Hemingway's use of literary formulas and a classical model in the Aristotelean and imitative phases may help assess his stature as an artist. The debts his works owe to precursors may add to Hemingway's artistic dimensions, for they show that he is an artist-scholar, like Pound, Joyce, and Eliot, able to conceal a classic poem or mode within a modern work. But debts may also subtract, for they should oblige us to ask some strong questions about the three novels of these phases. Is his imagination original or bookishly derivative in them? Are the novels experiential or epigonic? Are they organically structured or mechanically dependent upon preexisting forms? Do these novels reflect Hemingway's artistic freedom or his enslavement to a lifelong penchant for ritual and traditions? Do they show that he is motivated by an authentic compulsion to express a genuine artistic vision or by an athlete's desire to compete? And can a major writer also be subtle scrivener or crafty copyist and hypersensitive guardian of his reputation who conceals from ready view the imprints of his models?

Hemingway's debts to literary formulas and a classical model may also help assess his place within the larger tradition of literature. I hold no brief for the virtues of generic criticism; most usually it results in a pedantic catalogue of resemblances between a work and the formula, tradition, or model it follows, usually without addressing the questions of whether and why the resemblance is significant. Nevertheless, good generic criticism evaluates a work by the criteria the author has implicitly accepted, the set of predefined characteristics established by other authors who have written in the same genre or mode. And rather than just classify a work within a specific tradition, generic criticism isolates and compares the shared characteristics among or between works to
discover one work’s superiority or inferiority to another. In this regard, though I fault Hemingway’s three novels during these two phases, I also hope I have established that by attempting them he placed himself among exalted writers, wrote three “gallant failures.”

This may partly explain why Hemingway was vexed when Faulkner ranked him below Wolfe, Dos Passos, and even Erskine Caldwell, faulting him for never having risked any experiments, any “gallant failure.” It would be tendentious were I to argue that Faulkner’s assessment in 1947, the year before Hemingway began Across the River and into the Trees, goaded him into writing a “gallant” experiment. But I do not think it is tendentious to say that the disapproval that Faulkner articulated—widely shared by book reviewers and critics alike since as far back as the response to A Farewell to Arms—had partly goaded Hemingway into the experiments of not only Across the River but To Have and Have Not and For Whom the Bell Tolls as well. The sting of Faulkner’s attitude also echoes some of Hemingway’s parents’ disappointment in his early literary efforts. And Hemingway seldom responded to disapproval with indifference. Pugnacious challenge was more common: “How do you like it now, gentlemen?” It was his need, then, to prove himself worthy of approval that partly accounts for the literary competitiveness in the three novels of this and the preceding phase.

As I mentioned in my Introduction, artists renovate, parody, or challenge their predecessors in an act of competition that is a form of Oedipal rivalry. Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Milton take predecessors’ works to show what geniuses can do with their “fathers’ ” mismanaged materials. Fielding parodies Richardson and Twain Dumas. Joyce’s Ulysses tries to rival Homer’s. Even a minor writer like William Golding struggles to outdo his “fathers,” Pincher Martin, for instance, reworking Robinson Crusoe. Other artists follow the same pattern. Picasso, for example, competes against his ancestors, his 1955 Les Femmes d’Alger reworking Delacroix’s 1834 painting of the same title, his 1957 La Meninas Velázquez’s identically titled 1656 painting.

By adopting epic and tragic modes in his preceding phase, by imitating Dante’s Divine Comedy in this one, and by talking and writing about having “beat dead men at what they have done,” Hemingway shows his conscious attempt to challenge and surpass literary predecessors, proxies for his father. If Hemingway feels that he beats them—“ . . . I beat Mr. de Maupassant
and had an edge [on Mr. Stendhal] in the last [fight]"—then he presumably frees himself to go his own way, independent of predecessors' restraints, conventions, and values. But his continued competition against those "fathers" also reveals his dependency, his belief in their superiority, his wish to be esteemed as their worthy rival, in short, his filial respect.

