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A Narrated Stream of Consciousness in “Soldier’s Home”

In Ernest Hemingway’s “Soldier’s Home,” the main character Charlie reluctantly returns to his hometown after serving with the Marine Corps in World War 1. His experience back in his place of upbringing is no longer comfortable for him, as the community does not find his war experiences very interesting. In order to cope with this, Charlie had to lie about his experiences, drawing from the anecdotes of his peers in the service. He did not want to lie, however, so he eventually gives up on talking to anybody. This point where Charlie begins to dissociate himself from the people around him is the marks the beginning of the stage of his internal struggle which sets the tone for the remainder of the story.

At this point, the cause of his hidden strife is the fact that nobody is available to socialize with him. Charlie is convinced that “When you were really ripe for a girl you always got one” (Hemingway 113). He is also convinced though that it is not worth the trouble of attempting to humor any of the potential partners around him, because he would have to lie. He goes on to say that “He did not want to leave Germany. He did not want to come home” (Hemingway 113), which is at least partially because Charlie felt that meaningful relationships with people in Germany were much simpler. Charlie does not like the girls in Europe for another reason though, as he states that the German girls who pose for a photo with him “are not beautiful” (Hemingway 111). Eventually it is stated that he much prefers the American girls in his hometown. Due to this contradiction, Charlie has mostly eliminated his options for potential relationships, as he refuses to settle for a homely Germany girl while also refusing to socialize with Americans. The ultimate outcome is that Charlie is very lonely.

This is the basis for the tone of loneliness present in the voice of the narrator as they recount the events of the story. Charlie’s loneliness is robbing him of the ambition he needs to keep himself occupied away from the house as exemplified by the intervention by his mother. Due to this lack of ambition, he simply does not commit much effort into any of the activities he does, nor does he attempt allow himself to carry a conversation, though this is also due to the fact that he refrains from talking to avoid having to lie. These factors cause any contribution to dialogue on his part to be very short, concise, and terminating to the conversation. This structure of cursory statements is not limited only to Charlie’s speech, and is in fact present throughout the story. The entire narration, with the exception of dialogue from his sister or mother, is contrived of short and very basic sentences. These sentences are not only basic, but some of them contribute no additional explicit details to the story for the reader to make sense of, either due to being repetitive or otherwise tangential, such as the when the narrator states “They were such a nice pattern.” (Hemingway 113) followed by the redundant “He liked the pattern” (Hemingway 113). These duplicate statements and short sentences are structured such that the flow of the storytelling seems as the words are coming from Charlie himself in third person. In fact, one could conject that the whole story is just Charlie making sense of his rather frustrating personal situation by recounting the events since the end of the Great War as one way to cope with this loneliness. Regardless, the story is meant to read as though the words themselves are being filtered through the psyche of someone in Charlie’s disposition in order to reinforce the themes of loneliness and confusion.