Isn't it pretty to think so? : theatricality and The sun also rises. Does the shadow know? the "Between" and Hemingway's "The battler". Philosophizing badly?: hypertext and the politics of empowerment

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TITLE: "Isn't It Pretty To Think So?": Theatricality and the Sun Also Rises; Does the Shadow Know?: The "Between" and...

DATE: October 10, 1993
"Isn't it pretty to think so?": Theatricality and *The Sun Also Rises*  

Does the Shadow Know?: the "Between" and Hemingway's "The Battler"  

Philosophizing Badly?: Hypertext and the Politics of Empowerment  

by  
John Madritch  

Thesis Papers  
Presented to the Graduate Committee of Lehigh University in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts in English  

Lehigh University  
1993
These thesis papers are accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts.

27th September 1993
Date

Advisor, Paper 1

Advisor, Paper 2

Advisor, Paper 3

Chairperson of Department
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"Isn't it pretty to think so?": Theatricality

and The Sun Also Rises

Using the work of modernist art critics Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried to locate the ideology of modernism in Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises, this paper argues that Hemingway's novel both participates in and troubles that ideology.
Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre. Theatre is the common denominator that binds a large and seemingly disparate variety of activities to one another, and that distinguishes those activities from the radically different enterprises of the modernist arts.

--Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood"

One easily forgets that human education proceeds along highly theatrical lines. In a quite theatrical manner the child is taught how to behave; logical arguments only come later. When such-and-such occurs, it is told (or sees), one must laugh. It joins in when there is laughter, without knowing why; if asked why it is laughing it is wholly confused. In the same way it joins in shedding tears, not only weeping because the grown-ups do so but also feeling genuine sorrow. This can be seen at funerals, whose meaning escapes children entirely. These are theatrical events which form the character. The human being copies gestures, miming, tones of voice. And weeping arises from sorrow, but sorrow also arises from weeping.

--Bertolt Brecht, "Two Essays on Unprofessional Acting"

The following is concerned with Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and its relationship to what might be called the project or ideology of modernism. Using the work of modernist art critics Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried to locate the ideology of modernism in Hemingway's novel, I argue that *The Sun Also Rises* both participates in and troubles this ideology.

In his "Modernist Painting" Greenberg, arguably the most
influential of modernist art critics, explains modernism as the attempt to discover the essential in each of the arts. Modernism, that is, wants "to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art" (68), wants to make architecture architecture, painting painting, poetry poetry, etc. Hence he will write passages like the following --from his 1948 study Joan Miro, which takes a reminiscence about the Spanish painter by none other than Hemingway himself for its introduction--that praise painting for being painting and for eschewing those effects extraneous to this particular art form:

Literalness...is, ultimately, the premise of all truly contemporary painting: a literalness which understands painting as something that begins and ends, no matter what happens in between, with pigment applied to a flat surface and depends for its essential effect on the sensations received from a pigmented rectangle. (8-9)

The modernist project is important, Greenberg's "Modernist Painting" continues, because by determining their value intrinsically rather than allowing it to be determined extrinsically, the individual arts can "save themselves...by demonstrating that the kind[s] of experience they provide ... [are] valuable in [their] own right and not to be obtained from any other kind of activity" (68). Modernist art is to be contrasted with kitsch--"popular, commercial art and literature with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan
Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc., etc."—for
this latter derives its value not from its specificity as art
but rather from its easy relation to its viewer; kitsch
"predigests art for the spectator and spares him effort, provides him with a short cut to the pleasure of art that
detours what is necessarily difficult in genuine art"
(Greenberg, "Kitsch" 11, 16-17). Polemical art is really
kitsch rather than art, for example, because its value comes
in no small part from its politics (and if one disagrees with
the politics, then one might well fail to see the value in the
art); Norman Rockwell drawings are kitsch rather than art
because they receive their value in no small part from their
sentiment (and if one fails to be moved by the sentimental,
then one might well be unable to find value here), etc. While
modernism can be described as the project of art discovering
what it wants to be (architecture as architecture, painting as
painting, etc.), then kitsch can be described as that which
art does not want to be.

Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood" brings the notion of
theatricality to discussions about modernism:

The concepts of quality and value—and to the
extent that these are central to art, the concept
of art itself—are meaningful, or wholly
meaningful, only within the individual arts. What
lies between the arts is theatre. (142)

Theatricality, in other words (namely, those of Steven
Connor's admirably compact summary),
stands for all those falsifying divisions which
complicate, diffuse and displace the concentrated self-identity of a work of art, and so encompass a number of different effects, including self-consciousness of the spectator, the awareness of context and the dependence upon extension in time. Theatricality is the name for the contamination of any artefact that is dependent upon conditions outside, or other than, its own. (133-34)

Greeting-card verse can serve as an example. Such verse is theatrical because it is not so much concerned with the art of poetry as it is with creating a specific effect—'I'm amused, I'm touched, I'm moved, etc.'—in its audience. Further, because what might tempt me to be moved by a greeting card is not the intrinsic value of the sentimental, rhymed verse I encounter, but rather the gesture and my relationship to the card's sender, context emerges as an all-important factor in the determination of that card's value. Lastly, because context is so important and because that context is always subject to revision (I thought that you loved me when you sent me this card, but now you've left me and taken my dog, too), the value of that card's verse is subject to change over time.

Much in _The Sun Also Rises_ joins with Greenberg and Fried in valuing the essential. The novel's two connoisseurs, Count Mippipopolous and the hotel keeper Montoya, for instance, both of whom are highly—and, it seems, legitimately—valued by Jake Barnes, display a concern for appreciating something as it is in and for itself. Mippipopolous knows better than to mingle his appreciation of wine with considerations external to its taste:

"This wine is too good for toast-drinking, my
dear. You don't want to mix emotions up with a
wine like that. You lose the taste."
Brett's glass was empty.
"You ought to write a book on wines, count," I
said.
"Mr. Barnes," answered the count, "all I want
out of wines is to enjoy them." (59)

Similarly, Montoya works throughout the novel to maintain the
purity of bull-fighting, to separate the essential from the
theatrical. Hence he keeps the pictures of those bull-
fighters lacking in aficion (and notice here that this lack is
linked to a temptation toward the theatrical) apart from those
of the true ones:

The photographs of bull-fighters Montoya had really
believed in were framed. Photographs of bull-
fighters who had been without aficion Montoya kept
in a drawer of his desk. They often had the most
flattering inscriptions. But they did not mean
anything. One day Montoya took them all out and
dropped them in the waste-basket. He did not want
them around. (132; emphasis added)

Hence too Montoya tries to protect the young Romero from
flattery and distraction—he's to be a bull-fighter, not a
womanizer—so as to maintain his purity: "'He's such a fine
boy,' said Montoya. 'He ought to stay with his own people.
He shouldn't mix in that stuff'" (172).