Looked at in this light, Hemingway's parricidal wish to compete against his literary "fathers" is subordinate to his affiliative wish for paternal approval. Both phases, Aristotelean and imitative, support this idea. Hemingway chooses to compete with worthy predecessors, not mere contemporaries. The rivals he selects—"the dead you know are good"—are, then, substitutes for his father, men he respects and whose respect he seeks, not "brothers." And Hemingway chooses to write novels whose similarities show his reluctance to rebel and to free himself of his fixation on his father. Such labels as "the Hemingway hero," "the Hemingway code," and "the Hemingway style," for example, are vague and oversimplified. But they legitimately respond to a uniformity in Hemingway's vision and material that signals his deep-seated unwillingness and inability to be original and autonomous, his wish not to alienate his father: "You could if you wanted," he writes his father, "be proud of me sometimes—not for what I do for I have not had much success in doing good—but for my work" (Letters, 259). Hemingway also chooses to resurrect past modes and models, implying that just as they are still useful to modern writers, so too is his father's influence still meaningful to him. And just as Dante honors Vergil's worth by choosing the Roman poet to guide his pilgrim, so too does Hemingway honor the worth of both Dante and the paternal guide Dante represents, Dr. Hemingway. Finally, Hemingway chooses to conceal his resurrection of past modes and models, hopeful that his keen-eyed father would see and approve of his craftiness. That is, rather than write fiction that would immediately garner his father's approval, Hemingway's ploy was to write works whose subtle or ambiguous elements, undiscerned upon first reading, would eventually be discerned by the father whose pleasure would acknowledge that his son truly knew best, would satisfy Hemingway's secret wish to win paternal approval on his own terms.

The text of Across the River reveals the strength of Hemingway's affiliative wish for approval and nonerotic love. Superficially the novel purports to be about the love of an old colonel and
a young countess. But the love relationship takes a hind seat to
the father-daughter relationship between Cantwell and Renata.
Dependent upon her both to rejuvenate him by giving him reason
to fight his failing heart and to redeem him by helping him over­
come his guilts and hostilities through confession, Cantwell em­
embodies the wish to be approved of as an aging, good father, prop­
erly dependent upon a daughter.

From a biographical point of view, the father-daughter rela­
tionship seems to address Renata’s model, Adriana Ivancich,
even though her role in reality little resembled the romantic one
Hemingway imagines for her. Indeed, Cantwell and Renata’s re­
relationship is not very romantic. Now I grant that as lover she does
kiss Cantwell so hard that the inside of his lip bleeds (111). And
she seems to enjoy the sexual delights that Cantwell manually
provides beneath the blanket in the gondola. But more of her de­
lights come from doting on Cantwell’s needs, from soliciting him
to tell of his experiences, from consoling him for his guilts, from
worrying over his hand, and from bequeathing to him family jew­
els and her portrait. In effect, Renata gives Cantwell more psycho­
logical than sexual release, as his monologues with her portrait
suggest. Add to this Hemingway’s insistence that Renata be
maritally unavailable, that she be menstruating on this last week­
end, that Cantwell be suffering from heart and hand troubles,
and that the novel’s sexual scenes be unusually ambiguous.
Summed up, these details suggest that something in the prospect
of Cantwell’s marrying Renata repels Hemingway. Perhaps it is
some sexual anxiety that repels him. Perhaps he deeply senses
that Cantwell and Renata’s heterosexual relationship is inces­
tuous. Perhaps his anxiety is symptomatic of feelings of impo­
tence, welling up due to the eye injuries and illnesses that accom­
panied the writing of the novel.

Although these anxieties may partly explain the ultimately
nonerotic relationship between Cantwell and Renata, it can be
better explained by translating their father-daughter relationship
into a father-son relationship that Hemingway tries to keep from
being homoerotic. Specifically, Hemingway unconsciously ad­
dresses his sons, collapsing all three of them in Renata.

