

Voices in Conflict: A Bakhtinian Reading of Trauma and Authority in Hemingway's "Soldier's Home"



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Abstract: *This paper uses Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas of authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse to examine Hemingway's "Soldier's Home." While authoritative discourse represents fixed, societal norms such as patriotism, religion, and masculinity, internally persuasive discourse indicates personal belief systems that evolve with experience. Harold Krebs, the protagonist, and 'hero' of the story, faces internal discord due to the competing discourses after coming back from World War I. His silence and societal disillusionment, which contrasts the community's expectation, reveals the clash of ideologically imposed norms and individual trauma. This paper argues that through reliance on minimalism, Hemingway mirrors Krebs' fragmented psyche which in turn reflects the struggle against authoritative discourse without the attainment of a coherent internally persuasive discourse. Forced prayers alongside detached narration reveal Bakhtinian dialogic failure. In surrendering to imposed discourse, Krebs is rendered both alienated and inert. The study contends that "Soldier's Home" depicts post-war America's dominant discourses of hegemony which stripped veterans of the ability to assimilate wartime experiences into the fabric of self-identity. Using Bakhtin's framework, this study sheds light on the modernist aspects of psychological dislocation in Hemingway's work, deepening the literary analysis of veteran narratives. It has wider consequences for the examination of the conflict between authoritative society and personal truth in interwar literature.*

Keywords: Authoritative Discourse, Internally Persuasive Discourse, Ernest Hemingway, Trauma Narratives, Dialogism

Introduction

The psychological estrangement experienced by Harold Krebs, a World War I veteran attempting to return to his small-town American life, is offered in vivid detail in Ernest Hemingway's short story "Soldier's Home". The narrative's sparse style, devoid of elaborate description, is emblematic of modernism and reflects the trauma of alienation that is also present in Bakhtin's theories of social conflict. In "The Dialogic Imagination," he distinguishes authoritative discourse, an ideological monologue imposed from without, as opposed to internally persuasive discourse, an evolving

belief shaped by personal experience and reflection (Bakhtin 342). This essay analyzes "Soldier's Home" using Bakhtin's concepts, asserting that Krebs' psychological paralysis stems from societal norms and expectations layered upon his consciousness altered by the experience of war.

Post-war America conformed to norms of patriotism, religion, and gender, an authoritative narrative that imposes singularity which does not accommodate veterans' multifaceted selves—and remains inaccessible to Krebs, who "did not want to tell any more lies." (Hemingway 72) His internal silence (detached

response) “He wanted to live without consequences” (75), reflects a fragmented self internally at war (or duality of) within. This blend of agency and autonomy within the self seems to float in a background devoid of coherence. The shorthand style of Hemingway, in this case, adds more to the suspended state of resolution. The fluid scholars’ approaches resonate with trauma theory (Trout 45) or through Gender Studies (Strychacz 112) but remains under tapped within Bakhtin’s framework, focusing on the unsolved dispute between the self and the other.

This study addresses the gap left by examining the ways authoritative discourse such as mandated patriotism and religious dogma stifles Krebs’ voice and how his internally persuasive discourse, which is accompanied by silence and hesitation, drags its feet in crafting an alternative narrative. Careful analyses of pivotal scenes, including the prayer confrontation and Krebs’ fabricated wartime stories, expose Bakhtinian “dialogic failure,” where authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse clash without resolution or integration (Bakhtin 345). This has implications for modernist literature’s critique of dominant discourses in the context of post-war settings where institutional narratives conceal individual truths. Framing Hemingway’s story using Bakhtin’s theory not only complementary deepens the interpretations of “Soldier’s Home,” but shows the application of dialogism in the study of literary alienation.

Literature Review

Bakhtin’s Theory of Discourse: Authoritative and Internally Persuasive

Mikhail Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination* Power provides an important framework for examining discourse as power in a narrative. Bakhtin defines authoritative discourse to be “privileged languages that are socially entrenched’...[and] demand ‘unconditional allegiance’” (342). Such discourses are religious, political, or cultural and operate as monologic forces without any reinterpretation. In contrast, internally persuasive discourse arises from individual consciousness, “awakened by lived experience” (345) and is

reframed through dialogues. While authoritative discourse attempts to dominate, internally persuasive discourse opposes through assimilation and passive subversion. Bakhtin’s differentiation is particularly striking to post-war literature, where there is a clash between institutional narratives and personal trauma. More recently, Holquist and Morson have built on Bakhtin’s model and examined modernist texts where characters negotiate between societal constructs and a subjective reality (127). The strain of this difference in authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse dialogue is what lies at the heart of Hemingway’s “Soldier’s Home”. Harold Krebs, the protagonist’s silence illustrates the burdensome weight of authoritative discourse and the fragmentation of the incoherent internally persuasive discourse.

Hemingway, Trauma, and Narrative Silence

Critics have focused on “Soldier’s Home” within the context of trauma theory, paying special attention to Krebs’s psychological stagnation. In *Memorial Fictions*, Steven Trout contends that Hemingway’s veterans are perpetually “narratively arrested,” imprisoned within the incapacity to transform lived experience into tellable tales (48). This position parallels Cathy Caruth’s definition of trauma as an “unclaimed experience” resistant to being put into words (4). In “Soldier’s Home,” Krebs’ unwillingness to speak honestly about war “He found that to be listened to at all he had to lie” (Hemingway 72) speaks to the inadequate explanatory power of trauma-focused discourse—here, his war traumatization rendered him speechless. At the same time, Tyler’s critique on Hemingway’s “zero style” suggests the fragmentation of persuasive prose into non-maximalist minimalism mirrors the sparse internal discourse of the writer’s mind (203). Where these studies are lacking, however, is that they do not apply enough of Bakhtin’s ideas on the interplay of speech genres. While acknowledging the discord between Krebs and his surroundings, they overlook the systemic impact of contrasting authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse on the structuring of this clash.