Similarly, much in the novel also joins with Greenberg
and Fried in devaluing the theatrical. Though Jake clearly
admires Mippipopolous and Montoya for their good taste, both
he and others are critical of Robert Cohn, and they are so in
terms that evoke Fried's discussion of theatricality. Cohn is
criticized for putting on airs (Bill Gorton speaks, for
instance, of Cohn's "'Jewish superiority'" [162]); further, as
John Atherton notes, he confuses fiction and life:

Cohn...has compounded errors by taking fiction as life (he has "read and reread" The Purple Land [sic] as a "guidebook to what life holds" [11]) and life as fiction ("The childish, drunken heroics of it. It was his affair with a lady of title" [148]). (209)

Likewise, Jake attacks gay men because they are not as he thinks men are to be, but rather they are effeminate and posturing (Gaggin 95):

Somehow they always made me angry. I know they are supposed to be amusing, and you should be tolerant, but I wanted to swing on one, any one, anything to shatter that superior, simpering composure. (20)

The ideology of modernism—the theatrical as inferior, the essential as valuable—is also clearly on display when Jake Barnes talks and writes about bull-fighting, the aesthetics of which receive careful consideration in The Sun Also Rises. Bull-fighting is bad, the aficionado Jake tells us again and again, when it is theatrical, when it takes place so as expressly to please its audience. Jake criticizes those bull-fighters who employ tricks and contortions in order to heighten the appearance of danger:

Romero never made any contortions, always it was straight and pure and natural in line. The others twisted themselves like corkscrews, their elbows raised, and leaned against the flanks of the bull after his horns had passed, to give a faked look of danger. (167-68)

Because here the danger is "faked," because the bull-fighter tries to let the value of his art grow first and foremost out of his interaction with the audience rather than out of his skill as a bull-fighter, the worth of the bull-fight proves
fleeting: "Afterward, all that was faked turned bad and gave an unpleasant feeling" (168). Likewise, Jake criticizes Belmonte because, rather than letting an impressive bull-fight grow out of his skill as a matador, he instead assures himself of a crowd-pleasing show by choosing inferior bulls:

He had flashes of the old greatness with his bulls, but they were not of value because he had discounted them in advance when he had picked the bulls out for their safety, getting out of a motor car and leaning on a fence, looking over at the herd on the ranch of his friend the bull-breeder. So he had two small, manageable bulls without much horns, and when he felt the greatness again coming, just a little of it through the pain that was always with him, it had been discounted and sold in advance, and it did not give him a good feeling. (215-16)

Notice here again, then, how theatricality negates value.

Against the theatricality of the inferior bull-fighters and of Belmonte, there is the self-possession of the novel's exemplary artist, Pedro Romero. When Jake first meets Romero, he admires him in terms that draw attention to his self-sufficiency, his autonomy (Broer 51):

The boy stood very straight and unsmiling in his bull-fighting clothes....Pedro Romero nodded, seeming very far away and dignified....The boy was nineteen years old, alone except for his sword-handler, and the three hangers-on, and the bull-fight was to commence in twenty minutes....He was standing, straight and handsome and altogether by himself, alone in the room with the hangers-on.... (163)

This self-possession never turns into showing-off for an audience, either, but rather it keeps Romero focused upon the art of bull-fighting itself; instead of being swayed by flattery or indulging in boasting, he "talked of his work as
something altogether apart from himself. There was nothing
conceited or braggartly about him" (174). Further, unlike the
ostentatious contortions of the flamboyant bull-fighters and
their "faked" danger, the self-possession of Romero invests
his bull-fighting with a calmness and a purity of line that
insure its superiority:

Romero was the whole show....Romero's bull-fighting
gave real emotion, because he kept the absolute
purity of line in his movements and always quietly
and calmly let the horns pass him close each time.
He did not have to emphasize their
closeness....Romero had the old thing, the holding
of his purity of line through the maximum of
exposure, while he dominated the bull by making him
realize he was unattainable, while he prepared him
for the killing. (167-68)

What is important about Romero's art, in short, is its
revealing of "absolute purity," its concern with the essential
in bull-fighting. And because his art concerns itself with
purity and with the essential, because it isn't learned ("'He
knew everything when he started. The others can't ever learn
what he was born with'" [168]), this art has more than the
fleeting value found in the work of the inferior bull-fighters
("Afterward, all that was faked turned bad") and is free from
the contamination of the omni-present Hemingway "they." It
is, then, like the Turgenieff Jake reads: "I would always
have it" (149).

The successful execution of recibiendo by Romero
functions in the novel as the supreme expression of the self-
possession of Romero's art. There are, Hemingway writes in
Death in the Afternoon, two ways of killing a bull in the
either the bull must come to and pass the man, cited, drawn on, controlled and going out and away from the man by a movement of the muleta while the sword is being inserted between his shoulders; or else the man must fix the bull in position....When the man awaits the charge of the bull it is called killing 'recibiendo'. (236-37)

"I have seen [recibiendo] properly completed," adds Hemingway, "only four times in over fifteen hundred bulls I have seen killed" (238). While normally the bull charges the bull-fighter until it is sufficiently exhausted and confused that the bull-fighter can then kill it, that is, in recibiendo the bull-fighter's control is so great that he gets the bull to charge him and then uses the bull's own forward momentum to drive the sword into the bull.² Jake's description of this killing again emphasizes Romero's self-possession and lack of theatricality:

All the passes 'he linked up, all completed, all slow, templed and smooth. There were no tricks and no mystifications. There was no brusqueness. And each pass as it reached the summit gave you a sudden ache inside....Romero killed directly below us. He killed not as he had been forced to..., but as he wanted to. (219-20)

Indeed, "[t]his was a real one" (164).

