

The Lure of Similarity : Incestuous Desire in the Stories of Nick Adams

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Abstract

This study first focuses on Hemingway's interest in incestuous relationships from his depictions of similar-looking pairs. Then, by examining several intimate brothers and sisters in his works the protagonists' strong suppression of incestuous desire is suggested. Finally, by reconsidering the stories of Nick Adams from the aspect of compositional periods, it is suggested that Hemingway results in the internalization of incestuous desire in his unfinished manuscripts of 'The Last Good Country.'

Keywords : Ernest Hemingway / similarity / incest / suppression / American Literature

1. Introduction

Strong similarities in the appearance of intimate pairs are often seen in Hemingway's works. In "The Battler," Nick Adams is told that Adolph Francis' mental disorder was triggered by gossip asserting an incestuous relationship between him and his wife who "looks enough like him to be his own twin" (Hemingway, 1987, 103). In *A Farewell to Arms* Catherine Barkley tells Frederic Henry of her wish to make their hairstyle be alike (Hemingway, 1929). In *For Whom the Bell Tolls* Pilar says to Robert Jordan that he and Maria could be brother and sister by the look (Hemingway, 1940), and also in the manuscripts of *The Garden of Eden* both of the two couples, the Bournes and the Sheldons wear similar hairstyles. In Hemingway's unfinished manuscripts of "The Last Good Country," Nick Adams and his sister Littless, who cuts her hair like a boy, probably look very alike because they have the same shoulders and the same kind of legs (Hemingway, 1995).

Such similarities occur as a repeated motif throughout Hemingway's writing career from the 1920s to his death. This study first stresses Hemingway's special interest in incestuous relationships in couples by considering other intermingled influences on his similar-looking pairs. Then, by examining several intimate brothers and sisters in his works it is suggested that his stories consistently depict the strong suppression of incestuous desire. Finally, by reconsidering the stories of Nick Adams from the aspect of compositional periods, it is suggested that

Hemingway's stories show a shift in focus from the lure of incestuous relationships to the internalization of incestuous desire.

2. On the Lure of Similarity

What can we infer from the similarities in the appearance of couples in Hemingway's works? The motif seems problematic because it can be interpreted from so many angles. An androgynous appearance was the fashion for young women during the 1920s¹⁾ and it surely had a great influence on his female boyishly hair-styled characters. Also, many characters in Hemingway's works such as Nick Adams, Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*, and especially David and Catherine Bourne in *The Garden of Eden* seem to demonstrate narcissistic tendencies.²⁾ Also Hemingway's interest in the diversity of sexual relationships beyond the heterosexual becomes obvious for us especially in later works as *The Garden of Eden*. So, it is proper to see the intermingled influences of these factors underlying the similarity of appearance between couples in Hemingway's works.

However, it should be noted that in Hemingway's works most of the similarities of the couples are associated with sibling relationships, such as that of twins in "The Battler," that of brothers and sisters in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, or even that of brothers in *The Garden of Eden*. These naturally suggest an incestuous relationship because we see the sexual intimacy between the sibling-like pairs. In addition, since the close relationship of brother and sister is one of the most notable motifs from his early works such as "Soldier's Home" through later unfinished

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manuscripts such as “The Last Good Country” it is fair to say that incestuous relationships seem to be the strongest undercurrent in Hemingway’s works.

3. Nervousness for Sisters

How are the “real” brothers and sisters depicted in Hemingway’s works? It is quite clear that he was interested in this relationship from the many stories which show a special closeness between brother and sister. In “Soldier’s Home,” the protagonist Harold Krebs has two younger sisters and one of them, Helen, is his “best sister” (Hemingway, 1987, 114). In “Nobody Ever Dies,” the heroine Maria worships her dead brother Vicente. In one of the Nick Adams stories, “Fathers and Sons,” the exceptionality of a sister’s existence is stressed as follows: “[t]here was only one person in his family that he liked the smell of; one sister. All the others he avoided all contact with” (Hemingway, 1987, 375). Additionally, the unfinished manuscripts of “The Last Good Country” portray the quite close relationship between Nick and his sister Littleless.

Here the interesting point is about the age of the sisters. Helen and Littleless are probably in their early teens, as might be Dorothy in “Fathers and Sons” based on Nick’s age.³⁾ We can infer the virginity of Helen and Littleless from their lack of hesitation in wishing their brothers were their loves and that no special man or boy can be seen around the girls.⁴⁾ Only Maria in “Nobody ever Dies” appears to be older than the other sisters, and no one can insist on her virginity because the conversation clearly indicates her sexual intimacy with her lover Enrique. However, it is interesting that this happens after her brother is dead. In Hemingway’s works most brothers appear only with their virgin sisters. After the loss of their sisters’ virginity, they or their sisters disappear from the stories.

At the same time, we can easily assume that this virginity will be lost soon: Helen is very interested in the matters of love and lovers and Littleless, fixates on the sexual relationship between her brother and his ex-girlfriend Trudy and confuses him by saying that she wants to have his children (Hemingway, 1995). The words of Littleless have so much sexual implication as a whole⁵⁾ that we can say, as Gerogiannis (1983, 184) puts it, “she is innocent but certainly not ignorant.” Truly, the favorite sisters of Hemingway’s protagonists are just at the age of being sexually innocent but not sexually ignorant.

The Nick Adams stories, “Fathers and Sons” and “The Last Good Country” include some strain toward the moment of the loss of sisters’ sexual innocence. It is

important to note that in these stories on one hand the virginity of the sisters is inferred while on the other they are already fully sexualized. In “Fathers and Sons” the boy Nick hears from his Indian girlfriend Trudy that her half-brother Eddy Gilby wants to sleep with Dorothy. Nick learns this in the virgin forest which is going to be lost. This surely represents Dorothy’s virginity and further, by the suggestion of its loss, the sister and the forest are associated with each other as virgins who are going to be violated.

In addition, Johnson (1990, 316-17) suggests the possibility of “the brutal rape” of Littleless as a paradigm of the rape man has committed on the unspoiled virgin land. From this angle, the situation in this story might be much more strained because no-one can help imagining “Nick’s” sexual relationship with his sister. In addition to Littleless’ wish to have his brother’s children, this story has plenty of incestuous motifs such as the apples they eat and the novel *Wuthering Heights* they have. Critics’ attitudes toward the close relationship between this brother and sister vary to a great extent: from those do not find any incestuous connotation to those do read the sexual undertones.⁶⁾ However, their enthusiastic disputes indicate that every reader is very aware of the sexual taboo surrounding Littleless.

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that in “Fathers and Sons” we can see the remarkably contrastive brother-sister relationships from this aspect: that between Nick and Dorothy and those between Nick’s Indian girlfriend Trudy and her brothers. After giving himself up to have sex with Trudy in the virgin forest in front of her brother Billy, Nick explodes with anger hearing that her half-brother wants to sleep with his sister. Nick’s hysterical response here is stressed so much that we can clearly see his inconsistency: he will not allow Trudy’s brother have sex with his sister while sexually enjoying Trudy. His inconsistency shows that in Nick’s stories only his sisters are in a position of sexual taboo which he is neurotically wary of transgressing or of allowing transgression.⁷⁾

4. Meeting Face to Face at “Last”

From here we will examine Hemingway’s treatment of incestuous motifs from the aspect of the chronological order of his works because it will show Hemingway’s characteristics concerning this motif. “Soldier’s Home,” which was composed in 1924 and published in 1925, is the first work where we can identify Hemingway’s interest in incestuous sentiments. In this work the protagonist Harold Krebs is asked by his sister Helen to be her beau

(Hemingway, 1987). In "The Battler," a story of Nick Adams composed and published in 1925, the topic of incestuous relationship has some mysterious appeal to the protagonist, Nick. In 1933, about 8 years from then, in "Fathers and Sons," which is also a story of Nick, the protagonist's special sentiment toward his sister is shown for the first time. In "Nobody Ever Dies," which was written in 1938 and published in 1939, the heroine Maria shows a strong sentiment for her dead brother. In 1940, Hemingway (1940, 67) showed the couple, Robert Jordan and Maria who "could be brother and sister by the look" in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. From 1946 to 1958, the manuscripts of "The Garden of Eden" were written and they show the heroine Catherine who wants to look like her husband. From 1952 to 1957, Hemingway wrote "The Last Good Country" which depicts vividly Nick's younger sister Littleless who tells him of her desire to have his children (Hemingway, 1995, 597).⁸⁾

It seems that throughout his career, Hemingway tends to avoid male incestuous sentiments in favor of female ones. It is always the female characters who strive to become similar to their love. It is always a sister who yearns to be the love of her brother. But the key point is that the sisters are nymphetic. They are probably sexually innocent but just beginning to be sexualized. Here lies Hemingway's subtlety in suggesting both the implication of the brothers' incestuous sentiment toward their sisters and its strong suppression.⁹⁾

We can see Hemingway's strong suppression of this desire by following the stories of Nick Adams in the order of compositional date. The stories were written intermittently over a 30 year period from 1923 to 1958.¹⁰⁾ Although they were fragmentally presented to the readers, as Young (1972) mentioned, now, thanks to Young's *The Nick Adams Stories* and other studies, it is much easier for us to construct Nick's chronology. Knowing the treatment of the close relationship between Nick and his sister in "The Last Good Country", we can consider the relationship portrayed in "The Battler" and infer, as Gerogiannis does, that in the latter "Nick's relationship with his sister is certainly concealed in his heart" (Gerogiannis, 1983, 186) while he is listening to Adolf Frances' tragedy.

However, we need to keep in mind that Nick's sister never appeared before the publication of "Fathers and Sons" in 1933.¹¹⁾ So we do not actually know whether Hemingway intended that Nick had a sister or sisters at the point of composing "The Battler" in 1925. Nick's sister might have never been intended by the author for a long

time and could suddenly have been created at the point of writing "Fathers and Sons." If so, it took quite a long time for Hemingway to make the decision to create Nick's sister: about 10 years from the compositional date of the first Nick story, during which Hemingway composed about 20 Nick stories! This long interval can be regarded as Hemingway's internal conflict between the suppression and creation of a sister for Nick.

Seeing his treatment of Dorothy in "The Fathers and Sons," it is probable that Hemingway had that conflict. Her first and last appearance is quite interesting because Nick cannot directly see her as follows:

He would be standing with his father on one shore of the lake, his own eyes were very good then, and his father would say, "They've run up the flag." Nick could not see the flag or the flag pole. "There," his father would say, "it's your sister Dorothy. She's got the flag up and she's walking out onto the dog." (Hemingway, 1987, 370)

Nick can catch his sister's image only through her father. This seems to stress the sister's special existence as a sexual taboo in Nick's stories.

Moreover, it should be noted that the earlier manuscripts of "Fathers and Sons" were first-person narratives. The four manuscripts or manuscript fragments of this story in the JFK Library¹²⁾ are narrated in the first person by Nick. However, Hemingway's typescript¹³⁾ is a third-person narrative. That is, Hemingway intentionally changed the style of narration from the first-person into the third-person. Nick was changed from "I" into "he" during the compositional period and his complex attitude toward Dorothy also changed from "my" matter into "his": that is, the matter was externalized from "mine" into "his."

However, the manuscripts of "The Last Good Country" show some change. They were composed from 1952, 19 years from the compositional date of "Fathers and Sons." Here, Nick faces his sister, Littleless and his incestuous sentiment at last. Although this story is a third-person narrative, Nick surely contemplates his complex sentiment, even his desire toward her as his "own" matter, not as those of others like he did in "The Battler" as follows:

He loved his sister very much and she loved him too much. But, he thought, I guess those things straighten out. At least I hope so. (Hemingway, 1995, 595)

Here Hemingway treats the incestuous sentiment or desire of one's own: in a sense we can say that he internalized them.

5. Conclusion

Hemingway's strong interest in incestuous relationships did not fade throughout his career and it can be clearly shown by many similar-looking pairs. However, in the stories of Nick Adams we can see that Hemingway is incredibly careful about treating the incestuous sentiment or desire of Nick toward his sister(s).¹⁴ The quite late appearance of his sisters in the compositional history might indicate Hemingway's conflict of treating the incestuous desire of his protagonist.

In this situation the manuscripts of "The Last Good Country" are especially informative because they seem to admit Nick's own incestuous desire for the first time. At the point of writing "The Last Good Country," Hemingway might have relaxed his suppressive attitude toward the treatment of the internalized incestuous desire for sister(s). Or this might be the result of their remaining as manuscripts, intact from their author's heavy deletion and editing.

Hemingway is meticulous about finishing his stories. Many of his stories have a variety of manuscript versions each of which has subtly or sometimes quite different storylines from each other. So, we must make much of the fact that he did not finish the story of "The Last Good Country." It is only dangerous to guess Hemingway's final attitude toward incestuous desire from the unfinished manuscript in his later life. He often managed to finish his stories writing to and fro in his abundant ideas. All this study can say is that the manuscripts of "The Last Good Country" show Hemingway's exceptionally relaxed treatment of incestuous desire and we can see his new aspect concerning this matter.

There is a kind of genealogy of incestuous depiction of brother and sister relationships in American literary works, as well as those of other countries, such as Herman Melville's, William Faulkner's, and Alice Walker's. In Hemingway's case, the author's interest in this relationship is probably based both on his family background, in which he did grow up with many sisters, and his personal curiosity about intimate relationships out of the social norms around him. For this point further study is needed in the future.

Notes

This thesis is mainly based on my presentation at the 15th International Hemingway Society Conference in Michigan, U.S. in June 2012.

- 1) Hemingway (1987) himself mentioned about it in

"Soldier's Home."

- 2) The Bournes even indicates an autoerotic tendency. Catherine reproaches David for carrying around clippings which are about him and says that, "I think he reads them by himself and is unfaithful to me with them. In a wastebasket probably" (Hemingway, 1986, 215). Also Catherine admits to have the narcissistic tendency herself and can be seen to have some autoerotic desire from the scene in which she wants to behave as "Peter" and have David behave as "Catherine" and have sex with "her."
- 3) Littleless appears to be about eleven or twelve for the local warden (Hemingway, 1995, 576).
- 4) Littleless says "It would be easy if there was some boy my own age to copy" (Hemingway, 1995, 592). She has no other boy but Nick around her. Neither does Helen we can assume because although playing indoor baseball with lots of the boys, she asks Harold, "Couldn't your brother really be your beau just because he's your brother?" (Hemingway, 1987, 114)
- 5) Her tale of becoming a whore's assistant (Hemingway, 1995, 591), for example.
- 6) On this point, refer to Tamura (2011, 23-24).
- 7) This neurotic wariness seems to be peculiar to Nick because both Trudy and Billy do not appear to have such nervousness from the scene as follows.

. . . they three [Nick, Billy, and Trudy] lay against the trunk of a hemlock wider than two beds are long, with the breeze high in the tops and the cool light that came in patches, and Billy said:

"You want Trudy again?"

"You want to?"

"Un Huh."

"Come on."

"No, here."

"But Billy --- "

"I no mind Billy. He my brother."

(Hemingway, 1987, 372)

Although we cannot decide which phrase is spoken by whom in this scene, Boutelle (1981-82, 133-46) sees incestuous implications between Trudy and Billy here. If this Indian brother and sister incestuous acts cannot be something shameful which must be hidden from others, this scene can also emphasize Nick's nervousness which is addressed not only to someone who is going to violate the virginity of his sister, but also for "his" violation of it. Furthermore on this point, refer to Tamura (2011, 23-24).

- 8) It should be noted that comparing this work with *The Garden of Eden* which was written in an overlapping period, Littleless' behavior toward her brother easily reminds us of Catherine's toward her husband David in *The Garden of Eden* such as her wish to be his brother or her interest in the literary works of her brother.
- 9) Further on the suppression of incestuous sentiment toward sisters in Hemingway's works, see Tamura (2010).
- 10) The first was the Chapter VI vignette starting from "Nick sat against the wall..." in in our time composed in 1923 and the last was the manuscripts of *The Last Good Country*, from 1952 to 1958.
- 11) Before then we could not find any hint of his sisters or even brothers in the stories. In fact, even "Ten Indian," composed from 1925 to 1927 and staged around the Adams' house, does not hint at any brothers or sisters of Nick who seems to have already become a teenager.
- 12) File number 382, 383, 384 and 385.
- 13) File number 385a.
- 14) This study is not concerned with whether Dorothy in "Fathers and Sons" and Littleless in "The Last Good Country" are the same person or not.

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類似の魅惑

—Ernest Hemingway の Nick Adams 物語における近親姦的欲望について—

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要 旨

本稿では、20 世紀のアメリカ人作家 Ernest Hemingway の描く物語に複数登場する外見の似た二人組に焦点を当て、この作家の incest（近親姦¹⁾）を想起させる関係に対する強い関心と、その表現手法の変化について考察する。

まず、外見の似た二人組が様々な作品に登場する事には執筆当時の時代、文化背景の関わりも深いことをふまえつつ、その描写には親密な異性のきょうだい関係のニュアンスが重ね合わされ、その親密さは近親姦的ニュアンスを含む事を提示する。次に、この作家による実際の異性のきょうだい関係の描写に着目し、その極めて慎重な描写から Hemingway 作品に一貫して流れる近親姦的欲望に対する強い抑圧を指摘する。最後に、Hemingway がそのキャリアを通じて描き続けた Nick Adams 物語群を執筆年代に注意しながら考察することで、この作家が近親姦を想起させる関係の扱い方に葛藤しながら、晩年の未完成作品草稿「最後の良き故郷」に向けて、この関係をそれまでの三人称的視点から見る姿勢からついに主人公の主観的視点から描くに至ったのではないかと主張する。

註 1) 近親相姦という用語をここで使わない理由は、この研究で扱う incest の関係には片方からの暴行の可能性も含まれる為、「相」という字により双方の合意のもとというニュアンスを含む事を避ける為である。

キーワード：Ernest Hemingway / 類似性 / 近親姦 / 抑圧 / アメリカ文学