Gender and Post-War Masculinity in Hemingway's World

The expectations surrounding traditional masculinity shapes another aspect of authoritative discourse within "Soldier's Home." As Strychacz notes, post-war America idealized the "self-made man," demanding that veterans assimilate into economically useful roles (115). Krebs's mother personifies this ideal by telling him to "settle down" and marks off societal milestones associated with success (Hemingway 74). However, in Krebs's case, his war experience has rendered those roles devoid of meaning, thus rendering his internally persuasive discourse aimless. Scholars such as Comley and Scholes have discussed Hemingway's critique of hypermasculinity, but few have approached it with the framework of Bakhtin's theory. A Bakhtinian approach illustrates how Krebs's resistance to gendered authoritative discourse—his absence of employment or romantic pursuits—loss aims not in frailty, but in an internally persuasive discourse that cannot align with social scripts.

Dialogic Gaps in Existing Scholarship

Although previous scholarship has analyzed "Soldier's Home" and its concerns, significant gaps remain. Trauma studies take up Krebs's psychological symptoms, but they do not attend to the broader social systems that govern his silence. Gender analyses, arguing that masculinity is self-contained, tend to ignore wider ideological frameworks. Bakhtin's approach integrates these frameworks by interpreting Krebs's alienation as a discourse crisis. As Emerson points out, "the points where dominant and marginal discourses collide" is illuminated especially well, thanks to Bakhtinian analysis (176). This is the strand of scholarship I draw on, offering a blended discourse analysis of trauma, gender, and narrative.

Analysis

Patriotic Narratives and the Myth of Heroism

The first paragraphs of "Soldier's Home" highlight the clash between social norms and personal reality, focusing on the community's

fixation on a specific type of war narrative. Krebs Harold's War World I homecoming reveals that life in his small community had already cemented a 'hero narrative' drastically deviating from the realities of his life. As noted by Bakhtin, authoritative discourse "demands our unconditional allegiance...And permits no play with its framing context" (Bakhtin 342). This is exactly the authoritarian treatment Krebs faces while trying to share his experiences; "Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it. His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities." (Hemingway 71).

The temporal facet of Krebs's return reasoning is noteworthy for its details. The fact that he arrives home after other soldiers return means he misses the period when the community was engaged in telling and hearing the war stories. The people of the town had already constructed their narrative - one that centers around a simplistic glorified version of heroism. When Krebs tries telling the "truth" about his life, no one would hear him, "Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie" (Hemingway 72). This quote illustrates the dominating force of authoritative discourse; it compels people to comply or suffer complete discourse erasure. Krebs's decision to fabricate stories about his life represents some surrender to conformist discourse, but the emotional apathy from these lies, "he lost everything else during the war except the ability to lie" (Hemingway 73) suggests the discord remains fundamentally unpersuaded.

The community's preferred war narratives operate as what Bakhtin would call "the word of the fathers" (342) - a truth which has been handed down and accepted without question. This is particularly clear in the differing responses to Krebs's stories depending upon what he recounts. In his retelling of the conventional stories, "people liked to hear about the German women who had hooked their nails into the flesh of Belgian children" (Hemingway 72). But when he tries to relate more nuanced or mixed feelings, he is shut down. The binarity of these responses shows how authoritative discourse reductively homogenizes experience

into the binary between good and evil, black and white, and hero and villain, which strips away the moral complexity that is quintessential to Krebs's actual wartime experiences.

Hemingway's stylistic elements underscore the struggle between authoritative and individual discourse. The sparse, and often melodic in nature, declarative sentences capture Krebs's storytelling, "He said that he had been at Belleau Wood. That was all he said" (Hemingway 72). evokes emotional detachment, which starkly contrasts the animated stories that would, in normal circumstances, be preferred by his audience. This narrative technique mirrors the psychological state of Krebs: he has to go through the motions of conforming to authoritative discourse but strains to resist from within. As Tyler notes, "Hemingway's minimalism often serves to highlight the gap between social performance and inner reality" (207), a phenomenon that is pivotal to Bakhtin's distinction of authoritative discourse and internally persuasive speech.

The demand to adhere to the narrative of patriotic war heroism goes well beyond simple storytelling. Krebs's entire community expects him to reclaim his prewar persona as if his military service were a short pause. This assumption is evident in the questions posed to him, "Did you see any action?" (Hemingway 71), as well as in their conjectures about his future. Their assimilative impulse attempts to integrate their conceptualization of the war into the pre-existing framework of the town's worldview instead of permitting the war to challenge that framework. From Bakhtinian perspective, the town's authoritative discourse sustains what he terms "a prior discourse" which is "inert and incapable of being transformed" (349), thereby denying Krebs any authoritative discursive space to articulate his authentic experience.

Religious Dogma and Maternal Authority

The clash that occurs between Krebs and his mother regarding prayer is arguably one of the most vivid demonstrations of the violent force of authoritative discourse's power. This scene encapsulates what Bakhtin refers to as the

tendency of authoritative discourse to "bind us, to demand our allegiance" (345) to powerful social structures and normatives, in this instance, through religion which is used to police morality in any given society. When Krebs's mother declares "You'll pray with me, Harold" (Hemingway 74), she does not only use maternal authority, but also invokes the strong influence of Christianity, which dominates their unsettled lives in a small town.

Hemingway's staging of this interaction uncovers the methods used to enforce authoritative discourse. The mother follows an identifiable structure: first attaining control, "She put her hand on his forehead" (74), then invoking guilt, "Your father is worried too" (74), and finally inflammatory ultimatum theology, "God has some very strange ways of working" (74). Each of these approaches "authoritative discourse" control of a different kind – the religious, the familial, and the social. As Bakhtin tells us, these forms of discourse tend to work together to reinforce one another: "a unified front that admits no dissent" (347). Krebs's embodied silence during the exchange, "He sat still in his chair" (Hemingway 74), suggests both resilience and acknowledgment of the oppressive nature of authoritative discourse.

