

# A Hermeneutic Ethics to the Reading of Gender and Sexuality in Literature: The Oxymoronic Rhetorical Signification of Ernest Hemingway's “A Simple Enquiry”

Eisuke Kawada

## I. Introduction

“A Simple Enquiry” is a short story included in Ernest Hemingway (1899–1962)’s *Men Without Women* published in 1927. This short story depicts an event in a military command hut in the Italian army some time during late March in World War I. The major, in his back office, persistently attempts to verify his orderly’s proclivity by interrogating him to determine if he is “corrupt” (CSS 251).<sup>1</sup> The attempt fails however, since the orderly leaves the room without showing any signs necessary for the major to determine whether he is “corrupt.” Then the adjutant, stationed in the next room smiles when he finds the orderly walking “awkwardly” (CSS 252) and moving “differently” (CSS 252). Hearing and feeling the orderly walk across the floor, the major thinks “[t]he little devil . . . I wonder if he lied to me” (CSS 252).

For nearly a century since its publication, this story has often been said to depict “demoralization of army life” (Wilson 114), “homosexuality” (Defalco 131), and “latent homoeroticism” (Brenner *Concealments* 19). Such discourses have been establishing a strong current among the critics to ignore and marginalize the importance of this short story by such labeling. However, once the school of gender and sexuality in literary studies had arisen in late 1980’s, “A Simple Enquiry” and other alleged homosexual tales by Hemingway suddenly saw literary attention for their themes in gender and sexuality. Such a sea change had occurred only because Hemingway’s controversial posthumous work, *The Garden of Eden* that came in print in 1986, gained great interest among critics who were highly interested in investigating not only the diverse sexual behaviors depicted in the novel, but also Hemingway’s complicated proclivity. This posthumous book provoked a new theme worth discussing; gender and sexuality related issues became a new gateway and a fashionable theme in Hemingway Studies.

Although “A Simple Enquiry” has been receiving some attention in recent Hemingway Studies, it is clear that the story gained attention only for its alleged “homosexual” labeling. Valorizing the work through such labeling only seems to re-authorize and empower the previous discourses that blindly limited the textual dimension by repeatedly defining it as a “homosexual” tale. On one hand, such valorization might help induce new discourses for gender and sexuality and help entail more attention, but conversely, we must realize that the more we approach the work through such themes, the more we are distancing ourselves from the

art of the text. What is most problematic in valorizing in such manner is that it blindly authorizes and urges its reader to participate in the semiotic riddle posed by the narrative: who is the homosexual man and who is lying?

While there seems to be a sufficient general agreement on the reading of "A Simple Enquiry," this paper undertakes to destabilize the previous valorization done to this text. This is done by inspecting the arguments projected by the major discourses that lead to limit the dimension of the text. After verifying the discourses through the manner of reader-response criticism, this paper examines the effectiveness and its possibility of semiotic reading toward this text proposed by the prominent Hemingway scholar Garry Brenner. It will then embark on its own careful reading of the text and articulate the hidden nature of text. Through detailed rhetorical analysis of the work, this paper exemplifies what is meant through its speech and behavior of the characters, and posits what could be legitimately assumed through the entire system of its rhetoric. By way of its argument, it will also shed light on the latent problems concerning the nature of texts in general.

In summary, in order to fully appreciate Hemingway's "A Simple Enquiry," this paper analyzes its poetic effects and undertakes to stipulate a new theme as a result of its rhetorical analysis. During the argument, it constantly questions the necessity and legitimacy of discussing the topic on gender and sexuality in this text. Through such questioning, this paper aims to demonstrate the untouched but obvious subject matter that is literally scripted in the text, and indirectly attempts to reaffirm the primal importance of careful reading of literary texts. The argument begins by exemplifying how issues related to gender and sexuality in this text have been casually determined without careful observation, and demonstrates the importance of holding a hermeneutic ethical stance toward reading a text. As this paper will demonstrate, careful reading is necessary not only to understand the work precisely but also to assure the status of a text as it is written. When readers casually determine the gender and sexuality of the text's characters without applying a hermeneutic ethics<sup>2</sup> in their reading, the text will come to acquire a different status, distant from its original appearance, which in the end may degenerate new significations derived by it. Although we may claim that misreading or misprision in reading are productive and legitimate ways to give birth to new themes, the stance of hermeneutic ethics --- an ethical attitude to determine contexts--- is momentous, since the understanding of a text directly represents our vision and understanding of reality.

