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On a Sentence in Ernest Hemingway's Novel "A Farewell to Arms"

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This paper deals with some properties of Hemingway's style in the novel **A Farewell to Arms**. The author has examined in detail a sentence whose length has been taken as an example through which the reader can see how much Hemingway is concerned with problems of the so-called inseparable unity of form and sense. The connector **and** can be understood as a dominant factor in the structure of the analysed sentence. The author discusses in detail the semantic integrity of the used lexical items, their specific distribution and their succession. Owing to these and other facts, the analysed sentence assumes an important stylistic function in the whole story.

One most usually speaks about a writer's style in general lines to point to its essential characteristics. In many cases these characteristics are not easily observable, since stylistic expressions need not necessarily be conspicuously structured. Indeed, the maturity of a writer is best confirmed when his style does not attract too much notice. The perfection which generally comes out of a long process is due not only to the phenomena of cognition but also to the adequacy of language expression. Writers tend to find balance, to establish a rhythm capable of uniting all the parts and elements into a whole. Only in this way can they project their ideas while also bringing forth all their artistic conceptions. The rule "neither too much nor too little" may appear an extremely simple one, but it is not easily realisable in a creative work.

Hemingway acquired rather a wide circle of readers throughout the world for several reasons.¹ First, not only as a writer but also as a witness, he followed movements and events of political and social importance most closely, almost at first hand. This in particular refers to his novels *A Farewell to Arms* and *To Whom the Bell Tolls*.² They distinctly point to the place and the role of Hemingway's prose in American literature, and also give evidence of the author's earlier and maturer days spent on battlefields in Europe. As a matter of fact, he most often created an atmosphere in which his readers saw their contemporary in him. It is this fact that moved him to be constantly concerned with the problem of an authentic, almost documentary, presentation of events. For sure, a war correspondent should always endeavour to arrive at the very source of information. Yet, to artistically shape events personally experienced is a specific problem. The novel *A Farewell to Arms* is most likely the best example of Hemingway's efforts in this respect and is experimental in the full sense of the word. He aimed at finding a literary expression that would impress the reader in the highest possible degree. Dialogue has an extraordinarily significant role for this purpose in his prose; in addition, there is his particular approach to the vocabulary, his attention to the syntactical configurations of the sentence etc.³ The sentence is no doubt in the focus of interest since it unites and reveals all other efforts. There is also an abundant use of the connector *and*, by means of which numerous short or long, complete or elliptic, clauses are made into specific and impressive wholes. In this way, all elements and structures are brought into both formal and sense unity. The succession of ideas often seems to be strange or irregular, which is due to big jumps from one lexical field

1 Hemingway has been translated in every continent. Numerous critical essays and studies have been written on his books in many countries. See **Hemingway and His Critics**, An International Anthology, introduced by Carlos Baker, Hill and Wang — New York, 1961.

2 The translations of these two novels in Serbo-Croatian are: **Zbogom oružje**, by Branko Kojić, Mladost, Zagreb, 1952. **Zbogom oružje**, by Radojica V. Ćirković, Narodna knjiga, Beograd, 1965. **Kome zvono zvoni**, by Šime Balen, Zora, Zagreb, 1967.

3 After World War I, Hemingway often visited the American writer Gertrude Stein in Paris. She contributed very much to the development of his experience, particularly his style and literary expression in general.

to another.⁴ This occurrence is not a rare phenomenon in contemporary poetry.

In this paper, we shall be concerned with just one sentence in the novel *A Farewell to Arms*. The sentences occurring immediately before and after the sentence singled out in this paper will also be quoted and taken account of.

