' or 'the less you invest in your non-tangible services, the fewer sales you will get.' (Wikipedia "Gresham's Law").

The course our city runs is the same towards men and money.

She has true and worthy sons.

She has fine new gold and ancient silver,

Coins untouched with alloys, gold or silver,
Each well minted, tested each and ringing clear.

Yet we never use them!

Others pass from hand to hand,

Sorry brass just struck last week and branded with a wretched brand.

So with men we know for upright, blameless lives and noble names.

These we spurn for men of brass.

adjectives. "Impersonal," "indifferent" negative in form but neutral in meaning? Qote Anne Carson

1.

What kind of information does a negative fact convey? How does it differ from that of a positive fact? How do we recognize, and use, the difference? My focus here, drawing on examples from literature, are the means by which writers create character, scene action and the like. I also want to discuss transformations authors make in their texts by means of positive and negative facts— Cinderella's transformation from a servant into a
princess, for example, or Gregor Samsa's transformation from an undistinguishable clerk into an "ungeheuer Ungeziefer." In the case of Cinderella, the process is from lacking to having. In Gregor's case, from having to lacking.

But, it will be important to raise the question: what are the constraints on such transformation? What, if anything, stays untransformed with Cinderella, Gregor and others? A loose analogy would be to aspects of the "island-constraint" theories of linguists (Phillips; Campbell 175-79). A simple example is possible syntactic positions of the word "down." A speaker (of English) can say either "the detective tracked the thief down" or "the detective tracked down the thief." But there is a constraint on saying "the thief down" tracked the thief" or "the down detective tracked the thief." We can say "mow the grass" or "cut the grass" and "cut the hair" but not "mow the hair." Contextual constraints determines usage. Examples of constraints, of a more nascent nature, occur in Aristotle, especially in his biological writings (Campbell). Here we might ant to call to mind the constraints of being zero, in itself neither positive nor negative, but yet the unmoved origin and end of all negative and positive numbers.

For Cinderella salient constraints are her gender and age. She cannot be male or old. For Gregor Samsa the constraints are having a human consciousness, especially memory and certain emotion. He (assuming maleness) cannot be unconsciousness of his past or familial relationships.

My first thought-run is that we should take negative facts as cosmologists take the role of "dark energy" in the universe. According to the Nobel Laureate in
The main point I wish to attempt to make is that, in the course of telling a story, one can engage in three specific procedures with positive and negative facts. One can reciprocally transform negative and positive facts into the other. Or one can leave each one un-transformed. Negative facts can be made positive, positive ones negative. The analogy to the story of Cinderella (one of the most popular, along with that of Goldilocks, in world history) is on the basis of a negative to positive transformation. Cinderelle's attributes, recall, are first unrecognized, but one who achieves recognition or success after a period of obscurity and neglect. A positive to negative transformation, perhaps as popular a storytelling strategy as that of Cinderella, is Gregor Samsa's transformation (The Metamorphosis) from an ordinary son, brother and employee into a monstrous bug ("ungeheuer Ungeziefer"; note that both these words are negative). Gregor goes from something to nothing—nothing in the sense of being without a species identification, a name, without human locomotion and language. "ungeheuer Ungeziefer" can only be translated into another language as "nothing, nothing" and, as such, can never designate a member of a unique species.
Another way of saying the above is that "ungeheuer Ungeziefer" is a phrase that refers to the necessarily non-existent (Brandom 319).

As Kafka himself tells us, he is an author who writes about the "negative element of an age":

I have brought nothing with me of what life requires, so far as I know, but only the universal human weakness. With this—in this respect it is [a] gigantic strength—I have vigorously absorbed the negative element of the age in which I live, an age that is, of course, very close to me, which I have no right ever to fight against, but as it were, a right to represent (qtd Medin).

Burke's pentad of "motives" (act, scene, agent, agency and purpose) presuppose a positive relationship between each:

Any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where was it done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose) (xvii).