## II. Discourses and the Problem of Reading Hemingway's Sexual Tales

When Hemingway was being exposed to newly acknowledged modes of human sexual behavior of the 20th century at Gertrude Stein's Avant-guard salon in Paris in 1920's, he posed

the following question. He asked Stein how she would reckon an old gentleman who behaved beautifully brought Marsala or Campari to the hospital in Italy where Hemingway was on treatment for his leg injury from WWI. Stein succinctly told him "those people are sick and cannot help themselves and you should pity them" because "[h]e's just a showman and he corrupts for pleasure of corruption" (*MF* 19). Stein suggested without hesitation that homosexuals could be dangerous for young and innocent men. This scene comes to play an invaluable role in Hemingway's long career since he had absorbed something important as a writer through this conversation. While listening to his mother-figure teacher Stein, Hemingway felt that "I had lived in a world *as it was* and there were all kinds of people in it and I tried to understand them, although some of them I could not like and some I still hated" (*MF* 19; Italics my own).

Although Hemingway had likes and dislikes as Stein did, he did his best not to allow the readers take his literature in the way Stein did toward homosexuals. He did so in the subtlest and solemnest manner to lead the readers perceive the world "as it was." However, historical discourses toward "A Simple Enquiry" demonstrate that Hemingway's attempt had mostly failed due to the receivers' nature of text reading. "A Simple Enquiry" is, according to the author, "a little story about the war in Italy" (*SL* 245) where the major interrogates his young orderly to find out if he is a homosexual. When the orderly left the room without leaving any signs of aberration, the major wondered if he had lied to him. Notwithstanding, even though the orderly and the major leave no obvious features to qualify for any sign of perversion, this short story has been read for almost a century, primarily as represented in the early Hemingway scholar Joseph Defalco's reading, for focusing on the "apparent homosexuality of an officer and his attempt to seduce a young soldier" (131).

Having such connotations stipulated in the 1960's, generations of Hemingway critics<sup>3</sup> have long ignored to fully articulate this story. Although "A Simple Enquiry" has been referred to quite a few times in the criticisms of Hemingway, many of these usually occupy only a small part of the arguments. To be the best of my knowledge, only one or two full length papers deal with it. The majority of criticisms took this piece only as an example of Hemingway's homosexual tales, and did not bother to analyze the text further and speculate about the previous readings. Scott Donaldson, a leading Hemingway scholar in the 1970's, had mentioned that "[i]mplicit in these incidents is the superiority of the heterosexual to homosexual" (184). Likewise, many thought it elicited Hemingway's antipathy toward homosexuality, and thought it to be unimportant. Donaldson also mentioned that the text is "abound with evidence of his antipathy to homosexuals," and this story has "no real point other than to illustrate the author's scorn for the mimicing [*sic*] gentry" (183). Similarly, Sheridan Baker, one of the early leading Hemingway scholars also defined this piece to be "an efficient study of a homosexual major" (58). Obviously, this kind of trend in criticism that promoted the subject of homosexuality and the author's alleged inclination toward it, influenced adversely to the potential depth and value of its text. It is evident that such influence blindly legitimized marginalizing the work due its sexual

disposition.<sup>4</sup>

It was not until Hemingway's posthumous work *The Garden of Eden* emerged in 1986, when "A Simple Enquiry" began to receive attention. According to Susan Beegel, a major Hemingway scholar, "the posthumous *Garden of Eden* has forced critics to confront for the first time themes of homosexuality, perversion, and androgyny" (11). Beegel's comment informs us that the classical criticisms were not truly ready to face the problems of sexuality or gender both in literary and real space. Their discussion simply labeled fictional characters as homosexuals through prejudicial-symptomatic diagnosis, rather than getting into fundamental discussions on the historical-institutional problems regarding gender and sexuality. Yet, though it opened up a new critical arena for examining the sexuality and gender related issues in Hemingway texts, these texts instead became the *deus ex machina*<sup>5</sup> for explicating Hemingway's newly discovered complex sexual desire exposed by the Hemingway biography boom during the 1980's. They became precious because they helped undermine "Hemingway's life that had been previously minimized or evaded" (Moddelmog 24). In that way, these gender and sexuality related texts now became an expedient and valuable utility to explain the author's hidden nature rather than explicating other inter-texts of similar roots.

The real issue of recent critical discourse toward Hemingway's gender and sexuality related texts is the *ad hominem*<sup>6</sup> reasoning, the trend in which critics explicate the texts. The recent trend of reading Hemingway texts depends heavily on the understanding of the historical author whose nature is determined by history, culture, biography, psychology, etc. Through these recent reading methods, contexts external to the text determine the nature of its historical author that decisively determines the meaning of the text. Yet, no matter how much we construct a historical author through external texts, the persona of this author cannot be a legitimate reason to determine the context of a text in a certain way. Searching how Hemingway was interested in diverse sexual behavior or whether he was sexually perverted cannot determine the way a text should be understood. Does a persona of an author determine what a text says? Were it not for the current critical-literary interests in undermining the author's sexual proclivity and imagination, the text "A Simple Enquiry" would not have seen attention to begin with. However, reading a text through a certain agenda or an ideology is vastly different from trying to read a short story "as it is." If anything, if we are to understand a text, perhaps we need to pay more attention not to who the author was, or his traits, but to *how the author envisioned* the world and *how he described* it. Learning how Hemingway viewed, read, and understood a text called "a world *as it was*," and how he was trying to write it through his artistic vision, is the key to understanding the text.