"... After supper I would go and see Catherine Barkley. I wished she were here now, I wished I were in Milan with her. I would like to eat at the Cova and then walk down the Via Manzoni in the hot evening and cross over and turn off along the canal and go to the hotel with Catherine Barkley. Maybe she would. **Maybe she would pretend that I was her boy that was killed and we would go in the front door and the porter would take off his cap and I would stop at the concierge's desk and ask for the key and she would stand by the elevator and then we would get in the elevator and it would go up very slowly clicking at all the floors and then our floor and the boy would open the door and stand there and she would step out and I would step out and we would walk down the hall and I would put the key in the door and open it and go in and then take down the telephone and ask them to send a bottle of capri bianco in a silver bucket full of ice and you would hear the ice against the pail coming down the corridor and the boy would knock and I would say leave it outside the door please.** Because we would not wear any clothes because it was so hot and the window open and the swallows flying over the roofs of the houses and when it was dark afterward and you went to the window very small bats hunting over the houses and close down over the trees and we would drink the capri and the door locked and it hot and only a sheet and the whole night and we would both love each other all night in the hot night in Milan..."⁵

One can see that the first clause of the sentence printed in italics expresses the doubt that the protagonists are in love with each other. Frederic bears in mind that Catherine's boy was killed in action in France. The ideas of the main and the two following (dependent) clauses, occurring at the very beginning of the sentence, are quite different from the ideas expressed throughout the rest of the (chiefly independent) clauses (twenty one of them). The independent clauses are linked with

⁴ A partnership of literary theory and linguistics is possible since literary theory deals with that art whose medium of expression is language. Linguistic approaches are convenient in cases in which one can observe morphological, syntactical, lexical or other grammatical properties of the expressions used. See Radoslav Katičić: "Linguistics and Literary Theory" in *The Art of the Word*, A Journal of Literary Studies edited by the Croatian Philological Society in Zagreb, 1969, p. 75-88.

⁵ Ernest Hemingway: *A Farewell to Arms*, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 33-34, Chapter VII.

the connector of co-ordination *and*.⁶ They are either simple, expanded or various types of elliptic clauses. Obviously, in the sentence we are analysing, which appears as rather a long complex of ideas, the role of the connector *and* is very significant. It primarily connects and unites a whole series of ideas, establishing one common and inseparable sense for the entire sentence. Thus all the ideas are equated, regardless of their individual different meanings. Accordingly, the stylistic value of the whole sentence results from a specific and unrepeatable realization of the unity of form and sense.

For better insight, before observing some details and general characteristics of the sentence under review, one may make a vertical representation of all the clauses:

- 1 Maybe she would pretend
- 2 that I was her boy
- 3 that was killed
- 4 *and* we would go in the front door
- 5 *and* the porter would take off his cap
- 6 *and* I would stop at the concierge's desk
- 7 *and* ask for the key
- 8 *and* she would stand by the elevator
- 9 *and* then we would get in the elevator
- 10 *and* it would go up very slowly clicking at all the floors
- 11 *and* then at our floor
- 12 *and* the boy would open the door
- 13 *and* stand there
- 14 *and* she would step out
- 15 *and* I would step out
- 16 *and* we would walk down the hall
- 17 *and* I would put the key in the door
- 18 *and* open it
- 19 *and* go in
- 20 *and* then take down the telephone
- 21 *and* ask them to send a bottle of capri bianco in a silver
 bucket full of ice
- 22 *and* you would hear the ice against the pail coming down
 the corridor
- 23 *and* the boy would knock
- 24 *and* I would say
 leave it outside the door please.

⁶ The connector **and** combines notions or senses by harmoniously placing them in the same order or relation. It is not strange that this connector always yields a high frequency count even without being used with specific stylistic determination.

Observing this sentence, one inevitably becomes aware of the domineering occurrence of the so-called conditional mood (would + verb) and not of tenses past, present or future. This is to say that in this sentence nothing that is happening, or has happened, is in question. The sentence tells us about what *might* happen; it expresses the hero's desire to meet the girl he loves. The vision of such a desired encounter assumes a very important role in the story: above all, for being entirely opposite to life in barracks, to the fighting on the battle fields, to the horrors of war, the suffering etc. However, the encounter has a rather realistic frame and scope, with quite an ordinary milieu and familiar atmosphere. There is no exaggeration in the choice of the place: the hotel does not represent a particularly romantic or even exotic environment. In fact, at that time, almost no town or village in Italy was far from the field of battle.