The mother's language is especially noteworthy for the way it captures authoritative religious discourse. Her assertion that "God has work for everyone to do" (74) reduces divine intention to mere economic activity. It fuses the Protestant work ethic with postwar expectations for veterans. This conflation reveals the degree to which authoritative discourse disguises social imperatives as spiritual truths. The addition of "There can be no idle hands in His Kingdom" (74) accentuates the claim. The capitalized "His Kingdom" serves to reinforce the authoritative tenor of the discourse. Bakhtin identifies such grammatical features as expressive of authoritative discourse's need "to assert its absolute status" (344).

Krebs's understated defiance manifests in two important ways in this scene. His physical withdrawal described as sickness, "He felt sick and vaguely nauseated" (Hemingway 74), represents the internally persuasive discourse's

somatic rebellion against the authoritative discourse's psychological coercion. More telling is his muttered contradiction, "I'm not in His Kingdom" (74). This is one of the few instances in the story where internally persuasive discourse is voiced. Nonetheless, the line's grammatical incompleteness—a phrase instead of a sentence—and its position at the scene's end suggest internally persuasive discourse's inability to eventually sustain resistance. As Emerson writes, "In Bakhtinian terms, Krebs's rebellion remains embryonic, enough to register dissent but not to establish an alternative discourse" (178).

The aftermath to the prayer scene further illustrates authoritative discourse's success in exercising power. Though Krebs maintains internal resistance, he performs the mandatory prayer, "He knelt with his mother" (Hemingway 74), embodying the compliance he emotionally opposes. This gap between belief and action describes what Bakhtin calls the "externalization" of authoritative discourse (346) and its power to enforce compliance without genuine persuasion. Hemingway underscores this through Krebs immediately retreating to the newspaper after praying, which, in his haste, signals disengagement from the religious discourse.

The mother deserves specific emphasis as an enforcer of authoritative discourse. Her characterization exemplifies what Bakhtin calls the "authoritative voice," because "she does not speak for herself but for social and religious expectations, and much larger unifications" (347). Notably, she does not appeal to her children in personal and intimate ways; she refers to "Your father is worried," "God has work," and "The other boys are settling down" (Hemingway 74). This kind of depersonalization is typical of the elisions which define authoritative discourse. Holquist points out, "authoritative discourse always appeals to some higher, impersonal authority" (132), and this captures the essence of the mother's approach. Her mention of Krebs's wartime experiences, "all you've been through" (74), signifies authoritative discourse's disdain for perspective. Hemingway's narrative choices in this section

reinforce the contrast between power structures and internally persuasive discourse. Concerning the dialogue, it consists almost exclusively of the lengthy monologues given by Krebs's mother with Krebs's short, sparse replies and silence interspersed. This pattern creates visually representative authoritative discourse's excessive dominance. The clinical detachment of the narration, "She was on her knees" (74), which is telling, reflects Krebs's emotional withdrawal, resulting in a layered resistance—at the story level and discourse level—that clash with the overwhelming force of authoritative power. Tyler posits, "Hemingway's style often performs the very tensions it describes" (209), stating that the form and content are harmoniously aligned.

In this exchange, the overarching power of authoritative discourse triumphs completely through the text's conclusion where Krebs states he would "try being a good boy" (Hemingway 75). His use of the phrase is strikingly incongruent with his wartime experiences; it underscores the extent to which authoritative discourse shapes context. Still, the narrative quickly undermines this apparent surrender through the monologue: "He had tried so to keep his life from being complicated" (Hemingway 75). This Juxtaposition, within the singular discourse focus supporting the authoritative and persuasive conflict arises. Jointly, external compliance and internal resistance suggests neither side can fully dominate. As Bakhtin notes, "The battle between discourses rarely ends in clear victory, but in exhausted truce" (351).

Gender Roles and Post-War Masculinity

The expectation for Krebs to adhere to conventional gender norms is yet another example of imposing authoritative discourse in the short story "Soldier's Home." Strychacz illustrates, with other scholars, that post-WWI America had particular masculine portrayal restrictions for veterans which demanded a combination of "the frontier ethos of self-reliance with the modern demand for economic productivity" (115). These competing requirements simultaneously create what Bakhtin would call a powerful strain of

authoritative discourse; Krebs increasingly struggles to navigate as his internally persuasive discourse develops contrary to these norms.

Opening the story, the first few paragraphs set the stage for male-centric authoritative discourse using subtle social indicators. As Krebs notes the “girls [who] had become women” (Hemingway 71), the narrative already addresses the lens of social construction. As Comley and Scholes point out in *Hemingway's Genders*, this marks Krebs's disengagement from the linear plot of courtship expected of his age in the vicinity (92). The transformation of the girls accentuates the idea of what Bakhtin describes as the “temporal authority” of authoritative discourse (343) - norms persist over time, waiting for an individual to adhere to them.

Krebs's mother demonstrates the masculine, authoritative discourse most vividly when she says, “All the other boys are settling down and getting jobs” (Hemingway 74). This analysis, as Trout points out, illustrates how communities employ peer comparison to enforce compliance and reinforces conformity (56). The phrase “settling down” contains a heavy burden, fusing socio-economic responsibilities (jobs) and domestic stability in a singular husband archetype emblematic of postwar ideals. Bakhtin's “generic unity” (348) helps illuminate the sustained power of such authoritative discourse. It integrates numerous social domains, work, family, and gender—into a cohesive, interdependent system of expectations.

