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## Shadow Rider: The Hemingway Hero as Western Archetype

JAMES PLATH

Ever since Western writer Owen Wister praised Ernest Hemingway in a publicity blurb for *A Farewell to Arms*, noting especially “the unmuted resonance of a masculine voice,”<sup>1</sup> a number of critics have observed similarities between Hemingway’s fictional world and the rugged American West. Among the earliest was Leslie Fiedler, who concluded that “For Hemingway there are many Wests, from Switzerland to Africa, but the mountains of Spain are inextricably associated in his mind with the authentic American West, with Montana whose very name is the Spanish word for the mountains that make of both isolated vastnesses holy places.” By “holy places,” Fiedler meant that “Great Good Place” apart from the “busy world of women”—in other words, an outdoor arena where a man can do what a man’s gotta do.<sup>2</sup>

Although Fiedler stopped short on that trail, John J. Teunissen wrote at length about the Custer legend which serves as the mythic underpinning to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, while a number of scholars have since explored the Hemingway-Wister relationship, focusing on the latter’s criticism and Hemingway’s response.<sup>3</sup> In one of the more recent studies, Dean Rehberger notes that elements of the Western showdown are present in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and characteristics of the Western hero appear in Robert Jordan. Rehberger states, “it is possible to read the standard definitions of the Hemingway ‘code’ as a rewriting of the adventure ethos: the taciturn character of stoic reserve who faces the presence of death in life and who always exhibits grace under pressure. Who better exemplifies this code than the stereotype of the cowboy?” Yet Rehberger, quickly shifting to a discussion of the Custer myth and Western rhetoric, claims that “we need to go beyond simply listing the conventions and stereotypes of the Western formula that can be matched up with Hemingway works” because such “elementary comparisons lead to a reductive reading of both Hemingway and the popular Western.”<sup>4</sup>

I would argue, however, that if the Custer myth is recognized as an important underpinning, then the Western formula that shapes the novel’s

infrastructure also deserves a closer look, especially since, as Michael Reynolds reminds us, Owen Wister was the only American fiction writer available to students at Oak Park High School, where the curriculum was largely British literature.<sup>5</sup> *The Virginian*, Wister's 1902 novel about knights on horseback, was almost as romantic as Sir Walter Scott and was required as outside reading.<sup>6</sup> *The Virginian* is also widely regarded as the novel that established what would become the "formula" in all Western genre fiction to follow. Then there's the Wister-Hemingway correspondence from 1928–36, where Frank Scafella reports that "the main burden of Wister's letters was to identify and instruct Hemingway in the treatment of 'garbage,'" which the older author found in Hemingway's depiction of "foul and violent" elements.<sup>7</sup> Though Hemingway's responses never indicate whether he took any of Wister's advice to heart, his fiction grows increasingly more romantic after *The Sun Also Rises*. At the very least, the lengthy correspondence shows the respect Hemingway apparently had for Wister as a writer, just as copies of *The Virginian* and a nine-volume set of Wister's works included in the author's Key West inventory indicate Hemingway's familiarity with Wister's sense of the American West.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, as Rehberger noted, whether Carlos Baker was correct that young Hemingway's first complete sentence was "I don't know Buffalo Bill" is "not as important as the fact that Hemingway was exposed at an early age to the perpetuation of the frontier myth."<sup>9</sup>

After a century of pulps, dime novels, literary and popular Westerns, and a cinematic celebration that dominated television and movie marquee during the Fifties, the genre is as familiar as Stetsons and Colt .45s. Will Wright summarizes the classic Western structure as a system of primary oppositions: inside versus outside society, good versus bad, strong versus weak, and wilderness versus civilization, with an uncomplicated plot that revolves around the moral character of the hero<sup>10</sup>—all elements of Hemingway's various fictions as well. Although revisionists have since challenged the notion of the Western as grand metaphor for westward expansion—Jane Tompkins, for example, posits that the Western "isn't about the encounter between civilization and the frontier. It is about men's fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the Western tirelessly reinvents"—most nonetheless acknowledge what Tompkins termed "the classic oppositions from which all Westerns derive their meaning: parlor versus mesa, East versus West, woman versus man, illusion versus truth, words versus things." Even if "Westerns strive to depict a world of clear alternatives" but are "just as compulsively driven to destroying these opposites and making them contain each other," or if the Western is "a reaction against a female-dominated tradition of popular culture,"<sup>11</sup> it's still the man's world that Wister described and Fiedler

observed. Cynthia Hamilton sees the classic Western as being set in “an idealized environment which allows competitive individualism free reign. The two crucial attributes of the formula’s setting are lawlessness and the maximum opportunity for personal enrichment. . . . Women and the aged are particularly at risk.”<sup>12</sup> And as Tompkins so succinctly puts it, “When life itself is at stake, everything else seems trivial by comparison.”<sup>13</sup>

In the world of men always on guard, where justice is dispensed at the end of a gun’s barrel or rope, the archetypal Western hero knows the rules and abides by them, skillful at everything that could be perceived as a test of his manhood. In the American West, card playing was never only a game, but an arena for displaying and judging character, just as the corral gave men a chance to showcase their cowboy skills, while the mountains and chaparral gave them an open field in which to demonstrate their knowledge of the wilderness. In such a society, the Western hero is the quintessential Man among men whose “code” reinforces his superior position: Strong and silent, he’s slow to anger, cool under fire, and more duty-bound than the common citizen or the most stoic settler. In the lawless West, the hero has a heightened sense of personal morality which goes beyond simple knowledge of the unwritten laws that govern other men’s behavior. His code requires him to act, even when action could result in a quick trip to the cemetery. As Wright observes, society recognizes the hero’s special nature, yet it never fully accepts him because he is so different—literally, the odd man out.

