

Study of Religion in Hemingway's Works from Psychoanalytic Perspective

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Foreword

This paper attempts at studying Ernest Hemingway's works through classical psychoanalytic perspective in order to throw light on Hemingway's treatment of religion. To begin with, Freud's views regarding origin, the need, and futility of religion were delineated and then Jung's opposing stances in favor of religion were presented. Generally, it seems that Hemingway and his characters have more inclination towards adopting the former views so far as they are in constant state of frustration and struggle in their lives, and religion and traditional beliefs are of no avail to them in appeasing their pains and sufferings. However, they take refuge in latter's views in assuaging their suffering and finding a way out of their plight in dire and desperate situations through creating a reciprocal relationship with God.

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Freud

In his celebrated book, *The Ego and The Id*, Freud poses the question of whether the ego of primitive man or his id has the responsibility of acquiring religion and morality in the early days of father-complex. Then, he concludes that it is id which is capable of being inherited and stored up vestiges of the existences led by countless former egos: "when the ego forms its superego out of id, it may perhaps reviving images of the egos that have passed away and be securing them as

resurrection” (51-2). Freud traces the incontrovertibility of the need for religion in a child’s feeling of helplessness and longing for a father. It is kept alive perpetually by the fear of the superior power of fate after childhood. Freud believes that religion is an attempt to get control over the ‘sensory world’ by means of a kind of ‘wish-world’ we have developed internally as a result of ‘biological and psychological necessities’. Furthermore, he takes a strong position in holding that religion cannot achieve its aim and purports that has originated from ‘the ignorant childhood days of human race’. He proposes that based only on the model of neurotic symptoms of the individual religious phenomena should be understood. It is a kind of a return of long-forgotten important happenings in the primeval history of human family (Fodor, *Freud: Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, p.155). In *The Future of an Illusion* he meticulously divulges his stand toward religion and trails its psychical origin in the state of a child’s helplessness and explicates the emergence of these attitudes among human beings:

These, which profess to be dogmas, are not the residue of experience or final result of reflection; they are illusions, fulfillment of the oldest, strongest and most insistent wishes of mankind; the secret of their strength is the strength of these wishes...the terrifying effect of infantile helplessness aroused the need for protection...the discovery that this helplessness continue through the whole of life make it necessary to cling to the existence of a father. Thus, the benevolent rule of divine providence allays our anxiety in the face of life’s dangers; the establishment of a moral world order ensures the fulfillment of the demands of justice (p. 52).

At the very beginning of *Civilization and its Discontent*, Freud openly contradicts a friend to whom he had sent a copy of *The Future of an Illusion*. His initial reaction was in line with Freud's judgment upon religion, but he regretted that he had not properly appreciated the true source of religious sentiments. He defends his positive attitude toward religion by holding on to what Freud calls 'peculiar feeling', which he strongly believes that it is shared by millions of people. He calls the feeling a 'sensation of eternity', limitless, unbounded, and oceanic one. He thinks that one may rightly be called 'religious' on the grounds of this oceanic feeling alone even though he repudiates all specific belief systems. Nevertheless, Freud states that he cannot discover this 'oceanic' feeling in himself so far as feelings are not easy to be dealt with scientifically (pp. 1-2). He regards the concept of 'oneness with universe' as a first attempt at a religious consolation in helping the elimination of the danger, which the ego recognizes as a threat from external world (p. 9). Yet, he considers religion as one means of achieving happiness for those who regard reality as the only enemy and source of all suffering. One can gain more happiness by creating another world in which all the unbearable features and suffering are eliminated and replaced by those that are in conformity with his wishes. This supposition, as Freud believes, is doomed to failure since reality is too strong and leads him on the path of insanity so long as he finds no one to help him out of his delusion. Then he concludes:

A special importance attaches to the case in which this attempt to procure a certainty of happiness and a protection against suffering through a delusional remolding of reality is made by a considerable number of people in common. The religions of mankind must be classed among the mass delusions of this kind. No one, needless to say, who shares a delusion ever, recognizes it as such (p. 18).