Romero's victory--for while Romero emerges from their fight physically beaten but with his spirit "[un]touched" (219), Cohn is "'ruined'" (203)--over Cohn can readily be discussed in similar terms, as it is Romero's self-sufficiency that enables him to defeat Cohn. Dewey Ganzel goes so far as to liken Romero's victory to recibiendo:
Cohn's repeated attack against Romero and his final refusal to attack further is the symbolic equivalent [of the bull-fight, wherein the bull-fighter wears down the bull so that it no longer attacks]; so too is Romero's continuing willingness to expose himself to Cohn's attack. As in the bullfight itself, there is no question of which is physically the stronger—it is a test of will and stamina, and in this regard Romero is clearly the victor. But it is more significant that the final blow which ends the encounter is delivered by Romero after Cohn has come to him. This is the symbolic equivalent of recibiendo and as such worthy of particular praise. (37)

Cohn, that is, who took up boxing neither as a sport nor as an art ("He cared nothing for boxing" [3]) but rather as a means to defend himself against anti-Semitic attacks, simply cannot defeat Romero, who as an artist practices bull-fighting for the sake of bull-fighting alone.3

And yet there is a paradox at the heart of what might be called—following Jonas Barish—the antitheatrical prejudice that runs throughout Greenberg, Fried, and The Sun Also Rises. Steven Connor describes the paradox this way:

The paradox here is that [an absolute self-absorption and obliviousness of the beholder] is required precisely in order to stimulate that which 'theatrical' art denied or blocked—the complete absorption of the beholder in the painting. The painting must repress the fluttering eyelashes of the theatrical come-on, in order to allow access to some deeper central truth. (84)

This same tension emerges in Jake Barnes's narrative:

Everything of which [Romero] could control the locality he did in front of [Brett] all that afternoon. Never once did he look up. He made it stronger that way, and did it for himself, too, as well as for her. Because he did not look up to ask if it pleased he did it all for himself inside, and it strengthened him, and yet he did it for her,
too. But he did not do it for her at any loss to himself. He gained by it all through the afternoon. (216)

This paradox works to unsettle, I want to claim, the anti-theatrical aesthetic we've been examining, for it would seem that a necessary—an essential—condition of art's being art is its existing to be seen, is its relationship to an audience (Connor 92): "...he did it for her, too... He gained by it all through the afternoon." Though it makes sense—to return to an earlier example—to say that greeting-card poetry exists for its audience, that is, still I think we'd also want to say that essential to what we'd call "real" poems is their readability, the fact that we as an audience can take them in and make sense of them.

It is just because works of art are readable that their claims to purity, to self-sufficiency and autonomy, become problematic—for an enabling condition of their readability is their participation in (public, external) conventions. Here is Stephen Melville:

However convinced we may be that the making of art is natural to man, we have no access to it, no way to speak of it, except insofar as it is profoundly conventional and thus caught between invisibility and fragility. Art makes itself count only by exposing itself and so also its fragility, its gratuitousness and arbitrariness [i.e., its relationship to an audience]; such strength as it has it has only so long as it remains invisible, so long as it passes for natural [i.e., so long as its claims for truth appear free from socio-economic-political considerations, from the concerns of its audience]. Fried's phrase, "the primordial convention that paintings are made to be beheld," conceals and reveals at once the essential contradiction that makes of art a historical
This tension between the autonomous and the conventional appears too in *The Sun Also Rises*, perhaps most clearly with Romero's victory—or "victory"—over Cohn: it is indeed strange, I think, out of the ordinary, to call Romero the victor in his fight with Cohn, and this is because Cohn beats him badly and is gracious in stopping. In other words, because Cohn beats up Romero, it is most tempting—precisely because it is consistent with our normal, everyday manner of discussing fights—to label him the victor; to call Romero the victor and to appeal to an aesthetics of self-possession in doing so elides something important—Cohn "'did hurt Pedro Romero,' Brett said. 'He hurt him most badly'" (206).

To its credit, Hemingway's work acknowledges—despite the antitheatrical prejudice displayed throughout—that the theatrical is itself essential. Witness Pedro Romero, who mimics the theatricality of the other bullfighters and yet knows that such theatricality cannot be disposed of entirely:

"You know English well."
"Yes," [Romero] said. "Pretty well, sometimes. But I must not let anybody know. It would be very bad, a torero who speaks English."
"Why?" asked Brett.
"It would be bad. The people would not like it. Not yet."
"Why not?"
"They would not like it. Bull-fighters are not like that."
"What are bull-fighters like?"
He laughed and tipped his hat down over his eyes and changed the angle of his cigar and the expression of his face.
"Like at the table," he said. I glanced over. He had mimicked exactly the expression of Nacional.
He smiled, his face natural again. "No. I must forget English." (186)

Indeed, while the novel is busy praising Romero for his self-possession, it is also full of characters working to protect this self-possession—Montoya, as noted above, works to maintain Romero's purity, and, after Romero proves corruptible, Brett leaves him ("'You know I'd have lived with him if I hadn't seen it was bad for him'" [243]) so that he can regain this self-possession. But because this self-possession emerges as something that needs to be protected, because it is a self-possession that is threatened from the outside, it is never wholly or purely self-possession; rather, the outside, the extrinsic, what I have been calling the theatrical, marks Romero's self-possession, remains a problem to be lived with rather than sealed away.
Endnotes

1. Much of how I think about modernism has been influenced by a course—"Kitschin' Kant: Theatricality and the Death of Art"—taught by Gordon Bearn at Lehigh University in Spring 1992.

2. Ganzel's article has been instrumental in my understanding of the bull-fighting sections of the novel.

3. Rudat challenges this reading and argues for a more sympathetic reading of Cohn in his "Cohn and Romero in the Ring: Sports and Religion in The Sun Also Rises." I find his argument ultimately unconvincing, however, as it fails adequately to account for Cohn's being "ruined" (203).
The significance of Nick Adams' evening in the woods in Hemingway's "The Battler" derives from Nick's confrontation with the "between," the gap between what is and what appears to be the case.
T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" and Ernest Hemingway's "The Battler" both first appeared in 1925. So profoundly does the evening encounter with Ad Francis and his companion Bugs affect Nick Adams in the latter that by story's end Nick is surprised to find a ham sandwich in his hand. That he puts this sandwich "in his pocket" (138)--despite his being "'hungry as hell'" (133) only a few moments earlier--further attests to this encounter's power. In the following I advance that the significance of this evening for Nick derives in no small part from his confronting something like (a detailed reading of "The Hollow Men" will have to await another occasion) the "Shadow" of Eliot's poem.