The rest, Wright reminds us, is equally familiar. Villains stronger than society, or who somehow break the unwritten code of the West, threaten the stability of that society. The hero, like the country whose mythic code he embodies, is never the aggressor and always acts to dispense justice on behalf of others, sacrificing his own happiness to do so—or at least causing conflict between his love interest and himself. His horse, of course, doesn’t mind. Eventually he wins because he knows the territory, knows the rules, knows human nature, and knows himself. *The Virginian*, for example, suggests that “Every good man in this world has convictions about right and wrong. They are his soul’s riches, his spiritual gold. When his conduct is at variance with these, he knows that it is a departure, a falling; and this is a simple and clear matter.”<sup>14</sup> The code, which sets him and a select group of others apart from everyone else, lies at the center of every Western novel and film, shaping and defining the genre. But I’m suggesting that it may also have shaped and defined the code by which Hemingway’s heroes aspire to live—even more than Rehberger would have us believe—for the Western hero and the Hemingway “code” hero bear a striking resemblance to one another. Both privilege experiential over book knowledge, action over talk, and

precision and skill over sloppiness or mediocrity. Both value stoicism and self-control, and both respect coolness under fire and confronting death bravely.

Wister's description of the cowboy's character and proclivities could just as easily describe the typical Hemingway code hero's: "Adventure, to be out-of-doors, to find some new place far away from the postman, to enjoy independence of spirit or mind or body (according to his high or low standards)—this is the cardinal surviving fittest instinct."<sup>15</sup> The Western hero lives on the edge, his survival skills are constantly tested, his manhood challenged every day. Among cardplayers, gunfighters, brawlers, trackers, hunters, cowboys, drinkers, and sagebrush philosophers, he's the best because he *has* to be. Wister thought cowboys "the manly, simple, humorous American type" and "the bravest we possess. . . . They work hard, they play hard."<sup>16</sup> As Wister explained, the cowboy "fought his way with knife and gun and any hour of the twenty-four might see him flattened behind the rocks among the whizz of bullets and the flight of arrows, or dragged bloody and folded together from some adobe hovel. . . . Among these perils the cow-puncher took wild pleasure in existing"<sup>17</sup>—experiencing as heightened a sense of what it meant to be alive as Hemingway's bullfighters felt.<sup>18</sup>

All this, of course, sounds remarkably like the fictional world which Robert Penn Warren described and Philip Young and Jackson Benson detailed in the early years of Hemingway scholarship, save linking Hemingway to the Old West except through metaphorical language and undeveloped comparisons. Perhaps the notion of a code hero dominated early Hemingway scholarship because it *was* such a deeply enculturated and familiar archetype. Writing in the Fifties, Warren noticed that Hemingway's was a showdown-style world of violence, where the "typical character faces defeat or death." As Warren observed, Hemingway's characters are usually

tough men, experienced in the hard worlds they inhabit, and not obviously given to emotional display or sensitive shrinking. . . . His heroes are not squealers, welchers, compromisers, or cowards, and when they confront defeat they realize that the stance they take, the stoic endurance, the stiff upper lip mean a kind of victory. . . . They represent some notion of a code, some notion of honor, that makes a man a man, and that distinguishes him from people who merely follow their random impulses and who are, by consequence, "messy."<sup>19</sup>

Despite the long shadow cast by the Hemingway code hero on the American literary horizon, there's nothing uniquely Hemingwayesque about it if one considers it alongside the archetypal Western hero. In *The*

*Virginian*, as with subsequent formulary Westerns—including the serialized Westerns by Ernest Haycox that Hemingway enjoyed as late as 1950<sup>20</sup>—that which sets the hero apart is immediately noticeable, even before his heightened moral sense becomes clear: His skills are honed to a fine precision. When the tenderfoot narrator, a code-hero “wannabe,” first lays eyes on the man known as *The Virginian*, the cowboy is trying his hand at what others have repeatedly failed to accomplish: to rope a pony so “rapid of limb” and watchful of eye that he resembles “a skillful boxer” (1). But, of course, the animal is no match for the hero, who moves with “the undulations of a tiger, smooth and easy” (1). Unlike other wranglers, the *Virginian* holds his rope so that the pony can’t see it until it’s too late, and “like a sudden snake [the tenderfoot] saw the noose go out its length and fall true,” causing a fellow train passenger to remark, “That man knows his business” (2).