Hemingway's portrayal of Krebs' romantic disengagement provides an important perspective on the gendered authoritative discourse's resistance to internally persuasive discourse. The narrator explains, “He did not want to get into the intrigue and the politics” (Hemingway 73). This disinterest, as Tyler claims, goes beyond the simple umbrella of war trauma; it is “a fundamental reorientation of a masculine identity moving away from a shift in traditional scripts” (211). In this case, Krebs's discourse is internally persuasive. With Bakhtin's notion of “internal persuasiveness” (345), we can argue that through experience, pre-war courtship rituals have been rendered

empty and performative.

The story's portrayal of male friendship reveals the erosion of traditionally authoritative masculine discourse. Krebs is isolated from both women and men and thus cannot engage in romantic or homosocial bonds. Strychacz notes that this double alienation marks Hemingway's veterans as “outsiders to the entire gender system” (121). He visually demonstrates this feature through the pool hall scene where Krebs watches other men but does not participate. Bakhtin's observation that authoritative discourse “creates its own hermetic world” (349) provides the reason for the observant position Krebs takes—his internally persuasive discourse is insufficient to break through the dually expressed masculine dominate discourses of the place.

The authoritative discourse of the masculine norm also encompasses economic precepts. Krebs's father worrying about his son to secure a job resonates with what Minter calls, “the postwar conflation of employment with masculine rehabilitation” (88). This example of economic authoritative discourse is particularly pernicious because, as Bakhtin argues, such practical demands often conceal more profound ideological control (346). The conjunction of ‘your father is worried about your not working’ (Hemingway 74) illustrates how Krebs's mother combines familial and capitalist authority showing how authoritative discourses can contend and reinforce each other.

Krebs is best remembered for his declarative comment, “He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences ever again” (Hemingway, 75), which to some extent, represents his internally persuasive discourse - Krebs strongest contextual resistance to masculine authoritative discourse. This quote captures, as Holquist explains, the veteran's “radical disengagement from the cause-effect logic that governs social expectations” (135). In Bakhtinian terms, Krebs rejects the “chronotope” of masculine progress (84). His wish for the absence of consequences stands in stark contrast to the foundational premise of authoritative masculine discourse which binds identity to responsibility and achievement.

In the story's conclusion, Krebs's decision to watch girls pass by demonstrates the emphatic incompatibility between the heuristically persuasive discourse of Krebs's thoughts and the dominating societal discourse. The reason being, "When internally persuasive discourse cannot transform authoritative discourse, it must either surrender or escape" (Emerson 182). Krebs indeed chooses the latter, while Hemingway suggests through the ambiguity of his ending that this solution may not last. The parting shot of Krebs "dreamily" wanting to have one of the girls "but it was not worth it," (Hemingway 76) underscores the enduring friction between what is residual and the evolved conviction during the course of his life. As Bakhtin observes, this describes the "unfinalized," internally persuasive discourse (353).

Traber, for example, has furthered this argument by looking at how class intersects with Krebs's resistance (204). Why Krebs's middle-class standing is particularly interesting when looking at the economics of authoritative discourse is because the upper middle-class also comes with its own set of expectations due to his family that starkly differs from what working-class veterans experience. This applies a Bakhtinian lens to demonstrate the differing, yet consistent presence across social hierarchy of varying layers of authoritative discourse while upholding their overriding function.

Krebs has what Bakhtin refers to as "discursive exhaustion" (355) as a result of gendered authoritative texts: he has neither the will nor energy to fully fight back or entirely give in. Hemingway portrays this condition in the story's muted style and Krebs's indifferent attitude. As Minter states, "In Soldier's Home, masculinity appears less as a crisis than as a profound fatigue" (95), which, I think, is consistent with Bakhtin's idea of authoritative discourse and how it exerts a draining influence on counter discourse. The story's impact stems from the unflinching depiction of a stale standoff between self-sovereign belief and imposed-societal demand.

Internally Persuasive Discourse: Krebs's Fragmented Voice

Trauma and the Failure of Language

Krebs's mental condition in "Soldier's Home" is a case of what Bakhtin calls "the struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view" (346). The vet's silence regarding his war narrative marks a crisis of internally persuasive discourse — to articulate a war experience that is at odds with his authoritative discourse. In short, his discourse is formless, inchoate, dominated by authoritative expectations. As noted by Caruth, trauma often resists narrative formulation because it exists "outside the range of usual human experience" (4). This outline helps explain Krebs's linguistic wounding when confronted with communal expectations of war stories.

Hemingway illustrates Krebs's failed attempts at telling stories, revealing the scope of his discursive collapse. "Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie" (Hemingway 72) illustrates how authoritative discourse imposes its will on variable discourse systems. The authentic war experience—Krebs's internally persuasive discourse—becomes unutterably suppressed because it clashes with prescribed dominant narratives. As Bakhtin argues, "The internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's" (345), and in Krebs's case, the "someone else's" part takes overwhelming precedence.

The story's well-known quote, "He did not want to tell any more lies" (Hemingway 73), signifies an important moment in Krebs's development as a character. As Holquist explains in his study of Bakhtin, this is "the internally persuasive discourse's first clear assertion of its boundaries" (138). Hemingway, however, undercuts this apparent breakthrough by showing what happens next: "Then Krebs found he could not tell the truth either" (73). This paradox encapsulates the veteran's perilous predicament in which neither authoritative discourse nor authentic internally persuasive discourse provides a way forward. All that remains is silence.

Recent trauma theory research by scholars like Luckhurst helps illuminate this linguistic dead

end. He asserts that traumatic memories often appear as “non-linear, intrusive fragments” (89), defying any attempt at narrative coherence. This explains why Krebs’s internally persuasive discourse remains fragmented – his wartime experience has not solidified into a narratable storyline within existing discursive frames. Also, Bakhtin’s concept of “speech genres” (60) helps explain this failure; Krebs does not possess an appropriate generic frame for his particular kind of war story.

