

**HOW DID ERNEST HEMINGWAY WRITE ABOUT
THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR?
A COMPARISON OF THE
NEWS DISPATCH
“THE FLIGHT OF REFUGEES”
AND THE
SHORT STORY
“OLD MAN AT THE BRIDGE”.**

Hausarbeit für das Proseminar II
”Chronicles of Conflict:
War Journalism and American Culture“
Anglistisches Seminar III, Universität Mannheim
Leitung: Oliver Koehler

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15.01.2003

Ernest Hemingway is widely considered to be one of the key representatives of modern American short stories. The short story “Old Man at the Bridge” is a good example for Hemingway’s ability of imaginative writing. But Hemingway was not only a writer of fictional texts he also was a journalist and worked as a war correspondent. “The Spanish Civil War dominates the middle period of Hemingway’s writing”(Josephs, 1989, p. 313), as there is not any other topic he wrote more about. During the Spanish Civil War he wrote two texts, a fictional and a non-fictional one, the dispatch “The Flight of Refugees”, with the same theme. Therefore a comparison of both texts can reveal similarities and differences of his writing style and his different approaches.

In the beginning it is important to become familiar with some historic facts and background information about the Spanish Civil War which lasted from 1936-1939. The Spanish Civil War began on 17 July 1936 with a military uprising of General Franco. At that time Spain was a republic with a liberal government under Giral. Franco had been deported to the canary isles due to political reasons, but with the help of German planes he could return to Spain accompanied by Spanish Foreign Legionnaires and Moroccans. Several more revolts took place throughout Spain during this summer, but the Eastern parts of the country remained republican in the beginning of the civil war. The Republicans were called Rojos (Reds) by the fascist insurgents. Monarchists, Catholics and the Falange (fascist group consisting of mainly upper-class students, later the name for Franco’s fascist party) supported the revolutionaries. Moreover military assistance was provided by Germany, Italy and Portugal. The republican government received support of France, the USSR and the International Brigades. On 30 September 1936 General Franco was announced as the head of government of the Spanish state and became commander-in-chief of the forces. Support of the International Brigades and supply of arms from the Soviets helped to strengthen the Republicans, so that the Fascists’ advance was slowed down. It came to bloody fights. In 1937 the Fascists got again the upper hand over the Republicans. Franco and his followers occupied and took the big cities gradually over the years. Barcelona was occupied by Franco in January 1939 and in March of the same year he took Madrid. The Republicans surrendered. About 1.2 million people (750,000 civilians) died as the civil war was fought with brutality on both sides. The Republican leaders escaped to France and Mexico.

Franco's government was accepted by Germany and Italy in 1936 and by France, England and USA in 1939. Spain remained neutral during World War II.

The Spanish Civil War was of great interest all over the world. And so it came that international correspondents were sent to Spain to report about the war for their countries. Hemingway had been to Spain before and returned in 1938.

Ernest Hemingway worked as a war correspondent in Spain. It was generally known that he was a supporter of the Spanish Republic. "The only positive 'cause' Ernest Hemingway ever really supported was the Spanish Republic" (Josephs, 1989, p. 314). He travelled to Spain from Key West, USA, in the spring of 1938. Originally he had planned to stay in the United States, because he wanted to write some stories, but then a little bit later he changed his mind and wrote in a letter "I feel a bloody shit to be here in Key West when I should be in Aragon or in Madrid"(Braasch Watson, 1990, p. 122). He left only two days later to return to Spain for the third time. He arrived in Perpignan, Spain, where he met two other correspondents on 30 April 1938. He was asked to report about the civil war for NANA (North American Newspaper Alliance) and Ken magazine, a new political magazine. Every fortnight he was supposed to send an article to Ken magazine. At the time of his arrival the political situation was difficult. "The front lines were changing dramatically almost every day, requiring that correspondents like Hemingway get as close to the action as they could and file their dispatches as quickly as possible" (Braasch Watson, 1990, p. 121). On the day after his arrival in Barcelona he met Herbert Matthews, a correspondent of the New York Times. Together they left for the Aragon front. First they made their way to Gandesa where Hemingway hoped to meet the International Brigades. It was very difficult to get there and on the way they were stopped near Falset by a group of refugees. Some soldiers informed them about the fall of Gandesa which had just been taken by the rebels. Only the bridge across the Ebro near Mora was still in the hand of the Republicans. One day later when he returned to Barcelona he wrote the first NANA dispatch about the fleeing peasants and soldiers he had seen the day before. He titled it "The Flight of Refugees" and it was cabled on 3 April 1938.