One can’t read such a passage without thinking of the white hunter in “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” who also wears a Stetson and whose skill level has made him a professional,<sup>21</sup> or of Santiago from *The Old Man and the Sea*, who kept his lines “straighter than anyone did, so that at each level in the darkness of the stream there would be a bait waiting exactly where he wished it to be for any fish that swam there,”<sup>22</sup> or Robert Jordan, who “knew from experience how simple it was to move behind the enemy lines in all this country” and “knew how to blow any sort of bridge that you could name and he had blown them of all sizes and constructions.”<sup>23</sup>

Jordan, who hails from Montana and whose grandfather was an Indian fighter during the Custer era (336–38), comes closest among Hemingway’s characters to the consummate Western hero. Like the *Virginian*, he is even called by a referential nickname, “the Inglés” (199). As much an outsider as the typical Western hero, Jordan risks his life to help a community of rebels to which he will never truly belong—the blowing of the bridge constituting Jordan’s high noon, his moment of truth. His code of honor is stronger than that of the strongest man in the brigade, and where even the bravest among them fears something, Jordan is outwardly fearless, confining any display of weakness or insecurity to his private thoughts, as the *Virginian* does.<sup>24</sup> Code-bound, the only fear Jordan voices is “of not doing my duty as I should” (91).

Like Wister’s hero, Jordan works with almost exaggerated ease, preferring action to inaction. For him, “the problem of [the bridge’s] demolition was not difficult. . . . He sketched quickly and happily; glad at last to have the problem under his hand; glad at last to be actually engaged upon it”—this wartime showdown (35). It’s the same relief that the *Virginian* feels when the time finally comes for him to face the rustler and murderer

Trampas in a confrontation that had been brewing since the beginning of the novel. Finally, "It had come to that point where there was no way out, save only the ancient, eternal way between man and man. It is only the great mediocrity that goes to law in these personal matters" (291).

Just as the Western hero is set apart from others in the community by his outsider status and his skill at gunplay, in war Jordan is an expatriate weapons expert among patriot amateurs. He knows guns as well as explosives, and his knowledge seems even more superior when juxtaposed against the limited experience and perception of those around him. When a machine gun is captured and Jordan asks what kind of a gun it is, a gypsy vaguely replies, "A very rare name." Jordan asks how many rounds of ammunition they have for it, and the gypsy says, "An infinity. One whole case of an unbelievable heaviness," and Jordan thinks, "Sounds like about five hundred rounds." After another question and response he thinks, "Hell, it's a Lewis gun" (26-27)—identification complete. But the Inglés, like the Virginian, never wears his knowledge like a pair of shiny new spurs. His observations stay largely in his mind, and when spoken they're voiced in quiet tones or with near self-effacing casualness. That's because action is more important to the Western hero than talk. Bragging is for tenderfoots and tinhorns.

In *The Virginian*, when a train full of starving passengers pulls into a beefless cow town where the residents are also starving, the cowboy notices a swamp and remembers a frog farm where he once lived and recalls having frog legs at Delmonico's. He and sidekick Scipio head into the swamp with empty sacks and return with them full to cook for all of the passengers. But like Santiago, who "was too simple to wonder when he had attained humility" (13), the Virginian shrugs off their praise of his resourcefulness and superior knowledge, chalking it up to experience: "I've been where there was big money in frawgs, and they ain't been," he explains. "They're all cattle here. Talk cattle, think cattle, and they're bankrupt in consequence" (117-19).

Likewise, when a stagecoach driver attempts to pull his stalled rig from the riverbed in which it was mired, the stranded heroine aboard "saw the tall one delaying beside the driver, and speaking. He spoke so quietly that not a word reached her, until of a sudden the driver protested loudly. The man had thrown something, which turned out to be a bottle. This twisted loftily and dived into the stream." After showing the driver the safe spot for crossing, the Virginian "dropped his grave eyes from hers, and swinging upon his horse, was gone just as the passenger opened her mouth and with inefficient voice murmured, 'Oh, thank you!' at his departing back." The driver, meanwhile, was humbled not by the Virginian's superior attitude, but by his superior knowledge. He held his

head “meek as his own drenched horses” and drove out of the riverbed “a chastened creature” (63).