A central demand of a civil and religious society for Freud is taken from the Bible: “love thy neighbor as thyself” (*Civilization*, p. 12). Freud sees religion as filling a need which would be better for society not to have, because this need is associated with the most primal desires and fears of childhood desires for safety and fear of abandonment or punishment. He later brings religion under minute scrutiny and censure by alluding to the fact that religion imposes its own path on everyone in acquisition of happiness and protection from suffering. He then refers to its technique in depressing the value of life and distorting the picture of the real world in a delusional manner presupposing intimidation of intelligence. By drawing people into a mass-delusion, religion succeeds in sparing them an individual neurosis. He believes that religion cannot keep its promise. Nothing will remain to a believer in God as a last possible consolation and source of pleasure in his suffering but ‘unconditional submission’ (pp. 21-22). Moreover, he asserts that religions are well-aware of the part played by a sense of guilt in civilization since their utmost effort is bended on redeeming man from this sense. In addition to that, he censures the ethics based on religion with the promise of a better after-life. He believes that since a virtue is not rewarded here on earth, this kind of ethic preaches in vain (p. 80).

Jung

However, Jung’s stance in this regard lies on the opposite extreme of what was stated by Freud. He affirms that the origin of many neuroses should be sought in that fact that people are not open to their ‘religious prompting’ because of their strong reliance on intellect. He cautions the modern psychologists that the questions of dogma and creed are no longer dealt with. He believes that a religious attitude is: “an element in the psychic life whose importance can hardly be overrated” (p. 77). He censures Freud for overlooking the fact that man has never been capable of gaining

predominance over the powers of darkness, unconscious. He believes that man can bring the unconscious under control by the help of spirituality, which is furnished by each individual's 'own religion'. He draws a direct link between the opening up of the unconscious and the 'outbreak of intense spiritual suffering'. He blames the world ordered by reason and rationale for the eruption and devastating outcome of the World War. He then offers the reason why the man has developed religion and magic from earliest times. He labels 'medicine-man' as the priest who is the savior of man's body and soul. He strongly holds that: "religions are systems of healing for psychic illness" (p. 278) and vigorously favors Christianity and Buddhism as the two greatest religions of man. He explores the outlet for man's suffering which cannot be furnished by his intellect but only through a revelation greater than his own and by the help of which he will be lifted out of his distress. He advises psychotherapists to occupy themselves with problems, which belong to theologians.

Hemingway

Contrary to the idiomatic expression "a chip off the old block", Ernest never seemed to be taken after his father and mother who were very outspoken about their being religiousness. Based on Carlos Baker's account about Ernest's life story, his father was a very religious man and he used to say it simply and sincerely (*A Life Story*, p. 54). His father's reaction to *In Our Time* is remarkable in this regard. Though admiring his son's latest achievement, he believed that the "book was somewhat lacking in spiritual uplift" (p. 201), and asked him to look for joyous, uplifting, optimistic, and spiritual character and reminded him that God holds us responsible to do our best. His mother was a very religious woman who sang in the church and loved music. Her reaction to *The Sun Also Rises* is also interesting to note: "she was glad that his book was selling, even though it seemed 'a doubtful honor' to

have produced ‘one of the filthiest books of the year’” (p. 224). She was inundated with ‘pious sentimentality’, in Anthony Burgess’s term, all through her life and seemed not to care much for his books. She christened him and offered him to God as a little lamb not knowing that this lamb went astray as soon as he reached manhood (*Ernest Hemingway and his world*, p. 10). It is surprising to know that his famous work *A Farewell to Arms* was banned in Boston on the ground of the love affair between the unmarried protagonists. The story was censored in the form of magazine installment in Boston, but it was not the case in the book form. Because, as Scott Donaldson remarks, a narrow-minded reader could choose to interpret Catherine’s death as: “a judgment against fornication” (Introduction to *New Essays*, p. 11). Hemingway was also accused of being preoccupied with sex in the novel.

