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## Impalpable Scars: Dual Traumas in Hemingway's "Now I Lay Me" and "A Way You'll Never Be"

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to contribute to the body of scholarly discussion surrounding Ernest Hemingway's *Nick Adams Stories* as interconnected works of subtle yet complex depictions of trauma and memory. It primarily focuses on two stories, "Now I Lay Me" and "A Way You'll Never Be," and attempts to unearth hidden parallels between the two, ultimately positing that each story informs the other in vital ways. The article does so through an examination of memory types, the narrative nature of episodic personal memory, and incorporation of an analysis on the disruptive nature of traumatic memory. Using that framework, it examines the function of screen memory and trauma in "Now I Lay Me," a story of nocturnal haunting, and unearths the existence of dual traumas within the text, those suffered in combat and those in childhood. Connections are made to the events and experiences of "A Way You'll Never Be," with the episodes Nick suffers interpreted as dreams. Thus, the image of the unplaceable yellow house is viewed as a manifestation of the domestic trauma of Adams's childhood, with the home itself representative of the terror of obliteration, a second trauma revealed and existing beyond the boundaries of the text.

**Keywords:** Ernest Hemingway, Nick Adams, trauma, memory, dreams, childhood, American literature, Freud

Contemporary studies on the relationship between trauma and literature often reveal the interconnectedness and interdependence of the traumatic event(s), memory, dreams, and the personal narrative. Much attention has deservedly been given to modernist writings, as the members of that Lost

Generation, trapped in the dizzying zone of progress between the two first World Wars, is undeniably a *scarred* generation. Ernest Hemingway's works often bespeak such forms of personal and generational suffering, as his writings frequently tend to examine the trauma and scars of modernity. Such portrayals are often subtle and surprisingly tender, punctuating not only his novels, but also his short stories, including his Nick Adams works.

Reading Hemingway's *Nick Adams Stories*, we do often get a sensation that something is unsettled and disturbed, both within Nick and with the pockets of the world he inhabits. In some stories, that which is unsettled and imbalanced is more apparent, and we can see that Nick is plagued by the past as destabilizing traumatic memories hover like strange peripheral ghosts. Two such quintessential Hemingway stories, "Now I Lay Me" and "A Way You'll Never Be," epitomize these types of hauntings. William Adair writes that in Hemingway's characters "the essential thing that happens to them is loss rather than violence" and that "[t]he essential things that 'happen' to them are the emotions that precede and the emotions that come after loss" (294). This is true in the case of both these stories, that they are ones of loss and the disruption caused by loss; though simultaneously in both we also have Nick Adams in states of recovery and reconstruction, attempting in his own way to reconcile such emotions. We may build on this idea of reconstruction and recalibration after loss and understand these texts as stories of nearly implacable timeless hauntings, texts which are just as much about recurrence and psychological *return* as they are about loss. What returns to Nick are the specters of trauma, in memory and in dreams, the thin shapes of events that exist separate from his personal, temporal narrative of the self. Regarding the trauma suffered while we read these texts or many of Hemingway's texts, for that matter, the idea of a wounding event in combat is often prioritized by the reader as the monumental and primary traumatic occurrence, and it is indeed a significant aspect of "Now I Lay Me" and "A Way You'll Never Be." However, by reading these stories as a nocturnal and diurnal pair, one of consciousness that contains memory, the other through sleep which contains dreams, we may discover a second trauma that exists alongside the physical wounding events, a recurring haunting equally massive and destabilizing. This coexisting trauma is the

buried terror of the home, a space *equally* representative of the erasure of identity and the self as the loss of consciousness or death is for Nick.