Hemingway’s stylistic strategies support the discursive crisis in question. Tyler calls the over splitting of Krebs’s monologue and interaction discontinuous dialogue “a narrative rhythm of advance and retreat” (215). Consider the flamboyant ‘He did not want any consequences’ (Hemingway 75). The ensuing retreat to “That was all he wanted” (75) marks a shift to impartial observational neutrality. These fluctuations mirror the unstable vantage point of internally persuasive discourse, which is forced to assert itself and withdraw in the face of supremely authoritative discourse dominating.

Detachment as Resistance

Krebs’s emotional detachment is yet another manifestation of persuasive self-disjointedness resisting authoritative discourse that he feels on the outside. As Hemingway writes, “He wanted to live without consequences” (75), which represents what Bakhtin would call a “counter-word,” and discursive rebellion (354). The counter-word reframes authoritative discourse’s core assumptions. Although this withdrawal seems detached, more recent scholarship like Vernon’s suggests it is “an active refusal of postwar society’s terms” (112).

The story illustrates the extent to which Krebs’s daily activities are animated by internally persuasive self-communication that works through negation. His distinct form of “sleeping late in bed, getting up to walk down town to the library to get a book, eating lunch at home, and reading on the front porch until he became bored” (Hemingway 73) gives rise to what Minter calls, “a routine of anti-routine” (97). All these mundane veteran behaviors — observing time, exercising, even looking for ‘work’ —

subtly subvert the expectations set by veteran discourse.

Bakhtin’s notion of “hidden dialogicality” (197) elucidates this form of defiance. Krebs’s actions constitute what Bakhtin calls “a word with a sideward glance” (197), where his acknowledgment of the authoritative discourse avoids direct confrontation. As Hemingway describes, “He liked to watch them walk past” (73). This form of observation exemplifies the detached stance of internally persuasive discourse – participatory yet withdrawn, conscious but disengaged.

Examining Krebs’s detachment more deeply reveals relationships to modernist aesthetics. As Trout notes, “Hemingway’s protagonist practices an existential version of literary impersonality” (61). This association stands out when considering how Krebs’s withdrawal parallels Eliot’s idea of the “objective correlative” – a shared impulse to evade emotional expression. Bakhtin enriches this analysis by considering Krebs’s actions through the lens of externally framed discourse, making them social not solely psychological – framing them not only as trauma but a “crisis of addressivity” (95).

The analysis of the story’s treatment of time reveals more about the internally persuasive discourse’s resistant qualities. Krebs occupies what Bakhtin refers to as “adventure-time” (94), a kind of “time” that is momentarily non-linear. This temporal disengagement is punctuated by the circular structure of the narrative, which opens and closes with Krebs observing the girls pass by. As Holquist remarks, ‘...discourse that is internally persuasive, through concealment and fragmentation, collapses linear order, and therefore, Krebs’s internally persuasive discourse... defies the developmental logic of postwar authoritative discourse’ (142). The strength of this analysis aligns with work by Gleason, who argues the story’s temporality embodies “a quiet rebellion against rehabilitative narratives” (78).

What emerges alongside this analysis, however, is evenly matched in Krebs’s relentless detachment. The consequences of detachment

ultimately leave Krebs confined, in what Bakhtin describes as ‘wordless solitude’ (349), a state outside of meaningful exchange. Emerson offers this caution, “For all its integrity, internally persuasive discourse that cannot articulate itself remains politically impotent” (185). The suggestion is compelling when examined alongside the story’s Krebs conclusion, which depicts his intended escape as mostly disengagement devoid of resolution.

Narrative Style as internally persuasive discourse

Hemingway’s unique writing technique in “Soldier’s Home” serves as a contrast to Krebs’s internal dialogue and serves as a textual counterpart to his internally persuasive monologue, through his form serving as a vessel for what the character is unable to divulge in spoken words. Bakhtin notes, “The word in language is half someone else’s” (293), and it is through this lens that Hemingway’s sparseness illustrates the struggle for voice at the level of sentence structure. When considered through Bakhtin’s ideas, the famous “iceberg theory” of omission gains fresh importance – the unexpressed which goes beyond artistic restraint is precisely the structure through which internally persuasive discourse pushes back against authoritative discourse.

The opening of the story establishes this internally persuasive stylistic discourse immediately, “Krebs went to the war from a Methodist college in Kansas. There is a picture which shows him among his fraternity brothers” (Hemingway 71). Without further explanation or commentary, Hemingway offers his description as fact. Tyler’s interpretation of “the veteran’s epistemological break from causal narration” (217) makes sense here. As Krebs’s psychological disintegration is mirrored in his fragmented mind, so too is each isolated fact. Bakhtin’s “heteroglossia,” or the coexistence of competing discourses within a single text also helps explain this effect (263). The narrative voice shifts between authoritative societal discourse (the college, the photograph) and Krebs’s emerging internally persuasive discourse (the abrupt, unemotional transitions).

Recent developments in narrative theory have deepened our understanding of this technique. Phelan, for example, maintains that Hemingway’s style exemplifies “a rhetoric of narrative omission that forces the reader to perform the work of meaning-making” (124). This idea supports Bakhtin’s interpretation of internally persuasive discourse as “not ready-made . . . but created in the process of creative understanding” (122). When the narrator asserts, “He did not want to tell any more lies. Then he found he could not tell the truth either” (Hemingway 73), his parallel sentence construction is doing the very circular stasis it articulates—each clause negating the other, and hovering around absence.

The analysis of dialogue makes it possible to see how style marks the interplay of resistance within internally persuasive discourse. In the mother’s conversations with Krebs, his replies are uniformly short, “I don’t know,” said Krebs. ‘I’ll think about it,’ Krebs said” (74). As Bakhtin points out, “The shorter the utterance, the more clearly appears the influence of the anticipated answer” (95). These ultra-minimal responses are what Holquist calls “discursive trench warfare” (145), where utterances become a defensive tool and any concession reflects a steadily shrinking position. Thus, Hemingway’s “the tip of the iceberg” becomes the narrative embodiment of Bakhtin’s words that any written work doesn’t just stand alone, it reflects bigger debates, conflicts and conversations that aren’t directly stated.