In addition, a great number of details mentioned in the description appear superfluous, not only as facts but also by their hair-splitting order. They most concretely and faithfully describe the surroundings underlying the resolute idea of love, anticipating its feverish and irresistible force. The hotel becomes a symbol of settled, undisturbed and peaceful life contrasted with the struggle for survival in war-time. The image of this feverishly desired encounter abounds in details, such as: *the front door, the porter, his cap, the concierge's desk, the key, the elevator, the boy, the hall, the telephone, a bottle of capri bianco and so on.*⁷ We can also see that, with the exception of the first idea in the sentence, no feelings, or any other psychological reality, are described. Consequently, the first idea is, in a way, opposed to all the others, representing a rather unconvincing introduction to the actions that follow. The movements and the behaviour of the protagonists are represented more or less mechanically and reduced to almost routine activities. Besides, the acting of the protagonists is maximally equated with that of the subsidiary characters so that all their roles are professedly brought to the same standard of stylistic relevance. Such impressions result from the reciprocal presentation of the details.

In addition to this sentence (printed in italics) the one immediately following it is also taken into consideration. Indeed, the connector *because*, occurring at the beginning of this sentence proves that it continues the previous sentence.

⁷ By grouping words belonging to the same or similar semantic field, we inevitably make some ideas in the text more prominent than others. See: J. C. Catford: *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 11.

Thus the idea expressed in the first clause of the latter sentence is directly associated with the idea expressed in the last clause of the former. In other words, the occurrence of the connector *because* makes the two clauses to be a true link between the two sentences. In fact, the two sentences might have been made into one grammatical unit.⁸ However, for all the sense interrelations that may be ascribed to them, there are elements that make them semantically quite different. For this reason, which the punctuation clearly shows it, they are constituted as two grammatically separate wholes. In the first sentence, most of the terms belong to one and the same semantic field. All of the terms, or groups of them, are contiguously related to each other.⁹ Another strong characteristic conspicuously represented in the first sentence is that all the ideas are arranged as movements or actions strictly succeeding each other, some of them being repeated. There are no so-called "jumps" from one semantic area to another, or better, no jumps between highly divergent semantic fields. From this viewpoint, the two sentences are distinctly marked, the second taking the first a step further: its contents yields true psychological and physiological evidence of love. The love theme also gains a fresh background in that sensations are given a new horizon, outside the hotel room: *... swallows flying over the roof ... very small bats hunting over the houses and close down over the trees ...* The sentence ends with the central point of the entire vision: *... and we would both love each other all night in the hot night in Milan.* Movements in the sphere of cognition here are of a different kind, the choice of associations being much freer; there is not the discipline restraint of the previous sentence. By the criterion of length, the first sentence is certainly more relevant than the second one. Therefore, one may ask why this sentence is longer than other one, even why it is the longest in the novel.¹⁰ The question may be posed owing to

⁸ The function of this period, as a punctuation mark, could be tested by comparing different approaches taken to it by a number of (professional) interpreters.

⁹ Meanings of terms are contiguously related to each other when they have at least one important distinctive component in common. See Eugene Nida: **Componential Analysis of Meaning**, Mouton Publishers, Second Printing 1979, p. 18.