When reading these stories which are heavily centered on the past and remembering, it is first useful to briefly discuss memory, how we remember, and the types of memory. Memory is an incredibly dense subject to parse, and while we cannot cover each theory on memory and how it functions here, we may briefly consider some useful, albeit broad, concepts and differentiations. Regarding types of long-term memory, here we may broadly differentiate between semantic and episodic memory. Semantic memory is that which is comprised of facts without a personal referent required; these are the memories that do not require the self to be involved in the process, such as the days of the week or the order of the months. Episodic memories, meanwhile, are the stories of our lives. Stanley B. Klein and Shaun Nichols write that “episodic memory records events as having been experienced at a particular point in space and time,” and that “an episodic memory represents the ‘what, where, when’ of an event” (679). The significance of this is that episodic memory has a narrative quality, it is our narrative really, and in remembering, it contributes to our sense of identity. Klein and Nichols explain that “these kinds of memories are (part of) what *make me* the same as the person I was in the past” and “[m]emories of past actions go towards *constituting* personal identity” (677). Since episodic memories have a distinct temporal quality, they can be placed on a timeline or, rather, they constitute the timeline of our pasts. Thus, through remembering we may attempt to recall in reverse order the events of our history, the myriad and incalculable events of our pasts which made us who we are in the present.

This act of recollection may fail, though. The memories may be incomplete or chronologically disorganized, or they may feel artificial and unreal. Terrifyingly and paradoxically, we may be overwhelmed by our states of constant change and the absence of a consistent self. In any instance, memories reign as dominant abstractions in our psyches. Richard Terdiman writes that “[i]n psychoanalysis the density and intensity of attention to the phenomena of memory, forgetting, false memories, and the like, are evidence of the power of the past” (94). He continues, saying that “[m]emory names the mechanism by which our present is indentured

to the past; or, to turn the structure around, by which a past we never chose dominates the present that seems to be the only place given us to live" (Terdiman 94). The past we never chose is inextricably bound to us through our being a witness or participant in events we often never chose to be part of, in experience forced on us whether we had a premonition of its occurrence or not. This is the traumatic event, which places us on a strange and nearly ineffable locus where experience, time, memory, and narrative intersect.

Trauma, like memory, is a naturally broad and detailed realm of study. Defining trauma concretely here feels strange in the way it often does when we try to give shape to the shapeless and shape-defying. We tend to think of it as a single or recurrent physical or psychological damage, one that is deeply wounding in any instance. Juliet Mitchell writes that either type of trauma "must create a breach in a protective covering of such severity that it cannot be coped with by the usual mechanisms by which we deal with pain or loss" and the "severity of the breach is such that even if the incident is expected, the experience cannot be foretold" (121). The *unpredictability* of the event and of its impact and magnitude is significant, as is the inherently disruptive nature of trauma. Michelle Balaev writes that "[t]rauma, in my analysis, refers to a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society" (150). She elaborates that "the idea that traumatic experience pathologically divides identity is employed by the literary scholar as a metaphor to describe the degree of damage done to the individual's coherent sense of self and the change of consciousness caused by the experience" (Balaev 150). So, the traumatic event is an unpredictable one which both disrupts and undermines, and, as such, the reliability of the self and of memory becomes severely destabilized.

One of the most prominent writers on trauma theory, Cathy Caruth, expands on these ideas and classifies trauma not only as a breaching psychological event, but also as a narrative event that seemingly exists outside of time. It is something that occurs repeatedly or forcefully after the event has passed. Caruth explains that "[t]he story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality

– the escape from a death, or from its referential force – rather attests to its endless impact on a life” (7). Though we may outlive the event and move seemingly beyond the threatening zone, we are by no means *free* of the event. As such, trauma attaches itself to the afflicted with a transparent tether, circling in an unpredictable orbit that always carries the threat of eclipsing or colliding with the sufferer.

Therefore, a traumatic event is an episodic event, though it is one that is difficult to articulate, understand or place within time. As Andrew Barnaby explains, citing the work of Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, while episodic memories help structure our pasts and selves, a traumatic event can disrupt that narrative in a “process whereby the mind, faced with an incomprehensible experience, fails to organize that experience within an unfolding temporal order – fails, that is, to assign it narrative coherence” (119). He continues, writing that “the mind cannot assimilate an experience into a broader life narrative” and “the experience cannot be assimilated into the broader cognitive patterns that are central to memory and, through memory, to the possibility of continuous or narrative selfhood” (Barnaby 119-120). If the traumatic event is one that does not fit neatly and comprehensibly into the temporal narrative order of episodic memories, it may thus be an event that is destabilizing in part due to its sheer incompatibility. We thus suffer the troubling task of placing the event and ourselves within the event, on our personal narrative timeline.