All of Hemingway’s code heroes, despite their superior knowledge and skill, similarly value modesty and humility. Even the oldest among them, the venerable Santiago, thinks, “I am a strange old man,” though he knows “many tricks” (14). Hemingway code heroes are schooled early in the importance of silence and humility. When Frederic Henry is in the hospital, Catherine pleads, “Don’t brag, darling. Please don’t brag. You’re so sweet and you don’t have to brag.”<sup>25</sup> This part of the code is best illustrated, perhaps, by Jake Barnes’ running commentary on the very unheroic Robert Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises*. Cohn’s attitude is instantly offensive to everyone: “The publishers had praised his novel pretty highly and it went to his head. Then several women had put themselves out to be nice to him” and *that* went to his head. “Also,” Barnes recalls, “playing for higher stakes than [Cohn] could afford in some rather steep bridge games with his New York connections, he had held cards and won several hundred dollars. It made him rather vain of his bridge game, and he talked several times of how a man could always make a living at bridge if he were ever forced to” (8–9). The problem, of course, is that Cohn is most emphatically *not* a man by code standards. He talks about feelings that “real men” would keep to themselves, and even cries in public—as Joaquin, the self-confessed “failed bullfighter” (140) does in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (106, 139). For Cohn, talk replaces action. Even in the bedroom, where a man’s man would spring into action (and Catherine reminds her young lover, “Come on. Don’t talk. Please come on”) (92), Cohn talks too much (13), and one quickly surmises that his talk about going to South America is just that—talk. In Hemingway’s novelistic meditation on manhood, Cohn fares no better than he would have had he lived in the Old West.

Proper conduct for a man is almost always on the Western hero’s mind. In a humorous section where the Virginian’s love interest tries to engage him in a discussion of literature, the cowboy turns it instead into a discussion of manhood, revealing how his world is governed by this simple principle. Molly reads him a Browning poem about “the need of a world of men for me,” which causes the Virginian to say, almost reverently, “That is very, very true” (219). Asked his opinion on *Romeo and Juliet*, the Virginian says simply that Romeo was “no man. I like his friend Mercutio that gets killed. He is a man. If he had got Juliet there would have been no foolishness and trouble” (174). Likewise, the Virginian thinks the prince in *Henry the Fourth* a man because “He killed a big fighter on the other side who was another jim-dandy—and he was sorry for having to do it” (217). When Molly reads more Browning to him, the

Virginian recoils from lines spoken by a dying soldier: "Touched to the quick, he said, / 'I'm killed, sire!' And, his chief beside, / Smiling, the boy fell dead." The Virginian tells Molly in his laconic drawl, "Now a man who was man enough to act like he did, yu' see, would fall dead without mentioning it" (218). For the Virginian—and "real" men—death isn't worth making a fuss over. At the end of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, when Robert Jordan and his gray horse are shot down by a tank, Jordan, not the horse, pulls up lame with a broken leg. Agustín casually, but seriously, offers to shoot him, but Jordan just as matter-of-factly responds, "*No hace falta . . .* Get along. I am very well here" (465) and only hopes to "last" until the enemy comes upon him (471). Significantly, during Jordan's last stand he thinks of his grandfather, comparing his own tale and his own heroics against the Indian fighter's (469).

In the Western hero, skill and experience combine to produce an individual who is so exceptional and knowledgeable of all aspects of life—death included—that he is supremely confident and therefore gracious. He's also seldom afraid, since fear stems partly from uncertainty and partly from not having the dedication to an ideal that would override any self-protective impulse. By the tender age of twenty-four the Virginian had seen nine states, and "Everywhere he had taken care of himself and survived; nor had his strong heart yet waked up to any hunger for a home." He was "one of thousands drifting and living thus, but . . . one in a thousand" (33). Skills honed over time and experiential knowledge make the Western hero as much a fearless survivor as Santiago, who, as an accomplished navigator, never worried when a hooked fish carried him far from the safety of daylight and land. It's the same supreme confidence that sends Wilson walking casually into tall grass to finish off a wounded animal, or allows Jordan to coolly focus on blowing a bridge without demolition caps.

The Virginian puts the philosophy clearly into perspective for his tenderfoot protégé, explaining how skill is important for both bad men and good:

Now back East you can be middling and get along. But if you go to try a thing on in this Western country, you've got to do it *well*. You've got to deal cards *well*; you've got to steal *well*; and if you claim to be quick with your gun, you must be quick, for you're a public temptation, and some man will not resist trying to prove he is the quicker. You must break all the Commandments *well* in this Western country. (250–51)

The tenderfoot is the first to admit that "[the Virginian] invariably saw game before I did, and was off his horse and crouched among the sage

while I was still getting my left foot clear of the stirrup" (47). Robert Jordan, likewise, is a better tracker and spotter than the old man who accompanies him. When he and Anselmo see "three monoplane in V-formation" and the old man proclaims "They are *Moscas*," Jordan can tell by the profile of the planes that instead "It was a Fascist Patrol coming home" (38). Despite his status as an outsider, Jordan knows the country so well that he astounds El Sordo with his knowledge and is able to offer attack advice that native Spaniards cannot provide (147).

Often, the Western hero is depicted alongside someone with two left feet—a pupil, a tenderfoot, or a not-as-skilled sidekick—to further highlight his near-mythic prowess. Here too, Young's distinction between the Hemingway code hero and the young Hemingway hero who aspires to learn the code sounds a lot like the accomplished cowboy tutor and his spunky protégé: The Virginian has his tenderfoot, Santiago has the boy, Wilson has Macomber, Harry Morgan has his rummy mate in *To Have and Have Not*, the bullfighter has Jake Barnes, and a succession of men whose knowledge was derived from experience, not books, are there to informally instruct Nick Adams.