¹⁰ It is also to be noted that in this same novel there are numberless clusters of short sentences, e.g. p. 63, chapter XII: "... I don't like Rome, I said. It is hot and full of fleas. You don't like Rome? Yes, I love Rome. Rome is the mother of nations. I will never forget Romulus suckling the Tiber. What? Nothing. Let's all go to Rome. Let's go to Rome tonight and never come back. Rome is a beautiful city, said the major. The mother and father of nations, I said. Roma is feminine, said Rinaldi. It cannot be the father..."

the simple fact that the literary medium of expression is language. Since every literary work must be realized through language, there must be unity of sense and form. The length of the sentence results from insistence on so many commonplace, even banal, facts; they impose an atmosphere not only different from, but quite opposite to, the omnipresent influence of the war. This reason is crucial; what follows can be left to the imagination of the readers. Thus the part most closely concerned with love and its possible manifestations cannot be said to be minimized but sketched in a poetic and rather efficient manner. According to this interpretation, twenty-four clauses, or so, constitute the first sentence while just thirteen occur in the second. As mentioned above, Frederic's vision of the intimate encounter with Catherine which he desires so much is brought to light within just two complex both formally and semantically marked sentences. The first insists on facts in the physical sense, the connector *and* becoming the decisive factor for their unity. It would now be convenient to make a synoptic survey of the stylistic components. The categorization and classification is based on a number of the formal and semantic aspects of literary expression.

The formal aspects:

- the longest sentence in the novel
 - the frequent and stressed presence of the connector *and*
- The semantic aspects:

- the appearance of the main characters
- the relationship of this sentence with the dialogue referring to the first encounter of the protagonists
- love as the central motive in the story in general
- the vision of the encounter as an ardent desire for love, expressed conditionally
- the position and the behaviour of the protagonists entirely outside the dull atmosphere caused by the war
- a series of details indicative of settled life in peace-time
- insistence on some banal successive or repeated actions
- the exclusion of psychological facts

The sentence that follows is mentioned due to its being not only logically but also most directly the continuation of the previous sentence. It completes the vision with the irresistible power of love, with the beauty of the surroundings a little widened in a romantic sense, with its image of a night, its duration and warmth, all this taking place in the Italian city of Milan, which is used as a notion of a definite and documentary (geographical and historical) point of reference.

In conclusion, it is important to stress the significant use of the connector *and* not only in *A Farewell to Arms* but more or less throughout his prose. Accordingly, the question should be posed as to how the role of the connector *and* relates to the other stylistic solutions in the novel. One of the examples that can touch upon this problem is the sentence analysed in this paper.

This paper has not taken difficulties in translating Hemingway's prose into account. He is well-known as a writer whose style is impressive for its putative oversimplicity or even imperfection, lack of finish etc. However, for this same reason, but convinced that his style needs polishing, translators very often make additions when there is no evidence at all in the original. Secondly, numerous repetitions of words and expressions are largely considered to be sources of monotony or to slow down the necessary rhythm. Long sentences are usually shortened and vice versa. Inadequacies may appear in the transposition of diction and rhythm, especially in dialogue structures so much divers in form.¹¹ Certainly, weaknesses are likely to appear as objective rather than subjective failures. All this obviously points to the complexities that may arise in our handling of a detailed and literal stylistic analysis based on translations.

O JEDNOJ REČENICI U ROMANU "ZBOGOM ORUŽJE" ERNESTA HEMINGWAYA

U ovome se članku raspravlja o nekim osobinama Hemingwayeva stila u romanu **Zbogom oružje**. Autor podrobnije raščlanjuje rečenicu čija je dužina uzeta kao primjer na kojemu čitatelj može vidjeti koliko se Hemingway unosio u probleme tzv. jedinstva forme i sadržaja. Veznik *and*, "i", može se smatrati jednim od značajnih faktora u strukturi raščlanjene rečenice. Autor podrobnije analizira semantičko jedinstvo upotrebljenih riječi, njihovu specifičnu raspodjelu i redosljed. Zahvaljujući ovim i drugim činjenicama, spomenuta rečenica ima veoma važnu stilsku funkciju u ovom Hemingwayevu djelu.

¹¹ On the use and the role of dialogue in Hemingway's prose, see: Ivo Krile: "O jednom dijalogu u romanu **Zbogom oružje** Ernesta Hemingwaya" (*On a dialogue in Ernest Hemingway's novel A Farewell to Arms*) (**Vidik** (Split) No 3—4, XXVII, series 6, 1980, pp. 120—127.