But what if we substitute for "positive" a negative relationship between members of the pentad, or what Brandom calls "incompatible." Incompatibility as negation: If any of the above, act, scene and so on is incompatible with any other act, scene, etc. Or if an act is incompatible with scene, with agency, purpose or any other member of Burke's pentad, then it can be said to be the effect of negation: "To assert
that $p$ is incompatible with $q$ one asserts the conditional whose antecedent is $p$ and whose consequent is the negation of $q$ (Brandom 115; see also Brandom xix, 92, 115). This maneuver by a storyteller is the basis of much comedy. *Gulliver's Travels*, for example, depicts our hero Gulliver in what can be called "determinate incompatibility." His size and shape negate every possible successful agency and act.

Since there are 120 possible incompatible relationships between these five elements of a story, then it is impossible to give examples of each.

Please note how negative facts (italicized) shape the five "answers" in the following passage from Danilo Kiš's *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*. The passage relates the story of one Karl Taube:

(He was ) born in 1899 in Esztergorn, Hungary. Despite the *meager* data about his earliest years, the provincial *bleakness* of central European town at the turn of the century emerges clearly from the depths of time:

*gray*, one-storey houses with backyards that the sun in its slow course divides with a clear line of demarcation into quarters of *murderous* light and *damp, mouldy shade* like *darkness*; rows of acacia trees which in springtime exude the aroma of childhood *sickness*, like thick cough syrups and lozenges; the *cold*, baroque gleam of the pharmacy glittering with the Gothic of white porcelain vessels; the *gloomy* high school with its paved yard (*green, peeling* benches, *broken*
swings like *gallows*, white-washed wooden lavatories), the municipal building painted Maria Theresa yellow, the colour of *dead* leaves and the autumn roses from ballads played at dusk by the gypsy band in the garden of the Grand Hotel (137).

But before going on to discuss ways storytellers transform negative and positive facts into each other, let me say a few more words about negative facts, the Cinderalla of this essay.

*Alswa*: the Old English word, from which we get the adverb "as," is the most important word for transforming a positive into a negative fact or vice versa. An example, discussed later in this essay is the opposing pair, cooperative and conflict. Either adding, or subtracting certain properties from one or the other we can make one into the other. If members of a community cooperate with each other than the effect is order and peace. If there is conflict, the effect is disorder and war, the absence of order and peace. Or please take the pair failure/success. In mountain climbing to summit the mountain means success. Not to summit, failure. In the former case, the means to the end (success) were favorable, say the weather, the training and experience of the climbers, their equipment and the like. In the latter case, some or all of these "means" were absent.

Does the representation of failure make a more interesting story? Please give some thought to this writer's opinion:
If an account of the climbing of Everest is ever written, I take leave to doubt whether it will be as widely read as have been the stories of successive failure. For, say what one may, when the summit is reached some of the mystery and grandeur surrounding a peak hitherto untrodden by man is lost. (Maurice Isserman and Stewart Weaver: *Fallen Giants. A History of Himalayan Mountaineering* frontispiece New Haven: Yale UP, 2008).

So, with this general exemplification in mind (no doubt it could use a lot of fine tuning) let me turn to comments made by writers on, respectively, "lying" and "lost":

* Getting lost appears to be a major theme in European Literature. From Odysseus' long detour home, to Dante's midlife crisis in the selva oscura, to the abandoned children of the Brothers Grimm, it would seem that the 'straight way' is rarely the best way to make an interesting story (Benfey 40).

So, if we go against the majority, those who believe only in positive facts and acknowledge (or perhaps assume) the existence of negative facts, where go from here? As a response to the question, I ask the reader to take this essay as a thought-experiment
on the possible uses of negative facts in storytelling and in the teaching of major forms of writing. Would a belief in negative facts make us better writers or better teachers of writing? Or would it cause us to lose our way in the labyrinth of language and in "the intolerable wrestle/with words and meanings" (T. S. Eliot).

Should we say that in order to write about negative facts, if only at the level of naming them, as Plato, Horn, Sorenson and others do, that by so doing we acknowledge their existence? If so, then it seems to follow that simply being conscious (however dimly) of something that we name "negation" gives us a warrant and ground for writing. Isn't that what supports, in part, the writing of fiction? Not always the palpable world of the senses, but the probability of things different in or lacking in the palpable world?

If writers since Parmenides, and before, only wrote about things their senses tell them exist, then I would not be writing this. I would have no subject.