There were some incidents in his later life contributing to the destruction of his belief in after-life. It was during his visits to wartime Spain that he noticed the main problem lurks behind the fact that the Church sided with Fascists: “This fact bothered him so much that he even quit praying: it seemed somehow ‘crooked’ to have anything to do with a institution so closely allied to Fascism” (Baker, *A Life Story*, p. 399). Ernest’s reply to Mary’s parents who had sent him a religious book as a first gift depicts different phases of his religious alteration. He offered a short history of the changes his faith had undergone in three wars briefed by Carlos Baker:

In 1918, said he, he had been very frightened after his wounding, and therefore very devout. He feared death, believed in personal salvation, and thought that prayers to the Virgin and various saints might produce results. These views changed markedly during the Spanish Civil War, owing to the alliance between the Church and the Fascists... In 1944, he had got through some very

rough times without praying once. He felt that he had fortified the right to any divine intercession in his personal affairs, and that it would be ‘crooked’ to ask for help... Deprived of the ghostly comforts of the Church, yet unable to accept as gospel the secular substitutes which Marxism offered, he abandoned his simplistic faith in the benefits of personal petition and turned, like his hero Robert Jordan, to embrace a doctrine of ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.’” (p. 532).

Hemingway did not believe in any systematic philosophy of life. He has only given an artistic expression to some of the harsh realities of life that he lived and saw. He is not seen working on particular system but finally he has always introduced himself as a skeptical man. He belonged to Roman Catholic faith by birth, yet he never seems to have been under the influence of the metaphysical doctrines of Christianity. The universe only devoutly mystifies his most devout characters. Anselmo in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* disclaim their religiosity. As in the story of the ants on a burning log in *A Farewell to Arms* as witnessed by Fredrick Henry, Hemingway depicts signs of pessimism in his stance towards religion. Jackson J. Benson draws our attention to the many of existentialists’ claim that Hemingway is one of the associate members of their school of thought by pointing to his gradual decay of belief in God (*The Artist’s Art*, p. 79).

Robert Jordan like many other Hemingway’s characters and even Hemingway himself adopt Freudian presumption in regarding religion as an illusion. Jordan believes firmly in his own will-power and prowess to achieve the goal he has set in mind right from the beginning. No other external or internal factors, even the palm-reading of Pablo’s wife, can deter him from his chosen path. Superstition, which is

somewhat associated with religion, is one of the aspects of Hemingway's attitude toward religion. Being a strong advocate of realism and materialistic worldview, Hemingway seems to be in constant struggle with religion in his novels. It might be the outcome of bringing up in a background which was quite religious and full of do's and don'ts. Now as a novelist he feels free to challenge the system of thought which has inflicted restraints during his childhood.

Some of religious drawbacks brought under harsh criticism are sexual freedom, papal intervention in war, and freethinking proposed in *A Farewell to Arms* in the scene at which officers bait and vilify the priest. Although the priest takes their baits as a joke and refutes their remarks, they seem to mean what they say regarding the above-mentioned issues. The captain baits him about the prostitutes, the major voices his being an atheist because the Pope has sided with Austrians to win the war and loved Franz Joseph for providing him with money and stresses the fact that: "All thinking men are atheists" (p. 8), and the lieutenant who claims that a book called 'Black Pig' shattered his faith. It is interesting to note that when the priest proposes Frederic the idea of visiting his place in Abruzzi the captain proposes him to go to "centers of culture and civilization" and believes that Abruzzi is filled with peasants and he should go to a place where he can have 'beautiful young girls'. At the end of their talking, however, Frederic prefers to accompany the officers to the brothel before it shuts down.

Anselmo is also one of characters ridden himself of religion since the church sided with Fascists, but oscillates between renouncing or readopting religion as a means of cleansing himself from the guilt sense of killing men. He does not need any God to admonish him for the fact that killing of human beings is a sin. He himself achieved this enlightenment that killing is a sin: "To me it is a sin to kill a man. Even

Fascists whom we must kill... I am against all killing of men" (p. 43). He is submerged in the guilt sense of those whom he had killed and hopes that he will be forgiven after the war. Jordan is quick to remind him that as long as they do not believe in God, His Son, and Holy Ghost, how they might be forgiven. Anselmo commences his reply by blaming God: "If there were God, never would He have permitted what I have seen with my eyes" (p. 43), then he underscores that: "a man must be responsible for himself" (p. 43), that is, man is capable of forgiving himself for the sins he committed in Jordan's terms. However, overwhelmed with the sense of guilt, Anselmo reiterates his remorse over the people he killed. He looks forward for an opportunity to cleanse himself of the guilt inflicted upon him by his act of killing. Before the movement he was a religious person but after the movement he seems to have lost everything. He is eager to return to his good faith days, go to church, and repent for the sins of killing.