Just as the Western hero has mastered his professional skills, more importantly he has mastered himself. He won't be provoked, and he won't tolerate being perceived as weak or imperceptive. He drinks—since that's part of the game, part of male bonding—but never to excess, because that leads to a loss of control, a loss of poise. He gets emotionally involved, at times, with women, but keeps his true feelings inside except on rare occasions when he speaks of them to his lady, but never around witnesses. In all situations, his actions are informed more by reason than emotion. The Virginian knows when to back down and he knows when to back others down. His calm response to being called a son of a bitch during a card game has since become a Western cliché: "When you call me that, *smile!*" (18). In other words, you'd better be joking. It's the same poker-style response the Inglés has when he enters the stronghold and a man with a scar asks in Western fashion what he is looking at, Jordan's response is a single word: "Thee" (57). And that response disarms his would-be opponents. When pressed by the gypsy about his reason for not killing Pablo, since he would "have to kill him sooner or later," Jordan tells the gypsy that he opted against violence because "I thought it might molest you others or the woman" (61). Besides, Jordan knows that to kill before being pushed to the brink of necessity is not to kill, but "to assassinate" (61). While those around him would follow their emotions, Jordan remains reasonable.

Similarly, the Virginian is cool in situations where other men are noticeably more nervous, and his calm demeanor disarms his opponents at times,

while at other times it unsettles them. When his archrival Trampas utters for the first time another cliché, "I'll give you till sundown to leave town," the Virginian says, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, "Trampas, are yu' sure yu' really mean that?" which drives his opponent to a bottle-throwing rage. That kind of Western slap-leather tension is reflected in Hemingway's description of Jordan's first encounters with Pablo and the freedom fighters (50-53). At several points gunplay seems likely, and Jordan, the consummate professional, senses potential danger and casually readies himself. While smiling at Maria,

At the same time he sucked in on his stomach muscles and swung a little to the left on his stool so that his pistol slipped around on his belt closer to where he wanted it. He reached his hand down toward his hip pocket and Pablo watched him. . . . His hand came up from the hip pocket with the leather-covered flask and he unscrewed the top and then, lifting the cup, drank half the water and poured very slowly from the flask into the cup. (50)

Later, Jordan was "watching Pablo, and as he watched, letting his right hand hang lower and lower, ready if it should be necessary, half hoping it would be" (53).

Interestingly, however, the tension between Pablo and the Inglés never turns into a showdown in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, though Pablo, like Trampas, grows drunk and belligerent later, and the cave becomes for a moment tense as a barroom. "I am drunk," Pablo announces, adding that "To drink is nothing. It is to be drunk that is important." Jordan, with a coolness equal to the Virginian, says, "I doubt it. Cowardly, yes," after which it became "so quiet in the cave, suddenly, that he could hear the hissing noise the wood made burning on the hearth where Pilar cooked" (211-13). Jordan thinks, "I'd like to kill him and have it over with. . . . Come on. Let us get it over with" (212). But he remains cool, and Pablo reacts as Trampas did when the dealer in the barroom chided all who would disrupt the fragile silence with shifting chairs or sudden movements: "Sit quiet. Can't you see he don't want to push trouble? He has handed Trampas the choice to back down or draw his steel" (19), and Trampas wisely elected to back down. As the tenderfoot narrator put it, "In no company would [the Virginian] be rated a novice at the cool art of self-preservation" (19).

Throughout Wister's novel this early Western hero displays a coolness under fire that anticipates the Hemingway hero's ability to conduct himself with what Hemingway termed "grace under pressure"<sup>26</sup>—the secret of which, as big-game guide Wilson explains, is an acceptance of death: "That's it," he tells Macomber. "Worst [a lion] can do is kill you." After

speaking this part of the hero's code, "He was very embarrassed, having brought out this thing he had lived by, but he had seen men come of age before and it always moved him" (32). Yet, one senses that Wilson is far less embarrassed by the vocalization of this maxim than he was by Macomber's earlier flight from danger. Clearly, the code hero is moved that his protégé has learned the most difficult part of the code, that which makes them stand taller than others: facing death bravely and gracefully as the bullfighters do in *The Sun Also Rises* (10).

The same emotion is stirred in the Virginian when he recalls how bravely his friend faced the hangman's noose, tightened around his neck by order of the Virginian himself, because the man had broken one of the unwritten but understood rules of conduct: He had been caught rustling cattle. The Virginian's view "was simple enough: you must die brave. Failure is a sort of treason to the brotherhood, and forfeits pity. It was [his friend's] perfect bearing [at the moment of his execution] that had caught his heart so that he forgot even his scorn of the other man" (247). The key, of course, is that killing and exercising force is never relished by the hero, who at one point exclaims, "I have been fearing he would force it on me" (103). When the hanging was accomplished, and the tenderfoot remarks how the Virginian "never **did** this before," the tall man responds, "No, I never had it to do" (246). But his code and sense of duty demanded that he execute his friend in order to enforce the unwritten laws of the West.