The gap--the "between"--bordered on one side by what is the case and on the other by what appears to be the case haunts "The Battler" as surely as does the "swamp ghostly in the rising mist" (130) that serves as the story's backdrop. Consider:
An apparently friendly brakeman proves less than so, as he knocks Nick off a freight train.

An apparently friendly former champion prizefighter, Ad Francis, ends up threatening Nick without reason.

While the apparently good ability to fight has earned the prizefighter praise, it also has landed him in jail for "'busting people'" (137).

Because the prizefighter and his manager appear to be twins, the public continues to believe they are so even after they wed; the ensuing accusations of incest then ruin the prizefighter's career and marriage.

The prizefighter--quite arguably the battler of the title--now himself requires care, both from his estranged wife and from his companion, Bugs.

The apparently gentle Bugs was himself in jail for knifing someone.

While Bugs seems submissive, addressing Ad as "Mister Francis" and Nick as "Mister Adams," really he is in charge: he controls the prizefighter, hitting him with a well-worn blackjack; when he tells Nick not to give Ad his knife, Nick complies (Gerogiannis 181-82).

While Ad and Bugs appear to live as hoboes, Bugs describes his way of life as that of a "gentleman" (137).

By presenting both Nick and its readers with certain unresolvable ambiguities, the story makes this gap further compelling: no sooner, for instance, does Bugs relieve doubts about Ad's relationship with his manager ("'they wasn't brother and sister no more than a rabbit,'" he says) than he renews them, as he again claims that Ad's wife "'[l]ooked enough like [Ad for them] to be twins'" (137). The suspicion that Ad and Bugs are lovers serves a similar function; what is
important about such intimations, I want to claim, is not
whether the men engage in homosexual relations, but rather it
is our own inability as readers to locate definitive proof—
whether positive or negative—within the story.2

That evening serves as the story's setting only further
complicates Nick's attempts to distinguish between appearances
and what happens to be the case. Clearly darkness concerns
Nick; the problems it presents for the reading of situations
becomes apparent when, for instance, Nick's inability to see
Ad's eyes (for he has obscured them with his cap) furthers
Nick's "nervous" (135) feelings. Other elements of the
setting, too, function to complement the story's concern with
the "between." The story, for instance, takes place not in
Walton Junction, not in Kalkaska, and not in Mancelona, but
rather it occurs between these places and "a long way from
anywhere" (129). Similarly, the "[t]hree or four miles of
swamp" (130)—which here anticipate the more fully terrifying
swamp of "Big Two-Hearted River"—seem appropriate, as the
swamp appears to be water but really isn't just water, is
neither quite water nor quite land. Also worth noting here is
that Nick's movement toward the fire of Ad and Bugs is one of
descent—as if Nick moves toward something like Hell (I'm
thinking here of the various mythologies of devil as deceiver,
for instance), or as if Nick moves toward a ground, a firm
base amidst the confusion of the swamp, only to find that this
ground (the warmth and comfort represented by Ad's initial
kindness) itself proves deceptive and so is no firm ground at all.

Nor does the "between" only make problematic our knowing of the outside world, for it also complicates our own knowing of our individual selves. Clearly self-knowledge and the problems attendant to it are of concern in the story from its very start: notice, for example, that with "The Battler" we see Nick Adams on his own, away from family and friends, for the first time in *In Our Time* (Flora, *Nick Adams* 19); notice, too, that the story begins with Nick's examining himself for damage done by the brakeman and that this examination culminates with Nick's wish to view his black eye—frustrated ("He wished he could see it. Could not see it looking into the water, though" [129]). Because our existence is temporal, because we always operate—in Eliot's phrase—"[b]etween the potency and the existence," we can never be completely or fully ourselves; rather, to be human is to be marked by desire. Though I have a past, in other words, a history—I was born in such and such a place, and I have done this and studied that, etc.—which serves in part to define who I am, at the same time I am also always already engaged in various projects—I am pursuing this degree and wooing that woman, and I am also simultaneously entertaining any number of other courses of action—that serve to make the "who I am" rather more than the "what I have been and am at present." "The Battler" signals Nick's
incompleteness through his restlessness--Nick here rides the rails and "must get to somewhere" (130), though just exactly where he seems not to know. This incompleteness appears again in the story's final paragraph, as Nick surprises--"He found he had a ham sandwich in his hand" (138)--himself.

Closely related to the story's concern with self-knowledge is its interest in insanity, for Ad defines insanity as the radicalizing of just this inability to be completely one's self: "'When you got it [i.e., are crazy],'' he says, "'you don't know about it!'" (132). Nor is insanity a possibility for a neatly defined group--those people who were once champion fighters, say, or those people who listened to too many rock and roll records with secret backward messages. Rather, because to be human is to live in the gap between "potency and existence" and so to be never fully complete or identical to one's self, there always exists the possibility that this gap might widen--as it has in Ad's case--to an extreme. Hence Hemingway's story paints Ad and Nick as "twins" so as to suggest the potential for insanity that Nick himself possesses. Note the several parallels: (1) both men share similar (Ad and Adams) names; (2) both are--as Ad labels Nick--"tough" (131); (3) both look beaten up; (4) both have wounds treated with water in the story; (5) both are stoics, for Ad was a rope-a-dope fighter and Nick refuses to take the offensive when confronted both by the brakeman and by Ad; (6) Ad and Bugs make something like a "separate peace,"
just as has Nick both in riding the rails and in the vignette with Rinaldi that immediately follows "The Battler" in In Our Time (Young 40); and, (7) both can—as Nicholas Gerogiannis discusses—be accused of incest, as "The Last Good Country" makes clear about Nick (184-87). Indeed, ample evidence suggests that, as Bugs jokes, Nick's "'got a lot coming to him!" (133).