In this news article he reported about his experiences on the day after their arrival in Barcelona, a nice day in the spring. That day Hemingway travelled outside of the city for his newspaper work. While they were on the way the driver

stopped as he had recognized planes. A moment later they saw smoke over the town of Reus. They drove through the town passing destroyed houses. Then they made their way up towards the city of Falset. They were driving a mountain pass when they saw several groups of refugees. Hemingway talks about an old woman, eight children and one little boy. These people took everything they owned while they were fleeing. They were pushing carts full with all their belongings along the road. Some had their animals with them. In the following paragraph a woman on a loaded mule led by a man, with a new born baby in her arms is described. Then a short verbal exchange about the time of the baby's birth. It was born the day before. Everybody moves on watching the sky for planes. They saw more and more groups of soldiers coming along, some were armed others were not. The group of correspondents met some people they knew and were told that the enemy had moved forwards and had taken the town of Gandesa. Only the Americans still tried to hold the bridge at Mora across the Ebro River. A bit further they were not able to move on, the road was impassable and so they had to turn back. On their way back towards Tarragona and Barcelona they passed again all the people they had seen earlier. The woman with the new born baby holds it very close and wrapped in a blanket. It is described that the feeling among the people had obviously changed, they all were in fear then.

During the next month Hemingway had to work very hard. He nearly wrote one dispatch per day. As he knew from his earlier visits to Spain while the Civil War was going on about the difficulties with censorship offices. He was supposed to keep certain deadlines for his dispatches and about delays at the censorship offices. So in the second half of April he often travelled from Barcelona to the Ebro everyday. It was exhausting as he so had to write his dispatches in a great rush. Moreover this commuting was dangerous. "Italian and German aircraft operated at will behind the lines..." (Braasch Watson, 1990, p.123). On 17 April 1938, Easter Sunday, Hemingway set off to cross the Ebro searching for rebel forces. Then at a pontoon bridge near Amposta he saw a lonely old man sitting on the ground. On his way back he crossed this place again and the man was still there although he had been away for one or two hours. Hemingway knew about the danger of the enemy forces, he had not been able to locate them but they had to be very close. Obviously he had a short conversation with the old man and tried to convince him to move on.

Back in Barcelona he wrote a story about his meeting with the old man, which was cabled the same day and therefore must have been written in a very short time. It was cabled like other dispatches, but it was not sent to NANA but to Ken magazine as a story about an old man. He had to keep a deadline set by the Ken magazine. He thought it to be too similar to the dispatch about the flight of refugees and soldiers he had cabled to NANA two weeks before. Later the short story "Old Man at the Bridge" became the 49th story in the *Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories*.

The story is about a tired old man who sits by the side of the road near a pontoon bridge. Several groups of people cross the bridge with carts and trucks. The old man does not move, he cannot go any further. The narrator, a correspondent, crosses the bridge to locate the enemy. On his way back he sees the old man again and starts to talk to him. He asks the man where he is from. The man smiles and answers that he is from San Carlos. There he has taken care of some animals, goats, a cat and pigeons. He had to leave them behind and is worried now. The narrator watches the bridge and listens for any noises of the enemy. The man does not have family. He has been the last one to leave his hometown. His worry are the animals, he only knows that the cat can look after itself and the pigeons can fly away. He is seventy-six years old and he is no longer interested in politics. The narrator tries to encourage him to move on, but the old man is too exhausted as he has travelled 12 kilometres and he does not know anyone in Barcelona, the direction the narrator wants him to go to. The man gets up but has to sit down again. The narrator knows that he cannot do anything about him as the Fascists are coming closer to the Ebro. There are no planes up yet as the sky is not clear on that Easter Sunday. The man's only luck is that he knows that his cat has a chance to survive without him and that due to the grey sky the enemy's planes are not yet up.

The short story's title describes the story's main character and its setting. The main character is mentioned and the reader gets an idea about the location. There is a single main character which is an old man. This old man is a refugee. The plot of the story centres around this refugee in the Spanish Civil War. The man is fleeing from the fascists. The theme is the situation of people who need to leave their homes and loved ones, in this case animals, behind due to the brutality of a civil war. In addition to the main character there is another character. The narrator is part of the story and communicates with the old man, he seems to be a