In a Godless and lawless land, the responsibility for administering justice ultimately rests with those Western heroes whose moral codes are as superior as their skills. But to be heroic, they must be reluctant, rather than eager enforcers. Speaking of the last "nervous" dynamiter, Jordan says matter-of-factly, "I shot him. . . . He was too **badly** wounded to travel and I shot him" (149). Once again, what Young observed of the Hemingway code hero sounds similar to the typical Western hero:

he represents a code according to which the hero, if he could attain it, would be able to live properly in the world of violence, disorder, and misery to which he has been introduced and which he inhabits. The code hero, then, offers up and exemplifies certain principles of honor, courage, and endurance which in a life of tension and pain make a man a man . . . and enable him to conduct himself well in the losing battle that is life.<sup>27</sup>

Life, to the Western hero, is a game to be played, and played well—especially in the arena of men only, where playing it well *extends* one's life. When the Virginian and Molly read Browning's poem about a world of men, the Virginian tells her that he was sure the man would come back

"afteh he had played some more of the game." When she asks what he means, he replies, "Life, ma'am. Whatever he was a-doin' in the world of men" (219). When the Virginian's friend, Steve, gets involved with rustlers and only he and another get caught, the narrator thinks how "he stayed game" throughout his unfortunate capture (247) and remarks, "Yes, the joke, as they put it, was on Steve. He had lost one point in the game to them" (243). When the Virginian hangs his friend, he thinks, "I would do it all over again. The whole thing just the same. He knowed the customs of the country, and he played the game" (258). In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, when Pablo executes four *guardia civiles*, Pilar vividly remembers how each member of the losing side faced death (101-2)—two more "gamely" than the others. For the rest of the fascists, Pablo constructs an elaborate gauntlet that the men must run, a game that turns the crowd cruel only because of "the insults" of one fascist and "the cowardice" of a second (114)—both violations of unwritten rules of proper conduct.

Talk may be cheap, but banter is a necessary part of the game, an important way for the hero and others to deal with injuries, indignities, and the ever-present possibility of dying. But there are rules here, too. Even the tenderfoot narrator of *The Virginian* quickly learns this part of the code, for at a boardinghouse dinner he notices that his "strict silence and attention to the corned beef made [him] in the eyes of the cow-boys at table compare well with the over-talkative commercial travellers" (11). Later, after he had seen the Virginian "wildly disporting himself" in a moment of revelry, the tenderfoot discovered that "those were matters which he chose not to discuss with me" (26). Riding together proved just as conversationally fruitless, since five or ten miles would pass before the Virginian would speak a word. Yet, while "The Virginian was grave in bearing and of infrequent speech . . . he kept a song going—a matter of some seventy-nine verses. Seventy-eight were quite unprintable, and rejoiced his brother cow-punchers monstrously" (59). Joking and idle talk are not the same thing.

When Jordan meets brigade leader Golz, they verbally spar. And when a staff person complains "in the language Robert Jordan did not understand," Golz tells him to "Shut up. . . . I am so serious is why I can joke" (8). If life is a game, then verbal sparring is a round-one form of character assessment as well as a stress reliever. "How otherwise can we divert ourselves?" Pilar asks Jordan (98). Such is the case both in the classic Western and in Hemingway's fictional world. One can't read the bunkhouse banter in *The Virginian* without thinking of the priest-baiting section from *A Farewell to Arms* (6-9), or the banter at the cave where Pilar takes on all comers (92-93, 155-56). Pilar even bests Jordan in the verbal duel that takes place before their big offensive. "I begin to think

thou art afraid to see the bull come out," she teases, to which Jordan responds, "Thy mother." But Pilar, who "would have made a good man" (92), whispers, "Thou never hadst one" (405). Those who fail to understand what constitutes appropriate verbal jousting are denigrated. Anselmo, for example, criticizes the gypsy for the latter's exaggerated talk: "He is a gypsy, so if he catches rabbits he says it is foxes. If he catches a fox he would say it is an elephant. . . . Gypsies talk much and kill little" (19). Those who cannot hold their own in a war of words are as poorly thought of as those who fail to act and act well.

Game references and metaphors in Hemingway's fiction have been well documented, most extensively by Benson. Santiago is likened to a baseball player, and the men in *The Sun Also Rises* are compared to matadors, bulls, and steers. Catherine Barkley says to her young patient-lover, Frederic Henry, "This is a rotten game we play, isn't it?" (*Farewell*, 31). Frederic realizes that "This was a game, like bridge, in which you said things instead of playing cards," though "Nobody had mentioned what the stakes were" (30-31). Jordan, meanwhile, is engaged in his own form of gamesmanship. He runs his demolition wire from the bridge "as an outfielder goes backwards for a long fly ball" (445). Earlier, upon hearing that some of the band have killed two members of the *guardia civil*, he responds, "That is big game" (21). "It is like a merry-go-round, Robert Jordan thought. . . . But this is another wheel. This is like a wheel that goes up and around. . . . There are no prizes either, he thought, and no one would choose to ride this wheel" (225). The game, of course, is the same one of which the Virginian spoke: Life itself. And, as Benson notes, "In the game of life you lose by playing, and the harder you play the more you lose."<sup>28</sup>