### III. Probing the Effectiveness of Semiotic Reading

By reading the signs in the text differently, we might be able to draw new themes and to reformulate the previous questions posed for "A Simple Enquiry." Gary Brenner, the sole Hemingway critic who discussed this text in a full-length essay, explains that "Hemingway had a knack for reading signs that revealed the character" (195),<sup>7</sup> and that particular signs in the text "invite reading the story's semiotic experimentation" (197). Brenner claims that this text has much to do with Hemingway's aptitude in seeing and writing things.

According to Brenner, this story is about sign reading. He relates the major as a sign-reader, and explains how his professional job is to read weather, calendars, maps, personal letters, and official papers (199). Brenner also explains that the adjutant who sits next to the major's room is also a sign reader since he reads official papers as well as pocket books during work (CSS 250). Thus, their professional job is partly "a semiotician specializing in pragmatics" (199). The orderly, Pinin, could also be qualified as a sign reader since his professional job is not only to pass messages but also to effectively report what he sees at the front. In other words, they are all deciphering signs related to military activity.

While Brenner illustrates many examples of sign reading acts in the text, the interesting part is where he reads the dialogue between the major and his orderly as sign of a reciprocal reading act occurring between them. Although the major asks to Pinin three times to confirm whether he is in a relationship with a girl, Pinin answers "I am sure" (CSS 251) quite confidently. Then, when the major feels he cannot read Pinin's signs anymore, he cannot help but asking directly, "you are not corrupt?" (CSS 251). However, Pinin cannot answer sharply this time, and instead asserts, "I don't know what you mean, corrupt" (CSS 251). The suspended moment confirms the fact that both are indeed trying to read signs of each other's real intentions. This suspended situation ultimately establishes the core question of the story since it exposes the sign reader's conflict in the act of sign reading.

What most gives dimension to this text is Brenner's semiotic meta-reading. When Pinin can no longer tolerate the major's interrogation, he looks at the floor silently. Since such behavior occurs three times in a brief moment, Brenner finds that Pinin is an artist who is communicating with his "mute" (205). Through his mute, Pinin has now become a silent text to be read for the major, at the same time, a text for the readers (205), while the major also become a text for the readers. Thus, through Brenner's proposition of meta-reading, the readers also become sign readers just like the major who is reading the text. Also, the adjutant who sits outside the major's room finds Pinin walking "awkwardly" (CSS 252) and moving "differently" (CSS 252), and smiles while seeing Pinin walk across the room. Here, the adjutant is also participating in this meta-reading in that he is reading what happened between the major and Pinin through Pinin's peculiar signs. In a way, the role of the adjutant is identical to the reader: Pinin and the

major are the adjutant's text.

Brenner's highly interesting meta-reading takes us to an imaginative dimension of reading. Through constructing a structural diagram <the major - Pinin - adjutant>, he has brought in not only the reader but also the author in his meta-diagram: <Reader - Text - the author>. Just as the major reads the text Pinin, the reader reads the text. Also, just as the adjutant is reading the major through Pinin's behavior, the author is reading beforehand how the reader would read and respond to the text. The meta-diagram suggests that the author is experimenting with the readers, identically to what is happening between the three of them at a meta-level, and leaves the readers in wonder just like the major.

Brenner's semiotic inquiry successfully takes the reader to another dimension with his highly effective method of pluralizing the text's signification. In his conclusion, Brenner profoundly suggests that what mattered to Hemingway was perhaps the "epistemological riddle" (205) his semiotic experiment could provoke the reader with. Although Brenner's proposition did open up a new gateway to decipher the text, it exhibited that fact that the new proposition did not exactly respond to the previous problem with which the critics had been dealing. In fact, Brenner reads the major's pauses in his dialogue with Pinin and mentions, "the major's homosexuality surely accounts for his pauses, his unfinished sentences" (198). This shows that although Brenner's method is surely a meaningful alternative to explore the hidden dimensions of the text, the old question still seemed to remain untouched.

#### IV. Sign and Context in Literary Space

So far through the argument, engaging in solving the riddles of sexuality and gender identity in "A Simple Enquiry" may seem unproductive since it not only limits the textual dimension, but also draws semi-theological debate which seeks a monistic answer. However, struggling to reach a monistic-poetic truth is entirely a decent philological venture that qualifies for some respect. Therefore, before getting into the old question, this problem needs to be addressed in a larger context at a different level, and through deeper underlying problems. It might be worthwhile confirming briefly how a text generally works, and to seek how we can reformulate the question on signs that constitute the gender and sexual riddle.