There are traces of existentialism in Henry and Catherine's outlook toward the world they are struggling to survive. Right from the outset of the novel, Henry and Catherine adopt a tragic vision in which the world is indifferent, there is no God, and life is ultimately meaningless. Catherine tells Henry that her fiancé was killed in war and expresses her skepticism regarding the existence of afterlife. She then assures him that his killing was the end of everything and there is no afterlife. When they are walking around the streets of Milan, Henry notices another soldier and a girl seeking shelter by a cathedral. Henry notes that they are like himself and Catherine, a soldier and a girl. Catherine sees more than just shallow similitude and says that nobody resembles them and later points out that the soldier and the girl have the cathedral to stay at, not them. This implies the fact that unlike Henry and Catherine, who do not have any religion, they have religion. She reiterates her adherence to no religion at the

time of her admission in a hospital in Switzerland. When the receptionist asked about her religion, she says that she has 'no religion'. In fact, as Spanier holds, she does not care about any tradition or convention and her values are private and personal. She reveals them when she checks into the hospital to have the baby: "it is clear that her only allegiance is to herself and Fredric, their love, indeed, her only religion" (*Hemingway's Unknown Soldier*, p. 91).

Besides the existentialistic view in *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway's nihilistic outlook is highlighted in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* when it comes to describing the sexual act itself. Hemingway is very explicit at a detailed account of touching and kissing but when it comes to the genitals he takes another path and renders it in the cover of symbolism and his description becomes implicit. For Robert Jordan, Maria's vagina serves as "a dark passage which led to nowhere" (p. 171), and the word "nowhere" is reiterated by the narrator twelve times. The significance of the word lies in the fact that the very life itself leads to no destination at all. The nihilistic worldview of the narrator who is the mouthpiece of the author indicates that the purpose shown as fighting for the Republic is what gives life meaning and direction rather than religious beliefs.

Once Henry states that only at the time of defeat, we become Christian that reveals a clear understanding of the way universe works. He perceives that religion is a belief system for those who cannot accept the indifference of the universe and futility of existence. Religion is also an abstract word like glory, honor, and courage, which stands in sharp contrast to concrete entities such as names of villages, rivers and number of roads, regiments and dates. His discovery of the universe's indifference leads him to rejection of abstract values as well as religion and acceptance of those that are concrete and perceptible.

However, in an introduction to *A Farewell to Arms*, Robert Penn Warren believes that the novel is a religious book. Against the collapsing world of 'nada' and blackness of war, there is a story behind the love story of Frederic and Catherine in which the quest is aimed at finding a meaning in a world that seems to offer nothing of the sort. He maintains that if the book does not offer a religious solution, it is conditioned by the religious problem. He points to the first scene of the novel at the officers' mess where Frederic refuses to take part in baiting the priest. He holds that there is a bond, recognized by both, between Frederic and the priest. The officers tell him where to go on his leave to find the best girls but priest advises him to go to his province, Abruzzi, where he can have good hunting and nice weather (p. xxviii).

In the conversation in the hospital between Frederic and the priest, the religious background of the novel is somewhat made clear. The priest is insistent on the fact that a man should love God. Frederic seems to understand it, but he says that he does not love God and he is afraid of Him sometimes at nights. Frederic implies in his replies that the cause of his fear is his revelry in the whorehouse overwhelming him with the guilt sense. The priest believes that the love made there is nothing but passion and lust and the true love is the love that one wishes to do things and sacrifice for. When Frederic, once again, says he does not love God, the priest counsels him that through love of God he can achieve happiness and asserts: "You will. I know you will. Then you will be *happy*" (*Italic is mine*) (p. 75). He affirms that he has always been happy but happiness is 'another thing' for the priest and cannot be experienced unless he has it.