How one plays the game—abiding by the rules or the code, and acting with style—therefore becomes most important, for both the Western hero and the Hemingway hero. Ironically, those who have a heightened sense of the code risk losing more so and more often than those who would play it safe—and therefore develop the heightened sense of living that characterizes both heroes. As the Virginian warned his beloved Molly, "Cow-punchers do not live long enough to get old" (209). He may have a way with horses and women, but his code makes him put duty first, because "a man goes through with his responsibilities" (258). Jordan, likewise, tells Pilar that he will not let drink or women interfere with his work. Duty comes first (91). The call of duty also makes the Virginian forestall his courtship to tend his herd and track rustlers, and it draws him into a gunfight with Trampas on the day of his wedding—even as coming up short on the wheel of fortune causes the Inglés to send Maria away with the others after his broken leg dooms him to stay behind and face death alone.

Although Rehberger suggests that in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* Hemingway equally embraces and subverts the myths of the Old West,<sup>29</sup> I would argue that the complicated network of formulaic elements indicates a considerably stronger embrace—which, nonetheless, makes the Custer underpinning all the more ironic. For one thing, there's Hemingway's own propensity for romance, not just in his adventurous life, but in documented episodes. Gertrude Stein sensed it when she wrote that he "looks like a Modern and he smells of the museums,"<sup>30</sup> and as Reynolds has observed, "As with so many of the modernists, Hemingway's modernism resided in his style, not in his ideas or value system."<sup>31</sup> As early as 1944, Malcolm Cowley was claiming that the literary lion could be grouped not with those who were attempting to remake reality, but "with Poe and Hawthorne and Melville," writers from the romantic period in American literature.<sup>32</sup>

Although Hemingway implies in all his fictions that romance, chivalry, and knighthood are dead, that does not prevent his characters from trying to think or act in a romantic fashion, or from considering what it takes to be a modern hero. In fact, they seem compelled to do so. Robert Jordan alludes to previous heroes such as the Greeks at Thermopylae, Horatius at the bridge, and the Dutch boy who stuck his finger in the dike (164). Even the drunken revolutionary leader, Pablo, is compared to General Ulysses S. Grant—a grand general but lousy president. In *Across the River and Into the Trees*, Colonel Cantwell describes General George Patton as being "quite rich in money and with a lot of armour" and notes how difficult rank makes it for a man to attain "the Holy Grail" in this day and age.<sup>33</sup>

*The Virginian* established the Western hero as a knight on horseback who lived by a code as honorable and chivalrous as medieval warriors (74, 208). The Virginian was "deeply proud of his lady," despite the fact that she "had slighted him. He had pulled her out of the water once and he had been her unrewarded knight even to-day" (74). Later, "before a lot of men . . . Trampas spoke disrespectfully of [her], and before them all he made Trampas say he was a liar" (211). Again, one can't help but think of Cohn, the "false knight"<sup>34</sup> who was unable to defend his lady's honor, and, in fact, violated the code even more by talking about his affair with her to Jake (100–1). Or one recalls Maria's "rescue" from the fascists, where one of the men who helped her later confesses that he was "glad thou wert hanging over my back when the shots were coming from behind us" and grateful to "hold onto thy legs." Hearing this, Maria holds her composure and simply says, "My heroes. . . . My saviors" (133).

However outdated or reductive the notion of a Hemingway code hero might now be considered, the fact remains that the code by which Hemingway's heroes live too closely resembles the code of the Western

hero to be considered anything but an embracing of Western myth—even down to the ironic endings. Though Wister romanticized the West, Haycox and genre writers to follow would have their heroes lose for winning—solving the problems of the community, but riding off alone and feeling empty. Despite readings of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* as a subversion of the Western myth, then, the Inglés can be read as another Virginian, but with a later genre-style ending, since he experiences a letdown after blowing the bridge (447) and cannot ride off into the sunset with his beloved Maria. Even so, it may still be too much to claim that the Hemingway code hero is derived strictly from the Western hero, since Wister himself wrote that the cowboy hero was himself a reincarnation of “the medieval man. It was no new type, no product of the frontier.”<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, the shadow cast by the Western hero upon American culture has been significant. And if the mountains of the American West loom as large as Fiedler and others have observed in Hemingway’s fictional world, they seem to have cast a technical as well as thematic shadow. In *The Virginian*, Wister used the mountains as a sundial of sorts, returning to them in his fictional descriptions as a way of heightening pre-showdown tension. As the shadow creeps closer to town, where the Virginian and Trampas must “slap leather” on Main Street, the reader experiences what it must feel like for the participants, sensing the magnitude of the moment drawing closer. Perhaps not so coincidentally, repetition of select descriptive elements is a technique Hemingway has employed often in his fiction. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway uses the movement of sunlight across a landscape as Wister did, in order to create suspense and set up the two-part tragic ending: Jordan’s injury, and Jordan’s impending death. Readers are told that Robert Jordan “lay on his belly behind the pine trunk, the gun across his left forearm and watched the point of light below him. . . . Robert Jordan lay there and waited for daylight” (410–11). Hemingway returns to descriptions of Jordan, the pines, and shifting sunlight again and again,<sup>36</sup> until finally the novel ends with Hemingway’s version of the showdown:

Robert Jordan [lying] behind the tree, holding onto himself very carefully and delicately to keep his hands steady. He was waiting until the officer reached the sunlit place where the first trees of the pine forest joined the green slope of the meadow. He could feel his heart beating against the pine needle floor of the forest. (462)

For Jordan and other Hemingway code heroes, as with the Virginian and every Western hero before them, and after, it often comes down to this simple maxim: in life and in the face of death, a man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do.