Because the "between" is, strictly speaking, nothing (it is neither this nor that, neither here nor there, etc.), let me add in closing that "The Battler" might well be said to anticipate Hemingway's nada-concept—described by Joseph Flora as "the sense of the vast void that modern man discerns" (Short Fiction 20)—which reaches its fullest expression in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." But just as "The Battler" anticipates the nada-concept, so too does it anticipate what become Nick's exemplary actions in the face of this nada in "Big Two-Hearted River." For, as has often been noted, the many rituals Nick follows in the latter story—Carlos Baker lists those of "endurance," "home-making," "food-preparation and thoughtful, grateful eating," "bait-catching," and "the ritualistic codes of fair play" (Writer as Artist 126)—work to impose order on an otherwise chaotic world grounded only in nada. In "The Battler" Nick finds in Bugs a teacher of the value of the ritualistic, for though Bugs knows the disorder and contingency of nada—he lives with the crazy Ad; his last words to Nick are "'good luck!'" (138), and this wish for
"luck" suggests one's vulnerability in the face of the contingent—he nevertheless emerges as a strong and generous character. There exists external evidence to suggest that Hemingway wished for Bugs to play this role; as Gerogiannis notes, in the earlier "The Great Man" draft "Bugs is servile" (181) and a much less impressive character. Happily, there exists internal evidence as well, for it is hard not to hear echoes of what Baker calls the rituals of "food preparation and thoughtful, grateful eating" in Bugs's careful making and arranging of a meal:

Into a skillet he was laying slices of ham. As the skillet grew hot the grease sputtered and Bugs, crouching on long nigger legs over the fire, turned the ham and broke eggs into the skillet, tipping it from side to side to baste the eggs with the hot fat. (133)

"Do you like to dip your bread in the ham fat?" the negro asked.
"You bet!"
"Perhaps we'd better wait until later. It's better at the finish of the meal." (134)

That Nick will himself later demonstrate similar attention to detail suggests that he takes away more of value from Bugs than the "ham sandwich" he finds in his hand.
Endnotes

1. The first six items on this list have been adapted from Clinton Burhans' "The Complex Unity of In Our Time," p. 23.

2. George Monteiro's "'This Is My Pal Bugs': Ernest Hemingway's 'The Battler'" offers reasons for suspecting that the men are physically intimate. Hemingway himself, however, balked at the suggestion when it appeared in Philip Young's Ernest Hemingway (Baker, Life Story 509). My reading attempts to account for just these contradictory reactions.

3. This first item, as well as the third, are from page 273 of Kenneth Lynn's Hemingway.

Philosophizing Badly?: Hypertext and the Politics of Empowerment

Jay David Bolter's *Writing Space* and George Landow's *Hypertext* appeal to critical theory in order to articulate what they see as the "empowering" potential of hypertext. In doing so, however, they ultimately elide significant features in the work of those critical theorists to which they appeal.
Yet electronic writing will at the same time take much of the sting out of deconstruction. As it restores a theoretical innocence to the making of literary texts, electronic writing will require a simpler, more positive literary theory.

--Jay David Bolter, Writing Space

The step "outside philosophy" is much more difficult to conceive than is generally imagined by those who think they made it long ago with cavalier ease, and who in general are swallowed up in metaphysics in the entire body of discourse which they claim to have disengaged from....What I want to emphasize is that the passage beyond philosophy does not consist in turning the page of philosophy (which usually amounts to philosophizing badly), but in continuing to read philosophers in a certain way.

--Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference (pp. 284 and 288)

While Richard Ohmann can write as recently as 1985 that only one of the twenty-three full-time people in the English department where he works has "an electronic workstation" (she's the secretary), this is certainly not the English department in which I find myself less than ten years later (222). Rather, I spend quite a bit of my time as a graduate student and instructor of composition interacting with relatively sophisticated technology: I write papers and prepare classes on computer; I correspond almost exclusively via electronic mail; I teach in well-equipped computer classrooms; I use computerized card catalogues and electronic
databases just about any time I try to locate materials for research, etc. Such technology has become part of my day-to-day existence, then, and what I write here is in no way—or so I like to think—motivated by a naive technophobia. (Such technophobia, to the extent that it is linked to traditional conceptions of pipe-smoking humanities professors, seems at any event by now—particularly given the omnipresence of the circumstances just outlined—largely anachronistic.) While I am comfortable using such technology on a daily basis, however, I remain guarded about the claims made on behalf of computer writing as "empowering." To that end, in what follows I hope to examine critically such claims via readings of Jay David Bolter's *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext,* and the *History of Writing* (1991) and George Landow's *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (1992). I have chosen these works because they are the two best known book-length texts to deal with hypertext, which seems to me to be the next and most radical wave in computer writing, in an overtly theoretical manner. I conclude by locating the possibility of a similarly critical reading of computer classrooms within such classrooms themselves.

(1) Hypertext: The Empowering Claims
Because Jay David Bolter's *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* seems representative of many of the claims about the "empowering" potential of computer writing (indeed, Landow's *Hypertext* refers to it approvingly at least 12 times), I'll use Bolter's text as an occasion to rehearse the principle claims made on behalf of hypertext.

Bolter's book promises that the computer writing of the future will liberate/empower us by defeating hierarchies and by establishing profoundly democratic networks in their place. The case goes (something) like this. First, it should be noted that Bolter isn't concerned so much with word processing (p. 5) as with "hypertext," the next generation of computer writing. He describes hypertext this way:

> A hypertext is like a printed book that the author has attacked with a pair of scissors and cut into convenient verbal sizes. The difference is that the electronic hypertext does not simply dissolve into a disordered bundle of slips, as the printed book must. For the author also defines a scheme of electronic connections to indicate relationships among the slips. In fashioning a hypertext, a writer might begin with a passage of continuous prose and then add notes or glosses on important words in the passage. As we suggested earlier, the glosses themselves could contain glosses, leading the reader to further texts. A hypertextual network can extend indefinitely, as a printed text cannot. (24)

One might think here of the multi-tiered organization one encounters using Apple or Windows software, for example, or of affording the indexes in printed books a rather more active role in one's reading and writing of them:
In one sense the index defines other books that could be constructed from the materials at hand, other themes that the author could have formed into an analytical narrative, and so invites the reader to read the book in alternative ways. An index transforms a book from a tree into a network, offering multiplicity in place of a single order of paragraphs and pages. (22)

To shape a text so that it can be read in any number of different ways is, however, to deprive the author of the control he's (sic) afforded in traditional, printed ("authoritative") texts. Hence, Bolter sees hypertextual writing as defeating the traditional hierarchy of author (as creator of meaning) over reader (as passive recipient of this meaning). Instead, "The reader exercises choice at every moment in the act of reading" (8); "The computer gives the reader the opportunity to touch the text itself, an opportunity never available in print....In the electronic medium readers cannot avoid writing the text itself, since every choice they make is an act of writing" (144); "The computer now extends the role of performer or interpreter to all forms of writing. In the electronic writing space all texts are like dramas or musical scores" (158). As such, while printed books aspire to a fixity and permanence, the newer electronic writing is more fluid: "A text as a network has no univocal sense; it is a multiplicity without the imposition of a principle of domination" (25). This fluidity of hypertextual writing resists closure:

There are ways of orienting the reader in an electronic document, but in any true hypertext the ending must remain tentative....If readers add to
the text as they read, their additions may have the same status as the original. An electronic book is a structure that reaches out to other structures, not only metaphorically, as does a printed book, but operationally. (33)

Nor is this simply a literary-critical exercise, as for Bolter hypertextual writing troubles the logocentrism constitutive of the Western philosophical tradition: even though it "encourages silent reading and the view of words as arbitrary signs" still printing retains "a vestige of orality" (201) (text as fixity, as presence); electronic writing, however, further frustrates the "belief that words are natural, immediate representations of the world" by breaking away from a phonocentric writing to one that is "more visual and includes signs that cannot be spoken" (200). By drawing attention in this way to what might be called the signness of the sign, hypertextual writing reminds us that we--all of us, all the time, and even if we are positivists like the scientist Bolter uses as an example--live in a world of signs: "No doubt many scientists believe that their graphs are natural writing or nature's writing--that human beings are reading what nature itself has produced....[But t]he scientist not only reads the graphic results; he or she also determines the variables to record and the way in which those variables will parameterize the writing space" (77). Indeed, because before there can be a self there must be a language in place to enable its demarcation as such, language precedes and constructs our being: "the mind is the creation of writing"
Nor is there any way for us to transcend this system of signs so as to gain access to a fully present or unmediated reality: "There is no way to get 'outside' the system to the world represented, because, as in the dictionary, signs can only lead you elsewhere in the same system" (197). And without any way to get outside the system of signs, there is then also no metaphysical way to ground those hierarchies (author/reader; man/woman; good/evil; reason/emotion; light/dark, etc.) that have been essential components of our social structures.

Because with electronic writing it becomes increasingly difficult to elide the signiness of the sign, then, such writing serves to confirm, to embody, and to further (even move beyond) deconstruction:

For the traditional reader electronic writing offers little comfort: it will in fact confirm much of what the deconstructionists... have been saying about the instability of the text and decreasing authority of the author. Yet electronic writing will at the same time take much of the sting out of deconstruction. As it restores a theoretical innocence to the making of literary texts, electronic writing will require a simpler, more positive literary theory. (147)

As we witness the gradual erosion in the power of hierarchies that comes with the "death of God" and all it entails, as the "goals of liberal democracy" move further and further toward their realization (Bolter: "the diminishing of racial and religious segregation, for example" [232]), and as we become further aware of the absence of metaphysical grounds through deconstruction and hypertextual writing ("our culture of
interconnections both reflects and is reflected in our new technology of writing" [233]), the network comes to replace the hierarchy as the dominant social structure (p. 232). Such interconnecting networks are free from the oppressive ordering implicit in hierarchies, and as such they both carry on and serve as realization of "liberal democracy":

We can now see that American culture has been working for decades against the assumptions of the printed book and toward the freedom from top-down control provided by electronic writing. The computer is the ideal technology for the networking of America, in which hierarchical structures of control and interpretation break down into their component parts and begin to oscillate in a continuously shifting web of relations. (236)

Bolter tells a tale, then, in which computer writing has everything to do with our empowerment.

(2) Hypertext: The Status of its Claims

Perhaps, however, such empowering claims are not so well-grounded as Bolter makes them out to be; such, at any rate, is what I hope to show—via the articulation of a critical reading both of Bolter's *Writing Space* and of Landow's *Hypertext*—in this section.

As we have just seen, central to Bolter's empowering claims is the linguistic turn that has characterized much of the recent French thought (Barthes, Derrida) to which he appeals. And like much of this recent thought, in Bolter too
this linguistic turn serves to trouble the "I" by revealing that it is itself a linguistic phenomenon: "the mind is the creation of writing" (211), he writes at one point; we need a philosophy that "recognizes the textuality of the mind and goes on to understand the individual as both author and reader of that text" (222), he writes at another. And yet, as even the latter of these two quotes anticipates, just as soon as he makes use of this linguistic turn to problematize the self he also reclaims ("individual as... author") that self. Indeed, and explicitly at odds with a belief in the linguistic construction of the "I", Bolter's text becomes--this is most apparent in the heady final pages of the book--a celebration of an American tradition of "ontological individualism" (232): with the breakdown of hierarchy we find confirmed that "the individual is the only firm reality" (232), and it is around this individual that society is re-organizing itself by embracing hypertext (page 233: "Our whole society is taking on the provisional character of a hypertext: it is rewriting itself for each individual member"). This tension between a linguistically constructed self and an ontologically given one leads Bolter to indulge uncritically in a contradiction: while the linguistically constructed self has--like all other linguistic constructions--no metaphysical grounding and so problematizes hierarchy (see above), the affirming of the ontological self finds Bolter embracing the hierarchy of self over other and elides the extent to which (with, for instance,
language preceding the self) the self is in fact defined by that other.

Bolter's reclaiming of the ontological self then enables his "liberal democratic" fantasy, for to consider the linguistic--and hence necessarily social--construction of the self would also be to draw attention to just those political forces that threaten to undermine his entire project. Indeed, while he will make the occasional admission--"the conservative character of the publishing industry, which is bound inevitably to the technology of print," will resist a complete conversion to hypertext (96-7); "there are insurmountable political and social obstacles" working to frustrate the installing of certain technologies (103)--that social factors stand in the way of the realization of "ultimate freedom" (233), he also quickly brackets those factors and returns to his celebration of hypertextual writing. Susan Jarratt's criticism of expressionistic pedagogies that both promise a free "writing space" in which to realize one's self and enact a bracketing similar to Bolter's are worth recounting, then, before we too quickly take Bolter's claims into our own classrooms:

In our society, men and women, blacks and whites, rich and poor are positioned in "antagonistic and asymmetrical relation," as the feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis has observed....Because those structural differences pervade the writing classes most of us teach, our students can't merely accept or reject...responses on an equal basis, because of the material realities in our society in which such responses are grounded. Such inequities often make the attempt to create a harmonious and nurturing
community of readers an illusory fiction—a superficial suturing of real social divisions. (110)