Please note I use negative forms, "no," "never," affixes like "un-," "-less" to give an account of negation—a example of the self-referentiality of language. Horn calls this a "paradox" (3). Perhaps. Please notice in these sentence how the writer uses negative forms to give an account of a negative fact, "the non-existent":

The non-existent is neither is or not is. It is not yet (Jaeger 382)

Let me remind the reader that here we are not only quoting the actual uses of negative facts, but searching for ways to raise our consciousness about their possible compositional uses. As our first entry into this territory let us take the word "absence" or not being seen or heard—here and now. Let us think particularly about the differences this makes in storytelling.
Nothing! thou Elder Brother ev’n to Shade,  
That hadst a Being ere the World was made,  
And (well fixt) art alone, of Ending not afraid.

Ere Time and Place were, Time and Place were not,  
When primitive Nothing something straight begot,  
Then all proceeded from the great united . . . What?

Something, the general Attribute of all,  
Sever’d from thee, its sole Original,  
Into thy boundless Self must undistinguish’d fall

(John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester, 1679; ten lines out of 31,  
*Upon Nothing*).

I invite the reader to paraphrase these lines using only positive facts.

Please notice in these lines Rochester takes negative facts in their ontological sense—they are the beginning and the end of being. Later on, he takes negative facts in their logical, and epistemological meanings:

Great Negative! how vainly would the Wise  
Enquire, define, distinguish, teach, devise,  
Didst thou not stand to point their dull philosophies?

Is, or is not, the Two great Ends of Fate,  
And, true or false, the Subject of Debate,  
That perfect or destroy the vast Designs of Fate;
When they have rack’d the Politician’s Breast,
Within thy Bosom most securely rest,
And, when reduced to thee, are least unsafe and best?

As I say later I think our best chance at using negative facts as a compositional tool lies in the above three meanings, as ontology, epistemology and logic—as being, as knowing (distinguishing) and as order-making. Crucial in this, however, is not simply taking them abstractly in these ways, but rather as *useful* tools in the search for order in a subject and the representation of such order: call the process ‘from extra-textual to textual order.’

Before going on to the above uses, I would like to pause for a few comments on theories about the origins of stories— theories given from the perspective of evolutionary psychology. Why do we tell stories? Why have we always told stories?

The general consensus seems to be, at least in the beginning of human evolution, that storytelling was a strategy of survival. Storytelling, taken as "cooperative play," trained us to confront dangers in the wild, and the pleasure in feeling empathy, made us more likely to cooperate with each other in facing these dangers (Flesch, McConachie). If we don’t know what the dangers are, then we have more time to practice cooperation and to become altruistic (Boyd; Bickerton).

On this reading, cooperation presupposes conflict. Conflict, as the absence of cooperation, is a negative fact. In any account of cooperation, we are tacitly assuming the existence of conflict. If there was no conflict, then there would be no need for cooperation in order to survive.
Or from the perspective of Aristotle's theory of mimesis (akin to mirror neuron thesis of today) we might claim that what we don't imitate develops earlier than what we do. Typically, children dissent from different kinds of behavior earlier, and more often, than they assent to them.

Ontology: Charles Kahn, in a seminal essay, on the Indo-European verb, "to be," claims that the three principal uses of "is" is to represent existence, location and duration of some X.

I invite the reader to paraphrase these lines only with positive facts. Please refrain from assuming that presence of negative facts in the poem are disguised positive facts. Notice that Rochester

Affirmation/Denial:A story based on the absence of the protagonist, and h/s presence elsewhere off-can be called stage implies that every exit from one place

Let me say at this point what is absent from this essay. I have nothing to say about the history, beginning with Parmenides, of discussions of negative facts, specifically, whether or not they exist (please see Horn). Nor do I say anything about the paradox that may arise from the (presumed) relationship that may arise from admitting their existence and then establishing their referents in extra-textual reality (please see Bjorrsen). If negative facts exist, then what do they refer to? Finally, I do not comment
on their role, if any, in establishing the "truth" of statements—the so-called "truth-making capacity of negative facts (please see Armstrong, Beall, Brownsein).

My main claim here is that if we assume that the "family" of absences (of which negative facts are a member) exists, then we have a powerful writing strategy to use.

Assuming then that these two claims have validity, can we then say that the representations of negative facts in storytelling creates "interest"? That reducing positive to negative facts, causes "interest" more often (and perhaps in greater intensity?) than leaving positive facts irreducible? Armstrong, David. *Truth and Truthmakers*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2004.


