Chapter One

Hook, Line and Salvation: A Semiology of Conflicts
The discourse codified within this text may be apparent or hidden; there may be one discourse with sub-discourses or there may be various different discourses, overlapping or separate. Whatever the final reading may signify, the interpretative process goes a long way in making evident concealed, subtle and apparently insignificant signifiers. The following text, 'Out of Season', needs to be looked at carefully in order to understand better the three human signifiers, their relationship with each other and their constantly deferred attempt at fishing.

To enter into a process of analysis and interpretation it would be convenient to segment the text. However, since there is no obvious break-off within the text of 'Out of Season', in terms of action or a change of situation, it would be more meaningful to study the text either sentence by sentence, or paragraph (a group of sentences) by paragraph, or both.

In we are to begin right at the beginning, then we start with the title. 'Out of Season', shows a displacement both in terms of time (chronology) and place (topography). The situation is inappropriate, it is either before or after, but not "in" season.
On the four lire Peduzzi had earned by spading the hotel garden he got quite drunk. This one sentence contains various units of signifiers each of which will open out into further signifiers later in the text. On the four lire shows an actual economic situation to be read as the condition in which Peduzzi exists. The name Peduzzi leads into a world peopled by proper names, some of whom we will meet soon. There are, further, in this sentence, two units of action: (a) had earned by spading the hotel garden and (b) he got quite drunk. (a) shows a positive action done in the past leading Peduzzi to be richer by four lires. But, this positive state is countered by unit (b) where he gets quite drunk leading to an inactive, and confused state, both physically and mentally. This opposition between action, inaction and a continuous movement toward action (here, fishing), which is never to be, is played out throughout the text and is, finally, abandoned on a fake, illusory note.

In the second sentence, he saw the young gentleman coming down the path and spoke to him mysteriously, again the actional code is extended with the verb units of coming down and spoke. However, these simple and everyday actions are invested with a questionable mysteriousness, which we otherwise don’t associate with Peduzzi from what has followed before.
The next two sentences push the action further while simultaneously setting the narrative within a given time frame. A plan is afoot for a trip, we do not know to where, and with the sub-segments, *to go as soon as lunch was finished* and *forty minutes or an hour* we are in a field of actual happenings, all of which take place according to social time (lunch) and clock time (forty minutes or an hour).

The next paragraph, from the words *at the cantina* to *day for trout fishing* should be segmented into two units, (a) the social/cultural, and (b) the natural. The import for both the segments is similar, a confident man looking forward to a mysterious, perhaps rewarding job, and a wonderful day to ensure the successful carrying out of the enterprise. The sense of 'out of season' is somewhat done away with, with an anticipation of fulfilment. The enterprise, toward which all movement focused up to now, is therefore trout fishing.

The next paragraph introduces varied connotations into what is apparently an obvious situation. The gentleman and Peduzzi are joined by a third person the gentleman's wife. There are oppositions throughout this passage. (1) The youth of both the man and the woman are stressed implying a young marriage. But the connotations of a marriage recently undertaken (with the emphasis on love, specially, romance) are undercut,
specially with the word 'sullenly' from the next paragraph. (2) The next confusion is phatic. First, Peduzzi says, let her follow us, but soon changes it to come up here and walk with us.... Let us all walk together. That he cannot make up his mind about her is also reflected later when she first follows her husband reluctantly on the expedition, then refuses to leave him preferring to go to jail with him and then, finally, returns to the hotel alone. (3) A confusion about her marital status — is she signora or signorina? — is also played out, a continuation of the problems centering around and emerging from her unhappy relationship with her husband. There is a further complicity between the husband and Peduzzi, cemented by the word winking.

The confusions and counterings continue in the next paragraph. The wife following rather sullenly is paired with Peduzzi who calls her tenderly. On the other hand, the young man's shout is paired with his wife's stopped lagging behind and walked up. In a reversal of roles, Peduzzi assumes the given tender (therefore, affectionate) expected role of a husband, whereas the new (even though an assumption) husband offers no tenderness. The results, however, are surprisingly the opposite of the expected. Tenderness is answered only with a sullenness, whereas the angry shout is promptly answered with movement.
The next paragraph is replete with signs about the actual state in which our three main characters exist. If we consider the three as one, then this *one* is totally isolated from the rest of the crowd which represents the socio-cultural world. The reader must identify each sign separately against the background to which it belongs. Suppose the bank clerk represents the financial pockets of the society, the groups of people the neighbourhood and the workmen the active, industrial set ups, then all the response Peduzzi, and therefore the gentleman and his wife, gets for his "elaborate greetings" are *stares* and *looks*. The only action paralleling Peduzzi's is a similar greeting by the equally shady beggar a character signifying similar status to that of Peduzzi's.

*Peduzzi stopped in front of a store with the window full of bottles and brought his empty grappa bottle from an inside pocket of his old military coat.... It was a wonderful day.* If we are to consider the first sentence apart from the text, it will seem that Peduzzi is in control of the situation. The affirmative verbs — *stopped*, *brought* — would be useful for this confirmation. Followed by the sentence about a wonderful day, it does seem that every thing is alright. However, a comparison of these two signifiers with a large number of the preceding ones will lead to a different connotation. Nothing is alright, everything has gone wrong and the need for a drink is only to lull Peduzzi into a fake sense of security and
enjoyment. In six short sentences the word marsala is repeated four times implying the repetitive and reductive situation they are trapped in.

The next seven lines with its negatives offer a contrast between the characters of the husband and wife. The wife is still sullen but her husband is not paying her any attention. While she tries to figure out whether Peduzzi is drunk or not, the husband is contemplating what the drink is all about. The point of convergence for an unhappy couple is, however, the drunk himself, since both their thoughts are trained on him.

"Gold", Peduzzi said finally, taking hold of the young gentleman's sleeve "Lire." He smiled, reluctant to press the subject but needing to bring the young gentleman into action. Again, this is a contrast between action and inaction, action which will lead to inaction and a displaced authority. Peduzzi's said finally, taking hold, smiled, to press, needing to bring, seem to invest in him an authority which he does not otherwise possess. In these same sentences he has to take the lire from his customer. The lire, the giving of which will make the young man active, and the taking of which will do the same for Peduzzi, lies at the centre of this passage. But the action will only lead to further inaction and confusion with the marsala getting in the way of the trip.
This connotation becomes clearer when the ten-lira note leads Peduzzi only to a locked door and scorn and hurt. His desire for action has not borne fruit but has brought him down further to a negative state.

They walked down the road to the concordia three abreast. This sentence also has different signifieds. Read out of context its signifieds are confidence and camaraderie. But, within the text it shows compulsion and the forced nature of the "companionship". The ten-lira note exchanges hands reversing the roles as well, where the gentleman now is the buyer with an embarrassed Peduzzi settling for nothing... anything... I don't know.

Behind the doors of the Concordia which shut in the gentleman and his wife, thereby shutting out Peduzzi, the unit of three is reduced to two by an outsider. Here we have the first dialogue between the married couple. Any interaction earlier was reported — went back into the hotel and spoke to his wife, looked back and shouted — now they are facing each other. But reported speech has only been replaced by indefinites — might as well, maybe. Again the conversation veers away from them and focuses on Peduzzi. He is not present at the scene but present in their thoughts. The man is looking for him, while the woman states his desire. If we take a long shot, the woman at the counter of the wine shop best signifies the situation, It all amused her.
To focus back to the couple and their earlier argument, apology is futile, because, there is apparently no argument despite an argument. As the man says, *we were both getting at the same thing from different angles*. Again, to state exactly the same thing from a different angle, this time the wife's, *It doesn't make any difference.... None of it makes any difference.*

The emphasis on another sweater and three sweaters only corroborates what has gone before. (1) Another sweater on three sweaters would burden an already overburdened situation, and (2) the situation has reached too cold a point where not even another sweater will provide warmth, a situation metaphorical of their relationship.

The next five lines encapsulate all that has gone before. In a recapitulation: marsala is mentioned again, money (five lire) exchanges hands, the door opens out, it is stressed again that the girl was amused and Peduzzi is back on the scene, waiting impatiently with what started it all, the fishing expedition.

The following paragraph is devoted to him. As he offers to carry the rods he says, *What difference does it make if anybody sees them? No one will trouble us. No one will make any trouble for me in Cortina. I know them at the municipio... Big trout, I tell you. Lots of them.* He devalues his own words
because it is not a new situation that he speaks of. They have been in full public view all along. There was nothing hidden, therefore, the question of revealing something, anything, does not arise at all. As for the influence which he relies on, it has already been shown as hollow. This entire paragraph holds out certain promises — those of a devil-may-care attitude toned heavily with confidence and self reliance, a trouble free life, influence, affection, and the promise of fish. These offerings are constantly deferred and never to be attained.

*My daughter.... His doctor?*

A redeeming touch brought in with Peduzzi’s mention of his daughter, implying a family (i.e. roots, responsibility etc.) somewhere, is undercut with the wife’s misunderstanding the word as his *doctor*. Family may mean generation and continuity, love, affection, responsibility, roots, possibly, meaningfulness. But it is undercut along with all its signifieds. Not only is the word *daughter* replaced by a situationally meaningless word, *doctor*, but the girl moves away from the scene as if denying any ties with Peduzzi. *The girl went into the house as Peduzzi pointed.*

Now with specific directions such as *they walked down the hill across the fields and then turned to follow the river bank*, the party’s movements are invested with meaningfulness. This temporary certainty is supported by
the words *much winking* and *knowingness*. However, a reference to similar words used earlier will split up the signifiers into different signifieds. Similarly, the earlier confusions of identity and implications of role reversal are repeated again. *The wife caught his* (Peduzzi’s) *breath across the wind* and *he* (Peduzzi, again) *nudged her in the ribs.* This is an attempt at intimacy which fails all over again.

*Part of the time he talked in d’Ampezzo dialect and sometimes in Tyroler German dialect. He could not make out which the young gentleman and his wife understood the best so he was being bilingual. The young gentleman and the wife understood nothing.* These lines embody the phatic code and the corresponding gap/failure of communication. On the one hand is the garrulous Peduzzi, sending across feelers to maintain a sense of unity, and on the other, the couple who do not receive a single feeler. Speech, as it were, hangs in between.

For the first time a personal/familial dialogue is exchanged between the couple. Two things happen with the dialogue. (1) The reader finds out clearly the situation in which the trip is taking place and, (2) the feelings of the couple, revulsion/scorn on the part of the wife and cowardice on the part of the husband, are made clear. With this exchange a separation (a breach in the “group/community”) is mentioned for the first time which
will soon take place. But for now a different kind of loyalty is asserted. 'I'm going to stay with you. If you go to jail we might as well both go'.

The river is reached finally but all the promises of beauty and serenity are muddied with the dump heap.

The split in the group — the wife vs. the gentleman plus Peduzzi — is forced by an unfair complicity between the two men. They talk to each other in Italian which translated in English is asking Tiny to go back. *Three* is therefore now *two*. Peduzzi's ineffectualness is finally driven home by the symbol of his turning back to notice her absence, not presence, not even the process of her going away. When he calls out she is too far to hear. But, the point is, she was unable to listen to him even when she was near him. His words are actually silences, ineffective and useless. *She's gone! said Peduzzi. It shocked him.* His unnecessariness is clear now, even to him. All along the actors along with the readers have been attempting to draw close to the trip which is to culminate in *fishing*. All the various encounters have been a preparation for this experience. Now, without the woman, the men get down to ready themselves to start with the real thing. But, the real thing is marked/stained by signs such as *afraid* and *uncomfortable*. The young gentleman is now heartlessly and unhappily part of something which he had earlier desired. Guilt marks him while
Peduzzi's involvement is marked by his unarticulated desire to postpone and prolong the good life to a few days more.

The next few lines are an unfolding of this desire. What was to be, is not to be, because there is no lead, no piombo. The no — a negative — contrasts with the positive wish to fish.

Peduzzi says, "You said you had everything". Everything signifies fulfilment, satisfaction, completeness. However, the trip is a failure. At the end nothing remains with which they can look forward.


The trip is postponed and fixed for the next day, again supported by clock time at seven. As if to hold out a new promise for the future, the sun came out. It was warm and pleasant. Again in a repeat of the beginning, nature's confidence and warmth is paralleled by human confidence and trust, signified by the sharing of the bottle of marsala between the young man and Peduzzi. Marsala, as interpreted earlier, led to inactiveness and a false sense of security. It does so again, prompting the observation about
Peduzzi’s feelings, *it was wonderful. This was a great day, after all. A wonderful day.*

"*Senta, caro! In the morning at seven*. He had called the young gentleman caro several times and nothing had happened. It was good marsala. His eyes glistened. *Days like this stretched out ahead. It would begin at seven in the morning.*

*Finally, they started to walk up the hill toward the town.* Again, this is motivated movement. Again, money exchanges hands and roles are reversed. Peduzzi, after the day’s failures, assumes confidence and starts to plan vividly for the next day. *This was living. He was through with the hotel garden, breaking up frozen manure with a dung fork. Life was opening out.*

*With promptly at seven we are set firmly within the chronological frame, all ready to journey the cycle once more. But with the gentleman’s, I may not be going, a future indefinite, the text shuts down on Peduzzi’s entreaties and hopes. The cycle has been competed, though in an incomplete manner, probably never to be repeated again.*
The narrative packs in a lot of details from the very beginning and as we read the first seventy words of the first two lines of 'A Way You'll never Be', we are thrust into the scene and ambience while being simultaneously introduced to the protagonist, Nick Adams. The number of war-related words that make up the passage — "attack", "machine gun", "fire", "resistance" — startlingly culminate in the words "the position of the dead. Immediately, it should be pointed out that the sentence, "Nicholas Adams saw what had happened by the position of the dead", acts as a pivot around which the text revolves. There are three premises within this half sentence and all of these become important focal points as we enter the narrative more deeply. Nick Adams becomes the site in which the reading, understanding, and interpretation — i.e. "saw" (signifying seeing, observing, analysing) — of the position of the dead (these four words standing for war, violence, killing and the overall senselessness) is literally played out. In his deviation from the "normal, expected" behavior, in his fear that it will get him, war manifests itself in its worse than death incarnation. Nick Adams discourses on war in a subconscious and psychological manner and he literally "speaks" this discourse with his mind and body.
They lay alone or in clumps in the high grass of the field and along the road, their pockets out, and over them were flies and around each body or group of bodies were the scattered papers.

This sentence points the way to the probable reason behind Nick Adams' deranged state. This line shows what war can do and actually does to those involved in it. These men are lying dead scattered along the road and the field. The road, otherwise a symbol of motion/movement which takes people somewhere and brings them back from other places, does not take these dead men anywhere, neither home nor away from the war field. These men will never go anywhere again, for them all movement has ceased. They do not even have any possessions as their empty, turned out pockets signify. No possessions also signify no attachments or ties. The last rites are replaced by the humming of the flies and scattered papers (later called smutty photographs) instead of the chanting of the priest and flower petals. We again move from the domain of the conventional to the domain of the undesirable. This movement is also a fallout of the war.

Nick Adams will escape this fate, at least in the course of the text, but the one he faces is far worse than quick death and an end of the thought processes themselves. He is condemned by his knowledge to confront the war repeatedly. Perhaps what his fate promises is a
reconciliation, even a painful one, with the future, a future denied to those who are dead. However, the movement toward this future, with an intimate knowledge of the past, is too torturous for Nick to bear and it finally, if temporarily, breaks him.

The passage that follows lists objects lying around unclaimed in the grass and on the road just like the dead soldiers. The inventory of war weapons and articles like *stick bombs*, *rifles*, *ammunition boxes*, *star-shell pistols*, *gas masks*, *machine guns*, among many others brings the war closer to the reader along with the horror heightened by the juxtaposition of these deadly leftovers with the remains of photographs mentioned repeatedly but only as *typical papers*. The photographs would stand for memories and visuals of the past which one has captured on film to remember other things by. As the next passage recounts these papers consist both of prayer books and photographs either in remembrance of things past or for propaganda about apparently noble and heroic causes and deeds, *propaganda post cards showing a soldier in Austrian uniform bending a woman backward over a bed; the figures were impressionistically drawn; very attractively depicted and had nothing in common with actual rape in which the woman's skirts are pulled over her head to smother her, one comrade sometimes sitting upon the head*. The dead soldiers, therefore, lie surrounded by smutty, soiled memories and *letters, letters, letters*, obvious connections with the past,
connections with homes and families, connections no longer necessary and better done away with, connections which in any case the violence of war has already severed.

The only redeeming factor about war and the death that it scatters around is that it knows no difference between one victim and another, thereby encompassing all in a benevolent extinction. But war dehumanizes to such a level that even the soldiers do not refrain from pillaging from the bodies of their dead.

The most notable and revealing line in the next passage is *there was no one in the town at all*. What has been left behind are three dead soldiers killed while running, shelled and shattered houses, *many pieces of shell* and *shrapnel balls* scattered all around. Nothing that lives has been left behind — any human link or association has been blown off. Upto this point, we see Nick Adams passing through and taking in the deadness around him. We see him *seeing* the remains of war and capturing these images in his mind. He is a soldier too, and a similar fate is a probability for him. Therefore, for the protagonist at this point in the text, what he has observed ("seen") will determine what is to follow in his own life soon.
What needs mention here is that fishing, either the idea or an actual instance, is never mentioned directly in this text. However, Nick's delirious announcement to the soldiers about fishbaits and grasshoppers is more in keeping with the psychological wound he is suffering from. Moreover, in his shelled and trapped state, Nick's references to something familiar and, possibly, loved (here, the indirect mention about fishing) may be seen as his attempt to hold on to his sanity. But the beauty of the idea lies in the fact that by mentioning baits and indirectly the idea of fishing he is resisting the pressure on his mind to let go, but, by only mentioning baits, and not the actual game, he is referring to his own state of a baited, trapped and fished person.

We revert back to the passage where Nick mulls over the humanless town he has just ridden through. The words over- foliaged and over-green stand out in an atmosphere of desertion, death and decay. But, even though ripe and lush, these being images of (re)generation and fecundity, the town does not have a single living soul. What Nick spies instead are metal and guns, secreted away within the lushness of the foliage. It is as if, death and life, decay and growth, barrenness and fecundity co-exist, and what Nick observes all around him is this confusing symbiosis. Only, the river remains unchanged, unaffected totally by the assault of history. This is still as Nick knew it before, and, therefore, it is an anchor in the middle
of chaos. When he is unsettled by the present, the river, albeit indirectly, will provide him an answer as a thing which has been, is, and continues to be.

As the protagonist continues on his journey he finally encounters other human beings. There was a series of holes in the top of the bank with a few men in them. As yet we are not certain whether these men are alive or dead. The language of the sentence mentioned above is ambiguous, and may be interpreted in either way. If we are to think that the men are dead, we might not be too wrong as this reading will only be an extension of the images of death and decay seen earlier. However, the text itself points otherwise soon enough. The men in the holes in the side of the bank were sleeping. No one challenged. These men, obviously soldiers, are therefore, in a state of temporary death, too exhausted, by war to challenge an intruder.

However, soon enough, Nick comes face to face with the brutal, violent, slightly crazed, and a not-too-exhausted-by-war-to-challenge man. This soldier, the first that moves and speaks, lives the war in himself. As he threatens Nick, he can shoot without compunctions.

From a third person, slightly detached narrative so far, we move into dialogues which bring us close to Nick’s real suffering. The
conversation between Nick and the second lieutenant is commonplace with Nick's insistence on being helped and the lieutenant intent on challenging Nick's identity and credibility. These dialogues between a war-crazed and a war-weary combatant expresses in the repetitiveness of the language the boredom and exasperation they both probably experience. However, we are allowed a few insights into the psyche of the speakers, both deeply shaken by the war. As Nick had left the edge of the town three shrapnel had burst high and to the right over one of the wrecked houses and since then there had been no shelling. But the face of this officer looked like the face of a man during bombardment. There was the same tightness and the voice did not sound natural. His pistol made Nick nervous. Nick's nervousness is reflected in the nervousness of the officer and repeated in the sentence which follows, "This officer made him very nervous."

Nick's meeting with Captain Paravicini is another of the several meetings between Nick and another (either a thing or a person) in the text. Nick meets soldiers who feign death, and meets the pistol-cocking, crazed officer. None on these meetings is in any way normal or otherwise helpful in allaying his fears of the mental and psychological derangement he knows he is suffering from. Paravicini, on the other hand, is the most "normal", perhaps more normal than anything Nick has encountered so far or can hope to on the battlefield. He is the first to bring to notice Nick's
physically exhausted and mentally traumatised condition. He is the first person with whom Nick can speak with about himself and the only one who sees the need for Nick to recuperate.

Some other reasons as to why the dialogues between Nick and Paravicini are important are that they point to a few important aspects about Nick's state.

The first is that in the short exchange between Nick and Parvicini about the attack we understand that Nick's sensibilities are sound and active enough to observe, understand and, finally, corroborate Parvicini's verdict on the attack. "How was the show?" "We made a very fine attack. Truly. A very fine attack. I will show you. Look." "I came from Fornaci, I could see how it had been. It was very good". Nick's observations about the war are not all. He is acute in his reading of the whole deceptive purpose behind his circulating around the camp in an American uniform. What we must note is that Nick's mind is too keenly aware of all that is going on around him for us to simply derogatively dismiss him as nutty, or otherwise.

The second important fact is related to Nick's remark to Paravicini that he, Nick, is not attached to any regiment. "No. I am supposed to move around and let them see the uniform". This unattached state signifies a tieless,
bondless state of no relationships and no responsibilities where being alone and in isolation is more important and necessary.

The third point arises from the uniform itself. Nick is in an American uniform which he wears for the express purpose of "showing" to the other soldiers so that they will believe and hope that other Americans are on the way to their rescue. The irony lies in the fact that there is no way that the soldiers will know the difference between one uniform and another unless it is pointed out to them. Identity is not a quality inherent in an object and can only be established with the use of language from outside.

The fourth point is about what is supposed to be but is not. I'm supposed to have my pockets full of cigarettes and postal cards and such things. I should have a musette full of chocolate. These I should distribute with a kind word and a pat on the back. But there were't any cigarettes and postcards and no chocolate. So they said to circulate around anyway. Further, Nick says, In principle, I would have brought you a bottle of brandy. In all these instances there is evidently a disruption of plans. What must be (the idea) always falls short of what is (the reality) and yet the effort toward the reaching of the goal is continuous. Indirectly, these statements are applicable to Nick himself. He still possesses a sharp, active mind along with keen powers of
observation and yet he had been classified as nutty. It's a hell of a nuisance once they've had you certified as nutty. No one ever has any confidence in you again. Life is made more difficult for him because he is acutely aware of the dichotomy of his situation. Let's not talk about how I am. It's a subject I know too much about to want to think about it any more, and then, "I'm alright. I can't sleep without a light of some sort. That's all I have now". Nick knows what he has suffered from and in his own way has managed to get away from the problem. However, once he has been certified as nutty, the appendage cannot be cut off from him. To go back, therefore, to a point mentioned earlier, identity is partly external to a person. Try as he might, Nick cannot help but continue to live with something of his past which he would otherwise rather not think about. Another pointer to Nick's state of a more or less passive being on whom an identity has been thrust are all the passive verbs in his speech to Paravicini. When Nick is telling Paravicini about what his actual duties were to be he uses verbs like supposed to have, should have, should distribute, they said. Very clearly, even according to him, he has been told to, maybe even ordered to, do his duties. As for him, his reactions to these duties are not altogether passive. He does make an occasional and intelligent intervention.

The text now proceeds to perhaps the most telling of all passages on the state of Nick's mind. This entire passage of only one paragraph is
made up of Nick's reminiscences about the past, the war, and essentially, how the war has left him psychologically crippled. The sentences are all mixed up depicting a chronological confusion in his mind and the narrative. We must keep in mind the fact that Nick is only thinking about the past, not directly telling the reader about it. I focus first on the opening and closing sentences of this passage since I consider them of primary importance. The passage starts with, "Nick lay on the bunk. He was very disappointed that he felt this way and more disappointed, even, that it was so obvious to Captain Paravicini. Immediately before this Nick has made a subtle but desperate plea for his sanity. He can, however, "see" that his plea has had no effect. Ironically, Nick does not seem convinced of his own "normality". This starts him off on his confused recounting of the past, a narrative which is not so confused after all. Before analysing the narrative I would like to point out to the closing sentences of the passage. If it didn't get so damned mixed up he could follow it all right. That was why he noticed everything in such detail to keep it all straight so he would know just where he was but suddenly it confused without reason as now, he lying in the bunk at the battalion headquarters, with Para commanding a battalion and he in a bloody American uniform. He sat up and looked around; they all watching him. Para was gone out. He lay down again. These lines reiterate a point I made earlier. Nick Adams is neither "nutty" nor sane, he is neither cured nor sick, he neither needs help nor can do without it. This is the irony of his situation.
This passage recounts how Paravicini coaches Nick when he first starts to experience the attacks of war-related derangement. The lines focus on Paravicini's condition too which borders on the verge of breakdown, "... and Para had him walk them two at a time outside to show them nothing would happen, he wearing his own chin strap tight across his mouth to keep his lips quiet. No one remains unaffected by war". The logical structure of the narrative breaks down here to be taken up by unconnected references all of which heighten the sense of violence and inhumanity.

In the unconnectedness, however, we are able to see some coherence in that the staccato references are all about what actually goes on in the battlefield while an attack is on. Soon what follows are words like caved in, stinking, burned, wounded, and came down. These images of carnage and destruction soon dissolve in an account of Gaby Delys, with and without feathers, a very obvious reference to the sexual. From this impersonal mention of a baby doll we move to another equally impersonal sexual reference, this time to Nick's girl. The only reaction on Nick's part, which he read about, is, sometimes his girl was there and sometimes she was with someone else and he could not understand that. This, Nick's relationship with his girl, is the only reference to a personal relationship that he has formed in the course of the text, the one apart from the pleasant acquaintance with Paravicini. However, this relationship is an active one where sexual and
gender dynamics come into play. Nick is the partner who has been rejected and this rejection, and its corollary sexual confusion, finds reflection in the way the river, so far steady and unchangeable (connotations of security), changes its size symbolising a betrayal of security and unchangeability. The river is the only thing in the middle of a chaotic universe that registers the changes in Nick's feelings. And from the sexual confusion that he undergoes we are simply led on to the mental and psychological confusion that he currently experiences.

The first line of the next passage is interesting. The Paris part came earlier and he was not frightened of it except when she had gone off with someone else and the fear that they might take the same driver twice. The important point to note is that the attack does not frighten Nick enough for him to recall the fact. However, it is his personal relationship with his girl and the mundane detail about a driver that he recollects. These details show a confusion between the important and the everyday. And it changes and throws new light on our perception of the reason for Nick's disbalanced state because we know now that he was frightened but never about the front. Because of all the evidence that the text has provided so far, it is not easy to discount the effect war has had on Nick. However, we now get glimpses of a not too happy but otherwise important past, a past important enough to have shaped his present. As the text says, He never dreamed about
the front now any more but what frightened him so that he could not get rid of it was that long yellow house and the different width of the river. Some confusion still troubles Nick because despite the unchanged width of the river his nightmares still continue.

Once awake from his nightmarish state Nick starts literally to jabber almost verbally recreating the nightmare. His speech to the adjutant stresses on the concepts of absence and presence. "I regret", he says, "the absence of chocolate, the postal cards and cigarettes, I am, however, wearing the uniform." These concepts find further reiteration in the next long speech of his in which he underlines the fact that he is not what he is supposed to be, which the other American soldiers, supposedly on their way, are, and with those qualities that we as readers find difficult to believe in without question. In reply to the adjutant's question whether the Americans are coming or not Nick says, "Oh absolutely. Americans twice as large as myself, healthy, with clean hearts, sleep at night, never been wounded, never been blown up, never had their heads caved in, never been scared, don't drink, faithful to the girls they left behind them, many of them never had crabs, wonderful chaps". From such exaggerated descriptions of some hypothetical saviors Nick proceeds to accurately identify himself and his purpose for being in the camp. Gradually he tells the adjutant that he is a North American who can also speak Italian. We come then to the questions of valor, honor and
pride, concepts which have always been essentially interlinked with war. But, Nick’s verdict on medals, a symbol of honor and victory, is irreverential. He dismisses the medals as something to be had off the street and, cheap. In answer to the adjutant’s curiosity whether he had Italian medals or not Nick replies, “Just the ribbons and the papers. The medals come later or you give them to people to keep and the people go crazy; or they are lost with your baggage. You can purchase others in Milan. It is the papers that are of importance. You must not feel badly about them. You will have some yourself if you stay at the front long enough”. Nick’s lighthearted observations about medals, and therefore, about honor meet the tight lipped rejoinder of the adjutant, another participant in the fight for valor and victory, and one serious about his business, too.

Nick then speaks of the other American soldiers who will follow him and then assume their duties as saviors. But the saviors are likened to locusts and grasshoppers, in other words insects. “...soon you will see untold millions wearing this uniform swarming like locusts. The grasshopper, you know, what we call the grasshopper in America, is really a locust. The true grasshopper is small and green and comparatively feeble.” The locust is a symbol of a devourer and a devastator, an insect which scatters destruction all around. Nick, therefore, feverishly denounces all worthiness of concepts like honor, valor, pride, guardianship, authority, protectiveness and playing any roles
of saviors. In his delirium he becomes repetitive about grasshoppers and locusts and indirectly about his own disgust and disbelief in war, his place in it and the uselessness of the whole exercise. *If you are interested in scars I can show you some very interesting ones but I would rather talk about grasshoppers. What we call grasshoppers that is; and what are, really, locusts.* In his confusion he turns the attention back to himself and reveals, although patchily, all over again his past, his wounds and his intense desire to make sense of everything. *These insects at one time played a very important part in my life. It might interest you and you can look at the uniform while I am talking.*

Then he plunges into an absolutely clueless account about locusts and the various details which classify them while interpolating his speech with references to himself and his uniform. The style and tone of his speech resembles that of a military official talking down to his charges, a speech which is impersonal but authoritative. Most tellingly, he concludes his speech with the words, "*Gentlemen, there is one thing I would like you to remember. One thing I would like you to take as you leave this room. Gentlemen, either you must govern or you must be governed*."

Between Nick's attacks — not unlike the attacks of war; here, his mind is repeatedly bombed and shelled — when he knows *one is coming now* and he knew *he could not stop it now*, his speech and powers of
observation veer between the coherent and intelligent and the confused. His nightmares return and the language and imagery used to describe the terror he experiences are intimately linked with war and violence, blood and gore. We may interpret that Nick’s psychologically unstable condition is as much caused by the front as by sexual and psychological confusions. He shut his eyes, and in place of the man with the beard who looked at him over the sights of the rifle, quite calmly before squeezing off, the white flash and clublike impact, on his knees, hot-sweet choking, coughing it onto the rock while they went past him.... Among his imagined ideas connected to the war, is the river, once more changed and unstable, a river he can’t depend upon and, therefore, it frightens him.

He takes his leave from Paravicini on the assurance that he is confident of finding his way back, a sign that he has regained, if only partially, his sanity and coherence. But soon he finds himself back from where he started, in the middle of confusion and uncertainty.
This text is a narrative in retrospect. This is evident from two things. First, from the past tense used throughout, and second, and more important, that the text begins with a mention of the past and its unfortunate associations. \textit{That night}, we are told, something so terrible happened that \textit{that summer, I was unwilling to make the experiment}. The text reveals that the narrator has been wounded in war and has been condemned by this experience to repeatedly confront it. This experience of war is the point of departure in the narrative and gradually allows us to interpret the various other ideas in the text.

\textquote{Now I Lay Me'} is a first person narration by a person who has been psychologically crippled by war. \textit{I myself did not want to sleep because I had been living for a long time with the knowledge that if I ever shut my eyes in the dark and let myself go, my soul would go out of my body. I had been that way for a long time, ever since I had been blown up at night and felt it go out of me and go off and then come back}. This experience signifies that the narrator undergoes temporary death every time he shuts his eyes. Sleep is a temporary suspension of consciousness while death is an annihilation of consciousness and here, for the narrator, sleep and death are conditions which may be interchanged. We see the narrator as the \textquote{I} who is either
confused or deliberately seeks refuge in a confusion between the 'real' and the 'dreamt', and manages quite successfully to transfer this feeling to the reader. From a close reading of the text and certain recurrent words, it may be supposed that at least, for this 'I', there are different 'real' worlds or 'presents'. It is important to state here what these real worlds are, or have been. These are the world of the home (with the mother, father and grandfather. The mention of the grandfather seems to take the idea of the narrator's family further back in time, further legitimising its (the family's) realness /palpability). There is also a mention of the orderly's family, the only positive reference to marriage, companionship and commitment. Also, the narrator will consider his own marriage and reject the idea outright. Then there is the socio-cultural world where prayers abound (the church and religion are established social institutions which promise solace, peace, faith and stability). And finally, there is the world of the river and fishing (a much loved isolation in the middle of nature away from all human contact).

The narrator's active being takes meaning from making a choice between these "real worlds" and then collating this chosen "real" with the imagined as best as possible. In this way, he creates a real enough world for himself which helps to protect him from the frightening and unpleasant experiences in his life. Since these new worlds that he creates have to do
primarily with the experience of fishing (both in the past — what actually happened — and then in the present in the collusion between the known and the imagined) we may posit that fishing provides grounds to the narrator for distancing himself from the undesirable and unwanted events he has known, thereby enabling him to recondition and rebuild himself.

The first circuitous reference to the war is in the mention of the soul leaving the body in the opening lines of the text. However, it is rather difficult at this early point to see the intensity of the experience and how inescapably it is linked with the whole text. As we move further into the text we come across another reference to the war, this one more direct than the previous mention, and linked to the mention of the family. *Then I would start there and remember this way again, until I reached the war.* The words *there* and *this* are references to the many past experiences and associations that the narrator employs in order to keep his mind busy when sleeplessness takes over. Sleeplessness (a state without sleep/rest/passivity) may be seen as a state of displacement from a routine physical way of behaviour. When this routine, to which each one of us is conditioned, physically and socially, is disrupted, then the mind looks for other familiar means of balancing itself. Therefore, the narrator recalls things which he has experienced, and the names of people he has known. In the course of such a journey back into the comforting past, at least more
so than the present, his reverie is interrupted and fails to go on when he reaches the subject of war.

The traditional connotations of war have always been violence, disruption of peace, destruction of the normal and a state where one is catapulted into the unfamiliar, horrifying and chaotic. In the text, for the narrator, war has not only been a real experience but it also constantly intrudes upon his thoughts, even when he is bodily removed from it.

Another reference to the war is made through the only other character in the text, the narrator's subordinate. This subordinate is also reluctant and unwilling to continue in the war. Yet, for him, unlike the narrator, the war is only a physical and not a psychological threat. His goal is to be able to return home to his wife and family, to an established social circle. Unlike the narrator, this man is not troubled by thoughts of ruthlessness and instability. In fact, he is unable to comprehend the narrator's reasons for joining the war (to the narrator's wanted to, he replies, that's a hell of a reason). We suspect that the narrator too, in retrospect, is unable to logically explain his own behavior.

Though sleeplessness is a damaging resultant of the war which the narrator has to suffer, the meaninglessness of the situation is best conveyed
by the continuous chewing and dropping sounds of the silkworms in the heap of mulberry leaves through the night. These sounds are a persistent, mechanical and noisy presence, which disturbingly penetrate deep into the narrator's consciousness and distract him from his determined efforts to steady his disturbed mind and shaken self. Unlike all the other references which the narrator fishes out from his memory, and these are all temporary references, the presence of the silkworms is very real and palpable. Even when he manages to escape one reference to his past by terminating all thoughts of it and choosing another, he can't escape the presence of the silkworms because they exist outside his mind. He has no control over this presence and can, at best, accept and learn to live with their noise.

Fishing takes up a major portion of the reminiscences of the narrator, both in terms of the actual space taken up in the text and as a necessity which constantly occupies his mind. He fishes, in his mind, the streams he has known and actually fished, and also those streams which he creates along the way (I had different ways of occupying myself while I lay awake. I would think of a trout stream I had fished along when I was a boy and fish its whole length very carefully in my mind; .... some nights too I made up streams, and some of them were very exciting, and it was like being awake and dreaming). This is a telling state about the narrator's mental condition
because he becomes so involved in the game that he loses touch with reality and confuses it with what his mind has created. Some of those streams I still remember and think that I have fished in them, and they are confused with streams I really know. We must keep in mind that fishing is the only aspect of his life that excites the narrator. His memories of his family are unpleasant, and he finds it difficult to recollect too much about his parents and their relationship with each other apart from the one minutely detailed, painful instance. Prayers are only half remembered lines and his own future — marriage, wife and, maybe children — does not appeal enough to him and he finally dismisses the topic altogether.

The language he uses to describe what he thinks about is the key to the way he feels about the thing itself. About fishing he says, fishing very carefully under all the logs, all the turns of the bank, the deep holes and the clear shallow stretches, sometimes catching trout and sometimes losing them. Compare with this what he says about remembering all the people I had ever known. If we expect a detailed, or even only specific, list then we will be disappointed. Because the narrator does not mention a single person or name, not even anything about his parents, except their house, and some possessions "... the attic of the house where I was born and my mother and father's wedding cake..., jars of snakes and other specimens..., the alcohol sunken in the jars so the backs of some of the snakes and specimens were exposed and had
turned white — if you thought back that far, you remembered a great many people.” There is not a single mention about any other person and, therefore, no mention at all about love, caring, affection or sentiment.

To go back to another detail about fishing we read, sometimes I found insects in the swamp meadows, in the grass or under ferns, and used them. There were beetles and insects with legs like grass stems, and grubs in old rotten logs; white grubs with brown pinching heads,... and wood ticks under logs... angle-worms... Salamander.... The Salamander was very small and neat and agile and a lovely color. He had tiny feet.... This is a lovingly detailed list of fish baits. The narrator’s memory is alive to each bait and its specialty. However, about the prayers he sometimes recites when he cannot sleep, he says, "Some nights, though, I could not remember my prayers even. I could only get as far as "On earth as it is in heaven" and then have to start all over and be absolutely unable to get past that. Then I would have to recognize that I could not remember and give up saying my prayers that night and try something else".

That fishing is the sole anchor for the narrator is again reiterated in its detailed descriptions. Sometimes I would fish four or five different streams in the night; starting as near as I could get to their source and fishing them downstream. When I had finished too quickly and the time did not go, I would
fish the stream over again, starting where it emptied into the lake and fishing back upstream, trying for all the trout I had missed coming down. This passage is again packed with details so cherished that they do not fade from the memory unlike the boredom which takes over when the narrator tries to think about girls."... and thought of all the girls I had ever known and what kind of wives they would make. It was a very interesting thing to think about and for a while it killed off trout-fishing, and interfered with my prayers. Finally, though, I went back to trout-fishing, because I found that I could remember all the streams and there was always something new about them while the girls, after I had thought about them a few times, blurred and I could not call them into my mind and finally they all blurred and all became rather the same and I gave up thinking about them almost altogether. The girls are only an indistinct and unimportant patch in the narrator's consciousness and can never replace, in importance, what fishing means to him. Also, in rejecting the girls, he has rejected the notion of sex and physicality, the whole idea of the process of regeneration and, therefore, an essential aspect of being a part of society.

If the narrator at all desires rootedness, and therefore, stability, then his references to his home and parents does just that. Only, any overt feelings of love nor warmth are missing. In fact, there is neither any implicit sense of bonding and affection between the father, mother and son, except a slight tilt in the sentiments of the son for the father. The
images used to describe the home and the memories attached to it are of fire, and burning. Many things that were not to be moved were burned in the back yard and I remember those jars from the attic being thrown in the fire, and how they popped in the heat and the fire flamed up from the alcohol. Also, the word home evokes ideas of inclusion, bringing within the fold, enveloped and protected from the outside world. But, about the new house I remember how my mother was always cleaning things out and making a good clearance. This is a reversal of the traditional significance attached to the home. The mother, the source of all these images, symbolizes separation, exclusion, disfunction and divorce. She succeeds, for the narrator, in undermining the concepts of home and family by damaging the father by burning his prized possessions; a part of his self. The father in turn is reduced to a state of almost total wordlessness. This silence between the couple widens the gap already existing between them. The only comment the husband makes to his wife's vicious "I've been cleaning out the basement, dear" she was standing there smiling, to meet him is, the best arrow-heads went all to pieces. The rest of his very few words are to Nick and only of general instruction. As against his mother's "violence" and destructive force, Nick witnesses his father's passivity and emotionless and weary acceptance of the way things are. This state of affairs between the parents could stand as a sign for Nick's own life. In our interpretation we can posit that a parallel is being drawn where Nick tries to recreate a tranquil, if not exactly passive, balance for
himself to forget a violent and burnt-out past. For him, the best moments are all gone, completely destroyed by the war. But he rejects his father's wordless acceptance of things. He does not reject speech completely and yet does not depend on it totally either. He creates an alternate world for himself where he translates any need for speaking into only a desire to speak with himself in his own mind.

It would not be farfetched to say that fishing replaces prayers in Nick's life. He does say, *But some nights I could not fish, and on those nights I was cold awake and said my prayers over and over and tried to pray for all the people I had ever known,* but it is evident that not only can he not remember who he must pray for, he neither remembers the prayers themselves. In trying to pray he gives us an account of an incident of his life with his parents. Now as then, it is told that he does not remember any prayers at all except the line *on earth as it is in heaven.* If Nick's account of his life on earth is to be believed then heaven holds no such promise to tempt one away from the present. Clearly, the prayers are only a means of intensifying the poignancy of the life he is living.

Till now the text and the analysis have focused primarily on the reference to the narrator's past, both the distant and the immediate. But the final section of the text focuses on the present. It is important in two
respects. It shows the narrator with another human being, especially one who shares his war-front experiences and it takes us to thoughts of the future through the question of marriage.

The connotations of marriage are not hard to overlook — companionship, commitment, responsibility, sharing, regeneration, rootedness, family, continuity. The list goes on even though the other instance where marriage has been mentioned is a negative, unhappy and, therefore, an avoidable one (here the connotations, are of disunion and divorce), in the present context, the mention has been made by the narrator's simple subordinate whose naive suggestion that marriage is the cure to all problems, perhaps even the narrator's psychological wounds, takes root in the fact that he himself is a happily married family man. Posited against the situation of the narrator's parents, where the mother fails to understand her husband, perhaps deliberately does so, the subordinate's wife (it is important to remember that they do not share a common language — "To hell with talking the language. You don't have to talk to them. Marry them") cares enough about his feelings to send him those English language paper cuttings which she cannot read but thinks he would love to have. The contrast is interesting — the parents share a language, a medium of speech but communication between them breaks
down, whereas this American - Italian couple do not need to fall back on language to understand and care for each other.

The narrator's recollection of the names of all the girls he has ever known also has major significances. In thinking of the girls he has entered the world of relationships, therefore, commitment and responsibility, ways of identifying with society. Also, in thinking of the girls as wives, he thinks not only of relationships but of furthering those relationships in time by bringing in the idea of regeneration and family. However, it is significant that he rejects any idea of girls or of girls as wives and prefers to go back to thinking of the river and the trouts, clearly making a statement that he either distrusts, or is not ready to establish social ties.

We can say that the narrator, who is damaged not only by the war but also due to incidents from his past, sees the need to stabilise his shaken and bruised consciousness. He does it in the way that he identifies with. He seeks to be alone, removed from any human touch. He occupies his mind and the various worlds that he creates for himself by peopling it with thoughts of his past and by creating new ones. In refusing active and continuous speech, social bondings and immediate thoughts of the future, he is actually refusing to be baited by things external to himself. It is important, therefore, to conclude this analysis with an instance of how he
feels about certain fish baits, an instance which reflects on his own condition and his need to be a person in his own right, independent of anything other than himself. Once I used a Salamander from under an old log. The Salamander was very small and neat and agile and a lovely color. He had tiny feet that tried to hold on to the hook, and after that one time I never used a Salamander, although I found them very often. Nor did I use crickets, because of the way they acted about the hook.

'BIG TWO-HEARTED RIVER' Parts I and II

This appropriately named text speaks of a man’s complete absorption in the experience of fishing and his consequent isolation from the outside (constituted by all that exists beyond the perimeter of the river and the surrounding forests), thereby creating an alternative site of existence. The text comes to us in two parts, a division even otherwise inherent to it in the difference in their use of language. The two parts are opposed to each other; in one there is movement, and in the other, stasis. Part I, that of movement, has Nick moving in from the outside toward the river, while Part II, that of stasis, has Nick either absorbed in watching the river (inaction) or fishing (minimal action). However, this opposition may
be reversed and still be applicable to a reading of the narrative. In this possible second reading, Part II is made up of continuous action where each gesture and movement at the river becomes meaningful. In Part I on the other hand, movement is negated by Nick's rejection of the outside world in preference of the calmness of the river.

The first sentence of the text is, *the train went on up the track out of sight, around one of the hills of burnt timber*. In this sentence are three important signifiers — the nouns, *train* and *track*, and the verb, *burnt*. The train signifies movement, locomotion, transference from one place to another, a human invention and, therefore, a vestige of the socio-cultural sphere, the main object of reference to the world the protagonist has left behind. The track also encompasses these significances along with the added one of a road or path which provides the option of movement to and from somewhere, a chance for the protagonist to move away from the chosen isolation of the river if he so desires. The next signifier, which opens up a world of multiple signifieds, is *burnt* with its connotations of having been consumed by fire and heat, to become scorched or charred, to have been filled with a violent emotion. There is another signified for *burn* and that is a brook, a stream or a rivulet. The connection between these two different signifieds of fire and water, of heat and cooling, for the same signifier will become more obvious as this interpretation progresses.
If the first sentence is read contiguously, with each word seen in a relation to the next, and therefore, each sign leading to another, then, the only vestige of the "civilized" world (the train) has returned to the world which the protagonist has rejected. One instance, however, is still available for movement away from the deadness (the burnt-over country) that he has returned to (the track). But this choice is rejected and, instead, Nick chooses to enter more deeply inside the forest, and therefore, move away more surely from the outside. This inside-outside dichotomy works more strongly as he, Nick, sets up his own world around the river and hints at the possibility of continuing there for the future. The verb, pitched out, which follows this first sentence shows action directed by the baggage man at Nick. But, Nick's passive acceptance of this action is soon to take the form of an active, though unspoken, resistance to forces acting on him and the gradual willing of his own kind of life in a self-created world of water and trouts.

There was no town, nothing but the rails and the burned over country. There are only two choices available to Nick here — one of the rails (tracks) and two, of the burnt-over country. The rails will take Nick away from the burnt-over country and back to the hub of social and cultural life whereas in the burnt-over country life has been so thoroughly scorched and extinguished that Nick has to prepare to battle all over again. For
Nick there is no hesitation about what his choice should be and he shows it obviously enough. So completely is the solid past wiped out that even the surface had been burned off the ground along with the town’s thirteen saloons and the foundations of the Mansion House Hotel. The stones (these may signify the bedrock of Seney) are also left chipped and split by the fire.

The fate of the town offers a parallel for Nick’s life (not too overtly this early on in the text but only in degrees) where he must rebuild and rehabilitate his damaged self just as is demanded of Seney.

It is revealing that the narrative focuses on the continuousness and dependability of the river immediately succeeding the mention of the skin scorched town thus highlighting the central position that it occupies for its indispensable and therapeutic qualities. Nick looked at the burned over stretch of hillside, where he had expected to find the scattered houses of the town and then walked down the railroad track to the bridge over the river. The river was there. The river is also a world, a space of existence, with its own life (the fish) and its peculiar cyclical formula of existence (a cycle of predatory attack and determined countering of such attacks); a world and a way of life which continues to exist and continues to teach its ways to those who care to learn as Nick does here. Nick’s world is similarly cyclical — in his return to Seney and his desire to recreate the fishing days of the past he
brings together his present and past in a full circle. And, in his perception of similarity lies the answer to why in his mesmerized way Nick watched them (the fish) a long time.

If any doubt should persist in the readers' mind as to the intelligence of Nick's choice of the river running through a dead/parched town it is allayed with this first in a long line of short, convinced assurances of Nick's own complete absorption and total satisfaction in being at the river, watching the fish and fishing. It was a long time since Nick had looked into a stream and seen trout. They were very satisfactory.

We have first, he (the trout) tightened facing up into the current and immediately, Nick's heart tightened as the trout moved. The contrast/comparison is interesting because on the one hand the trout tightens itself to resist the onslaught of the current and to retain its place, and on the other, Nick's heart tightens with pleasant anticipation in observing the trouts behave as they do because he is the tyro learning not only to retain his place in the world but also to retain a hold on his mind.

He turned and looked down the stream. It stretched away, pebbly bottomed with shallows and big boulders and a deep pool as it curved away around the foot
of a bluff. The protagonist's choice necessitates a reconnaissance of the site where the process of home building and, more importantly, soul searching will begin and come full circle. The view offered is very satisfactory where the pond stretched (signifying width), boulders were big (signifying largeness) and the pond deep (signifying depth, a possibility of reaching down, of rootedness). All three significations of width, largeness and depth build up an ambience of limitless possibility, where the course of any thing may be changed as desired. Two important signifiers converge in the following line, Nick walked back up the ties to where his pack lay in the cinders beside the railway track. In this walking back to the tracks, a point from where he begins his river journey by shunning his immediate past, Nick makes a temporarily final return to a location from where the past and the present/future, the social and the individual, are equally viable options. But the sentence contains a paradox at the same time as it offers a choice, in fact, the choice is made meaningless/negated as soon as the word cinders is juxtaposed with the railway track. The railway track, is then by a semantic extension, as useless and burnt out as cinder and, therefore, without any scope of being rekindled with life and meaningfulness. If we keep zig-zagging across the given passage its import becomes clearer. Nick does walk along the road that paralleled the railway track, leaving the burned town behind in the heat, but then he almost immediately turned off around a hill with a high, fire scarred hill on either side onto a road that went back into the
country. For Nick it is the country which offers salvation not the railway track or the promises it offers along its way. Therefore, the reiterated references about the weight of the burden he carries on his back (cross like), it was too heavy, it was much too heavy, he walked along the road feeling the ache from the pull of the heavy pack, is countered and crossed out by the repeated acknowledgement of the sheer physical satisfaction he experiences in pulling this burden along, he was happy, but Nick felt happy. And, if, these sentiments are not assurance enough then, the succeeding passage spells everything out more clearly. Seney was burned, the country was burned over and changed, but it did not matter. It could not all be burned. He knew that. This confidence in he knew that, a certainty not only about his own contentment in his choice of a site for personal salvation, but an absolute hope that even the town will spring back to life and normalcy counters the passivity and ennuied acceptance of something done to oneself by another, albeit a total stranger. From the time he had gotten down off the train and the baggage man had thrown his pack out of the open car door things had been different. The terrain also seems to confirm the correctness and intelligence of Nick's choice where the road runs on dipping occasionally, but always climbing, where climbing signifies a looking forward, a reaching out and a moving ahead. Therefore, Nick went on up, where both on and up indicate positive movement and finally the road after going parallel to the burnt hillside reached the top. And, as soon as he reaches the top he slipped out the pack harness
almost symbolising a shedding of his burden once he has achieved the peak of his labours. And, from this appropriate altitude, this summit, he surveys his chosen site. *Ahead of him, as far as he could see, was the pine plain.* The burned country stopped off at the left with the range of hills. On ahead islands of dark pine trees rose out of the plain. Far off to the left was the line of the river. Nick followed it with his eye and caught glints of the water in the sun.

The pine plain stretches as far as his eyes can see with only the hazy, half-seen boundary in the distance which spring up mirage-like in the heat light over the plain and cease to exist when viewed fully. Locationally as well as emotionally, Nick's satisfaction seems complete as he did not need to get his map out. He knew where he was from the position of the river. Nick's being seems complete as he succeeds in locating and rooting himself around and in terms of the river.

Grasshoppers have been pivotal in a few of the narratives analysed so far, functioning as baits not only for the fish but also for the overburdened and tormented minds of the protagonists. Here, the roles between the protagonist and the grasshoppers are temporarily reversed. First, it is Nick who examines the grasshoppers who have literally turned black and expresses the hope that they will gradually return to normalcy.
And, it is only then that they can contribute their bit to help him recreate a better space for existence.

The grasshoppers, when Nick first becomes attentive to them, are *just ordinary hoppers, but all a sooty black in colour*, signifying a reversal from the normal, a state of being that - Nick is himself passing through. For these blackened grass hoppers — their black colour a gesture of empathy with the land — like the blackened land will help cleanse and reanimate Nick's scorched and blackened being. The land, the grasshoppers and Nick, all seem to be suffering a similar fate, each as determined for their own selves to recover and the confidence of each being reflected in the other. His question about the grasshoppers, *he wondered how long they would stay that way*, has been variously asked for the land and himself and the answers come over a period of time. Nick, examination over, propels the grasshopper away with the words, *Go on hopper, fly away somewhere*, as if instilling it with hope and confidence to live out its blackness and return to normalcy. The grasshopper, as if corroborating Nick's choice of place, does not fly away but settles down on a *charcoal stump across the road*. And, with such positive signs heralding his entry into Big Two-Hearted river country it is no surprise that the language of the narrative buoys up this feeling further where *underfoot the ground was good walking then it was sweet fern, growing ankle high, to walk through, and clumps of jack pines; a long*
undulating country with frequent rises and descents, sandy underfoot and the country alive again.

In the next passage, unlike some of the preceding ones, the semantic expression, through the kind of language used especially the verbs, conveys, the assuredness with which the protagonist heads for his goal. 

Nick kept his direction by the sun. He knew where he wanted to strike the river and he kept on through the pine plain, mounting small rises to see other rises ahead of him and sometimes from the top of a rise a great solid island of pines off to his right or his left. He broke off some sprigs of the heathery sweet fern, and put them under his pack straps. The chafing crushed it and he smelled it as he walked.

He was tired and very hot, walking across the uneven, shadeless pine plain. At any time he knew he could strike the river by turning off to his left. It could not be more than a mile away. But he kept on toward the north to hit the river as far upstream as he could go in one day's walking. Already, Nick has put behind his uncertainties and begun an elaborate, though limited, process to heal his self and soul. He has chosen and surveyed his terrain, decided on and observed his means and his end is clearly in sight. He is no longer to be pitched out as he has staked his claim and pitched in.
Before he finds it suitable to settle down into his camp, Nick rests along on the way. From the passage of description Nick's rest, (the semantic signification of rest being the refreshing quiet or repose of sleep; refreshing ease or inactivity after exertion or labour; relief or freedom, especially, from anything that wearies, troubles or disturbs), seems even more complete due to the womb-like structure of the patch of forest where he rests. The narrative continuously makes use of language which reflects not only the parallels between the state of the protagonist and the forest and river to which he has returned for solace, but also how the very terrain seems to empathize with him and extend its support.

There was no underbrush in the island of pine trees. The trunks of the trees went straight up or slanted toward each other. The trunks were straight and brown without branches. The branches were high above. Some interlocked to make a solid shadow on the brown forest floor. Around the grove of trees was a bare space. It was brown and soft underfoot as Nick walked on it. This was the overlapping of the pine needle floor, extending out beyond the width of the high branches. The trees had grown tall and the branches moved high, leaving in the sun this bare space they had once covered with shadow. Sharp at the edge of this extension of the forest floor commenced the sweet fern.
Moreover, the sky (signifying limitlessness, unknown possibility, desire to reach high) and the sun (signifying brilliance, warmth, power) are within his reach from the very patch on which he rests. There is, however, a reversal both for Nick and the empathetic landscape. The rest over, every surrounding thing seems to undergo a change as well — he woke up stiff and cramped. The sun was nearly down. His pack was heavy and the straps painful as he lifted it on. What sustains him and prods him on is the promise of the river, he knew it could not be more than a mile.

Nick's approach to the river seems to greet him with the best. The sun's heat is dissipated by the dew, the river is silent, smooth and fast but nevertheless welcoming because throbbing with life as the movements of the trouts set it alive and rippling.

The narrative turns now to the protagonist and his each action is so meticulously recorded that all thought is completely kept out. Actions and gestures — movement confined to the body — take over and any thought that is forced out of Nick, either as speech or merely as thought, is related to gratifying the senses — here, to the pleasure derived from food and physical comfort. He was hungry and he wanted to make his camp before he cooked; he smoothed the uprooted earth. He did not want anything making lumps under the blankets. Home making, paradoxically, gives him immense
pleasure. Paradoxically because there have been no affectionate references to family barring a mention of a friend, Hopkins, in the course of coffee making; no nostalgia except for the place to which he has returned; his only desire for rootedness seems to be for the river. Across the open mouth of the tent Nick fixed cheese cloth to keep out mosquitos. He crawled inside under the mosquito bar with various things from the pack to put at the head of the bed under the slant of the canvas. Inside the tent the light came through the brown canvas. It smelled pleasantly of canvas. Already there was something mysterious and homelike. Nick was happy as he crawled inside the tent. He had not been unhappy all day. This was different though. Now things were done. There had been things to do. Now it was done. It had been a hard trip. He was very tired. That was done. He had made his camp. He was settled. Nothing could touch him. It was a good place to camp. He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it. Now he was hungry.

For his dinner Nick opens a can of pork and beans and a can of spaghetti and in a fit of delight and self justification says, I’ve got a right to eat this kind of stuff, if I’m willing to carry it. Pork, beans and spaghetti constitute a very ordinary American meal and yet it sends Nick into raptures to exclaim, Chrise, Nick said, Geezus Chrise. Nick has carried the burden of his food and has, therefore, a right to enjoy it. By extending the argument (syllogistically), if he has been scarred, psychologically, then he
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deserves to make his self whole again at the place which does it best for him, that is the river.

With dinner over, chores completed, tent ready, Nick makes coffee the Hopkins way. The passage about Hopkins is crammed with references to the past and it is the only evidence of Nick's rootedness, however tenuous, to a social and personal world. There is a mention of friends (significant of Nick's inhabiting a social circle), tribute to a friend's methods of making coffee (fond remembrance and affection for a friend), memories of the past (nostalgia-laden rootedness) and reliving the past in the present (by virtue of the memories being about the same thing — a fishing expedition — a circle is being completed). It follows naturally that sleep overcomes Nick. *(He was sleepy. He felt sleep coming)* just as his circle of history seems to run its course before beginning anew in the structurally appropriate 'Big Two-Hearted River' Part II.

Part II takes up from where Part I left off. Here we have Nick's total absorption in his creation of a world away from the world. If taken as a piece separate from the previous one, then the only insight offered to the reader by the narrative would be of a man's (any man's) complete devotion to the sport of fishing. However, as part of a larger narrative, this isolation by/near the river and the involvement with the sport it offers
tells a totally different tale altogether. Fishing then takes on a more meaningful role than of being a mere sport. It has therapeutic qualities, it provides a scope for rootedness to the protagonist and, importantly, it allows the reader to locate the protagonist within a scenario to understand his moves and motives, and to trace back his roots and look to the future.

Nick was excited. He was excited by the early morning and the river. With these words Nick begins his journey through the world of the river where cooking and eating breakfast, bottling grasshoppers, readying hook, line and leader, feeling the rising cold shock of the river, playing benefactor to a fish while riding the ripples of elation and disappointment over others builds up the narrative in minute details and informed language. The narrative, however, seems to be split between the careful and, no doubt, lovingly detailed description of bodily movements, facial features and internalised surroundings and the slightly detached and mechanical approach of the protagonist to the entire enterprise. At this point it would do well to bring in all the information from Part I and, thereby, understand how necessary such a mechanised involvement actually is and how successful it becomes in allowing Nick to erase his traumatic past and build up a new future self. It is, therefore, no wonder that the text concludes yet looks forward with the words, He was going back to camp. He
looked back. The river just showed through the trees. There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp.

'THE LAST GOOD COUNTRY'

As part of a group of narratives all of which explicate the theme of 'fishing', the choice of 'The Last Good Country' may seem out of line. The reasons for this may be any — the text could be read simply as a chain of adventures of an enterprising youth, or a narrative about the initiation of Nick Adams into the predatory world of adulthood. For either/both readings fishing may not be significant at all other than being an inevitable means of survival for those forced to retreat into the closed in space of the river. Moreover, it may be argued that this narrative does not conform to the pattern of a traumatized, adult, protagonist seeking relief from the river, either physically or in the mind. I would argue otherwise and show through a close textual analysis that the end of this narrative is similar to those of the others, even though the sequence of events does not conform to the pattern.
A few points of clarification are necessary before going into the analysis of the narrative. First, 'The Last Good Country' is incomplete and, therefore, objections may be raised as to the advisability of its choice for reading any pattern or patterns into it. I would argue that its publication gives it a different status to the one prior to it. If a text is available to readers as a published work, then as a corollary, it should be available for interpretation as well. Further, I would refrain from reading too much into the name Nick Adams. Definitely the name, and by extension the character, is important enough to merit a series of stories. But, the fate he undergoes — either in the process of initiation or as an adult — is not one peculiar to him. Whether the other narratives bear nameless protagonists or ones with different names, the forces against which they are pitted are more or less the same. Therefore, it would be more fruitful to read the narratives on a general level and to situate them within a larger framework.

The reader enters the text as Littless, Nick's sister; brings him a warning to keep away from the world outside. After the first exchange between them, we have Nick watching the bottom of the spring where the sand rose in small spurts with the bubbling water. There was a tin cup on a forked stick that was stuck in the gravel by the spring and Nick Adams looked at it and at the water rising and then flowing clear in its gravel bed beside the road. This
inexplicable magnetism, and its numerous parallels in the other texts, between the protagonist and some form of water, here a spring and elsewhere rivers, anticipates the forceful presence of the river as the narrative unravels slowly.

This initial reference to water will weave itself around other related ones in the text and come back full circle in the concluding scene (albeit of an incomplete text) where Nick rests close to the river, with his sister, temporarily oblivious to the dangers which threaten him.

As Nick listens to his sister elaborate on the cause - and - effect fate which awaits him back home (the socio-cultural site), he scrutinses the topos made up of the road, hill, dock, lake, the wooded point across the bay and the open lake beyond. This is an interesting mixture of the natural and the man made. His back was against a big cedar tree and behind him there was a thick cedar swamp. The noun swamp denotes a wet, marshy ground, a tract of soft land unfit for cultivation. The verb could mean to plunge or cause to sink in or as if in a swamp, to overwhelm, to render helpless, to sink or be stuck in something.

In a reversal of roles, it is the social sphere, manifested as the law and personified by the rapacious cops, which becomes a swamp (a trap)
and threatens to *swamp* (pull in or sink) Nick. It is this trap which compels him to retreat to the safety of the river, that body of water which he initially exploits to make quick money.

This process of commercialization of and dependence on the river is played out repeatedly in *The Last Good Country*, and the yield of the river, the trouts, which are at the beginning only a means of money making soon become a means of preserving life. "Oh, Nickie, I wish your wouldn't sell them." "She gives me a dollar a pound", Nick Adams said. This debasement of both river and fish into a source of economic transaction is reflected in the negation of the concept of family. *She and Nick loved each other and they did not love the others. They always thought of everyone else in the family as the others.* These two children create an alternative world for themselves in the depth of the woods, a womb-like protected and protective space away from all threats. This space is removed from an indifferent mother, an absent father and other faceless and nameless siblings. In a confusion of roles, the mother appears not only to be indifferent (she withdraws to her room with a sick headache as if to shut out all references to the outside world, even to those about her children) but also vindictive, as she wittingly or unwittingly tells of Nick's whereabouts. *It was our mother told them you'd gone fishing at the creek. I don't think she meant to. Anyway I hope not.* This mother figure, to whom the
references are few and far between and never too laudatory, is from the beginning displaced by the sister, Littless, who fulfils the roles of mother, sister, beloved and even attempts to be the brother she can never be.

I wrote a note to our mother and told her I was going with you to keep you out of trouble and not to tell anybody (surrogate mother taking over from the real mother) and that you'd take good care of me (sister's faith in the elder brother). Soon, in a swift transformation the sister becomes the seductress ready to give up home and comfort for her brother's safety.

Take me, Nickie. Please take me. She kissed him and held onto him with both her arms. Nick Adams looked at her and tried to think straight. It was difficult.

This transformation, from sister to beloved, is however not a permanent one. There is a constant shift between the two, where the sister and the "beloved" do not compete against each other but complement their roles since the end for them "both" is the same, Nick's safety and well being.

The verbs and adjectives which follow, gutted them, wrapped in cheesecloth, cool, and fresh, have been repeated very often in the other texts
and always, as now, in the context of the actual process of fishing. The difference between this and the other texts is that here there is a confusion on the one hand about the importance of fishing as an act of introspection followed by a state of consolation and relief, and on the other, about fishing as a commercial activity. "I'll tell her I'm in some trouble with the game wardens and that they're looking for me and I have to get out of the country for a while". Here, evidently, fishing is a game which requires policing, leads to trouble and even, as in Nick's case, to "exile". The concluding sentence of this paragraph, "She'll help me because buying trout is as bad as selling them", is an interesting lead to some of the other issues within this text. As yet we are not aware of the identity of "she". But obviously, Nick has an accomplice in crime. Mrs. Packard, (she is "she"), will help to give unity to some of the issues in the text, as the narrative unfolds slowly.

For the moment lets scrutinize the following paragraph. "I can get a blanket", his sister said, "I'll wrap it around the rifle and I'll bring your moccasins and my moccasins and I'll change to different overalls and a shirt and hide these so they'll think I'm wearing them and I'll bring soap and a comb and a pair of scissors and something to sew with and Lorna Doone, and Swiss Family Robinson". For Littless, in the role of the little sister, their flight from home is almost a picnic. A picnic could be defined as a social entertainment or an excursion. The irony lies in the fact that this picnic is no uncomplicated
excursion into the wild. Instead, it is the result of a complex social and legal network. Though the legal angle of Nick’s troubles are obvious, the social facet works in a slightly less manifest manner. This comes up only later with reference to Mrs. Packard.

In answer to Littless’ bubbling preparations Nick says, “Bring all the .22s you can find”. Not only are the two children running away to escape punishment but between them with reference to the real and the imagined, they open up a world of crime and depravity, a world of guns, knockout drops, whorehouse, cops and fugitives.

Interpolated between this world which is removed from the home and family and brought down to the level of the streets is the sentinel-like presence of the mother.

“Our mother will think we’re fugitives from justice steeped in sin and iniquity. It’s a good thing she doesn’t know I got you that whiskey”.

This reference to the mother is almost an interference which comes much after any previous mention of her and at a point when the siblings seem entirely absorbed in themselves and in their make-believe happiness. The fact remains that they are, or at least Nick is, a fugitive
from justice though not one to be condemned by words such as *sin* and *iniquity*. The children's mother is a presence both shadowy and palpable. Whereas any mention of her is only reported to the reader, yet she is always present in the minds of her children, evident from the way she crops up in their conversations. Mrs. Adams' intrusions into the text are never as a figure of maternal love and affection whom the children confide in, miss or long to go back to. At first, she is a woman easily indisposed and upset by domestic discord and given to shifting the burden of household management to her husband, *(our mother's gone to bed with a sick headache. She wrote our father, and she has a sick headache and she can't see you).* Then she is the incautious woman who threatens her son's chances of safety by her carelessness *("It was our mother told them you'd gone fishing at the creek. I don't think she meant to. Anyway I hope not").* And yet, she forces herself into the text through the allusions made by her children.

Interestingly, Mrs. Adams invites attention to herself because there are two other mother figures available in the text for comparison.

Littless, the sibling-mother surrogate, alternates between what the mother represents and what she is not. She is, what her mother should be, Nick's guardian. While the mother is only a thought which prevents Nick from becoming too reckless, Littless is an actual presence. She is, literally, the warden who protects him from the game wardens *("But you're not going*
to kill people and that's why I'm going with you"). But unlike the mother who seems otherwise unconcerned about the condition of her son, Littless provides her brother with support, companionship and conversation.

Littless is, however, too protean to be a "mother" for long. She ranges between her roles of mother, sister, "brother", companion and "partner", without pause. And it is because of this slipperiness, coupled with her extreme youth, that Mrs. Packard shifts easily into the gap left by Mrs. Adams. Mrs. Packard's "mother" (the softer, positive aspect to her) blends paradoxically with her desire to seek "culture". (According to this reading, "culture" has negative connotations within the text as it is Mrs. Packard's thirst for culture which leads her to open a hotel for the change-of-lifers, whose demand for trout dinners she hopes to satisfy. This "temptation" — a quick method of making money — gets Nick into trouble).

The reader gets acquainted with Mrs. Packard in three stages. Initially, she is an unidentified pronoun, only a she or her. "She gives me a dollar a pound", Nick Adams said. "She ordered them for dinners tonight"; "I'll tell her I'm in some trouble with the game wardens..." and then, "I'll get her to give me a small skillet and some salt...." Finally comes the clinchers, "She'll help me because buying trout is just as bad as selling them." Here, the she has been
identified, at least partially — as an abettor and accomplice in crime. These reported references establish the negative influence of she on Nick. The second instance is a direct interaction between Nick and Mrs. Packard where it is established that the trout is a commodity of exchange and money-making, though, the actual deal is carried out in verbal disguise.

"You don't mean you want to sell trout. Don't you know that's against the law?"

"I know", Nick said. "I brought you the fish for a present. I mean my time for the wood I split and corded".

"I'll get it", she said, "I have to go to the annex".

Mrs. Packard, however, cannot simply be dismissed as a woman for whom the deal stops with the actual give and take. Her concern for Nick's welfare prompts her to extend to him all the support she can, monetary as well as emotional and empathetic.

"You get out of here", she said quickly and kindly. "And get out of here fast. How much do you need?"

"I've got sixteen dollars", Nick said.

"Take twenty", She told him....

"You stay away until things quiet down. Nickie, you're a good boy no matter what anybody says. You see Packard if things get bad. Come here nights if you
need anything. I sleep light. Just knock on the window...."

"I'll have what you need. Packard knows what you need. I don't give you any more money so you'll keep out of trouble."

And, finally,

Don't worry and don't do anything bad".

It must be mentioned that the impersonal Mrs. Packard used at the beginning of this conversation between Nick and Mrs. Packard, (no such dialogue ever takes place between Nick's mother and him), changes to an affectionate Aunt Halley by the time they wish each other a temporary farewell. Also, She smelt wonderful when she kissed him. It was the way the kitchen smelted when they were baking. Mrs. Packard smelled like her kitchen and her kitchen always smelled good. Numerous signifiers within these three sentences counter any suggestions that Mrs. Packard is held responsible for the trouble that has befallen Nick, least of all by the victim himself. Wonderful, according to its dictionary meaning is, "of a kind to excite wonder; marvellous; extraordinary; remarkable", where wonder could variously mean "to be filled with admiration, amazement, or awe; marvel".

Smelt wonderful would then connote that which is sensate, that is, she, Mrs. Packard, is perceived by Nick's senses to be wonderful, he feels her goodness and it is more important to him that she smell wonderful
rather than "did" wonderful or "said" wonderful. To kiss or to be kissed is also a gesture of fondness for another person where the touch of the lips is a "token of greeting, affection, love, etc". The connotation of Mrs. Packard's kiss is telling. She strengthens her feeling of affection and concern for Nick with actual contact, by touch, i.e. a coming together. This is in direct contrast with Mrs. Adams' behaviour where she shuts herself in her room, a gesture of drawing away, distancing and keeping aloof.

But, it is at the third instance, which is a detailed reference to Mrs. Packard by Mr. Packard, that we can understand the role she, or rather her yearning for "culture", plays in Nick's life. She liked the resorters because some of them brought culture, and Mr. John said she loved culture like a lumberjack loved Peerless, the great chewing tobacco, and then, Packard you don't have to care about culture. I won't bother you with it. But is makes me feel wonderful. It is due to her need to cater to the culture ushers that Mrs. Packard turns to Nick to fulfil the demand for trout dinners. At this point, we should consider what the word "culture" signifies. It may mean (1) the quality in a person or society that arises from an interest in and acquaintance with what is generally regarded as excellent in arts, letters, manners, scholarly pursuit, etc., (2) a particular form or stage of civilization, as that of a certain nation or period, (3) the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one
generation to another, (4) in Biology, the product or growth resulting from cultivation or cultivating or raising of plants and animals with a view to their improvement, (5) development or improvement of the mind by education or training, (6) to subject to culture; cultivate. If we use the sum total of the meanings available to us then "to acquire culture" would effectively mean an education or a civilizing process with an end in mind. In other words, it could also be a kind of initiation. Then, in the context of the text, Mrs. Packard's culture seeking compels Nick to turn to fishing as a commercial activity. But, his exploitation of the river and its yield leaves him a legal outcast. And it is precisely this fate that pushes him back to the safety of the river where he undergoes an initiation of a different kind. Now, the river becomes a protective space, a womb-like enclosure which shuts out all the dangers of the world outside. The river becomes mother-like, and Nick is educated to understand and appreciate this alternate identity. He is "acculturated" to the ways of the river. It is significant to note here that the concluding scene of the text has Nick reading aloud to Littless from Wuthering Heights, where a book, any book, represents literature, and therefore, an aspect of the cultural process within society. It is to be seen from this reading how inextricably the various strands within the text — individuals, mothers, social space, legal space, the space of the river, "culture", fishing — are linked together and how one leads to another in an uninterrupted flow till they come full circle.
In Mr. Packard we have a latent Richter scale with which to measure the preference of the text for its various characters and what they represent. He could be a dividing line on the one side of which are Mrs. Packard, Nick, Littless, Suzy and, somewhat uncertainly, Mrs. Adams. On the other side, are the "down-state" warden, the local warden Mr. Evans, and his terrible, no good son. The former could be the pro-fishing group, while the latter, the anti-fishing or the trailers. The reason why Mr. Packard should be considered as the scale of measurement is because all the characters in the text turn to him for guidance at some point or another. Mrs. Packard tells Nick, You see Packard if things get bad, Packard knows what you need, and with utmost faith in her husband, Packard will figure out something. Suzy, and with her as a medium, Mrs. Adams, also turn to Mr. Packard. Mr. John, what will they do with Nickie?, and he takes over as her mentor advising her against violence. Most significantly, Nick, who would like to see Mr. Packard about getting a few things after his troubles have started, has earlier chosen Mr. Packard as the person to whom he will never lie. I don't want to do anything bad, Nick had said.

"I don't want you to", Mr. John had said. "But you're alive and you're going to do things. Don't you lie and don't you steal. Everyday has to lie. But you pick out somebody you never lie to."
"I'll pick out you", and the text seems to sanction Nick's exploits of the river when it recalls the relationship between Mr. Packard and him. "Mr. John liked Nick Adams because he said he had original sin", and "you're going to have things to repent boy", Mr. John had told Nick. "That's one of the best things there is. You can always decide whether to repent them or not. But the thing is to have them".

The wardens are also deferential to Mr. Packard and finally turn to him for information about the violator. But instead of showing concern and offering assurance to them as he had done for the others, Mr. Packard provokes, insults and exposes them as criminals unfit as protectors of the law. After heaping them with names like Splazey, Splayfoot, cock-sucker, Splayfooted bastard and Turd-face, Mr. Packard permanently condemns the down-state man with a decision that it was his tracks by the spring where that Nester's boy was shot that they hung Tom for. Clearly the scales are titled against the wardens. Moreover, they seem condemned by the word trail. The word trail acts as a signifier with its connotations of the secretive, stealthy, sly, dishonest, or to follow a track or scent, as of game.

"I think it was just that boy of his found it. He trails around after Nick all the time", and Nick's verdict, "The Evans boy could have followed him here before...But the Evans' boy did not care about fishing". "All that bastard cares about is trailing me," he said.
The only description of fishing in this text is when Nick lands trout for food. Though the passage is much reduced in size as compared with other passages on fishing in the other texts, yet the details are as meticulous as always. Nick lands his fish relatively quickly, and without much trouble and is almost dismissive about the massive trout he sees in the stream (his only remark is, "Boy, what a trout"). And yet his preparedness for and total absorption in the act of fishing, even in the face of his troubled nomadic existence, is in tradition with all the troubled fishermen - protagonists that the reader has come across so far.

He took a coil of silk line out of a tobacco pouch he carried in the left breast pocket of his shirt and cut a length that was not quite as long as the willow stick and fastened it to the tip where he had notched it lightly. The he fastened on a hook that he took from the pouch; then holding the shank of the hook he tested the pull of the line and the bend of the willow. He laid his rod down now and went back to where the trunk of a small birch tree, dead for several years, lay in its side in the grove of birches that bordered the cedars by the stream. He rolled the log over and found several earthworms under it. They were not big. But they were red and lively and he put them in a flat round tin with holes punched in the top that had once held Copenhagen snuff. He put some dirt over them and rolled the log back. This was the third year he had found bait at this same place and he had always replaced the log so that it was as he had found it.

Some significant insights to 'The Last Good Country' are provided by the occasional references to the religious feeling that washes over Nick, Littless and Mr.Packard, though the only direct Biblical allusion is to an incident in the Book of Judges 4:17-22.¹
In contrast with the violence of action (in the actual incident in the Bible) and the violence of thought (in Littless’ recalling the incident and expressing a desire to re-enact it) is the piousness and solemnity which take over Nick and Littless, “No But I always feel strange. Like the way I ought to feel in church.” To Littless, “Because this kind of woods make me feel awfully religious”, Nick replies, “That’s why they build cathedrals to be like this”. The forest is an approach to the river and it is with a spiritual awareness that Nick enters the space of the river to begin his initiation anew. It is through Mr. John that the separate spaces of the forest and the river, of religion and culture, of piety and education are brought together. Though he somewhat undecidedly tries to set a balance between culture and religion, it is textually obvious that they are meant to be considered along the same plane.
'ONE TRIP ACROSS'

In an assortment of texts to be analyzed along the same lines there may be an expression of apprehension about the intelligence of the choice of at least a few. As for 'One Trip Across', the objections may be (1) that the protagonist is personally not involved in the main activity as identified by the thesis that is, fishing; (2) that the thesis itself — which is, fishing as a therapeutic and meaning-giving activity which enables the protagonist, who has been shattered by some traumatizing incident in the past and is, as a result, on the verge of suffering a loss of sanity or mental balance, to regain his self-confidence and rehabilitate himself to his surroundings — is inverted and instead, fishing becomes the cause of suffering to the characters and forces them to turn to dishonorable means of sustenance. To refute such arguments I would state that the point which the text is trying to make is in stating a difference between fishing as an honorable act and fishing as a dishonorable one. It is in Mr. Johnson's dishonorable behavior — first, in his role of a man interested in fishing, he is concerned with landing a large fish not so much to satisfy his inner craving or love for the sport but to appear a hero-like, glamorous, figure and, second, in his incarnation as a cheat (he literally swindles Harry out of a hard-earned, well-deserved, sum of money) — that the seeds of Harry's misfortune lie. If the otherwise uncorrupted and worthy sport is tarnished by someone's
misbehavior, then assuredly it will have unfortunate repercussions, even for someone like Harry whose only fault is to have been indirectly responsible for the entire incident. It is in the light of this argument that I will be analyzing 'One Trip Across' and focusing on a text which varies from yet fits into the overall thesis.

The structure of the text is circular, that is, it begins with the premise of illegality/rejection, moves to one of the legal/honorable/desirable, and finally, concludes with the category illegal/compulsory/accepted. Here, (1) Harry refuses to transport the three Cubans from Havana to the States even though it means a lot of money — this is the rejection of an illegal deal, therefore, a choice of honor over dishonor, (2) Harry takes Mr. Johnson fishing at the cost of suffering an incompetent and insufferable fisherman and of clinching a deal which will otherwise not bring him much money and, which finally, brings him only losses — a choice made from a genuine love for a sport and a desire to do that which is honorable, and (3) Harry is forced to transport the Chinks out of Havana for an amount that will help him tide over the crisis — this incident, similar to the one of the Cubans, is illegal and to be rejected, but Harry already staggering from the blow rendered by Mr. Johnson's treachery cannot but accept the offer.
The text may also be seen as a series of propositions each of which is either rejected or accepted. The Cubans proposition Harry and are rejected, Mr. Johnson presumably propositions Harry and is accepted, and in a turn about, Harry is forced to seek out Mr. Sing so he, (Mr. Sing), may proposition him, (Harry), and be accepted. Interestingly, each proposition comes along with an offer of money, where the amounts when compared with each other provide another lead to the main issue of honor and dishonor in the text. This illegal, unasked for, offer comes with the largest booty whereas the most honorable and desirable proposition totals the least amount of cash, which of course never reaches the rightful owner. The other illegal deal, not desired but necessary, amounts to more than one and less than the other.

The language used so far in this analysis as well as the text throws up certain words again and again — legal/illega, deals, proposition, dollars, cash etc. To this list of words, all a part of the vocabulary of commerce, economy, law and the underworld, can be added another extremely long one of violence, and weapons, which the text will throw up — jail, "lengua larga", sacked liquor, Demijohns, "cut plenty people's throats", guns and bullets, Thompson gun, sawed-off automatic shotgun, tommy gun, big Luger, shots and long shots, pump guns, Winchester thirty - thirty, Smith and Wesson thirty-eight special and so on. This language of commerce together with the instruments
of violence and death indeed makes a deadly combination. It is in the light of all these issues raised so far that the analysis of 'One Trip Across' will proceed.

The first person narrative begins on a note of intimacy between the narrator and the reader. The locale and the range of characters in 'One Trip Across', and what motivates them to action is totally removed from the ones encountered otherwise in the narratives mentioned in this group of "fishing" texts, and yet there is a thread of connection — the reference and the attitude toward the concept of fishing itself.

The narrative opens on a point of shared reference between the speaker (here, also the protagonist) and the reader. "You know how it is there early in the morning in Havana with the bums still asleep against the walls of the buildings;...?" With the words you know how it is early morning Havana is brought into the direct consciousness of the receiver. And yet, this familiar sleepy ambience is soon to be shattered with the sound of gun shots. (Peace and calm are not available for a long time and this space is soon overtaken by violence and mayhem). On the one hand, there is a wide difference between early in the morning Havana and The first thing a pane of glass went and the bullet smashed into the row of bottles on the show case wall to the right. I heard the gun going and bop, bop, bop, there were bottles smashing
all along the wall. But on the other, not much is apparently different between the bums still asleep against the walls of the buildings and one of the boys was spread out on the sidewalk, face down, just outside the big window.... This one instance of similarity and difference entails within it references to peacefulness and violence, familiarity and strangeness, the expected and the unexpected. And, it sets in motion not only the narrative but allows us to glimpse the germ of the entire outline of the narrative as well.

Also, by evoking certain disparate instances on the same plane, the narrative enables us to see connectedness in disconnectedness. For instance, early morning Havana unfolds a clash of ideologies — that of underhand commercial transactions (a deal of illegal transport of men across national borders) and of another's religious devotion to his means of living, his boat (I make my living with the boat. If I lose her I lose my living). It is the refusal of the undesirable at daylight by one who circles back to forced acceptance of a similar illegal and undesirable deal at midnight. Harry, literally, comes full circle in his experiences when the desired, legal deal does not do much for him. It is of interest at this point to see another difference being made; that between the degree of illegality of different deals. (We have seen the split in the concept of fishing — how honorable fishing differs from dishonorable fishing and how each determines or is determined by, not
only the behavior of the person involved in the act but also the course of
events in the life of that person and of those around). Similarly, certain acts
of illegality are more risky than others and, therefore, Harry’s refusal to
ply men across waters, but not that which can’t talk. I told you I didn’t carry
anything that can talk. Sacked liquor can’t talk. Demijohns can’t talk. There’s
other things that can’t talk. Men can talk. At this point (Harry’s persistent
refusal to accept the proposition of the Cubans) he is counter questioned
by one of the rejected Cubans about his willingness to work for Chinamen.
“Can Chinamen talk?” Pancho said, pretty nasty. “They can talk, but I can’t
understand them,” I told him. It is not very obvious here as to what Harry
means or intends to do about the specific case of Chinamen. But the
narrative provides the answer when Harry, unwillingly but out of
necessity, accepts the offer to carry the Chinamen on his boat. The episode
provides a clue for our reading — Harry does not choose to be involved
in illegal trafficking even if it means a fair amount of money, he prefers to
be with his boat and fish — but he is forced to do what he initially refuses
because of the dishonorable, double dealing of another. Mr. Johnson can’t
fish well with discipline and love, and does not even feel a sense of shame
about his behaviour which embarrasses and angers both Harry, (sober,
balanced) and Eddy, (an unstable rummy), and cheats Harry of the money
for which he has actually laboured (literally, taken punishment) and is
legally entitled to. Mr. Johnson’s action tells on Harry’s fate and compels
him on a course of action full of risks and disgrace, but which is without any alternative.

Mr. Johnson is compared and contrasted variously with Harry, Eddy and Frankie. With Harry, the contrast serves mainly in terms of fishing and the code of honor it involves. Mr. Johnson fishes sloppily and shamelessly, more for the glamour and heroism that follow a catch rather than an interest in and love for the game. Initially, Johnson took the harness off the reel so he could put the rod across his knees because his arms got tried holding it in position all the time. Because his arms got tried holding the spool of the reel against the drag of the big bait, he screwed the drag down when I wasn’t looking. I never knew he had it down. I didn’t like to see him hold the rod that way but I hated to be crabbing at him all the time. Besides, with the drag off, line would go out so there wasn’t any danger. But it was a sloppy way to fish, and after a complete collapse of his attempt at catching a fish a fisherman would give a year to tie into, he ends up making a fool of himself and he sits there perfectly content drinking with a rummy. All that Johnson shows himself capable of by way of remorse at the fiasco is his shameless imperviousness to the pathos of the situation and this obtuse behavior is topped by his comment I saw a picture of a girl who caught one (a fish). Even this smug, accusatory comment is exposed for its hollowness by Harry, a person definitely more experienced in the ways of the sea. Sure, Harry says (about the girl in the
picture) Still fishing. He swallowed the bait and they pulled his stomach out and he came to the top and died. I'm talking about trolling them when they're hooked in the mouth. Johnson is in the habit of complaining no matter what the situation is like. Early in the text when he and Harry decide on the suitability of the day for fishing the conversation goes something like this.

"I think you're going to have a chance to fight one today, Mr. Johnson", I told him.

"It's about time", he said. "How long have we been out?"

"Three weeks today."

"That's a long time to fish".

"They're a funny fish", I told him. "They aren't here until they come. But when they come there's plenty of them. And they've always come. If they don't come now they're never coming. The moon is right. There's a good stream and we're going to have a good breeze".

"There were some small ones when we first came".

"Yes", I said. "Like I told you. The small one thin out and stop before the big ones come.

"You party-boat captains always have the same line. Either it's too early or too late or the wind isn't right or the moon is wrong. But you take the money just the same".
This is Mr. Johnson whining about not getting a chance to do some challenging fishing. Very soon, at sea, he hooks the marlin not just of his life but, in Harry's opinion, that of a lot of other fishermen. And yet, he, despite repeated instructions, (Ever1Jday I'd have to tell him the same thing but I didn't mind that says Harry), and due to his own stubbornness manages not only to lose that fish but also the rod, tackle, and a huge amount of line. Again, out of habit, he lays the blame in an unfisherman-like manner (against the code of behavior opted for by Harry and the other protagonists of the other texts) on the fish without considering his own mistakes. "What would I do if I was hooked to a fish that? Johnson said.

"That's what you wanted to fight all by yourself", I told him.

I was plenty sore.

"They're too big", Johnson said. "Why, it would just be punishment".

"Listen", I said. "A fish like that would kill you".

"They catch them".

"People who know how to fish catch them. But don't think they don't take punishment".

For Johnson fishing is no longer a pleasant, satisfying experience but a punishment (signifying, the act of being punished, as for an offense or fault; a penalty inflicted for an offense, fault, etc.) and Harry corrects him by stating its importance (punishment only as a burden to be borne before
reaping rich rewards) for fishing as a soul satisfying experience which comes at the end of a sincere but physically exhausting devotion to the act. If Mr. Johnson is not ready to expend any effort then he is also unable to reap any rewards. But this failure is transformed into a meanness which deprives another person of his means of livelihood. However, this stinginess is not a sudden development but an ingrained characteristic of Mr. Johnson. The text throws up numerous instances of his miserliness which lead him to petty bickerings about what he owes in various quarters—"It seems an unnecessary expense to me" (about the nigger who fixes baits), "But you take the money just the same" (about party-boat captains charging fares inspite of no real fishing), and most significantly, "I'll go to the bank tomorrow morning and come down in the afternoon" (this never happens). It is as if this inherent pettiness about money in some ways diminishes his (Johnson's) stature as a fisherman and, finally, leads him to his failure, not just as a sports person but also as a human being.

This reduction of character becomes more interesting because everything else — the natural forces including the boat — seem to be favourable to the venture. The reduction of stature is wholly dependent on Johnson himself and not precipitated externally. We were going just about the right speed and I headed her into the stream; It couldn't be better, I told him. It was a pretty day all right; The stream was in nearly to soundings and as we
came toward the edge you could see her running nearly purple with regular whirlpools. There was a light east breeze coming up and we put up plenty of flying fish, those big ones that look like the picture of Lindbergh crossing the Atlantic when they sail off.

Those big flying fish are the best sign there is. As far as you could see, there was that faded yellow gulf weed in small patches that means the main stream is well in and there were birds ahead working over a school of little tuna. You could see them jumping; just little ones weighing a couple of pounds apiece. The moon is right. There's a good stream and we're going to have a good breeze. But in total contrast to the positive signs made by sky, breeze, sea, boat and fish, Johnson reads signs only negatively and repeatedly so. Instances to this effect show what a poor fisherman he makes.

"He's gone," said Johnson.

"The hell he is", I told him. "Ease upon the drag quick".

I could see the curve in the line and the next time he jumped he was astern and headed out to sea. Then he came out again and smashed the water white and I could see he was hooked in the side of his mouth. The stripes showed clear on him. He was a fine fish, bright silver now, barred with purple and as big around as a log".
And again,

"He’s gone," Johnson said. The line was slack.

"Reel on him", I said. "He’s hooked good. Put her ahead with all the machine!" I yelled to the nigger.

Then once, twice, he came out stiff as a post, the whole length of him jumping straight toward us, throwing the water high each time he landed. The line came taut and I saw he was headed inshore again and I could see he was turning.

In both cases, Johnson can only feel absence contrary to the real, actual presence of the fish. Ironically, the situation is soon reversed with Johnson erring again.

"He’s gone", I told him. The fish was still jumping and he went on jumping until he was out of sight. He was a fine fish all right.

"I can still feel him pull", Johnson said.

"That’s the weight of the line".

"I can hardly reel it. Maybe he’s dead".

"Look at him", I said. "He’s still jumping". You could see him out a half a mile, still throwing spouts of water.
Johnson repeatedly confuses between absence and presence and can, therefore, never know correctly whether he may or may not make a catch. On the other hand, Harry can not only feel the position of the fish correctly but also indicate a benevolence toward money unlike Johnson, "We'd had this bird out three weeks fishing the stream and I hadn't seen any of his money yet except one hundred dollars he gave me to pay the consul and clear and get some grub and put gas in her before we came across", and,

"I was thinking three weeks was a long time to let him go but if he was good for it what difference was there?. He should have paid every week anyway. But I've let them run a month and got the money. It was my fault but I was glad to see it run at first. It was only the last few days he made me nervous but I didn't want to say anything for fear of getting him plugged at me. If he was good for it, the longer he went the better."

It would do at this point to mention a comment of Mr. Johnson's and Eddy's retort to it and see what the comparison between Johnson and Eddy shows. Earlier the narrative has mentioned the fact of Eddy's rum-sozzled existence and dismissed his usefulness as part a fishing crew. "Eddy was a good man on a boat once, before he got to be a rummy, but he isn't any good now. I looked at him standing there tall and hollow cheeked with his mouth loose and that white stuff in the corners of his eyes and his hair all faded
in the sun. I knew he woke up dead for a drink" and that, "The fish didn’t make any difference to him". But Eddy’s purposefulness in the text is served by the fact that he is allowed interjections which function as pointers to the emotional accents of the text. (The reader must remember that it is "God looks after rummies", and "Plenty of luck for Eddy, too. Plenty of luck, all right", Vs. "Mr. Johnson, you’re just unlucky", "Mr. Johnson, you’re unlucky. You know I never saw that happen before in my life"). In the light of these instances the following dialogue functions significantly for the concept of fishing and ideas related to it — enjoyment, desire, sincerity, and the all encompassing concept of honor.

"Well", said Johnson, "they’re too big. If it isn’t enjoyable, why do it"?

"That’s right, Mr. Johnson," Eddy said, "If it isn’t enjoyable, why do it"?

Though dismissed intermittently by Harry, Eddy serves companionably as his mate, as defender of his deserved earnings and, finally, as one who stands by him through a bad deal and helps him cross over to safety. Frankie, like Eddy, though marginal to the text, helps tide Harry over from a crisis, and in this respect, both Eddy and Frankie, belong to the same camp and are in contrast to Mr. Johnson. Despite their failings (Eddy, a rummy, can only live a liquor-induced life; Frankie has to bear a physical handicap, his deafness) they can be depended upon,
(about Eddy — "I'm going to need him now", and for Frankie — "But you never saw a fellow more loyal nor with a better heart", and, "Make me happy", said Frankie. I saw he was about ready to cry because he was so pleased everything was all right, so I patted him on the back). It is Frankie's efforts which allow Harry a try at making some money quickly in order to survive, and it is Eddy's presence which helps in the fruition of the plan unlike Johnson's bad luck which is somehow transferred to the boat and its occupants.

Another concept, like that of honor and sincerity, which comes up in the course of the narrative, is one of trust. Close to the conclusion of the text, Harry remarks, "Some Mr. Sing. He certainly wasn't much of a business man. May be he was. May be he just trusted me. I tell you I couldn't figure him". This quality of trust in Mr. Sing is defined by an indefinite — may be. But what happens without doubt is that Mr. Sing is done out of a job and money by Harry. And all because he (Harry) has been done out of a job, money, security and certainty, because he put his trust in Mr. Johnson. Another cycle comes full circle, only this one ends in death. However, Harry's degeneration is not total but temporary and necessity-induced which is why, "I never even looked in his (Mr. Sing's) pockets. I didn't feel like fooling with him". Another circle that the text has now completed is that of killing and death as Mr. Sing's murder at the end of the text only leads
the reader back to the other shootout in the opening lines which end in the deaths of the Cubans. One of other earliest lines of the text was, *You can name your own price*, and its applicability is tested in the case of each of the participants (in the text) where each completes this one trip across at the cost of something — unhappiness or loss of life.

Harry's inseparability from the boat (even in the face of trouble and the desperate need for making money) comes across with the words, *I go on her wherever she goes*, and this is not an exploitable commercial relationship to be traded according to need but one entwined with his very existence (*I make my living with the boat. If I lose her I lose my living*). This is not only a question of living but life itself and in the light of this attitude the episode of transporting the Chinks and murdering Mr. Sing is almost an expiatory act (although of an immoral kind) in payment for dishonoring the sanctity of the boat by Mr. Johnson's shamelessness, pettiness and cowardice. This idea takes us back to Harry's advice to Mr. Johnson about taking a punishment for the reward.

The steps of this "Chinese" transaction is very underhand and conducted in the lingo and the gestures of an underworld deal. Money is passed, ostensibly unnoticed, under plates (*Put it under the plate*), deals are fixed up with attention to the minutest of details (*"No", he said, "One half*
when you start to load and the other when you are finished") and only passing reference is made to the larger issues of the text (of trust and honesty) with Mr. Sing's, "Captain have you no trust in me? Don't you see our interests are identical?" Though Harry can't even think of butchering his entire human cargo (Now I tell you it would take a hell of a mean man to butcher a bunch of Chinks like that and I'll bet there would be plenty of trouble, too, let alone mess) he must ensure his own safety, and therefore that of the boat's (the only means of making sure that he may continue to live) by killing Mr. Sing or he will be confronted repeatedly by his nemesis (as in the instance of the photograph sent by the Cubans — a bad deal will haunt him forever, therefore, all traces must be absolutely cleansed). "Fellow gave me this for you", he said and handed me a rolled-up sort of tube wrapped in paper and tied with a piece of red string. It looked like a photograph when I unwrapped it and I unrolled it thinking it was may be a picture someone around the dock had taken of the boat. All right. It was a close-up picture of the head and chest of a dead nigger with his throat cut clear across from ear to ear and then stitched up neat and a card on his chest saying in Spanish: "This is what we do to lenguas largas". The threat is not only from outside (the real threat of the Cubans and the possible one from Mr. Sing if he is allowed to live) but also apprehended in Eddy, not in Eddy as a person but in a Eddy damaged by liquor and outside of control — "... and if you ever open your mouth about last night I'll hear of it and I'll do away with you".
Another repetition in the text is of the word *some* (as in, *some nigger, some Eddy, some Mr. Johnson, some Chink, some business, some Frankie, some Mr. Sing*). This is a qualifying adjective accompanying a noun and scattered throughout the text. Each *some* expression, however, qualifies its noun either positively or negatively, depending on the course of action which has preceded it. Also, importantly, each pronouncement is made by Harry and none other. This may be seen as an indirect but involved comment by the chief character about the others and on the course of narrative which tends to highlight the repetitive circle of highs and lows which characterize the text.

However, at least within the pages of this text, the circle is worked completely from a disruption of normalcy back to safety and security, and therefore, Harry is allowed the final word — "*It had turned out a good trip all right, finally, even though it had looked plenty bad plenty of times.*"