What has been said about the nature of a text? According to the French philosopher Roland Barthes, a text contains "the stereographic plurality of the signifiers which weave it" (60). This means there are many signifiers and their sets or formulations at work simultaneously in a text. He explains further that a text is like "language" that is "structured but decentered, without closure" (59). Such a fundamental insight on the nature of a text and its language lead us to understand that a textual space can be multidimensional without an axis or a center, and

is open-ended. Readers can participate in their signification of reading texts---which is often referred to as a "writerly text."<sup>8</sup> Such imagination of a writerly text legitimizes us to decipher signs differently and to open up other worlds in a text through the readers' participation.

Gilles Deleuze the French philosopher examined the plural nature of a text through the dynamics of signs. He explains that "plurality of worlds is such that these signs are not of the same kind, do not have the same way of appearing, do not allow themselves to be deciphered in the same manner, do not have an identical relation with their meaning" (5). From Deleuze's view, we can derive that a signifier itself is multidimensional and has its peculiar appearance according to its own position and direction, thus the signified will necessarily look different or be multi-faceted in its signification.

First of all, if we employ Barthes's theory of looking at a text as set of languages that constitute a decentered space, there is no intrinsic reason to persist in pivoting around the subject of neither homosexuality nor gender when reading "A Simple Enquiry." For Barthes, the readers determine the context in the "writerly text," therefore, it is natural that a reader provokes a new context by reading signs differently, and can derive a new problem. In Deleuze's theory, all signs appear differently from the beginning so that no reader deciphers them in the same way. Then the question arises. If a context could be easily drawn by the reader in an open-ended textual space as Barthes defines, and if signs are always appearing differently and that they have no identical relation with their meaning as Deleuze defines, then, why did all the criticisms end up in the identical problem of the major's sexuality? Also in Brenner's case, although he successfully derived a new context, why does Brenner still read the major to be a homosexual character?

Carefully observing the historical discourses toward this text, it is clear that they have been focusing mainly on the semantic nature of the text rather than its syntax; they mainly discuss the signified of the text but not the signifier itself.<sup>9</sup> Because no one doubted the context, the signs were not a question for scrutiny ---- thus no new problems arouse. Rather, it is plausible to assume that the discourses believed the signified of the text so strongly that they did not carefully observe how signs were appearing in the text in the first place. While signs usually assign meanings first, meanings can also backwardly reshape the appearance of signs with a much higher resolution: beliefs also shape the appearance of signs and contexts. Brenner was able to draw a new context not because he was observing the signs differently, but because, he was observing new signs that the previous discourses did not, and was building a new context through formulating a meta-schema.

## V. A Rhetorical Analysis of “A Simple Enquiry”

Hemingway had developed a way of seeing and describing the world early in his career in the 1920's. He acquired a dogmatic principle to recognize the “world as it was” and “understand” (*MF* 19) that there were all kinds of people in it, regardless of his preference toward them. Later in 1935, he further elaborated his writing principle:

Find what gave you the emotion; what the action was that gave you the excitement. Then write it down making it clear so the reader will see it too and have the same feeling that you had. . . As a man you know who is right and who is wrong. You have to make decisions and enforce them. As a writer you should not judge. You should understand. (*BL* 219)

These lines would give us a constructive guideline for deciphering the signified of “A Simple Enquiry.” For Hemingway, writing is about synchronizing and sharing feeling of the moment with the readers, while committing oneself to understand the world without expressing a personal judgement.

When we observe the historical discourses surrounding this short story, we find that it was much more important for the critics to determine or label the character's sexuality rather than reading the text “as it is” and “understanding” it. The critics' judgements tell us that Hemingway's literary effect of synchronizing and sharing the feeling of being was so substantive that they could not but help searching the sexuality or sexual properties of the characters, just as people in reality are inclined to unconsciously discern others' sexual preference. If Hemingway's writing principle is consistent in this short story, there should be by definition no evidence of homosexuality on the text.

What we learn from the discrepancy between the critics' writings and Hemingway's writing is that while the critics are trying to read the story through contents of the short story, Hemingway is strictly focusing on *how to portray* its contents. They are two incongruent matters, since the former is concerned with the understanding the signified, whereas the latter is concerned with the shaping of the signifiers. This explains why no critic valorized “A Simple Enquiry” until themes of sexuality and gender became fashionable topics to discuss in literary studies. Literature for Hemingway meant the art of describing the world: rhetorical art. If this analytical proposition holds, it becomes evident that we must look at how Hemingway shaped the world of “A Simple Enquiry” rather than inferring the signification of signs.

What is most obvious in “A Simple Enquiry” is the rhetoric Hemingway employs. Although the signs that constitute the story might connote homosexuality, according to the critics, nowhere in the story does it show proof that amounts to homosexuality. The story begins by describing a military hut somewhere in or near Italy in late March, where sunlight can only

reach inside the room from the reflection of the snow. After such introductory pictorial treatment, the camera pan shifts to the major's face and pictures how tanned and burned his long face was. The camera then shifts and zooms into his left hand as he carefully spreads the oil on a saucer, and then it follows how a thin film of oil on his fingers is spread carefully on his face while his long fingers play delicately with his nose. Then the major says "I'm going to take a nap," and tells the adjutant "You will finish up" (CSS 250). Although most critics relate the major's delicate movement as "offensively effeminate" (Brenner 202), it is obvious that anyone on a high mountain would gently spread oil on their face with their finger especially when one has a sunburn. If so, it must be the manipulation of the camera pan that is generating the "offensively effeminate" connotations. Nevertheless, no matter how many times the pan shifts and how deep the pictorial cuts zoom into the character's physical movement --- including his intention to take a nap and the imperative voiced speech to the adjutant--- the major cannot possibly be induced to have an "offensively effeminate" figure. Thus, we can plausibly assume that the rhetoric at work is affecting the way in which signs appear to formulate a metaphorical context in the reader's consciousness.

In fact, such rhetorical strategy is localized almost everywhere in the text, almost as bait for generating ambience for effeminateness. The next scene where the adjutant reads his pocket book while processing the order from the major also functions indirectly as a metaphor for the major's effeminateness. After the major's masculine imperative order, Tonani sharply responds "Yes, signor maggiore" (CSS 250). However, right after this sharp response to his officer as a military service man, he acts inconsistently.

He leaned back in his chair and yawned. He took a paper-covered book out of the pocket of his coat and opened it; then laid it down on the table and lit his pipe. He leaned forward on the table to read and puffed at his pipe. Then he closed the book and put it back in his pocket. He had too much paper-work to get through. He could not enjoy reading until it was done.

(CSS 250)

In contrast to Tonani's sharp and phallic-militaristic response, the camera pan zooms into Tonani's slackened posture to represent what war meant to him. The pan projects how he lays back, yawns, reads a book smoking his pipe, and explains that he stopped reading only because he cannot *enjoy* reading to the fullest extent: he is not portrayed as a soldier but as an effeminate figure. The sudden shift of the pan from the phallic to the effeminate emphasizes how lenient the atmosphere is between the major and Tonani, in contrast to the war going on outside the hut. Via capturing Tonani's slacked tension, the pan successfully portrays the absent major's sweetness and his emotional dependence on Tonani. It is clear that the major is spoiling Tonani not only because they get along with each other but also because they both depend on each

other. Therefore, this scene is strategically working to represent a metaphor of how sweet and dependent the major is on Tonani by way of capturing Tonani's slacked posture behind closed doors in his service in war, strictly without embedding evidence of homosexuality, although effeminateness is strongly emphasized.

Even in the next scene where Pinin is sent to the major's room seems to leave no evidence of homosexuality. While Tonani recovers his slacked posture by his militaristic hierarchal voice "Pinin! . . . The major wants you" (CSS 251), in contrast to his previous effeminate representation, the major also recovers his previous effeminate representation by ordering Pinin with an imperative voice to "shut the door" (CSS 251). When Pinin enters the room, the pan of the camera shifts to the major lying back with his head on the ruck sack, and zooms into capturing "his long, burned, oiled face" (CSS 251) that looks at Pinin while his "hands lay on the blanket" (CSS 251). Such deliberate panning is now working effectively to direct a sexual image through the major's face, although the pan is only capturing the major's face again. Despite the camera simply projecting his face, what is producing such a sexual image is the sense of spatial proximity toward a human's face.<sup>10</sup> It is the distance generated by the camera zoom-in that is enforcing a human cognition sense the major's face as a sexual entity. Moreover, the repetition of the facial zoom-in is functioning to emphasize such physical-spatial proximity. Thus, it is plausible to assume that both the spatial distance and repetition produced by the camera are denoting the sexual image of the major. Further, the zoom-in to the image of the major's delicate and oiled hands readily waiting for something on the blanket, adds to strengthen the sexual ambience of the scene. However again, there is no evidence of homosexuality, though sexual ambience is overtly emphasized.

The interrogative dialogue in the major's room between the major and Pinin is the crux of the story that has been causing the problem of reading. It might be worthwhile recapturing the dialogue again. The Major asks Pinin's age to confirm that he is only nineteen, and gets to the real question "[y]ou have ever been in love?" (CSS 251). Pinin cannot reply succinctly but instead questions back "[h]ow do you mean, *signor maggiore*? [sic]" (CSS 251), and tells him that "I have been with girls" (CSS 251). Having read all personal letters of his men as a part of his professional job, the major knows that Pinin had not been writing for a while to the girl he used to, so he asks, "[y]ou are in love with this girl now? You don't write to her. I read all your letters" (CSS 251). Pinin claims he is in love with this girl, and soon emphasizes that he is "sure" (CSS 251) about this. Further, the major, confirming that Tonani in the next room cannot hear their dialogue, looks at Pinin and asks, "that you are not corrupt?" (CSS 251). Pinin, unlike his previous assurance, cannot answer sharply this time, and replies, "I don't know what you mean, corrupt" (CSS 251). The major seems to find something and says "[a]ll right" (CSS 251) and accepts what Pinin claims, and then tells him "You needn't be superior" (CSS 251).

What is the rhetorical effect that is further causing the problem of reading? Here, the camera pan is fixated on capturing the two speaking. While the narrator is absent during this

scene, their loudness and rhythm of voice is emphasized. This happens because the absence of its narrator makes a larger room for their voices to echo in narrative space. In such space, the obvious schema is echoing loudly: the major's repetitive and insistent interrogation toward Pinin's gender, versus Pinin's resistance. Though the dialogue is performed with great tension and loudness through the background silence, the factual outcome of it is dramatically small. We only learn that Pinin has been with girls, he loves the girl for sure, he cannot understand the term "corrupt," and the major feels Pinin is playing innocent. Such dramatic contrast echoes in the major's speech as well. The major tells Pinin "[a]ll right" (CSS 251) to demonstrate his acceptance, but soon, the major adds in contra "[you] needn't be superior" (CSS 251). This is to show that although he is not accepting at heart what Pinin is telling him, he is posing as if he is. These contrasts in dramatic effects underscore the text's unmasked double-coded narrative at work. On the surface where the camera is capturing the two, there is a succinct discordance in the dialogue between the two. On the contrary under surface, where the camera cannot capture the two, they are playing the silent rhetorical combat in which both agents understand exactly what the other is trying to say, while both struggle not to let the other sense what each of them truly have in mind. First of all, there is a deep chasm between the visible and the invisible, and second, between what has been said and meant during the dialogue. The problem at issue here is that there is no way of prying into what has been meant through their speeches when the camera is off, since the silent rhetorical combat taking place under surface is completely concealed. Accordingly, by negating the verifiability of what is meant through the concealment, the rhetoric strategically forces the readers to assign what they physically sense toward the signs: the rhetoric disconnects the signifiers from the signified.

What is more troublesome to the reader is the change of rhetoric in the style of speech acts. When the major tells Pinin "[y]ou needn't be superior" (CSS 251), the camera now captures Pinin looking at the floor silently. Then the pan shifts to capturing the major looking into Pinin's "brown face down and up," and at "his hands" (CSS 251). The major asks Pinin with a pause; "[a]nd you don't really want ----" (CSS 251). Then soon after the sonically muted "----" pause, the pan shifts back to Pinin looking at the floor again. Then again it shifts to the major who says "[t]hat your great desire isn't really ----" (CSS 251) with a pause again, and then again, it shifts to capture Pinin looking at the floor again. The major leans his head on the ruck sack and smiles, and all of a sudden the narrator begins to explain the major's true feeling that "[h]e was really relieved: life in the army was too complicated" (CSS 251). And when the camera pans back to the major, he says "[y]ou're a good boy, Pinin. But don't be superior and be careful someone else doesn't come along and take you" (CSS 251). During such eccentric dialogue, the rhetoric gradually begins to split the sound and image. First the camera captured the major speaking physically, but all of a sudden it shifted to capture Pinin's image only. Then next, the same effect is applied to the major when he speaks with a pause. At first the camera was capturing both the sound and image, but from the pauses onward, the camera only captures

the image of him. Further, when the narrator begins to explain the major's feelings, the image of him disappears completely. But once he begins to speak, the camera comes back to capture both sound and image. The transformation of rhetoric through gradual splits of sound and image, and the total disappearance in sound and image, strategically invites the readers to change the way they perceive the media. Now the reader must read Pinin and the major through muted "-----" sounds, that is to say, the reader must decipher the sonically muted signifiers. The astonishing feature of this scene is that its rhetoric goes further to conceal (=mute) the image itself through the major's pause since the narrator voice is also absent. However, simultaneously, the disappearance of the image means the disappearance of signifier itself. How are readers supposed to relate meanings to image-muted signifiers? Such rhetorical effect is a strategy that compels the reader to become aware of the meaning of Pinin's silent gaze as well<sup>11</sup>: Pinin is replying with physical movements. Here, through the negation of images or sounds of signs, the readers are strategically forced to assign what they physically sense toward the signs --- the "writerly text" becomes complete. Yet, this time, not only the signifier and the signified are disconnected, but also the signifier itself is absent. The readers are forced to play a more difficult game where they have to fill in the blank sign through their sensual intuition.

Although the camera covers both sound and image, the next scene overtly presents the insoluble problem. While the major's hands are folded, he begins to negotiate with Pinin. He says "I won't touch you. You can go back to your platoon if you like. But you had better stay on as my servant. You've less chance of being killed" (CSS 252). Then Pinin asks, "Do you want anything from me, *signore maggiore*?" To this, the major surprisingly says "No . . . Go on and get on with whatever you were doing" (CSS 252). This time the camera captures everything, but now, the readers are at a loss because although the major was showing great interest in him, he is now overtly negotiating with Pinin to stay, but he sharply denies Pinin's question. Furthermore, what is perplexing is that when he was interrogating Pinin about his sexual preferences, he had his hands open on the blanket, however this time, he negotiates while his hands are folded. Such a difference represents that fact that the major is not tempting Pinin anymore. Here, he can be negotiating with Pinin because the major himself is a homosexual man who prefers men, or because he has piety over Pinin as a fatherly senior. Or in the modern sense, the major can be read as demonstrating his transgendered sexuality. If we accord with the text in a general sense, the major can be interpreted legitimately either as a heterosexual-ish homosexual or homosexual-ish heterosexual, or simply a transgendered person. Here, the rhetorical strategy is forcing the readers to commit to choosing between heterosexual or homosexual in the classical sense. As we observed through the historical discourses, most critics were trapped in choosing between this binary that always draws counterstatements. Yet, if we perform a careful reading, it is clear that the major has an oxymoronic disposition that does not allow the reader to choose between them. In other words, if we strictly commit ourselves

to what has been written in the text, the oxymoronic character of the major forces us to suspend the judgement on his persona. Therefore, this scene presents an insoluble problem, since this text is strictly written in a manner that one cannot necessarily choose either of these.

However, in the last scene, there lies the last mystery of the three characters. When Pinin leaves the major's room, the camera pan captures not only Tonani watching how Pinin "[walk] awkwardly across the room" (CSS 255) with his face "flushed," but also how he "moved differently" (CSS 255), and further captures Tonani's smile. Then in the last sentence of the text, the narrator explains the major's interior monologue: "[t]he little devil, he thought. I wonder if he lied to me" (CSS 255). Through this scene, most criticisms pivot on the issue of the characters' sexuality because all three of them project sexual ambience. In fact, Pinin's awkward walking may signify some sexual act that had taken place in the major's room. Also, Tonani's smile may suggest his camaraderie toward Pinin's homosexuality, and additionally, the major's wonder may suggest his regret of dismissing Pinin without any sexual act taking place between them. Or, they might suggest otherwise. Pinin might have walked differently due to mental pressure from the major, and Tonani might have smiled because he simply knew by experience what had happened in the major's room. In addition, the major might be wondering simply because he is a heterosexual man who was suspecting Pinin of being a homosexual. Here, the rhetoric is persistently forcing the readers to choose between two poles: homosexual or heterosexual. However, what is so problematic in this binary question is that it is also written in a way that readers, in principle, cannot choose between the two, although the text forces them to choose on either one. It could be explained that the rhetoric is strategically trapping the readers in eternal suspension. In fact, no matter how much the text adds sexual ambience or even homosexual ambience, this would not amount to designate the characters' homosexuality. Most importantly, if we surpass the rhetorical trap and stipulate this text as it is, we can say that different binary sets work to build an unfalsifiable and an oxymoronic characteristic of each character.

In conclusion, "A Simple Enquiry" has a nonlinear and oxymoronic nature not only at surface level, but also at the deep structural level. By strategically and carefully setting up traps that appeal to the readers' appetites, the rhetorical system of such nature suspends the readers' judgements that determine contexts. Elaborately configured signifiers fully function to formulate plural contexts, in which each of these obstructs other contexts which are also falsifiable through other contexts. As we have observed, the rhetoric employed in "A Simple Enquiry" is designed to affect the ways in which signs appear and how they formulate metaphors in the readers' consciousness. Further, by indirectly projecting a metaphor on the nature of a character through the portrayal of another character, the rhetoric deprives the reader of evidence that supports its designated metaphor. The often applied film techniques in this short piece such as panning, zoom-ins and repeating cuts of images used in the scenes serve to denote inexpressible ambience of its narrative space. The camera work also appeals to human cognition

by zooming into the human face so closely as to generate sexual ambience. Most importantly, by disconnecting the signifiers from the signifieds, as seen in the muting of sound and image, this story successfully negates the verifiability of not only the signified of signifiers but also the meaning of its context. Through such rhetoric, the text legitimately builds oxymoronic personas while compelling the readers to draw intuitive and unverifiable conclusions of gender and sexuality; or total suspension of their true persona. If we return to Hemingway's writing principle, these rhetorical effects employed in "A Simple Enquiry" are designated to perform and guarantee his principle that "a writer should not judge. You should understand" (*BL* 219). Critics have historically attempted to assign meanings through their own styles and methods, but a sincere reading of the text teaches us that judging whether the characters are homosexual is not the crux of this story. In other words, if the work is written in a way that characters are indiscernible in terms of their gender or sexuality, we must admit the fact that such a theme is simply not the true subject matter of this text. If anything, we must look at what is obviously stressed in the text, that is, the oxymoronic rhetorical signification.

## VI. Conclusion

By inspecting the rhetorical aspect of the text of "A Simple Enquiry," this paper has exemplified that this story has been largely misread due to its culturally coded signs that designate sexual and homosexual ambience. Clarifying the fact that any of the characters cannot be logically inferred as being a homosexual, and that it was the art of rhetoric that made the homosexual ambience possible, it is plausible to assume that the labeling by the previous discourses and their valorization of this text is no longer effective.

Through rhetorical analysis, it has become evident that "A Simple Enquiry" cannot be assumed to represent "demoralization of army life" nor "homosexuality," nor "homoeroticism," as the previous critics had labeled it. This is not to say that the characters and the total ambience produced by the literature are something other than such labels, but that the rhetoric applied to this work simply does not allow the readers, through its deliberate configuration of language, to logically determine whether the characters are homosexuals.

Through this analysis, we learn that the text is fully utilizing the readers' cognitive system to pursue its rhetorical art, which at the same time, is teaching us a lesson to understand the world "as it is" as Hemingway once felt at the Stein's. The more careful one reads the text, the more it becomes difficult for one to assign culturally coded properties to the sign available in the text. It can be said that such a rhetorical system tests the readers' ethics toward reading a text. In other words, this text is testing the readers' hermeneutic ethics toward understanding a text, and most importantly, understanding our reality.

"A Simple Enquiry" is an important text because it not only forces the readers to understand

the world "as it is" when read carefully, but it also enables us to adopt a hermeneutic ethics toward how we look at and envision the world.

<sup>1</sup> All Italicized acronyms in the parentheses indicate Ernest Hemingway's writing. For example, "CSS" indicates Ernest Hemingway's *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: The Finca Vigia Edition*. New York: Scribner's, 1987. Similarly, "BL" stands for *By-Line: Ernest Hemingway*. New York: Scribner, 2003. Likewise, "MF" is the acronym for *A Moveable Feast*. New York: Scribner's, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> This paper does not directly define what a "hermeneutic ethics" is. Rather, it attempts to exemplify hermeneutic cases to show why we need to hold such stance in the way we read texts. In addition, although this paper does not directly deal with J. Hillis Miller's *The Ethics of Reading* (1987), the term "hermeneutic ethics" originates from the following claim of Miller: "In any ethical moment there is an imperative, some 'I must' or *Ich kann nicht anders*. I must do this. I cannot do otherwise. If the response is not one of necessity, grounded in some 'must,' if it is a freedom to do what one likes, for example to make a literary text mean what one likes, then it is not ethical, as when we say, 'That isn't ethical'" (4).

<sup>3</sup> The following critics assume homosexuality of the major: e.g., Wilson 114, S. Baker 58, Waldhorn 228-9, Donaldson 183, Williams 97, Flora *Nick Adams* 214, Comley and Scoles 129.

<sup>4</sup> Carl P. Eby, a major scholar in recent Hemingway studies, explains that the "masculine myth" promoted by the critics had put veil on "the complex exploration of gender issues throughout Hemingway's works and marginalized such stories such as 'The Sea Change,' 'The Mother of a Queen,' and 'A Simple Enquiry'" (5).

<sup>5</sup> A Latin term which is "now used pejoratively for any improbable or unexpected contrivance by which an author resolves the complications of a plot in a play or novel, and which has not been convincingly prepared for in the preceding action" (Baldick 85). Here, I am suggesting that these texts became an expedient material to read and explain the author as a text, without serving its real purpose to contribute in explaining other inter-texts.

<sup>6</sup> The term "ad hominem" is meant to show the attitude of "appealing to personal considerations rather than to logic or reason" ("ad hominem")

<sup>7</sup> For example, Brenner introduces how Hemingway had comically described Benito Mussolini at a press conference reading the French-English dictionary upside down with avid interest, also, how Hemingway described the Czarist diplomat Tchicherin as always wearing military uniform when photographed. (196)

<sup>8</sup> Buchanan 399. A "writerly text" is a term Barthes proposed in *S/Z* in 1970, and is often explained in contrast with a "readerly text." According to *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Terms* on "readerly and writerly" text, it defines "the first kind of text renders the reader passive, while the latter variety forces the reader to become active" ("readerly and writerly"). In general, a readerly text is understood to be tyrannical whereas a writerly text is democratic in its reading.

<sup>9</sup> Here, the "signified" indicates the meaning of text as a whole. The same applies to "signifier."

<sup>10</sup> In reality we do not get so close to others' face as to get a full zoom of it unless one is in some special relationship with them: family, relatives, and lovers.

<sup>11</sup> In this case, we can still visualize Pinin through the narrator's voice. In the case of the major,

no voice is explaining his mute described as “----,” therefore both sound and image of him is muted.

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