Many of Hemingway’s works circle around the ideas of traumatic events, perpetual wounds, and the memories that spin repeatedly in our mind’s eye, keeping us awake through the night. “Now I Lay Me” is one such work, one which also concerns itself with the failure of identity after a destabilizing event and the role memory plays in trying to reestablish the self. The text is quintessentially Hemingway, with the young Nick Adams suffering from a nocturnal haunting, immediately telling us that “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” and that “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” (“Now I Lay Me” 276). He later elaborates further on the necessity of light for sleeping, telling us “[i]f I could have a

light I was not afraid to sleep, because I knew my soul would only go out of me if it were dark” (“Now I Lay Me” 279). As Miriam Marty Clark describes, “[i]n his wakefulness on those summer nights of ‘Now I Lay Me,’ he suffers both a stark knowledge of death instilled by the trauma of war and a sense of its inviolable mystery, signified by the darkness all around him” (173). In these details the idea of a combat trauma looms over the story, unspeaking and invisible but heavy as a stone on his chest in the darkness. It hangs over the reader as well, and our conception of Nick’s suffering is informed by this event he mentions. The event is one where he lost consciousness, and in having his consciousness taken from him, he had his sense of control and his sense self taken. He now aligns this event with the night and, as such, finds himself an insomniac.

Significantly, Nick is partially a willful insomniac, evading sleep as he avoids reliving the traumatic event by mentally occupying himself. What he conceives of to occupy himself is equally important to and as revealing as the ever-present, hovering traumatic event: it is the stuff of memories. He moves backwards to his boyhood, to “a trout stream I had fished along when I was a boy” and he fishes up and down the waters (“Now I Lay Me” 276). He retraces all the steps of finding bait, the types, and how they would react upon the surface of the water. In recalling, he goes beyond the places he has actually fished, telling us “[s]ome nights too I made up streams, and some of them were very exciting, and it was like being awake and dreaming,” and at times reality and creation become intermingled: “[S]ome of those streams I still remember and think that I have fished in them, and they are confused with streams I really know,” he ponders (“Now I Lay Me” 277). His recollections of the streams are curious, as they demonstrate a partial mental retreat to childhood. Margot Sempereora writes that “[i]n Nick’s practice of fiction/ fishing, an upstream movement brings us not only to the river’s natural origin and to the trout’s seasonal spawning ground, but also to the earliest memory that Nick can summon to consciousness” (22). She goes further, arguing that “[t]he conflation of fishing and remembering in these passages suggests that when we arrive at these early scenes, we should understand them to be, in some sense, a spawning ground, a fountainhead” (Sempereora 22). This act of willful confabulation is also curious, in that it represents a conscious

attempt to remember something *not* as it happened, as an active act of misremembering.

He wades from these streams into the familial memories of his childhood. "I tried to remember everything that had ever happened to me," he thinks, and he goes back to the "earliest thing" he can recall:

the attic of the house where I was born and my mother and father's wedding-cake in a tin box hanging from one of the rafters, and, in the attic, jars of snakes and specimens that my father had collected as a boy and preserved in alcohol, the alcohol sunken in the jars so the backs of some of the snakes and specimens were exposed and had turned white. ("Now I Lay Me" 277)

In this we have memory functioning on different levels, literally and symbolically. On the literal level, this memory is reaching back through his lineage and touching the items that were the remnants of his parent's wedding, as well as his father's snake collection, and beyond that to the structure owned by his grandfather, which housed all these items. The home was intended to preserve such things and keep them safe. It fails to do so, though, and these items are burned in a fire, following his grandfather's death in a symbolic act of the destruction of the past.

In a related memory Nick thinks of a time his father was gone hunting and his mother, who "was always cleaning things out and making a good clearance," went and "made a good thorough cleaning out in the basement and burned everything that should not have been there" ("Now I Lay Me" 278). His father returns to the remains and, contemplatively and quietly, sorts through the ashes. "He raked out stone axes and stone skinning knives and tools for making arrow-heads and pieces of pottery and many arrow-heads," Nick recalls, "[t]hey had all been blackened and chipped by the fire" ("Now I Lay Me" 278). Again, we have the memory of a fire that destroys the past, in this case literally destroying the artifacts of people from a different time entirely.

The significance of these two memories of destruction has been explored extensively, it seems. Clark describes these memories in relation to a loss of innocence. As such, imagery "marks the transfiguration of Nick's memories, revivifying the image of his embattled parents standing near dangerous, exploding fires or hovering, the snakes between them, at

the end of Eden” (170). Julian Smith details other theories posited, ranging from “Mom-the-destroyer” and castration anxiety, and settles on the idea that “the story concerns something that literally cannot be ‘fixed up’ by marriage, that the narrator has been sexually wounded, and that his memory of his father’s symbolic castration is selective, not random, highly personal, not removed” (178). What is apparent in any perspective offered is that these childhood burnings do matter deeply on a psychological level, and, arguably, that they matter as much as any later combat trauma suffered, though in a more insidious way.

Given Hemingway’s style of omission, it feels that it would be a mistake to assume these are *complete* memories, though. There are emotional omissions in how these events are recalled, as the emotional response and any narrative of conflict during or after the events is left out. People are also absent in the first burning, as Alan Holder writes on the difference between the two burnings: “Hemingway precludes the emergence of a perfect parallel between the two events by having his narrator forget who burned the jars” (157). “I remember the snakes burning in the fire in the back-yard,” Nick recalls, “[b]ut there were no people in that, only things. I could not remember who burned the things even, and I would go on until I came to people and then stop and pray for them” (“Now I Lay Me” 278). While the immolation of these vitreous relics required someone to perform the ritual, Nick’s memory is unwilling to accommodate, and both the performer and the spectators are absent. It becomes a void and he must continue the narrative until figures arrive. Equally curious is that when they do arrive in his mind’s eye, he prays for them, perhaps because of what they have done either to him or to each other. Such incomplete recollections may be what Freud referred to as screen memories. As Lindsay Freeman, Benjamin Nienass, and Laliv Melamed explain, “memories from childhood may be incorrectly recalled or recalled in a way that magnifies or minimizes their importance, thereby masking another memory of deep emotional significance” (1-2). The content recalled is incomplete in order to protect the individual remembering. Freud’s ideas of the self preserving itself from damaging memories is explained by Lisa S. Starks:

Freud referred to the surface layer of consciousness as the *Perception-Consciousness* (abbreviated by Freud as "*Pcpt.-Cs.*"). Bombarded with perceptions, the subject's perception-consciousness encounters fleeting moments; the impressions it forms are transient. Traumatic experiences that penetrate the perception-consciousness layer are stored in the unconscious – which exists *outside* time, thereby providing the subject with a stable space in which memory is stored. Thus, in Freud's view, the subject is split into two conflicting but interconnected layers – one caught up in the transient present, the other bound to a timeless past. (Starks 182-183)

Consequently, in "Now I Lay Me", within Nick resides the dissonance of two traumas that exist beyond time, but the trauma of the burnings and their significance is initially nebulous, obfuscated by partial memories and Hemingway's penchant for omission. While the interpretations on the burnings offered above certainly have merit, let us consider that the trauma of the burnings and what may be just so traumatic about them is best understood when held up alongside "A Way You'll Never Be." The unexpressed trauma of these events, the power of the events, manifests itself beyond the boundaries of this text, and in an entirely different time and place, in a setting where Nick's psyche allows it to assume a form that offers some clarity and effectively communicates the sense of danger it carries.

In "A Way You'll Never Be" we meet Nick Adams in circumstances that have been almost inverted and expanded. We first find Nick in the daytime, traversing the ruins of a destitute combat zone, making his way to an Italian battalion. The town he rides through has been shelled, the homes slumping, shot-through, all scattered with rubble and the materials meant to both destroy and preserve. We see the scattered "stick bombs, helmets, riles, intrenching tools, ammunition boxes, star-shell pistols ... medical kits, gas masks," the refuse of conflict ("A Way You'll Never Be" 306). Strewn among this tableau of barbarism are of course the bodies, "the hot weather had swollen them," the "flies around each" as they decompose ("A Way You'll Never Be" 307, 306). Surrounding the dead are countless bits of paper, the "smutty postcards, photographic; the small photographs of village girls by village photographers, the occasional picture of children, and the letters, letters, letters" ("A Way You'll Never Be" 307). "There was always much paper

about the dead and the debris of this attack was no exception,” we read, as if these materials constitute symbolic viscera, the contents of the identity spilling forth from the broken bodies (“A Way You’ll Never Be” 307). As Sempreora notes, “[t]he scattered ‘texts’ constitute evidence of one’s personal history, faith, and connections to loved ones; here is identity, memory and dream” (27-28). This idea of papers as the items that establish identity is reinforced when Nick arrives at the occupied camp, offers a soldier “the tessera with photograph and identification and the seal of the third army” as proof that he is who he claims to be (“A Way You’ll Never Be” 307). “How am I to know who you are?,” the soldier asks, and Nick replies that “[t]he tessera tells you,” deferring to the material to confirm such an abstract thing with any certainty (“A Way You’ll Never Be” 307, 308).

Once Nick is situated at the encampment and reunited with Captain Paravicini, we are told that his purpose here is to display an American uniform to boost morale and spread news of reinforcements. But the uniform is not entirely convincing and even unrecognizable to the Italians: “[B]ut how will they know it is an American uniform?,” Nick is asked, to which he responds that “[y]ou will tell them” (“A Way You’ll Never Be” 308). Again, the material is symbolic and identificatory. This costumed performance exists alongside his other reason for returning to the front, which is that of *reenactment* and remembering. John E. Talbot writes that “[r]eenactment is less a story than a fragment of a story, representing a larger and longer disaster, but without beginning, middle, or end and without meaning, resolution, or point,” and Nick’s physical return to a zone representative of physical and mental trauma is in itself an exercise in fragmented recollection (438). On one level, he returns and recalls the events of combat verbally with Para. He remembers the taste of the ether in the grappa that he drank to mask his fear, how he was “stinking in every attack” (“A Way You’ll Never Be” 309). “I know how I am and I prefer to get stinking in every attack,” he claims, “I’m not ashamed of it” (“A Way You’ll Never Be” 309). The two briefly discuss the details of a head wound Nick suffered as well, with Para telling him “it should have been trepanned” and Nick claiming “they thought it was better to have it absorb” (“A Way You’ll Never Be” 310). This is a

curious exchange for at least two reasons: for one, it implies some physical damage to the head that was possibly not treated correctly, and equally interesting is the symbolic implication of a trauma that should have been allowed to drain, to be somehow *released*, but instead seeped into Nick's psyche, a toxic permeation.

Alongside the conversational recollection of traumas are the psychological events in this story, what happens after the talking is done and Nick lies down. These fragmented sections of content are labeled by Paul S. Quick as "hallucinatory episodes" full of "recurrent images that haunt his memory and imagination" (32, 30). Most of Quick's conclusions are remarkably strong, and this is certainly a sound possibility that in those quiet moments his thoughts wander, his memories blend and bleed, and began to run into each other, producing a strange amalgam of horrors. However, this idea does exist in a strange contrast to the Nick of "Now I Lay Me," the one who had a remarkable amount of control over the narrative of his memories, who had some navigational power as he waded through the past. Instead, I will consider these moments as dreams, two periods in the story in which Nick loses consciousness and cannot steer, invent or screen his memories.

The memories in "Now I Lay Me" are given a temporal order, whereas the moments Nick experiences when he lies down in "A Way You'll Never Be" have an uncertain and fragmentary chronology, one more akin to dreams. "Our waking thoughts are organized along an internal time-line," Katherine MacDuffie and George A. Mashour claim, "[y]et the way memory functions in dreams is unique" (192). They posit that "[i]nstead of a chronologically ordered series of events, memory in dreams is fragmented" (MacDuffie and Mashour 192). As for the traumatic dream, Freud wrote that the "study of dreams may be considered the most trustworthy method of investigating deep mental processes" (11). He explains that "[d]reams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright" (Freud 11). So, with Freud's thoughts on the recurrent nature of the traumatic dream which brings the unwilling dreamer back

into those moments of trauma, let us approach the content of the first event, which will be referred to here as the first dream.

During the first dream, Nick returns to the “hysterics during the bombardment before the attack,” to a terrifying event where he was “wearing his own chin strap tight across his mouth to keep his lips quiet,” scared and trying to hold it all together (“A Way You’ll Never Be” 310). This dream contains a sequence of maneuvers and chaos, as he recalls that “he couldn’t find his own after the cave-in, one whole end had caved in; it was that started them; making it cold up that slope the only time he hadn’t done it stinking,” and perhaps this last detail alludes to one of the reasons this event may be so engrained, one experienced without the aid of a sedative (310). This dream moves beyond combat to more obscured personal memories of a woman, Paris, and a yellow house:

Sometimes his girl was there and sometimes she was with some one else and he could not understand that, but those were the nights the river ran so much wider and stiller than it should and outside of Fossalta there was a low house painted yellow with willows all around it and a low stable and there was a canal, and he had been there a thousand times and never seen it, but there it was every night as plain as the hill, only it frightened him. That house meant more than anything and every night he had it (“A Way You’ll Never Be” 310).

The yellow house thus becomes the foreign, unplaceable object in the dream. He mentally aligns this canal with a scene at Portogrande, where they were “wallowing across the flooded ground holding the rifles high until they fell with them in the water,” but that was clearly a different event at a different place (“A Way You’ll Never Be” 311). After waking momentarily, he lies back down and considers his time in Paris and on the front, thinking “never dreamed about the front now any more,” though he does, and then considers the “long yellow house and the different width of the river” (311). While he recognizes some dissonance between reality and fantasy, how the house should not terrify him, he still wonders “where did he go each night and what was the peril, and why would he wake, soaking wet, more frightened than he had ever been in a bombardment, because of a house and a long stable and a canal?” (311). As he clarifies here that these thoughts cause him to *wake*, we can take it as further

evidence that his visits to the yellow house are dreams rather than hallucinations.

After this destabilizing bout of lost consciousness, Nick appears distraught and off-kilter. He has a conversation with an Italian soldier that touches on combat, medals, ribbons, and again, the American uniform. Again, all objects which contribute to shaping identity. There is something building in Nick, though, a panic attack of sorts, and he “felt it coming on now” and tries to “quiet down” (“A Way You’ll Never Be” 311). But when the soldier brings up trauma, stating that “I can see you have been wounded,” Nick anxiously steers the conversation away, turning it into a sort of soliloquy (312). It is one that involves grasshoppers and fishing, recalling his nocturnal narratives of “Now I Lay Me” which serve to calm, and narratives or memories which he can control.

After a brief conversation with Para, who tells him he must leave, Nick has another panic attack in which he momentarily rambles. Para insists he lie back down, and at this time Nick has his second dream, much briefer but more revealing:

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, he saw a long, yellow house with a low stable and the river much wider than it was and stiller. (“A Way You’ll Never Be” 314)

Upon waking, he declares that he “might as well go,” as if something significant has occurred during this second dream (314).

The dominant question that arises after reading these fragmented incidents is, naturally, what is the meaning of this nonexistent yellow house that haunts him so? Quick sides with other critics in the common interpretation that “the yellow color of the house signifies Nick’s cowardice” (32). He writes that “[t]he yellow house is a psychological construct that Nick’s mind creates to alleviate what Freud would call his ‘traumatic neuroses’” and that “[s]pecifically, the yellow house replaces the memory of the Austrian soldier who shot him” (Quick 32). Ellen Andrews Knodt contends that “separating fear from cowardice is, I think, crucial to understanding the psychic trauma that Nick has been

undergoing prior to this visit to Fossalta and to understanding the discovery he makes the second time he lies down on Paravicini's bunk in the dugout," noting that Nick awakens "frightened" (80). She also wonders if the conflation of these images could be read "as a consequence of a head wound, and a masterful literary depiction of the documented effects of brain trauma" (Knodt 82). Another curious interpretation is that of Howard L. Hannum, who writes that the yellow house is an amalgam of actual places and exists as a stand-in for the cabin in "Indian Camp," that "[t]he river that 'ran so much wider and stiller than it should' was in one sense Walloon Lake, which he had been rowed across to the Indian camp on the night of the Caesarian," and that "[t]he low house, which he had 'never seen,' though he was so often there, was in one sense the Indian cabin" (97). Hannum not only marks the yellow house as being representative of the cabin or the river of the lake, but he also argues that Nick "replaced the Austrian soldier about to shoot him with the house and its more terrifying threat of his father" as well, the bearded sniper and the bearded father becoming confused and interchangeable (97). It is a rather compelling and smart argument, though during the event in "Indian Camp," we read that Nick "was looking away so as not to see what his father was doing," and that when the woman was being stitched, "Nick didn't look at it," which may be read as the cesarean being a peripheral, visceral experience for the child that is *not* directly gazed upon ("Indian Camp" 68, 69). What he does directly witness in the cabin is the suicide of the father following the childbirth, and the wound that he "had a good view of the upper bunk when his father, the lamp in one hand, tipped the Indian's head back" ("Indian Camp" 69). The confusion and terror of gazing into that blood-black void are arguably the most traumatizing event, and part of the confusion he experiences concerns the fact that one would choose self-destruction over family.

While "Indian Camp" is not the focus here, the terror of the home is, and the yellow house may be a symbol of exactly that: the idea that *his* home is not a space of safety, security, and love, but rather a zone that fosters the obliteration of the self and one's identity. As a result, the yellow house as part of a dream, a place that does not exist and confuses Nick upon waking, may be understood by employing elements of

Freudian dream analysis. Briefly, we must differentiate between manifest and latent content, and, as Ernest Jones explains, the former being that which has emerged and is understandable, the latter the buried, obfuscated content. He explains that “[t]his manifest content is to be regarded as an allegorical expression of the underlying dream thoughts, or latent content,” Jones writes, and that the mind uses “distorting mechanisms” by which it transforms this content (286). One such mechanism is condensation, “the mechanism by means of which similarity, agreement or identity between two elements in the latent content is expressed in the manifest content; the two elements simply become fused into one, thus forming a new unity” (Jones 287). In such a process “[t]he existence of a resemblance between two persons or places may thus be expressed in the dream by the appearance of a composite person or place” (Jones 287). So, while the manifest content may be as bizarre and unfamiliar as a yellow house beside a low canal which one has never actually seen, it may merely be a surface representation of a much deeper pool of unconscious memories, traumas, and neurosis. And this is what the yellow house in “A Way You’ll Never Be” is, namely a symbolic representation of the traumatic burnings of “Now I Lay Me,” conflated and confused with the combat trauma Nick experienced, a given form which is simultaneously familiar and foreign.

Just as the paper objects in “A Way You’ll Never Be” carry a person’s history, so do the objects described in “Now I Lay Me,” i.e. the snakes and arrowheads which traveled through ages and had meanings inscribed upon them. First, with the death of the grandfather comes a stopping of time. The erasure of history follows with the burning of the wedding cake tin and the snakes in the yard, the symbolic destruction of a marriage and a boyhood. Meanwhile, the burning of the Native American artifacts marks the obliteration of his father’s identity and of some literal tools of survival. “The best arrow-heads went all to pieces,” Nick’s father tells him, as the best, or most significant objects, have been ruined (“Now I Lay Me” 278). These events offer Nick traumatic episodic memories that are narratively disruptive and impossible to recall honestly while awake, and thus must be recalled in dreams. In each of these are

elements of destruction, each terrifying, and none presents the home as a safe place capable of preservation.

As such, the home stands for something worse than death, since death is a period at the end of a long sentence. The home represents the burning of the page that sentence was written upon. The image of the yellow home is symbolic of a trauma that transcends time and threatens Nick with nonexistence. Therefore, when he switches his nocturnal focus from trout fishing and streams to women and marriage, he is met with mental resistance, or rather a void. Fishing presents infinite narratives to cycle through, perhaps because there are no people in these narratives, “while the girls, after I had thought about them a few times, blurred and I could not call them into my mind and final they all blurred and all became rather the same and I gave up thinking about them almost altogether” (“Now I Lay Me” 281-282). He remains unmarried at the conclusion of this story, as marriage and domestication are events he simply cannot manage. Similarly, the yellow house in “A Way You’ll Never Be” is described as “what he needed but it frightened him especially when the boat lay there quietly in the willows on the canal, but the banks weren’t like this river” (“A Way You’ll Never Be” 310). The implication here is perhaps that domesticity and some stability, a grounding base, is something that would help him. This normalcy is also bluntly dismissed as an impossibility by the title itself, as a state of being Nick can simply never achieve after all he has lived through and all he has seen.

By reading “Now I Lay Me” alongside “A Way You’ll Never Be,” the curious emergence of dual traumas feels undeniable. Talbot writes that “[c]hronic exposure to extreme stress may permanently alter the chemical workings of the brain – serving, in effect, to engrave trauma on memory” and that “[s]o strong is the pull of reenactment in some cases that it robs current life of meaning in the way that a black hole entraps light” (451). This is in part what has occurred with Nick, with the chronic stresses of his childhood and the home searing itself into his psyche and trailing him into adulthood, comingling with later traumas, and manifesting themselves in strange, unrealized ways. As a boy, he witnessed the destruction of a variety of monumentally significant and symbolic physical objects, including the burnings of his parent’s wedding cake tin,

his father's jarred snake collection, and the arrowhead collection. These traumatic burnings, with the sense of erasure they carried, inscribed themselves on Nick's psyche in a language not entirely intelligible to him. And though partially uninterpretable, these screen memories trailed him into adulthood, reappearing in veiled forms, influencing Nick's thoughts and behaviors in strange ways. Meanwhile, the trauma of the combat wounding described in "A Way You'll Never Be" is revealed not through conscious remembering but through dreams, as Nick, in losing consciousness, is confronted by the destructive image of the sniper who pulls the trigger and the unplaceable yellow house.

In both works, these traumatic memories hover and in both they intrude. Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart write that "[t]raumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language" (176). This is precisely what the images of the childhood burnings represent for Nick, as does the physically wounding combat event. An intertextual examination reveals they are the moments of personal history which feel unlocatable on his historic timeline, the moments that make up the self which exists beyond time. The yellow house of "A Way You'll Never Be" thus becomes a symbolic image of the domestic memory of childhood trauma that Nick experienced in "Now I Lay Me," replete with the terror of identity and the past being burned. This traumatic memory, which exists alongside the trauma of a wounding event, is equally difficult to recall with honesty or incorporate into his personal narrative and is equally destabilizing. Both events, the childhood burnings and the combat wounding, are representative of losing oneself or having one's past erased against one's will. As it exists in conjunction with the wounding event, the symbolic terror of the home overlaps with the literality of combat trauma, and one freely replaces the other in dreams. In both instances, the home looms horrifically, behind its walls existing some zone beyond time within which Nick would potentially cease to exist or to have ever existed.

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