correspondent reporting about the war. The story is set near a pontoon bridge across the river Ebro in Spain. The reader is informed about the central conflict by the narrator. The narrator starts to talk to the man and gets to know why this man had to flee. Moreover the reader and the narrator learn that the man had to leave his animals behind. The fascists were advancing his hometown and he could not take his animals along. This leads to the central conflict. The man is worrying about his helpless animals. This conflict is not solved fully, only when the man talks about the cat which can look after itself and the pigeons which can fly away, the reader gets the impression that the man's internal conflict is solved partly. The man had to choose between his flight and his responsibility for the animals. The narrator is also confronted with a conflict. He knows about the danger of advancing planes of the fascists and tries to encourage the man to move on. When he recognizes that the man is too old and tired to continue his flight he does not know what to do about him. He leaves him behind. The narrator describes the man as 'old' and tired with 'steel rimmed glasses' wearing 'dusty clothes' (l. 1). The man's main concern is the fate of his animals. This becomes obvious as he repeats his worry and wants to be assured several times that the cat will be all right and that the pigeons can fly away. The story is told from the point of view of a first-person narrator who is involved in the story. The primary action takes place at that bridge. The time of the story is Easter Sunday during the Spanish Civil War. No year is mentioned but due to the historic facts it is known to be 1938. The story covers a couple of hours of the life of the narrator acting as a correspondent and the old man. The story gets started without an introduction. The narrator mentions that he sees an old man sitting on the ground near a pontoon bridge on his way. The action rises when the narrator comes back after a couple of hours and the man is still sitting at the same place. The narrator starts a conversation and the reader learns about the fate of this man. The climax of the story is the story's closing sentence. There is no falling action, because of the abrupt ending. The narrator leaves the old man behind. The readers do not learn about the man's future, but due to the facts about the advancing fascists' planes, the narrator mentioned, it can be assumed. When the man remains at the bridge and does not move on, he will probably be killed. Especially this knowing of the probable death of the man creates a mood of sadness. The narrator's verbal exchange with the main character helps the reader to get a personal

impression of this man. After reading this story set in Spain during the Civil War the mood of cruelty of war arises. The reader does not have to have detailed information about the Civil War to see that this story could be true. It could happen in any war all over the world. It describes the flight of refugees. In this case a very old man which wanted to spend his last years with animals peacefully in his hometown is forced to accept lots of changes and a flight. He is suddenly pulled out of his everyday life. As mentioned the general theme is the flight of refugees in the Spanish Civil War, but there is also an underlying theme. The personal story of this man fills the picture of a cruel war. At the end we do not learn about the man's future, will he survive or will be killed by the fascists' planes? The narrator does not present this fact, it is in this way kind of an open end. The fact of the open end that the narrator leaves something unsaid makes it important. Readers start thinking about it. Hemingway's iceberg principle says that sometimes facts that you do not see are more important as those you can see.

“If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them” (Hemingway, www.lostgeneration.com/hemfaq.htm#how, 25.12.2002).

Like an iceberg which biggest and most dangerous parts are often below the water. Only the top can be seen above the water. In this case it is most important to know about the man's destiny in the future. The tone of the whole story depends on it. If the man dies, it is very sad and it is remembered as one sad example of a person who is a victim of war. In fact then he shares a common destiny with other refugees. The fact that the narrator leaves it open demonstrates its importance.

The fact that Hemingway wrote two texts about the same topic within two weeks enables to a comparison, based on Traumann (1993, p. 484-493) of the news article and the short story. In the beginning it is interesting to look at textual and stylistic similarities. The news dispatch describes a situation which corresponds to the historic events of April 3, 1938. In contrast the short story rather shows the personal experience of the author. Both texts illustrate the same topic, the situation of refugees in the Spanish Civil War in April 1938. In comparison to the news article the short story describes the situation of only one refugee. The reader learns about the fate of one old man. The dispatch instead provides several impressions of correspondent and writer of the news article who describes what he sees while

passing these people. When reading the dispatch the reader does not get detailed information about the people mentioned. The article's story line consists of several small plots which are only connected by the reporting of the writer. Within the short story a more detailed look at one man's life is presented by the narrator. In comparison to the dispatch the story arouses feelings and emotions of the reader. Due to the detailed information presented the reader has much more sympathy with that old man than with the refugees mentioned in the dispatch.

The texts do not only have the refugee's fate but also the reporting about the danger of advancing planes in common. Both texts close with a remark on planes. This perception leads to a comparison of the choice of words.

Report:

"...one little boy
pushed on a **wheel**."
(l. 28)

"...they were just
plodding along."
(ll. 33/34)

"The **planes had not
yet come**, but ... they
were overdue." (ll. 81/82)

Short Story:

"...with soldiers helping
push against the spokes
of the **wheels**." (l. 5)

"... the peasants **plodded
along**." (ll. 6/7.)

"It was a grey overcast
day ... so their **planes
were not up**." (ll. 76/77)

Herewith also the similarities concerning the choice of words is explained. This comparison does not only shows that in both texts the theme is the same, but also that there is a connection between article and story written by the same author.