## NOTES

1. Michael Reynolds, *Hemingway: The 1930s* (New York: Norton, 1997), 4.
2. Leslie Fiedler, "Men Without Women," in *Hemingway: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert P. Weeks (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 90, 92.
3. John J. Teunissen, "For Whom the Bell Tolls as Mythic Narrative," in *Ernest Hemingway: Six Decades of Criticism*, ed. Linda W. Wagner (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1987), 221-37. See also Ben Merchant Vorpahl's "Ernest Hemingway and Owen Wister: Finding the Lost Generation," *Library Chronicle* 36 (Spring 1970): 126-37; Frank Scafella's "The Sun Also Rises: Owen Wister's 'Garbage Pail,' Hemingway's 'Passage of the Human Soul,'" in *The Hemingway Review* 6 (Fall 1986): 104; and Alan Price's "I'm Not an Old Fogey and You're not a Young Ass': Owen Wister and Ernest Hemingway," in *The Hemingway Review* 9.1 (Fall 1989): 82-90.
4. Dean Rehberger, "'I Don't Know Buffalo Bill'; or, Hemingway and the Rhetoric of the Western," in *Blowing the Bridge: Essays on Hemingway and "For Whom the Bell Tolls,"* ed. Rena Sanderson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 161, 163.
5. Michael S. Reynolds, *Hemingway's Reading: 1910-1940, An Inventory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 42-43.
6. Charles A. Fenton, *The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: New American Library, 1961), 16.
7. Scafella, "Wister's 'Garbage Pail,'" 104.
8. Reynolds, *Hemingway's Reading*, 202.
9. Rehberger, "Buffalo Bill," 160.
10. Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Riverside: University of California Press, 1975).
11. Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 45, 48.
12. Cynthia S. Hamilton, *Western and Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction in America: From High Noon to Midnight* (London: Macmillan, 1987), 10.
13. Tompkins, *West of Everything*, 31.
14. Owen Wister, *The Virginian* (New York: New American Library, 1970), 270. Subsequent references are from this edition and will be given as page numbers in the text.
15. Owen Wister, *Owen Wister's West: Selected Articles*, ed. Robert Murray Davis (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 38.
16. Owen Wister, *Owen Wister Out West: His Journals and Letters*, ed. Fanny Kemble Wister (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 246.

17. Wister, *Owen Wister's West*, 42–43, 50.
18. Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribner's, 1954), 10. Subsequent references are from this edition and will be given as page numbers in the text.
19. Robert Penn Warren, "Ernest Hemingway," in *Ernest Hemingway: Five Decades of Criticism*, ed. Linda Welshimer Wagner (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1974), 79.
20. Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Conversations with Ernest Hemingway* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), 63.
21. Ernest Hemingway, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," in *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Scribner's, 1987), 4. Subsequent references are from this edition and will be given as page numbers in the text.
22. Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (New York: Scribner's, 1980), 32. Subsequent references are from this edition and will be given as page numbers in the text.
23. Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (New York: Scribner's, 1987), 4. Subsequent references are from this edition and will be given as page numbers in the text.
24. There are numerous instances of such behavior in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, most strikingly on pages 43, 52, 62–3, 136–37, and 470–71.
25. Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Scribner's, 1969), 104. Subsequent references are from this edition and will be given as page numbers in the text.
26. Philip Young, *Ernest Hemingway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964), 11.
27. *Ibid.*, 10–11.
28. Jackson J. Benson, *Hemingway . . . The Writer's Art of Self-Defense* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), 102.
29. Rehberger, "Buffalo Bill," 162.
30. Gertrude Stein, *The Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Carl Van Vechten (New York: Modern Library, 1962), 204.
31. Michael S. Reynolds "The Sun in Its Time: Recovering the Historical Context," in *New Essays on "The Sun Also Rises,"* ed. Linda Wagner-Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 43–64.
32. Malcolm Cowley, in *The Portable Hemingway*, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Viking, 1944), vii.
33. Ernest Hemingway, *Across the River and Into the Trees* (New York: Scribner's, 1950), 144–45.

34. Mark Spilka, "The Death of Love in *The Sun Also Rises*," in *Hemingway: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert P. Weeks (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 127.
35. Wister, *Owen Wister's West*, 43.
36. See especially pp. 43<sup>1</sup>, 433-34, 450, 458, and 461-62.