Flesch, William.


Phillips, Colin.


***

ADDENA

"It is not un-natural that the best writers are liars. A major part of their trade is to lie or invent and they will lie when they are drunk, or to themselves or to strangers. They often lie unconsciously and then remember their lies with deep remorse. If they knew all other writers were liars too it would cheer them up" (Hemingway item 845 John F.Kennedy Library, Boston, MA.)

"Fiction movies in the shadow of doubt, knows it is a true lie" (James Wood: "Why." *NYRkR* dec 9: 13. P. 36)
"We are comfortable at pointing out contradictions and gaps....This enables us to consider negative evidence: for instance why did Shakespeare not write religious poetry? Important research often begins with changing he kinds of questions that we ask." Laurie Maguire and Emma Smith. 30 Great Myths about Shakespeare. Wiley-Blackwell (2013).

Use the word "not anything" not "nothing."

Books with negative facts in the title


Steven Poole. Who Touched Base in my Thought Shower: A treasury of unbearable Office Jargon. Sceptre (2013). Push the envelope; heads up; on my radar; deep dive

Lawrence Krauss, A Universe from Nothing. Why there is something not Nothing.


1. The Fascination of the Unfinished: (NYT, January 10, 2014: C25. Reflections on the Metropolitan Museum of Art reconfigured galleries of European paints. "Unfinished paintings are enticing cracks in the façade of art history, lures along the path to a deeper understanding of artistic processes and impulses." Examples are Tintoretto’s sketch of a Veetian doge; Jean-Baptiste Greuze’s "Aegina Visited by Jupiter"; the Ghent Painter’s "Virgin and Child with Saints"; Albrecht Durer’s "Salvator Mundi."

The paintings "reveal the preparatory precision of painters." Painting survive from the Renaissance because of the age’s "respect for "non finito...works that represent
the artist’s deeper intention as well or better than finished ones.” Unfinished paintings can feel contemporary because the history of painting has tended toward an "ever-increasing unfinishedness and loosenig of surface...unfinished paintings are mysterious. Pliny wrote of painters signing their work "faciebat" instead of "fecit" or doing not did.

...{hor]nas byrnað?  
[Hn]æf hléoprobeð dā  
hea[p]ogeong
cyning:  
‘Nė ḍis ne dagað ēast[a]n  
né hér draca ne  
fléogeð  
né hér ḍisse healle  
hornas ne byrnað.

Then proclaimed Hnaef,  
the battle-young king:  
‘This is not the eastern dawn  
nor is a dragon flying here  
nor here does this hall’s  
gables burn.  
But here they bear forth,  
birds screech,

Ac hér forþ berað <.....>,  
fugelas singað,  
( Finnesburh Fragment;  
http://www.heorot.dk/finnsburh-en.html)

**NF** in literary criticism: Eric Sundquist, "Death, Grief, Analogous form" As I Lay Dying.  

In Faulkner and the house divided: Baltimore Johns hop 1983. See p. 288 in Norton anthology  


"untranslatability with all its plurality and contingency, becomes he fundamental assumption with which to approach comparative literary criticism"  


*Rien n’est plus réel que rien*—S. Beckett
Thomas Kuhns *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: paradigms: established b a framework of inquiry of background beliefs, values, established procedures, experiment ingrained habits of imagination...objectivity only possible on the basis of a paradigm that defines at the outset what is andis not worth caring about, what is significant or insignificant, possible or impossible.


Value: the value of positie facts is always relative and what their value is relative to is the truth beauty and power of negative facts"

Negative adjectives: inscrutable; restless, unappeasable, immortal, ceaseless, boundless.

Aristotle high priest of positive facts.

2 kinds of narrative: Old Testament (places protagonist at mercy of a mythic event or immovable reality...a plan imposes an irresistible order on individuals); New Testament, centers more on the mission of the protagonist in a task...a test as hard as it is unavoidable if he wants to reach his goal).Luis Goytisolo. *Naturaleza de la novella.*
Did you, as I did, feel the power of negative facts in the "what if...?"

Nothingness as the beginning of things. By positing a negative fact as the beginning, and the end, we can say: