

# **Synthesis Seminar Preparation Activity: The Modern Period**

## **Seminar Focus**

Through an examination of direct evidence taken from the art and literature of and about the Modern Period, we will attempt to discover, during our seminar discussions, shared stylistic choices, rhetorical patterns, and common themes that will further illuminate our understanding of this period in literary history.

## **Sources for Discussion**

**Part One of the Seminar: Modern Values:** “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway, “Why I Haven’t Married” by Dorothy Parker, “Advice to a Girl” by Sarah Teasdale, and “The Conversation” by Henri Matisse

**Part Two of the Seminar: Modern Values:** “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” by Ernest Hemingway, “Once More to the Lake” by E. B. White, “Acquainted with the Night” by Robert Frost, and “Form and Light, Motif in West New Jersey” by Oscar Bluemner

## **Directions**

In preparation for our seminar, you are asked to write as many questions as you possibly can for each of the parts to our discussion. *For each part of the seminar, the discussion categories are listed in order of importance for each of the literary periods. For each category, try to make your questions numerous and specific, so we might avoid the excessive repetition of ideas during the seminar discussion.*

- **Type and print** your questions on a **single sheet of paper**.
- Organize and label your questions by section of the seminar discussion and by category, then list them by the order of their importance for each category.
- You must write a **minimum of three SYNTHESIS questions** for each part of the seminar. The first three questions, for each part, will be the ones that will receive an evaluative score.
- You will be scored for the quality, thoughtfulness, and originality of your questions.
- Print **two copies** of your questions: one to turn in at the beginning of the seminar – the other to use during the seminar discussion. This activity will be a minor grade.

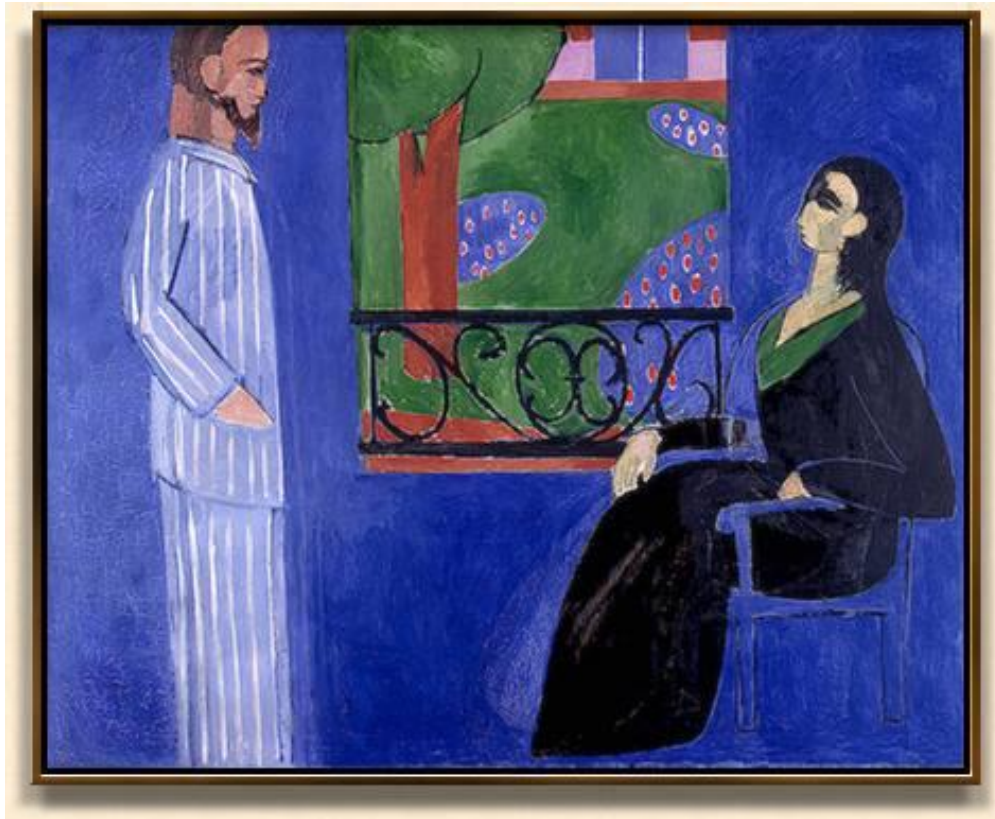
## **Part I: Modern Period Discussion Categories**

1. Write **at least three questions** that seek to generate discussion about **important themes and/or stylistic elements shared by the assigned sources** from the Modern Period. These questions must be specific in wording and in reference to the source from this period.
2. Write questions that seek to generate discussion about each artist’s purpose in respect to the rhetorical techniques and stylistic choices that the artist utilizes to achieve his or her goals. Your questions must be specific in wording and in reference to the artist and his or her work.
3. Write questions that compare or contrast the **film, writing, or images from this unit** to the selected texts or images for this seminar.

## **Part II: Modern Period Discussion Categories**

1. Write **at least three questions** that seek to generate discussion about **important themes and/or stylistic elements shared by the assigned sources** from the Modern Period. These questions must be specific in wording and in reference to the source from this period.
2. Write questions that seek to generate discussion about each artist’s purpose in respect to the rhetorical techniques and stylistic choices that the artist utilizes to achieve his or her goals. Your questions must be specific in wording and in reference to the artist and his or her work.
3. Write questions that compare or contrast the **film, writing, or images from this unit** to the selected texts or images for this seminar.

Synthesis Seminar: Modern Era Paintings from Europe and America



Henri Matisse, French *The Conversation*, 1909-1912 Expressionist- Oil, Canvas



Oscar Bluemner, American, *Form and Light, Motif in West New Jersey*, 1914, oil on panel

## ERNEST HEMINGWAY (1899-4961) "HILLS LIKE WHITE ELEPHANTS"

The hills across the valley of the Ebro' were long and white. On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun. Close against the side of the station there was the warm shadow of the building and a curtain, made of strings of bamboo beads, hung across the open door into the bar, to keep out flies. The American and the girl with him sat at a table in the shade, outside the building. It was very hot and the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes. It stopped at this junction for two minutes and went on to Madrid.

"What should we drink?" the girl asked. She had taken off her hat and put it on the table.

"It's pretty hot," the man said.

"Let's drink beer."

"Dos cervezas," the man said into the curtain.

"Big ones?" a woman asked from the doorway.

"Yes. Two big ones."

The woman brought two glasses of beer and two felt pads. She put the felt pads and the beer glasses on the table and looked at the man and the girl. The girl was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry.

"They look like white elephants," she said.

"I've never seen one," the man drank his beer.

"No, you wouldn't have."

"I might have," the man said. "Just because you say I wouldn't have doesn't prove anything."

The girl looked at the bead curtain. "They've painted something on it," she said. "What does it say?"

"Anis del Toro. It's a drink."

"Could we try it?"

The man called "Listen" through the curtain. The woman came out from the bar.

"Four reales."

"We want two Anis del Toro."

"With water?"

"Do you want it with water?"

"I don't know," the girl said. "Is it good with water?"

"It's all right."

"You want them with water?" asked the woman.

"Yes, with water."

"It tastes like licorice," the girl said and put the glass down.

"That's the way with everything."

"Yes," said the girl. "Everything tastes of licorice. Especially all the things you've waited so long for, like absinthe."

"Oh, cut it out."

"You started it," the girl said. "I was being amused. I was having a fine time."

"Well, let's try and have a fine time."

"All right. I was trying. I said the mountains looked like white elephants. Wasn't that bright?"

"That was bright."

"I wanted to try this new drink. That's all we do, isn't it—look at things and try new drinks?"

"I guess so."

The girl looked across at the hills.

"They're lovely hills," she said. "They don't really look like white elephants. I just meant the coloring of their skin through the trees." "Should we have another drink?"

"All right."

The warm wind blew the bead curtain against the table.

"The beer's nice and cool," the man said.

"It's lovely," the girl said.

"It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig," the man said. "It's not really an operation at all."

The girl looked at the ground the table legs rested on.

"I know you wouldn't mind it, Jig. It's really not anything. It's just to let the air in."

The girl did not say anything.

"I'll go with you and I'll stay with you all the time. They just let the air in and then it's all perfectly natural."

"Then what will we do afterward?"

"We'll be fine afterward. Just like we were before."

"What makes you think so?"

"That's the only thing that bothers us. It's the only thing that's made us unhappy."

The girl looked at the bead curtain, put her hand out and took hold of two of the strings of beads.

"And you think then we'll be all right and be happy."

"I know we will. You don't have to be afraid. I've known lots of people that have done it."

"So have I," said the girl. "And afterward they were all so happy."

"Well," the man said, "if you don't want to you don't have to. I wouldn't have you do it if you didn't want to. But I know it's perfectly simple."

"And you really want to?"

"I think it's the best thing to do. But I don't want you to do it if you don't really want to."

"And if I do it you'll be happy and things will be like they were and you'll love me?"

"I love you now. You know I love you."

"I know. But if I do it, then it will be nice again if I say things are like white elephants, and you'll like it?"

"I'll love it. I love it now but I just can't think about it. You know how I get when I worry."

"If I do it you won't ever worry?"

"I won't worry about that because it's perfectly simple."

"Then I'll do it. Because I don't care about me."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't care about me."

"Well, I care about you."

"Oh, yes. But I don't care about me. And I'll do it and then everything will be fine."

"I don't want you to do it if you feel that way."

The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station. Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees.

"And we could have all this," she said. "And we could have everything and every day we make it more impossible."

"What did you say?"

"I said we could have everything."

"We can have everything."

"No, we can't."

"We can have the whole world."

"No, we can't."

"We can go everywhere."

"No, we can't. It isn't ours any more."

"It's ours."

"No, it isn't. And once they take it away, you never get it back."

"But they haven't taken it away."

"We'll wait and see."

"Come on back in the shade," he said. "You mustn't feel that way."

"I don't feel any way," the girl said. "I just know things."

"I don't want you to do anything that you don't want to do—"

"Nor that isn't good for me," she said. "I know. Could we have another beer?"

"All right. But you've got to realize—"

"I realize," the girl said. "Can't we maybe stop talking?"

They sat down at the table and the girl looked across at the hills on the dry side of the valley and the man looked at her and at the table.

"You've got to realize," he said, "that I don't want you to do it if you don't want to. I'm perfectly willing to go through with it if it means any-thing to you."

"Doesn't it mean anything to you? We could get along."

"Of course it does. But I don't want anybody but you. I don't want any one else. And I know it's perfectly simple."

"Yes, you know it's perfectly simple."

"It's all right for you to say that, but I do know it."

"Would you do something for me now?"

"I'd do anything for you."

"Would you please please please please please please stop talking?"

He did not say anything but looked at the bags against the wall of the station. There were labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent nights.

"But I don't want you to," he said, "I don't care anything about it."

"I'll scream," the girl said.

The woman came out through the curtains with two glasses of beer and put them down on the damp felt pads. "The train comes in five minutes," she said.

"What did she say?" asked the girl.

"That the train is coming in five minutes."

The girl smiled brightly at the woman, to thank her.

"I'd better take the bags over to the other side of the station," the man said. She smiled at him.

"All right. Then come back and we'll finish the beer."

He picked up the two heavy bags and carried them around the station to the other tracks. He looked up the tracks but could not see the train. Coming back, he walked through the barroom, where people waiting for the train were drinking. He drank an Anis at the bar and looked at the people. They were all waiting reasonably for the train. He went out through the bead curtain. She was sitting at the table and smiled at him.

"Do you feel better?" he asked.

"I feel fine," she said. "There's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine."

1. The Ebro is a river in the north of Spain.

## **"Why I Haven't Married: Sketches of My Seven Deadly Suitors"**

**By Dorothy Rothschild**

**Vanity Fair, October, 1916**

### **I. Ralph, Whose Place Was in the Home**

You see, this was the way it happened. The first one of them all was Ralph. His was one of those sweet, unsullied natures that believes everything it sees in the papers, and no matter what I said, he would gaze into my eyes and murmur "yes." He had positively cloying ideas about women. If any girl in his vicinity lit a cigarette, Ralph's eyes, behind their convex lenses, assumed the expression of a wounded doe's. He superfluously assisted me up and down curbs; he was always inserting needless cushions behind my back. He laboriously brought me a host of presents that I didn't want—friendship calendars, sixth-best sellers, and the kind of flowers that one puts in vases—but never wears. He had acquired a remarkable muscular development merely from helping me on with so many wraps and coats. His greatest fault was his lack of them.

I felt that life with Ralph would be a deep dream of peace, and I was just on the verge of giving him his answer and receiving his virginal kiss, when, in a flash of clairvoyance, I had a startlingly clear vision of the future. I seemed to see us—Ralph and me—settled down in an own-your-own bungalow in a twenty-minute suburb. I saw myself surrounded by a horde of wraps and sofa pillows. I saw us gathered



around the lamp of a winter evening, reading aloud from *Hiawatha*. I saw myself a member of the Society Oppressed to Woman Suffrage...

So I told Ralph that I wouldn't, just as gently as possible, and he went away to sob it out on his mother's shoulder.

## II. Maximilian, Table d'Hôte Socialist

Maximilian was the next disillusionment. He was an artist and had long nervous hands and a trick of impatiently tossing his hair out of his eyes. He capitalized the A in art. Together we plumbed the depths of Greenwich Village, seldom coming above Fourteenth Street for air. We dined in those how-can-they-do-it-for-fifty-cents table d'hôtes, where Maximilian and his little group of serious thinkers were wont to gather about dank bottles of sinister claret and flourish marked copies of [The Masses](#). I learned to make sweeping gestures with my bent-back thumb, to smile tolerantly at the mention of [John Sargent](#); to use all the technical terms when I discussed Neo-Malthusianism. Maximilian made love in an impersonal sort of way. He called me "Comrade" and flung a casual arm across my shoulders whenever he happened to think of it.

But the end came. Maximilian painted my portrait. Chaperoned by an astounded aunt, I posed for him in an utterly inadequate bit of green gauze; posed until every muscle ached. Finally, one day, Maximilian flung his brush across the room—narrowly missing my aunt—threw himself in a chair, and wearily drew his hand across his eyes, murmuring, "It is done."

I stole around and looked over his shoulder at the canvas—and immediately Love went out of my life. Reader—are you by any chance a pool-player? Well, the only thing I can think that the portrait resembled was what is known in pool circles as an "open break." I turned and fled from Max and Bohemia. I didn't know much about Art, but I knew what I didn't like.

## III. Jim—Of Broadway

Perhaps it was only natural that the next one should be Jim. He was a thirty-third degree man about town. He could tell at a glance which one of the [Dolly Sisters](#) was Mrs. Harry Fox, and he could keep track of [Nat Goodwin's](#) marriages without calling in the aid of an expert accountant and a Burrowes adding machine. His peacock blue Rolls-Royce had worn a deep groove in Broadway and his checked suits kept just within the law about disturbing the public peace. Jim was a man of few words; his love-making consisted of two phrases—"What are you going to have?" and "Where do we go from here?" I shall never forget the thrill of entering restaurant after restaurant with Jim and watching the headwaiters do everything but kiss him.

It was an idyll, while it lasted. We used to sit, a table's breadth apart, at cabarets, and shriek soft nothings at each other above the blare of the Nubian band, while waiters literally groveled at our feet. Jim gave me the deepest, truest love he had ever given a woman. In his affections I was rated third—first, and second, [Haig and Haig](#); and then, third, me. I began to feel that life with him would be one long all-night cabaret, and I was just about to become the owner of the largest engagement ring in the city, when, one night we went to a dinner. Not a cabaret dinner, but one where two famous authors sat and ate with their forks, just like regular people. Everyone was properly stricken with awe—everyone that is, but Jim. While the rest of us hung on the gloomy utterances of the authors, Jim loudly discussed (with a kindred spirit across the table) the certainty of Hatrack's winning the fourth race at Belmont Park, offering to back his conviction with a large quantity of coin of the realm, and urging that his friend either produce a similar amount of currency, or else desist from arguing. Under cover of the table, I kicked him into quietude. Presently a point was reached in the lofty-browed discourse whereon the two celebrities differed, and, as if going to the right source for information, they turned to Jim.

"Now what is *your* opinion of Baudelaire?" they inquired.

Jim looked up with the same perfectly-at-home air with which he entered the New Amsterdam Theatre on the first night of the *Follies*.

"I really can't say," he explained, affably, "I've never seen him get a good sweat-out in practice."

The silence that ensued seems still to crash in my ears...

#### **IV. Cyril, Hero of the Social Register**

Cyril, the next event, was almost the man. People are still shaking their heads over my idiocy in not taking him. You see, he had practically all the money in the world, and the plot of the Social Register was almost entirely written around his family. In spite of all that he was most amazingly intelligent. In fact he had such a disconcertingly remarkable memory that every time I said a clever thing, he remembered just who had written it. Cyril led a blameless life; whatever he did, one might rest assured was Being Done. His was a perfect day, from his cold shower at 11:30 to his appearance at the opera, exactly three-quarters of an hour late. The one religious rite in his life was his weekly pilgrimage to a sacred Mecca up the Hudson, to assist at the mystic ceremonies of the smartest week-end in America. His clothes—but who am I to write of them? It would require all the passionate lyricism of a [Swinburne](#) to do them justice. He made the debonair young gentlemen in the clothing advertisements look as if they'd been working on the railroad. Collars were named for him. What more can be said?

Yes, Cyril was faultless. I had almost decided to devote my life to living up to him, when, one terrible night I found a hideous flaw in him. It was at the opera. I remember that it was one of those awful German atrocities, and the stage was full of large, strong women, shouting "Yo ho" at each other. Relentless Fate directed my gaze at Cyril's left hand, as he sat there all unconscious in the box. And I saw it! Saw that his white glove, the glove of Cyril the impeccable, had split like that of a mere broker or bank clerk, split all the way around the thumb, the edges gaping like a hideous wound, and a part of his hand exposed in all its glaring nudity. I hid my eyes, but the sight had seared my brain...

#### **V. Lorenzo, the Life of the Party**

Lorenzo was the next occurrence. Never have I seen anyone so bubbling over with good, clean fun. He specialized in parlor tricks. Give him but a length of string, three matches, and a lump of sugar, and he would be the life of the party for an entire evening. He had an uncanny habit of leaving the room for two minutes and, on his return, telling you exactly what card you had drawn from the pack. He had amassed a great repertoire of parlor anecdotes in Irish and Negro dialects. It was he who wrote most of the jokes about the Ford car. It broke Lorenzo's heart to see people wasting their lives in mere conversation; he panted to gather them all in a big circle and play guessing-games. Nor did he care for one-steps, fox-trots, or such selfish dances; no, Lorenzo insisted on Paul Joneses and Virginia reels, so that all the people could get to know each other.

He did imitations, too, of bumblebees and roosters and fog-horns and of a man sawing wood. This last imitation had amazing touches of realism in it, especially when he came to the knot-holes. Lorenzo was not a fanatic on athletics; he didn't go in for golf or tennis, but he certainly played a rattling good game of Parcheesi.

Life with Lorenzo might have been a continuous round of innocent little parlor tricks and yet—those tricks were the drawbacks to my happiness. I feared he might so perfect himself in his chosen art that I could never know at which moment he was going to reach over and take a guinea pig out of my hair, or

remove the flags of all nations from my unsuspecting ears. The nervous strain would have been too great; and so we parted.

## VI. Bob, Son of Battle

Bob came next. I had always thought the American flag was the personal property of George M. Cohan until I met Bob and found that Mr. Cohan had ceded a half-interest in it to him. Bob was every inch a soldier, and you never could forget it. He wore his khaki uniform wherever it was possible (or even probable) and he always wore his chest well swelled out, the better to display his badge of honor—that awe-inspiring little bit of red ribbon that meant he kept his gun cleaner than any one else in his tent. The word “preparedness” was to him as a red flag to an anarchist. He lived but for the [season at Plattsburg](#). He even carried the thing so far as to stand outside of a property tent, with all the persuasiveness of a Billy Sunday, exhorting the halt, the maimed, and the blind to enlist, like little men. He spoke tenderly and at great length of his horse, which, I gathered from his conversation, shared his pillow. He used to relate little anecdotes of its startlingly human intelligence. It walked, it ran, it neighed, it slept, it evinced a liking for oats. It even—yet some there are who say that dumb beasts have no souls—had been known to whisk away flies with its tail. Bob was a martial and God-fearing youth. I feel sure that every night before he went to bed he knelt down and asked [General Leonard Wood](#) to bless him and make him a good boy.

The thing was almost settled. You know there’s something about a uniform—full or empty—and then those military weddings with crossed swords are always so picturesque. We were just going to announce it, when a cruel summons came for Bob to [leave for Mexico](#) with his troop. He left me, tenderly vowing to bring back Carranza’s head to put upon my mantelpiece—and then, while he was gone, Paul happened.

## VII. Paul, the Vanished Dream

I cannot dwell on Paul, the last one. I have not yet fully recovered from him. He was the Ideal Husband—an English-tailored Greek God, just masterful enough to be entertaining, just wicked enough to be exciting, just clever enough to be a good audience. But, oh, he failed me! In a moment of absent-mindedness, he went and married a blonde and rounded person whose walk in life was the runway at the [Winter Garden](#). I am just beginning to recuperate.

And these are the seven reasons why my mail is still being addressed to “Miss.”

### “Advice To A Girl” by Sarah Teasdale

No one worth possessing  
Can be quite possessed;  
Lay that on your heart,  
My young angry dear;  
This truth, this hard and precious stone,  
Lay it on your hot cheek,  
Let it hide your tear.  
Hold it like a crystal  
When you are alone  
And gaze in the depths of the icy stone.  
Long, look long and you will be blessed:  
No one worth possessing  
Can be quite possessed.



## **“A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” by Ernest Hemingway**

It was very late and everyone had left the cafe except an old man who sat in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light. In the day time the street was dusty, but at night the dew settled the dust and the old man liked to sit late because he was deaf and now at night it was quiet and he felt the difference. The two waiters inside the cafe knew that the old man was a little drunk, and while he was a good client they knew that if he became too drunk he would leave without paying, so they kept watch on him.

"Last week he tried to commit suicide," one waiter said.

"Why?"

"He was in despair."

"What about?"

"Nothing."

"How do you know it was nothing?"

"He has plenty of money."

They sat together at a table that was close against the wall near the door of the cafe and looked at the terrace where the tables were all empty except where the old man sat in the shadow of the leaves of the tree that moved slightly in the wind. A girl and a soldier went by in the street. The street light shone on the brass number on his collar. The girl wore no head covering and hurried beside him.

"The guard will pick him up," one waiter said.

"What does it matter if he gets what he's after?"

"He had better get off the street now. The guard will get him. They went by five minutes ago."

The old man sitting in the shadow rapped on his saucer with his glass. The younger waiter went over to him.

"What do you want?"

The old man looked at him. "Another brandy," he said.

"You'll be drunk," the waiter said. The old man looked at him. The waiter went away.

"He'll stay all night," he said to his colleague. "I'm sleepy now. I never get into bed before three o'clock. He should have killed himself last week."

The waiter took the brandy bottle and another saucer from the counter inside the cafe and marched out to the old man's table. He put down the saucer and poured the glass full of brandy.

"You should have killed yourself last week," he said to the deafman. The old man motioned with his finger. "A little more," he said. The waiter poured on into the glass so that the brandy slopped over and ran down the stem into the top saucer of the pile. "Thank you," the old man said. The waiter took the bottle back inside the cafe. He sat down at the table with his colleague again.

"He's drunk now," he said.

"He's drunk every night."

"What did he want to kill himself for?"

"How should I know."

"How did he do it?"

"He hung himself with a rope."

"Who cut him down?"

"His niece."

"Why did they do it?"

"Fear for his soul."

"How much money has he got?" "He's got plenty."

"He must be eighty years old."

"Anyway I should say he was eighty."

"I wish he would go home. I never get to bed before three o'clock. What kind of hour is that to go to bed?"

"He stays up because he likes it."

"He's lonely. I'm not lonely. I have a wife waiting in bed for me."

"He had a wife once too."

"A wife would be no good to him now."

"You can't tell. He might be better with a wife."

"His niece looks after him. You said she cut him down."

"I know." "I wouldn't want to be that old. An old man is a nasty thing."

"Not always. This old man is clean. He drinks without spilling. Even now, drunk. Look at him."

"I don't want to look at him. I wish he would go home. He has no regard for those who must work."

The old man looked from his glass across the square, then over at the waiters.

"Another brandy," he said, pointing to his glass. The waiter who was in a hurry came over.

"Finished," he said, speaking with that omission of syntax stupid people employ when talking to drunken people or foreigners. "Nomore tonight. Close now."

"Another," said the old man.

"No. Finished." The waiter wiped the edge of the table with a towel and shook his head.

The old man stood up, slowly counted the saucers, took a leathercoin purse from his pocket and paid for the drinks, leaving half a peseta tip. The waiter watched him go down the street, a very oldman walking unsteadily but with dignity.

"Why didn't you let him stay and drink?" the unhurried waiter asked. They were putting up the shutters. "It is not half-past two."

"I want to go home to bed."

"What is an hour?"

"More to me than to him."

"An hour is the same."

"You talk like an old man yourself. He can buy a bottle and drinkat home."

"It's not the same."

"No, it is not," agreed the waiter with a wife. He did not wish to be unjust. He was only in a hurry.

"And you? You have no fear of going home before your usual hour?"

"Are you trying to insult me?"

"No, hombre, only to make a joke."

"No," the waiter who was in a hurry said, rising from pulling down the metal shutters. "I have confidence. I am all confidence."

"You have youth, confidence, and a job," the older waiter said. "You have everything."

"And what do you lack?"

"Everything but work."

"You have everything I have."

"No. I have never had confidence and I am not young."

"Come on. Stop talking nonsense and lock up."

"I am of those who like to stay late at the cafe," the older waiter said.

"With all those who do not want to go to bed. With all those who need a light for the night."

"I want to go home and into bed."

"We are of two different kinds," the older waiter said. He was now dressed to go home. "It is not only a question of youth and confidence although those things are very beautiful. Each night I am reluctant to close up because there may be some one who needs the cafe."

"Hombre, there are bodegas open all night long."

"You do not understand. This is a clean and pleasant cafe. It is well lighted. The light is very good and also, now, there are shadows of the leaves."

"Good night," said the younger waiter.

"Good night," the other said. Turning off the electric light he continued the conversation with himself, It was the light of course but it is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant. You do not want music. Certainly you do not want music. Nor can you stand before a bar with dignity although that is all that is provided for these hours. What did he fear? It was not a fear or dread, It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all nothing and a man was a nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada. Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee. He smiled and stood before a bar with a shining steam pressure coffee machine.

"What's yours?" asked the barman.

"Nada."

"Otro loco mas," said the barman and turned away.

"A little cup," said the waiter.

The barman poured it for him.

"The light is very bright and pleasant but the bar is unpolished," the waiter said.

The barman looked at him but did not answer. It was too late at night for conversation.

"You want another copita?" the barman asked.

"No, thank you," said the waiter and went out. He disliked bars and bodegas. A clean, well-lighted cafe was a very different thing. Now, without thinking further, he would go home to his room. He would lie in the bed and finally, with daylight, he would go to sleep. After all, he said to himself, it's probably only insomnia. Many must have it.

### **E.B. White - Once More to the Lake (1941)**

One summer, along about 1904, my father rented a camp on a lake in Maine and took us all there for the month of August. We all got ringworm from some kittens and had to rub Pond's Extract on our arms and legs night and morning, and my father rolled over in a canoe with all his clothes on; but outside of that the vacation was a success and from then on none of us ever thought there was any place in the world like that lake in Maine. We returned summer after summer--always on August 1st for one month. I have since become a salt-water man, but sometimes in summer there are days when the restlessness of the tides and the fearful cold of the sea water and the incessant wind which blows across the afternoon and into the evening make me wish for the placidity of a lake in the woods. A few weeks ago this feeling got so strong I bought myself a couple of bass hooks and a spinner and returned to the lake where we used to go, for a week's fishing and to revisit old haunts.

I took along my son, who had never had any fresh water up his nose and who had seen lily pads only from train windows. On the journey over to the lake I began to wonder what it would be like. I wondered how time would have marred this unique, this holy spot--the coves and streams, the hills that the sun set behind, the camps and the paths behind the camps. I was sure that the tarred road would have found it out and I wondered in what other ways it would be desolated. It is strange how much you can remember about places like that once you allow your mind to return into the grooves which lead back. You remember one thing, and that suddenly reminds you of another thing. I guess I remembered clearest of all the early mornings, when the lake was cool and motionless, remembered how the bedroom smelled of the lumber it was made of and of the wet woods whose scent entered through the screen. The partitions in the camp were thin and did not extend clear to the top of the rooms, and as I was always the first up I would dress softly so as not to wake the others, and sneak out into the sweet outdoors and start out in the canoe, keeping close along the shore in the long shadows of the pines. I remembered being very careful never to rub my paddle against the gunwale for fear of disturbing the stillness of the cathedral.

The lake had never been what you would call a wild lake. There were cottages sprinkled around the shores, and it was in farming although the shores of the lake were quite heavily wooded. Some of the cottages were owned by nearby farmers, and you would live at the shore and eat your meals at the farmhouse. That's what our family did. But although it wasn't wild, it was a fairly large and undisturbed lake and there were places in it which, to a child at least, seemed infinitely remote and primeval.

I was right about the tar: it led to within half a mile of the shore. But when I got back there, with my boy, and we settled into a camp near a farmhouse and into the kind of summertime I had known, I could tell that it was going to be pretty much the same as it had been before--I knew it, lying in bed the first morning, smelling the bedroom, and hearing the boy sneak quietly out and go off along the shore in a boat. I began to sustain the illusion that he was I, and therefore, by simple transposition, that I was my father. This sensation persisted, kept cropping up all the time we were there. It was not an entirely new feeling, but in this setting it grew much stronger. I seemed to be living a dual existence. I would be in the middle of some simple act, I would be picking up a bait box or laying down a table fork, or I would be saying something, and suddenly it would be not I but my father who was saying the words or making the gesture. It gave me a creepy sensation.

We went fishing the first morning. I felt the same damp moss covering the worms in the bait can, and saw the dragonfly alight on the tip of my rod as it hovered a few inches from the surface of the water. It was the arrival of this fly that convinced me beyond any doubt that everything was as it always had been, that the years were a mirage and there had been no years. The small waves were the same, chucking the rowboat under the chin as we fished at anchor, and the boat was the same boat, the same color green and the ribs broken in the same places, and under the floorboards the same freshwater leavings and debris--the dead helgramite, the wisps of moss, the rusty discarded fishhook, the dried blood from yesterday's catch. We stared silently at the tips of our rods, at the dragonflies that came and wells. I lowered the tip of mine into the water, tentatively, pensively dislodging the fly, which darted two feet away, poised, darted two feet



back, and came to rest again a little farther up the rod. There had been no years between the ducking of this dragonfly and the other one--the one that was part of memory. I looked at the boy, who was silently watching his fly, and it was my hands that held his rod, my eyes watching. I felt dizzy and didn't know which rod I was at the end of.

We caught two bass, hauling them in briskly as though they were mackerel, pulling them over the side of the boat in a businesslike manner without any landing net, and stunning them with a blow on the back of the head. When we got back for a swim before lunch, the lake was exactly where we had left it, the same number of inches from the dock, and there was only the merest suggestion of a breeze. This seemed an utterly enchanted sea, this lake you could leave to its own devices for a few hours and come back to, and find that it had not stirred, this constant and trustworthy body of water. In the shallows, the dark, water-soaked sticks and twigs, smooth and old, were undulating in clusters on the bottom against the clean ribbed sand, and the track of the mussel was plain. A school of minnows swam by, each minnow with its small, individual shadow, doubling the attendance, so clear and sharp in the sunlight. Some of the other campers were in swimming, along the shore, one of them with a cake of soap, and the water felt thin and clear and insubstantial. Over the years there had been this person with the cake of soap, this cultist, and here he was. There had been no years.

Up to the farmhouse to dinner through the teeming, dusty field, the road under our sneakers was only a two-track road. The middle track was missing, the one with the marks of the hooves and the splotches of dried, flaky manure. There had always been three tracks to choose from in choosing which track to walk in; now the choice was narrowed down to two. For a moment I missed terribly the middle alternative. But the way led past the tennis court, and something about the way it lay there in the sun reassured me; the tape had loosened along the backline, the alleys were green with plantains and other weeds, and the net (installed in June and removed in September) sagged in the dry noon, and the whole place steamed with midday heat and hunger and emptiness. There was a choice of pie for dessert, and one was blueberry and one was apple, and the waitresses were the same country girls, there having been no passage of time, only the illusion of it as in a dropped curtain--the waitresses were still fifteen; their hair had been washed, that was the only difference--they had been to the movies and seen the pretty girls with the clean hair.

Summertime, oh summertime, pattern of life indelible, the fade proof lake, the woods unshatterable, the pasture with the sweet fern and the juniper forever and ever, summer without end; this was the background, and the life along the shore was the design, the cottages with their innocent and tranquil design, their tiny docks with the flagpole and the American flag floating against the white clouds in the blue sky, the little paths over the roots of the trees leading from camp to camp and the paths leading back to the outhouses and the can of lime for sprinkling, and at the souvenir counters at the store the miniature birch-bark canoes and the post cards that showed things looking a little better than they looked. This was the American family at play, escaping the city heat, wondering whether the newcomers at the camp at the head of the cove were "common" or "nice," wondering whether it was true that the people who drove up for Sunday dinner at the farmhouse were turned away because there wasn't enough chicken.

It seemed to me, as I kept remembering all this, that those times and those summers had been infinitely precious and worth saving. There had been jollity and peace and goodness. The arriving (at the beginning of August) had been so big a business in itself, at the railway station the farm wagon drawn up, the first smell of the pine-laden air, the first glimpse of the smiling farmer, and the great importance of the trunks and your father's enormous authority in such matters, and the feel of the wagon under you for the long ten-mile haul, and at the top of the last long hill catching the first view of the lake after eleven months of not seeing this cherished body of water. The shouts and cries of the other campers when they saw you, and the trunks to be unpacked, to give up their rich burden. (Arriving was less exciting nowadays, when you sneaked up in your car and parked it under a tree near the camp and took out the bags and in five minutes it was all over, no fuss, no loud wonderful fuss about trunks.)

Peace and goodness and jollity. The only thing that was wrong now, really, was the sound of the place, an unfamiliar nervous sound of the outboard motors. This was the note that jarred, the one thing that would sometimes break the illusion and set the years moving. In those other summertimes, all motors were inboard; and when they were at a little distance, the noise they made was a sedative, an ingredient of summer sleep. They were one-cylinder and two-cylinder engines, and some were make-and-break and some were jump-spark, but they all made a sleepy sound across the lake. The one-lungers throbbed and fluttered, and the twin-cylinder ones purred and purred, and that was a quiet sound too. But now the campers all had outboards. In the daytime, in the hot mornings, these motors made a petulant, irritable sound; at night, in the still evening when the afterglow lit the water, they whined about one's ears like mosquitoes. My boy loved our rented outboard, and his great desire was to achieve single-handed mastery over it, and authority, and he soon learned the trick of choking it a little (but not too much), and the adjustment of the needle valve. Watching him I would remember the things you could do with the old one-cylinder engine with the heavy flywheel, how you could have it eating out of your hand if you got really close to it spiritually. Motor boats in those days didn't have clutches, and you would make a landing by shutting off the motor at the proper time and coasting in with a dead rudder. But there was a way of reversing them, if you learned the trick, by cutting the switch and putting it on again exactly on the final dying revolution of the flywheel, so that it would kick back against compression and begin reversing. Approaching a dock in a strong following breeze, it was difficult to slow up sufficiently by the ordinary coasting method, and if a boy felt he had complete mastery over his motor, he was tempted to keep it running beyond its time and then reverse it a few feet from the dock. It took a cool nerve, because if you threw the switch a twentieth of a second too soon you would catch the flywheel when it still had speed enough to go up past center, and the boat would leap ahead, charging bull-fashion at the dock.

We had a good week at the camp. The bass were biting well and the sun shone endlessly, day after day. We would be tired at night and lie down in the accumulated heat of the little bedrooms after the long hot day and the breeze would stir almost imperceptibly outside and the smell of the swamp drift in through the rusty screens. Sleep would come easily and in the morning the red squirrel would be on the roof, tapping out his gay routine. I kept remembering everything, lying in bed in the mornings--the small steamboat that had a long rounded stern like the lip of a Ubangi, and how quietly she ran on the moonlight sails, when the older boys played their mandolins and the girls sang and we ate doughnuts dipped in sugar, and how sweet the music was on the water in the shining night, and what it had felt like to think about girls then. After breakfast we would go up to the store and the things were in the same place--the minnows in a bottle, the plugs and spinners disarranged and pawed over by the youngsters from the boys' camp, the fig newtons and the Beeman's gum. Outside, the road was tarred and cars stood in front of the store. Inside, all was just as it had always been, except there was more Coca Cola and not so much Moxie and root beer and birch beer and sarsaparilla. We would walk out with a bottle of pop apiece and sometimes the pop would backfire up our noses and hurt. We explored the streams, quietly, where the turtles slid off the sunny logs and dug their way into the soft bottom; and we lay on the town wharf and fed worms to the tame bass. Everywhere we went I had trouble making out which was I, the one walking at my side, the one walking in my pants.

One afternoon while we were there at that lake a thunderstorm came up. It was like the revival of an old melodrama that I had seen long ago with childish awe. The second-act climax of the drama of the electrical disturbance over a lake in America had not changed in any important respect. This was the big scene, still the big scene. The whole thing was so familiar, the first feeling of oppression and heat and a general air around camp of not wanting to go very far away. In mid-afternoon (it was all the same) a curious darkening of the sky, and a lull in everything that had made life tick; and then the way the boats suddenly swung the other way at their moorings with the coming of a breeze out of the new quarter, and the premonitory rumble. Then the kettle drum, then the snare, then the bass drum and cymbals, then crackling light against the dark, and the gods grinning and licking their chops in the hills. Afterward the calm, the rain steadily rustling in the calm lake, the return of light and hope and spirits, and the campers running out in joy and relief to go swimming in the rain, their bright cries perpetuating the deathless joke about how they were getting simply drenched, and the children screaming with delight at the new sensation of bathing in the rain,

and the joke about getting drenched linking the generations in a strong indestructible chain. And the comedian who waded in carrying an umbrella.

When the others went swimming my son said he was going in too. He pulled his dripping trunks from the line where they had hung all through the shower, and wrung them out. Languidly, and with no thought of going in, I watched him, his hard little body, skinny and bare, saw him wince slightly as he pulled up around his vitals the small, soggy, icy garment. As he buckled the swollen belt suddenly my groin felt the chill of death.

**“Acquainted with the Night” by Robert Frost**

I have been one acquainted with the night.  
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.  
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.  
I have passed by the watchman on his beat  
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet  
When far away an interrupted cry  
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-bye;  
And further still at an unearthly height,  
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.  
I have been one acquainted with the night.