After looking at the similarities it is now necessary to search for differences. As the work was hard during that time in Spain and all the correspondents did not have much time for an article they took notes during the day. So did Hemingway. As there are sources containing the field notes of Hemingway, it is possible to evaluate the notes of the dispatch and those of the story. When looking at the notes on which the story is based it is obvious that Hemingway used almost all information for his article. Although he put down only single words or short phrases he could expand those notes to a full article. The case is different for the story. He had taken notes that day as usual, but when he wrote the story later he used only the first information about the weather. (Braasch Watson, 1990, p.124/125) The first look shows that although the fictional text "Old Man at the Bridge" is a short story,

(“American literary genre: short concised realistic form of prose narrative” Metzler, 1990, p. 427) there is not much action taking place. The dialogue between narrator and old man predominates. The article in contrast presents only one very short dialogue. The dialogue as main action in the story leads to a concentration from a group of refugees to one single character with its personal fate with whom the reader sympathizes. He is a lonely old man. His loneliness is supported by the loss of his animals. There is no real communication as the narrator contributes to the dialogue only by asking short questions or giving short answers. It is rather a monologue held by the old man. The monologue helps to centre the man in its title role. The news article in contrast is not dominated by a dialogue. The correspondent describes his impressions about all the refugees. So here one thing follows another, as the correspondent drives along the road where the peasants are fleeing. There are several information about the timing which help the reader to recognize the chronological order of the scenes, for example “Then ... the chauffeur shouted, ‘Planes, planes!’” (l. 8), “As we went on, the road ... swelled with this migration...” (l. 51), “Suddenly, the stream of troops thinned ...” (l. 64). A brief analysis of the dispatch shows that it lacks an introduction and some other requirements for news articles like answering the w-questions. Therefore it is sometimes rather vague to the reader, the use of the pronoun ‘we’ is unlikely for a news correspondent. This discovers the questions of the correspondent’s objectivity. The lining up of scenes even seems to support the reader’s impression that he has to deal with an extract from a diary rather than with a news article. The monotonous reporting was changed towards a sharpened structure in the story with a general introduction to the topic, an accentuate dialogue and a subsuming in the last paragraph. The fictional text does not present a scenery change and more interest is put on the old man’s fate. His characterization helps to draw the reader’s attention to it. The comparison reveals a narrowing focus. No longer the view on several refugees, but on a single one. From changing scenes to static one. Moreover the point of view has changed. As mentioned above in the dispatch the pronoun ‘we’ is used, later in the story it concentrates on a first-person narrator. A central symbol in the story is the bridge, it plays a main part. The bridge is only temporary, but the steep banks last longer. Modern American short story often contain the presentation of a decisive situation in the protagonist’s life. Here a parallel can be drawn to the old

man's fate. The civil war that forced to flee is as temporary as the bridge. The changes in the man's life are permanent as he will not be able to return, for two reasons. The bridge will then probably have been removed and he is too old to go back all the long way to his hometown. The river symbolizes the separation between the man's happy life with all his animals in San Carlos where he wanted to spend the eve of his life and the life as a refugee away from home with an insecure future. The general tendency of both texts lies in the presentation of uprooting, fear, danger, misery and uncertainty of refugees in the Spanish Civil War near the Ebro in the springtime of 1938. As far as the texts' comparison is concerned it is recognisable that the description thickens from a general portray of a scenery of refugees to an individual one, from the impersonal to the personal presentation of a character. A comparison of the two titles support this perception. The old man is an example for Hemingway's philosophy "Ein Mann kann geschlagen, aber nicht besiegt werden, wenn er seine Würde bewahrt" (Josephs, 1989, p. 492). Anyway the general tenor in both texts is pessimistic. However, the personal fate of the man is presented even more tragically. A critical evaluation is difficult as the texts are in an intermediate zone between fact and fiction. W. White once said that Hemingway's special ability was in "... the craft of fiction, not in the art of factual reporting" (Traumann, 1993, p.493).

To conclude I would like to mention that I agree with White's commentary. I even like to go further and say that the short story would have been the better dispatch. The story's great value is that it gains the reader's involvement to the topic. The story when published as a dispatch with its detailed characterization would have filled the demand of literary journalism as Shaber described in one of her essays. "Hemingway's journalism can be called literary because it sought to tell a story, to communicate a slice of real life to his readers, ..." (Shaber, 1980, p. 420). To learn more about Hemingway's writing style and his usage of literary journalism it would be interesting to look at other dispatches written by Hemingway.

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