This bracketing is itself marked by a certain condescension in Bolter: "we use money to play at class, at hierarchical organizations that no one now takes seriously" (232). Bolter can, apparently, afford health insurance; perhaps, however, he would do well to remember that many others cannot, and that this inability isn't merely a game at which one plays. And it appears, in fact, as if this bracketing is itself part of another ill-considered contradiction to be found in Bolter's text: while he celebrates that "the computer as writing space simply sweeps away" what he calls "colossal metaphysical issues" (p. 205), he at the same time essentializes hypertext (page 20's "true electronic writing," for example, and page 87's "but any true hypertext") so that there are things that look like electronic writing but don't match the ideal and so aren't and others that both look like and match the ideal and so are true electronic writing. This proves a rather convenient move, for it allows Bolter to contain those uses of hypertext as a technology—like military ones (see below, page 13)—that trouble a rhetoric of empowerment by dismissing them as not "true."

Landow's Hypertext, which in large part echoes the claims made on behalf of hypertext in Bolter's Writing Space, enacts a bracketing similar to Bolter's of those social and political factors that would in fact make such a model of conversation
possible more than "potentially." Landow too balks when it comes time to make his readers see the ways in which what it means to be a self are constituted by others. While he allows the linguistic construction of the self ("Hypertext and contemporary theory....both agree in configuring the author of the text as a text" [72], for instance) to play a crucial role in his discussion of how hypertext alters our conceptions of authorship, that is, and while he appears more vigilant than Bolter in holding to this position, still he no sooner articulates the position ("As Said points out, major contemporary theorists reject 'the human subject as grounding center for human knowledge'" [76-77]) than he seeks to contain its implications ("Before mourning too readily for this vanished or much diminished self, we would do well to remind ourselves that, although Western thought long held such notions of the unitary self in a privileged position, texts from Homer to Freud have steadily argued the contrary position" [77]). Significantly, when Landow turns to provide examples of other challenges--"[d]ivine or demonic possession, inspiration, humors, moods, dreams, the unconscious" (77)--to notions of a unified or autonomous self, he both points to ideas that today seem largely innocuous and fails to acknowledge what is quite arguably the richest and most compelling current challenge to such notions--namely, the body of ideology critique which locates the determining influences that political and social factors play in constructing
subjectivity. And, just as Bolter points to ways in which hypertext seems to "rewrit[e society] for each individual member" (233) and thereby contributes to a sense of ontological individualism, so too does Landow—when he finally gets around to discussing ideology critique in a footnote, and despite a rhetoric of empowerment apparently at odds with the status quo—duplicate this move by writing approvingly, not about Althusser's work on ideology, but about the process of hailing—the creation of subjectivities that allows for the reproduction of current modes of production—*itself*:

Terry Eagleton's explanation of the way ideology relates the individual to his or her society bears an uncanny resemblance to the conception of the virtual machine in computing: "It as though society were not just an impersonal structure to me, but a 'subject' which 'addresses' me personally—which recognizes me, tells me that I am valued, and so makes me by that very act of recognition into a free, autonomous subject. I come to feel, not exactly as though the world exists for me alone, but as though it is significantly 'centered' on me, and I in turn am significantly 'centered' on it. Ideology, for Althusser, is the set of beliefs and practices which does this centering. (207)

Given the ways Landow's text functions to accommodate its reader (one hears echoes of Bolter's kindler, gentler "more positive literary theory" here) by containing any significant threats to her sense of autonomy, then, one must begin to wonder about the extent to which Landow's claims are potentially emancipatory.

Just as Landow's work fails to address adequately those social and political factors that construct subjectivity, so
too does he effectively fail to address adequately those same factors when he considers how hypertext has been and will be put to use. Vincent Mosco suggests the importance of such concerns:

Technology itself, even such seemingly powerful forces as the computer, does not determine or even shape social relations and social institutions. It is, rather, more useful to see technology as opening up a number of social potentialities. Those who have power to advance certain of these determine or shape the use of technology. This is not to suggest that all uses of technology are a function of power; rather, power sets the pattern for the principal direction of production, distribution, and use. (3)

While Landow is in fact quite good when he turns to consider resistance—"in large part because of technological conservatism and general lack of concern with pedagogy that characterize the faculty at most institutions of higher learning" (160-61), for instance—to hypertext in the academy, unfortunately his discussion of the various institutional forces that come to shape the uses to which we put hypertext and which stand in the way of its empowering potential effectively comes to a stop here. (On this point, Stuart Moulthrop merits hearing: "Are academic and corporate intellectuals truly prepared to dispense with the current means of text production and the advantages they afford in the present information economy? More to the point, are we capable of overturning these institutions, assuming we have the will to do so?" [51].) Landow's text doesn't, that is, move on to account for the "hard facts" Moulthrop prompts us
The era of the garage-born computer messiah has passed. Directly or indirectly, most development of hardware and software depends on heavily capitalized multinational companies that do a thriving business with the defense establishment. This affiliation clearly influences the development of the new media—consider a recent paper on "The Rhetoric of Hypertext" which uses the requirements of a militarily training system to propose general standards of coherence and instrumental effectiveness for this medium (Carlson [in Hypermedia 2] 1990). Technological development does not happen in cyberspace, but in the more familiar universe of postindustrial capital. Thus to the clearheaded, any suggestion that computer technology might be anything but an instrument of this system must seem quixotic or plain foolish.

Indeed, while Hypertext acknowledges the need for everyone to have equal access to information and information technologies in order for its vision of empowerment to achieve actualization ("As long as any reader has the power to enter the system and leave his or her mark, neither the tyranny of the center nor that of the majority can impose itself. The very open-endedness of the text...promotes empowering the reader" [178, emphasis added]), it doesn't address the extent to which, for instance, the increasing commodification of information stands in the way of its "as long as"; as Mark Poster writes,

The fact that it is technically possible for information to be available to everyone at little cost in no way ensures that it will be. In fact under the aegis of private property all efforts are made to ensure that it is not available....In the mode of information the market inverts itself: by restricting the flow of information it produces the scarcity that economists tell us is a fact of nature. (73)
"[D]ifference," Terry Eagleton writes in his Ideology of the Aesthetic, "must pass through identity if it is to come into its own" (414)—if we are to be able to embrace the celebration of difference and of empowerment that both Bolter and Landow advance, that is, such empowerment must first be located in a politics of identity that acknowledges others and secures for them an equal space from which to articulate their concerns. While both Writing Space and Hypertext move toward such a space by giving voice to the possibility of "a society of conversation in which no one conversation...dominates" (70), both works ultimately fail to address obstacles that prevent the securing of such a space.