Santiago's method of achieving happiness besides drinking is religion. The pictures on the wall, which were the relics of his wife, proves the fact that if there is no one to take care of him, at least there are the holy son and mother to divert him

from feeling lonely. He no longer keeps his wife's photograph, which was once on the wall. His activating agent of Eros is no longer available and he is now an old man who is at his rope's end filled with death instincts. Keeping her picture on the wall induces more pain and feeling of loneliness. In the course of catching the great fish, he constantly prays to God and Christ to help him out of the suffering and hardships induced by the fish. In fact, he knows that nobody is there to help him, but taking refuge in religion and religious beliefs might act as a consoling agent so that his pains will be bearable. Although once he confesses that he is not a religious person, he feels that he has no other choice but taking refuge in his religious beliefs. He asks religious figures like Jesus and Mary to help him out of his ordeal. Even when the old man wants to do some comparison about the fish's eye, he likens it to a 'saint in a procession'. His confession of being a non-religious makes no sense so far as his fear of the father figure and going through strong demands of super-ego have made him to do that. He wants to alleviate his pains and achieve his aim through illusory factor of religion as Freud has put it. He defies religion consciously but deep inside he is heavily manipulated by what Freud calls the Morality Principle, induced by strong operation of super-ego brought up by parental authority and religion. In psychoanalysis, one of the ways of achieving happiness is taking refuge in religion, which directly stems from fear of the father initiated in one's infancy and childhood.

The only relationship in which Hemingway seeks God as revealed in his religion is reciprocal one. Only at the times of catastrophic situation Hemingway's characters turn to God in a desperate attempt to somehow relieve from their psychological tensions. In line with this reciprocal relationship, Alfred Adler holds the idea that religious and ethical feelings of the guilt are constructed and utilized to attain a sensation of power. For example, they provide a desperate person whose

mother in jeopardy a means of saving his mother if he prays to God (*Practice and Theory*, p. 39). Santiago of *The Old Man and the Sea* displays no apparent signs of fervent belief in the existence of God, however, he prays to God on a few occasions in the development of the story. Although he does not believe in religion in an orthodox sense, he is not totally irreligious. In the case of his success in catching the huge fish, he promises to make a pilgrimage to a holy shrine and repeats some prayers and asks for help from Mary. This give and take tie with religious figures commences when he is in dire and desperate need of help for gaining victory over the fish. His disillusionment overwhelms him to the extent that he is scared of his own survival. In fact, he makes these prayers mechanically but in the face of his ordeal the significance of these prayers should be sought in the reciprocal relationship.

This kind of relationship is established in the final chapter of *In Our Time* where a badly frightened soldier prays to Jesus for salvation during a heavy bombardment. Through stream of consciousness, Hemingway records the desperate unmanly fear of a soldier who persistently asks Christ to get him out of there. Nevertheless, he seems to suggest that this prayer resembles a curse by lower-case spelling of Jesus and Christ. Christ has lost His Majesty like one of those abstractions that soldiers came to distrust on the battlefield.

Likewise, in Frederic Henry's repetitive prayers for not losing Catherine in her labor implies the fact that this reciprocal relationship exists between him and God. He helplessly asks God not to let her die and he promises that he will do anything for him if he won't let her die. Nevertheless this relationship seems futile since Catherine dies. James F. Light forges for this lack of reciprocity in the image of a God whose eternal selfishness is the origin of man's selfishness. As Catherine lies dying, this divine

selfishness is portrayed in Henry's selfishness in not saving the ants from burning (*Notes and Discussions*, p. 170).

The same reciprocal relationship at the time of distress and helplessness can be observed in an irreligious guerrilla like Anselmo. At the early stages of the novel, he introduces himself as a man without God to whom he will return one day. Under the mental strain over the killing of his comrades and disquieting state about the next day, he first starts to pray for their souls: "It was the first time he had prayed since the start of the movement" (p. 348). Then he prays, seeks the help of Virgin Mary and has the anguish of the next day. He reiterates each prayer with 'Oh Lord' and 'Help me'. He asks God's help to control him under the plane bombardments, comport him as a man in his last hours, understand clearly the needs of the day, dominate the movement of his leg so that he should not run away when the bombardment comes, and comport him as a man in the day of battle. He is so persistent that his prayers somewhat conveys the aura of command: "Since I have asked this aid of thee, please grant it, knowing I would I would not ask it if it were not serious, and I will ask nothing more of thee again" (p. 348). Moreover, his prayers acts like a mechanism of relieving and unloading his mental strain. He feels better after prayer and gets confident that his demands will be met.