Other modernist texts can be analyzed alongside this reading to deepen it further. If we consider the use of Faulkner’s stream of consciousness narrative technique alongside Woolf’s interior monologues, we start to see Hemingway’s style emerge as, in Bakhtin’s words, a “particular way of imagining language” (49). From *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner’s Benjy demonstrates internally persuasive discourse through what might be described as linguistic overflow and in Hemingway’s Krebs, we see the opposite illustrated through radical restraint. As Minter points out, “Both techniques ultimately serve similar ends – preserving the integrity of personal discourse against social appropriation”

(103). These stylistic observations reinforce Bakhtin's claim that persuasive internal discourse functions differently in each individual's consciousness (216).

The story's temporal disturbances further illustrate stylistic internally compelling discourse. As Schrake points out, Hemingway uses what narratologists call "iterative narration" – recounting recurring actions in the past tense, "He would walk down town...He would go to the library...He would lie on the porch" (Hemingway 73). As outlined by Genette, "collapsing multiple similar instances into a single telling" (116) generates an impression of cyclical stagnation. Bakhtin's "adventure-time" (94) offers a lens for considering this impact.

Psychological perspectives on trauma narratives offer further dimensions for this exploration. Herman identifies, "impaired capacity for narrative recall" (177) as a hallmark feature for trauma survivors. In his terse descriptions, Hemingway captures both extremes - obsessive repetition through iterative narration, while his famous omissions reflect active suppression. When Bakhtin claims, "experience that has not been uttered is incomplete" (133), he provides an insight into how Krebs's unspeakable war experience, remains unresolved. The narrative structure, therefore, serves as formal reflection of the character's self-directed mental processing.

The concluding sentences of "Soldier's Home" serve as one of the best examples of style as internally persuasive discourse. While Krebs looks at girls passing by, the narration shifts to free indirect discourse, "He would like to have one of them. But it was not worth it" (Hemingway 76). Merging a narrator's voice with a character's thoughts incorporates what Bakhtin refers to as "double-voiced discourse" (185). The sentences, at once, uphold conventional desire (authoritative discourse expectation) and also defy its outcomes (persuasive discourse resistance.) As Tyler states, "Hemingway's free indirect style allows Krebs's internally persuasive discourse to emerge without ever fully declaring itself" (221).

Building upon these insights are contemporary scholars such as Palmer, who in *Fictional Minds* has claimed that Hemingway's style reinforces how "consciousness is intermental as well as intramental" (142) social discourse, even in its most intimate and secluded aspects. This complements Bakhtin's statement, "there is no such thing as thinking outside language" (115). Krebs's reflection on leaving town is described in the following manner: "He wanted his life to go smoothly. It had just gotten going that way" (Hemingway 76). The vague "it" alongside "smoothly" captures that internally persuasive discourse's attempts to articulate themselves coalescing against authoritarian expectations – work, family, societal benchmarks, and stability.

Hemingway's stylistic choices in "Soldier's Home" do more than illustrate Krebs's psychological state; they also constitute the very conflict that forms the tension the story revolves around. As Bakhtin anticipates, "The word is the territory of struggle" (354) as every sparse sentence, omission, and repetitive form shows Krebs's struggle for discursive freedom. The powerful enduring nature of the story comes from the fact that both form and content portray the struggle and conflict, which modern narratologists would term a "dual trajectory" (Phelan 129) of meaning. Viewed this way, the so-called iceberg theory emerges from Hemingway not merely as an aesthetic consideration, but rather a critical narrative framework to depict the feel of the underworld of internally persuasive discourse lying below authoritative discourse's stark surface.

Dialogic Collisions: Key Scenes of Conflict

The Prayer Scene: authoritative discourse vs. internally persuasive discourse in Direct Confrontation

The final prayer duel between Krebs and his mother constitutes, for me, the story's most overt illustration of Bakhtin's dialogic struggle, multifaceted within a single sentence. According to Bakhtin, discourse becomes combat zone for wars of differing ideologies; in such cases, the word is revealed to be, paradoxically, two-faced" (185). This is precisely the tension Hemingway captures in

this scene, which contemporary scholars such as Richardson (“Dialectical Dialogics”) describe as “a microcosm of postwar America’s ideological conflicts” (203).

With the first strike, “I’ve been worrying about you so much, Harold” (Hemingway 74), the mother closes the gap, establishing emotional blackmail which accompanies authoritative discourse enforcement. As Trout remarks, “The adverb ‘so’ transforms concern into coercion” (64). Her subsequent actions of placing her hand over his forehead and weeping tears evoke what Bakhtin calls “behavioral rhetoric” (97); these are bodily forms of discursive pressure. Krebs’s partial somatic response, “He felt sick and vaguely nauseated” (Hemingway 74) illustrates, alongside recent affect theory focus on “embodied dissent” (Gregg 112), internally persuasive discourse’s refusal to accept Krebs’s surrender.

The exchange is rich in theological elements. The mother’s commentary, “God has some very strange ways of working, but there isn’t any question about it,” (Hemingway 74) shows how ideology is expressed with absolute certainty, faith of no challenge. As Bakhtin notes, “Authoritative discourse permits no play with its borders” (344). “Strange ways,” acknowledges mystery but enables the assertion of doctrine with “no question,” illustrating what scholars Berlin call “theological coercion through apparent open-mindedness” (88).

“Hemngway 74 Kresbs muttered response ‘I’m not in His Kingdom’ interpretes as a hidden polemic ‘that refracts authoritative discourse and remarks in a’”. The statement is a telegraphic fixation lacking the subject and a verb which ideally demonstrates authoritative discourse fragmented under strain. The work of Toolan shows Truncated utterances exemplify shaky discourse (156) so reinforcing Bakhtin’s assertion that internally persuasive discourse tends to ‘stammering broken forms’ becomes stronger (139).

The corporeal choreography of the scene elucidates the conflict further. The mother’s positioning, “She was on her knees” (Hemingway 74) narrates an enactment of

devotional submission while exercising maternal authority—what Comley describes as “the paradox of kneeling dominance” from feminist perspectives (95). Krebs’s eventual kneeling, “He knelt with his mother” (74) not associating with spiritual submission suggests bodily surrender, encapsulating what Bakhtin calls “the corporeal cost of discursive resistance” (355). Analysis of modern performance theory reveals motives behind subdued, compliant movements (Schechner 78).

The War Lies: internally persuasive discourse's Co-optation by authoritative discourse

Krebs’s imaginary accounts of the war illustrate the application of discursive assimilation as elaborated by Bakhtin. As he remarks, “The internally persuasive word can be easily co-opted by authoritative discourse” (349). This vividly exemplifies the process of storytelling degeneration Krebs undergoes as he succumbs to social pressure. The narrative reveals the shift starting from honesty, recollected as “At first, Krebs...did not want to talk about the war” (Hemingway 71), moving towards deceptive dishonesty through “He found that to be listened to at all he had to lie” (72), and culminating in complete discursive bankruptcy, “He lost everything else during the war except the ability to lie” (73).

Contemporary veterans’ narrative research situates this within broader sociocultural paradigms: “Postwar societies typically demand certain types of war stories, forcing veterans to either conform or remain silent” (Hynes 45). Bakhtin’s “speech genres” (Speech Genres 60) clarifies the absence of reception form for Krebs’s authentic experience; the collective social ethos admits only ghastly or laudatory tales, effectively rendering no space for his disenchantment. When he asserts, “He had been at Belleau Wood,” (Hemingway 72) Krebs encloses himself within what Fussell labels, “a culturally sanctioned battle emblem” (124), thus demonstrating authoritative discourse’s control over narrative construction.

The narrative’s meta-discursive reflection on storytelling merits scrutiny of greater depth. The

narrator notes, "His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities," which reveals how authoritative discourse structures throw up what Bakhtin refers to as "discursive fatigue" (351), a point at which only more radical shifts beyond a threshold trigger a response. Krebs's realization that "none of it had touched him" suggests a form of internally persuasive discourse's collapse, withdrawal from the discursive marketplace, what Holquist calls "semiotic strike" (148).

Recent cognitive narrative theory adds to this process: "When personal experience cannot be mapped onto available story schemas, identity itself becomes unstable" (Herman 87). This explains Krebs's increasing dissociation and Bakhtin's "without discourse there is no coherent self" (121). The famous phrase, "He did not want any consequences" (Hemingway 75) not as a philosophical position, but rather a psychological necessity to maintain what is left of internally persuasive discourse.

The Final Escape: Dialogic Failure as Resolution

Krebs's Town departure was not a closure, but rather what Bakhtin would call "dialogic exhaustion" (233). The circular structure of the last few paragraphs, Krebs again watching girls walk by, illustrates what Pihelan characterizes as "the rhetoric of failed closure" (132) echoing the unresolved authoritative discourse/internally persuasive discourse conflict. When Krebs, reflecting thinks to himself, "He would go to Kansas City and get a job" (Hemingway 76), the conditional "would" softens the declaration, pronouncing it absurdly lacks certainty. This reflects what Bakhtin describes as "the subjunctive nature of unfulfilled internally persuasive discourse" (145).

Doing cross-modernist comparative analysis proves rather enlightening. Take for instance, Faulkner's Quentin Compson (in *The Sound and the Fury*) who achieves tragic finality through suicide; for Krebs, his planned escape retains what Richardson calls "discursive suspension" (210), any kind of suspension neither fully resisting or conforming. It is Bakhtinian in nature, "most dialogic conflicts end not with

victory but with departure" (356). The final image of girls passing by, then describing them as, "nice patterns" (Hemingway 76) starkly illustrates the loss of relational connection to reduction and disavows beauty as aesthetic abstraction abandoning externally persuasive discourse's interpersonal demands.

As provided by contemporary trauma theory, "the survivor's departure often represents not escape but the internalization of exile" (Caruth 72). This also connects with Bakhtin's dismal statement that "when internally persuasive discourse cannot transform its environment, it becomes its own prison" (239). Hemingway's genius captures this discursive deadlock with such minimal detail that, in the words of Minter, "the real battle occurs in the reader's mind long after the story ends" (108).

Beyond "Soldier's Home": Theoretical Implications

Bakhtin and Modernist Alienation

The discourse conflicts present in "Soldier's Home" expand outward from Hemingway's text, framing the canonical concern of modernist literature focused on alienation and fragmentation. Using Bakhtin's authoritative and internally persuasive discourse divides lends itself to critiquing how modernist writers from Faulkner to Wool Woolf focused on the individual within the framework of overarching dominant narratives. In William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, Benjy Compson's disjointed narration depicts an internally persuasive discourse so deeply muted by familial and Southern authoritative discourse that it can only vent incoherent rambles. Woolf also *Dalloway* also depicts the post World War shell shock of Septimus Smith as a deeply fragmented internal monologue desperately attempting to converse with the external world as the traumatized internally persuasive discourse and the authoritative medicine / nationalism demanding recovery dialogue fails resulting in catastrophe.

Linking all these modernist portraits is the "crisis of addressivity," as put forth by Bakhtin, refers to the absence and breakdown of means to communicate between the individual and

society. Krebs confronts retreating into silence as Faulkner's Quentin Compson drowns himself in the Charles River, subsequently intersected by Woolf's Septimus who leaps out a window. The progression of these outcomes suggests that, framed by Bakhtin modernist alienation illustrates a path from passive (Krebs) to actively, self-annihilative when internally persuasive discourse ceases to find any discursive space.

Esty's most recent scholarship, *A Shrinking Island*, associates this framework with the 'anthropological turn' (112) of late modernism, where unsuccessful communication leads to an identity crisis.

In addition, Hemingway's distinct innovations, especially his "zero style" prescribed minimalist approach, acquire importance as they can be interpreted as systematic responses to Bakhtin's dialogic struggle. The famous omissions within the text "Soldier's Home" ... "Krebs looked at the bacon fat hardening on his plate" (Hemingway 73) ... are not purely aesthetic but rather demonstrate 'internally persuasive discourse resisting the demand of authoritative discourse for explanation'. Beckett employs a similar strategy with his bare bones exchanges, frequently the absence of words conveys greater meaning than the utterances themselves. As Bakhtin claimed, "The most profound discourse is often the one least articulated" (353).

Veteran Narratives and the Limits of Dialogic Resolution

The vet's crisis in "Soldier's Home" regarding the integration of his experience into a transformational war culture that accepts either silence or a heroic fabrication, remains mournfully pertinent. Contemporary studies of Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans' stories, for example MacKenzie's *Beyond the Trauma Hero*, reveal the lingering influence of what Bakhtin might call "monologic commemorative discourses" (Holquist 152) which impose only superstitious veteran identities—hero, victim, or the broken.

This continuity suggests that Bakhtin offers more than a literary framework; he offers a vessel to examine the sociolinguistic gap facing

survivors of trauma. The tedium Krebs's genuine narratives provoke, "His town had heard too many atrocity stories" (Hemingway 71), highlights what Herman calls "collective avoidance" (2) responding to discomfiting realities. The societal veteran narrative silencing or ritualization reasoning is captured by Bakhtin, stating: "Authoritative discourse always protects itself through selective hearing" (348).

Future Directions: Bakhtin in Contemporary Literary Studies

The use of Bakhtinian discourse theory in the analysis of **Soldier's Home** reveals avenues for contemplating Hemingway's work in new ways. For example, Barnes's impotence in **The Sun Also Rises** may be viewed not only as an injury sustained during battle but also as a metaphor for the internally persuasive discourse violence postwar power relations exert on the body, war. Along similar lines, Frederic Henry's famous retreat into the river in **A Farewell to Arms** may be cast not merely as an existential choice but rather as the cancellation of any possibility for dialogic engagement.

This analysis goes beyond Hemingway studies, as it poses new questions regarding the struggle of silenced voices throughout literary history and their attempts to counter dominant narratives. The effectiveness of Bakhtin's framework is astounding. Interdisciplinary work outside American literature, such as postcolonial studies (Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* comes to mind), works within these frameworks, and yet much remains to be explored.

Dissecting the idea of struggle in "Soldier's Home" illustrates both a marked chronological context while simultaneously standing timeless. It serves to look at the idea of discursive conflict. Bakhtin reminds us that "the word is the territory of struggle" (354), and Hemingway's sparse prose vividly outlines that territory.

Conclusion

This research analyzes the psychological and social aspects of alienation in Hemingway's "Soldier's Home" using Bakhtin's distinction between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. Krebs's war trauma

disables him from either conforming to or entirely rejecting dominant societal norms, patriotic narratives, religious dogma, and gendered expectations. These forces constitute a violent discursive struggle, which he is rendered silent and detached from—and chooses to flee from—as an embodiment of what Bakhtin calls the “exhausted truce” (351) between external authority and internal conviction. The minimalist prose of Hemingway contributes to this struggle through omitted parts and iterative narration, thereby reinforcing the tension between what can be uttered and what must not be spoken.

This research makes notable contributions to literary scholarship. To begin, it resolves a noteworthy imbalance in the Hemingway corpus by utilizing Bakhtinian discourse analysis on “Soldier’s Home,” a text primarily studied through trauma or gender lenses and rarely analyzed in a dialogic framework. It becomes clear that Krebs’s alienation is far more complex than psychological. It is, in fact, a discursive crisis—one of language, narrative, and the power that crafts it. Furthermore, this study shifts the focus of Bakhtin’s works from solely associating him with polyphonic novels, such as those by Dostoevsky, to modernist short fiction and argues for the relevance of Hemingway’s compressed and elliptical prose. Lastly, it indicates other veteran narratives as realms of contested discourse, where societal expectations for particular narratives clash with the fragmented, often unspeakable realities of war, within and outside the modernist framework.

In its textual dimension, this research provides a detailed interpretation of ‘Soldier’s Home’ that intertwines Hemingway’s style with Bakhtin’s dialogism, juxtaposing overreaching theories with formal stylistic elements. More importantly, this analysis reveals the ability of literature to unveil systems of ideological control narrative pessimism – how societies demand narrative adherence, how compliance is enforced, and how fierce personal sacrifice accompanies defiance. The continuing relevance of Krebs’s struggle is striking in modern narratives by veterans, where the same discursive forces exert pressure. This study

elucidates his struggle in Bakhtinian terms, thereby enhancing understanding of the story while simultaneously interrogating the silence surrounding patriated trauma – the experiences of veterans, survivors of trauma, and other subalterns wrangled within the confines of articulable existence.

Krebs’s definitive act—the departure from the town—isn’t a triumph or a loss; rather, it’s an acceptance of the fact that certain struggles exist unresolvable. This enduring struggle in today’s world has been captured from the beginning in “Soldier’s Home.” It captures a universal tension as Bakhtin has described; as an individual’s fight to retain originality in a society that strives for uniformity. Hemingway has left us with unresolvable questions; as readers and researchers, the questions we are left to ponder include: What does one do with enduring consequences? What does one do when the only version of the truth is the voiceless one? All discourse that is unspoken is rendered faded and hushed, and this notion is the essence of silently battling suffering.

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