Given Hypertext's interest both in articulating a "convergence" between critical theory and hypertext and in addressing potential oppositions to its case, it is also somewhat surprising that Landow's work doesn't consider what seems the most obvious argument to be made against claims for the empowering potential of hypertext from a post-structuralist perspective—namely, Michel Foucault's work on panopticism in his Discipline and Punish. Bolter's work too, despite his many appeals to contemporary French thinkers, does likewise. And indeed, the bracketing of political and economic forces from their necessary relationships to this new technology that I've been considering allows both texts to embrace network culture and to elide Foucault as readily as they do. For while such networks may foster an awareness of
ourselves as individuals, this might well be bad news rather than good. To engage—and who among us can anymore avoid it?—in network culture is to leave electronic records of our banking, shopping, reading, corresponding, working, etc., habits; to leave such records when "for many [sic]...ultimate freedom is not available" (Bolter 233) is not so much to realize our desires in some consumerist fantasy, however, as it is to feel an increased pressure to conform. Mosco again: "contact networks can pinpoint groups of people who may [for instance] be acting against the interests of top management....Social management is...changing your behavior to conform because you know the technology can monitor your behavior whether or not it is actually doing so" (13). The experience of individualization offered here becomes, then, one of existing in a Panopticon, of feeling oneself as among the many occupying "so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized, and constantly visible" (Foucault, quoted in Robins and Webster, p. 58). Because of the obviousness of the Foucauldian critique and because of the potential damage it represents to both works, it would have been nice to see one or the other of these texts engage—even if it means arguing the opposite case—this critique.

(3) The Computer Classroom: Love it or Leave it?
Clearly for most of us that teach composition the computer classroom is here to stay, and, while I'm not convinced that this fact is an unqualified good, I am sure that it is not an unqualified evil. Indeed, it's hard to read Bolter's work or Landow's without becoming quite excited at times for the various new possibilities and challenges the computer classroom presents to student and teacher alike. Hypertextual writing poses a new rhetorical situation, and as students learn to navigate their various ways through that situation their ability to use and to manipulate language will most likely be tested and improved. Certainly, though problematically, one of the nice things expensive computer classrooms do for us as teachers of composition is to lend legitimation to what we do--the twenty-three workstations, two laser printers, and stereo VCR in each of the two computer classrooms where I teach suggest to my students that what we do there is worth the expense of such equipment, and it stands in ready contrast to the small, over-heated rooms with bolted-down chairs where many of the composition classes were taught before the computer classrooms were financed. Further, composition in a computer classroom often leaves students with the impression that they've "learned something," for several of the more practical computer skills they acquire are more tangible than learning to write well. And indeed, both Bolter and Landow are right in drawing attention to similarities between hypertext and critical theory, and these
connections might well offer those of us interested in critical theory with new ways to bring it into our composition classrooms. No doubt, for instance, that the challenges hypertext presents to ideas of authorship fit quite nicely alongside discussions of the AIDS Quilt as a multi-authored document (what happens when you put all these different stories together like this?) and of Sherrie Levine's challenging of artistic originality (what do these pictures of famous pictures say here?).

I hope to be careful, however, not to embrace such new technology either simply or uncritically, for, while it is here to stay, the uses to which such technology can and will be put remain at least in part to be contested. As such, in teaching in these rooms I hope to make them appear as interested sites rather than as facts of nature or the result merely of technological progress. Fortunately, the rooms offer themselves up to just such a critique. One needn't, for instance, look very far to see that such rooms serve corporate interests: where I teach, a plaque announces that "Microcomputer Classroom a Gift of the General Motors Foundation." Further, one of the frustrating things about teaching in the computer classrooms where I work is their prominence on the university tour, and this too (look, class, here is the university marketing itself with our classroom: why might it do so? how else does it market itself? what can we learn from this?) seems a viable topic for class
discussion. There is too a good class hour to be had handing out the following passage from Richard Ohmann's *Politics of Letters*, first in order to try to come to terms with the claims it makes and second in order to engage those claims critically:

I am suggesting that, seen from the side of production and work, the computer and its software are an intended and developing technology, carrying forward the deskilling and control of labor that goes back to F.W. Taylor and beyond, and that has been a main project of monopoly capital. As Taylor consciously sought to transfer all understanding of production to management and reduce the worker's role to that of a conduit for the transfer of commands into physical energy, engineers are shaping computers now so that those who work at them will be only keyboard operators....And predictably, there are now programs for programming, aimed at reducing the need for intelligent programmers....There are now [1985] more than 500,000 computers in American schools, many of them gifts or nearly so from the manufacturers and from other companies. The motives for such generosity are not hard to imagine. Apparently, business will take care that its needs are met..., and one cannot expect those needs to include many...liberatory classrooms. (223-25)

And Foucault's work on Panopticism also seems a worthwhile topic for consideration in class--indeed, the horseshoe shape of the classrooms where I teach, with one's work on the computer screen visible to those surrounding you and with your back turned toward the screen so that you can't simultaneously work and know if anyone is watching, all too readily invites just such an examination. Further, and more importantly, to draw attention to these rooms as interested sites is also to block the all-too-ready "hailing"--the feeling that the world
is "significantly 'centered' on me" (Landow 207)--that both hypertextual writing and network technology encourage: maybe the General Motors Foundation doesn't have my best interests in mind after all? And maybe, too, what's at stake here isn't my self-realization or self-actualization? Instead of merely accommodating its users, then, perhaps the users of hypertext will be in a better position to encounter some of the more genuinely challenging implications that accompany--to borrow from Landow's subtitle--the "convergence of contemporary critical theory and technology."
Works Cited: "'Isn't it pretty to think so?': Theatricality and The Sun Also Rises"


Works Cited: "Does the Shadow Know?: the 'Between' and Hemingway's 'The Battler'"


Works Cited: "Philosophizing Badly?: Hypertext and the Politics of Empowerment"


Vita

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