This relationship is dominant in the church-going Jake Barnes and even it is also a means of achieving happiness and alleviating psychic tensions. He sees a cathedral and walks toward it and gets inside. He kneels and starts to pray for his friends and even bullfighters. While praying for himself he feels sleepy so he decides to pray that bullfights would be good, it would be fine fiesta, and they would get some fishing. Then he prays that he "would like to have some money" and "would make a lot of money" (p. 97). At the same time he feels ashamed and regretful and he is

overwhelmed with the guilt sense of being a “rotten Catholic”. But anyway, he realizes that he can do nothing about it and confesses that ‘it was a grand religion’, and wishes that he “felt religious’ (p. 97). It is because of the fact that religion equips him with a means of softening the pains of sexual frustrations and achieving, at least, a temporal happiness as long as he prays and believes in its efficacy.

While Jake can benefit from this kind of relationship through his prayers, Brett’s guilt sense worsens since she cannot get what she wants through prayers. Jake wants to take Brett into the chapel, the offer that she is insistent on withholding. He wants to pray for San Fermin or others in order to pave the way for fulfilling his wishes and get the things he wants. But, once again, Brett is persistent on leaving there since it makes her ‘damned nervous’. Then Brett comes up with an excuse why she gets very nervous in the church: “Never does me any good” (p. 208). When Jake advises her to pray, she comes up with a further justification: “Never does me good. I’ve never gotten anything I prayed for.” (p. 209) and asks him whether he has got anything he prayed for. Jake’s reply is definitely positive: “Oh, yes”, since it does him good in averting his suffering, relieving him from psychic tensions, and placing him on pathway of happiness. In fact, Brett is floating in the bitter world of realities, and religious mindset or illusions in Freudian terminology, are of no avail. She has her own means of fending off pains and achieving happiness, which is by no means religion. However, Brett is not the only character whose grip on religion is on shaky ground. People in the fiesta of San Fermin, which is supposed to be a religious festival, do not care about the religious procession but their own merry-makings. During the procession Mike, Brett’s fiancé, asked one of them is the thing he was observing was procession. One of them replied the procession is “Nada”, that is, “It’s nothing. Drink up. Lift the bottle” (p. 157).

The old man is also obsessed by what Psychoanalysis calls sense of guilt that is produced by an act of violence carried out or intended. He has performed this violence through killing the fish. The sense of guilt is what religious doctrines called sin and brings about sense of anxiety in the individuals. On the whole this concept is depicted as an allusion to the Biblical story of Abel and Cane, Adam and Eve's sons, in which Cane kills his brother Abel and goes through a great trouble hiding his brother's body. The old man says that he has killed the fish that is his brother and now he must do the slave work like what Cane did. Because he cannot hide and secure it from the constant attacks of sharks that are devouring it piece by piece. He thinks that losing hope and killing the fish are sin but he has no choice but to do it in order to secure his living. Originally, the sense of guilt comes from fear of internal and external authority. The old man's fear of internal authority has its deep root in his unconscious partly dominated by super-ego, so super-ego is the cause of this sense of anxiety. The fear of external authority is what parents have cultivated and rules of civilization strengthened his super-ego in return. To overcome this sense, he comes up with some excuses such as he is born to be fisherman as the fish is born to be a fish or DiMaggio's father, a famous baseball player, is a fisherman, he does not kill the fish for living, but for pride and the love he has for it. The old man's sense of guilt aggravates when he sees that the sharks are constantly mutilating the fish. He feels sorry and regrets catching the fish. In Psychoanalysis, remorse is ascribed to the ego's reaction to sense of guilt. He wishes it were a dream and not a reality. He subjects himself to the punishment, which is losing the fish, because he admits that he has 'gone out so far'. The repetition of his statement "I went too far" is only justification he can make. As it was mentioned not going too far is a rule to be obeyed by all fishermen and when there is a violation of a law, punishment seems unavoidable.

Catching and killing the fish, Santiago is overcome by the sense of guilt, and feels troubled that he has committed a sin. However, he later comes to this conclusion that it is not sin so far as he loves the fish when it is alive and even afterwards. The feeling of guilt is so heavy upon him that he says: "Perhaps it was a sin to kill a fish... do not think about sin. It is too much late for that and there are people who are paid to do that. Let them think about it" (p. 90).

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Received: February 25, 2008

Published: June, 2008