Consider the fiction he was working on just before and after
Across the River. What we now know as the “Bimini” section of
Islands in the Stream deals primarily with Thomas Hudson’s re­
relationship with his sons, commemorating one of them in particu­
lar. The “Cuba” section extends that relationship and so focuses
upon Hudson’s grief over the death of his oldest son, as does the last section of the novel, “At Sea.” Likewise The Old Man and the Sea deals essentially with Santiago’s relationship with his “son,” Manolin, not with the marlin. Some of the sentimental risks that Hemingway takes in those works, by emphasizing a father’s love for his sons, he avoids in Across the River, emphasizing instead a man’s love for a younger woman. But the dynamics of the relationships are quite similar. Cantwell’s calling Renata “Daughter” partly shows the similarity, since the narrator notes that the word “meant a different thing” (107) to Cantwell, to the Gran Maestro, and to Renata. Even the dialogue shows a father-son relationship. Although there are, of course, Cantwell’s declarations of heterosexual ardor, the larger number of his monologues are prompted by questions a son or an ingénue, not a lover, would ask: “‘Did you like many Germans?’” (122). “‘Don’t you ever close windows?’” (210). “‘How could you have done such a thing?’” (213) as to marry a conceited, ambitious journalist? “‘Can I come duck shooting?’” (142). “‘Richard, what is a jerk?’” (97). “‘Why do you hate cavalry?’” (232). “‘How do you lose a regiment?’” (233). “‘Tell me about the town’” (239). “‘But why do you have to obey other people’s orders when you know better?’” (242). “‘Where will we stay in Wyoming?’” (265). “‘Can’t I ride with you to the garage?’” (274).

The egocentric monologues that such a parade of queries invites might charm boys who spent relatively little time with their renowned father, especially during the war years. But at the time the novel was written, none of Hemingway’s sons had the need, the boyish adoration, or the patience to listen to their worldly father reminisce and utter obiter dicta. John was twenty-six, Patrick twenty-one, and Gregory eighteen. That may explain why Hemingway has Cantwell recite his monologues to a daughter figure rather than to a son; a teenage daughter might still nurse the Oedipal fantasy of adoring a knightlike surrogate father, particularly since Renata’s father had been killed in the war. Moreover, Renata’s patient adoration would shame Hemingway’s sons for their lapses in filial respect. In this light, Hemingway addresses his sons to censure them. This is seen in his portrayal of one group of Cantwell’s “sons”: the contemptible, comic-book-reading chauffeur, Jackson; the young Fascist hall porter who snoops among Cantwell’s belongings; and the “sullen boatman,” who treacherously shoots at mallards “coming to the Colonel’s blind” (280). It is also seen in Hemingway’s portrayal of an exemplary son, Alvarito, properly deferential.
Stronger than Hemingway’s unconscious wish to censure his sons is the wish for their understanding, forgiveness, and acceptance. This explains the confession formula the novel appears to follow. For as lover Cantwell has little cause (and less savoir faire) to confess his wrongs and seek therapy from a young woman who supposedly loves him. But Hemingway had reason to apologize to sons harmed by his marital instability, extended absences, and lack of sustained paternal regard. And the frequency of overt father-son relationships in Hemingway’s remaining works validates his guilt feelings about his fatherhood.

Cantwell’s apologetics, though, aim finally at ears other than Hemingway’s sons. They aim at a man who died in his fifties, who had that incurable ailment, diabetes, who suffered from angina pectoris, and who in his last years was particularly moody and embittered: Dr. Hemingway. Renata is not, then, a substitute for Hemingway’s sons. Rather she substitutes for Hemingway. And Cantwell substitutes for Hemingway’s father.

Like *Green Hills*, dedicated to one surrogate father, Philip Percival, *Across the River* is dedicated to a pair of fathers, Colonels “Buck” Lanham and Charlie Sweeny, men who would appreciate Cantwell’s reminiscences, allusions, and jargon. But these fathers are stand-ins for Hemingway’s real father. After all, Hemingway’s return to Italy in 1948 and his memory of the physical trauma he had suffered at Fossalta thirty years earlier precipitated a special trip to visit the site of that wounding. That visit revivified the psychological trauma he suffered from his father’s ignominious suicide, the guilt that he was partly responsible for it. Farfetched? I think not, for at the deepest level of *Across the River* Hemingway fabricates a weekend during which he can reconstruct his relationship with his father, at whose death he had not been present. This reading is partly suggested by the “great miracle” of Renata’s love for Cantwell, which literally expresses her desire to give a war-injured older man the love she had been unable to give to the man whose place he takes, her father, killed in the war. It is also suggested by seeing that Hemingway’s projection of himself into Renata expresses his unconscious wish that he had been a self-sacrificing son, solicitous of his dying father’s needs. He wishes that he had heard his father’s confessions, had given him intimate companionship, had boosted his morale. And by transforming himself into a malleable, beautiful noblewomen, he wishes he had been able to provide his father with a woman who could obliterate and avenge his father’s relationship with a
matriarch who brooked commands from no male. He even wishes he had been able to make his father, like Cantwell, a more aggressive, domineering male to compensate for that lack in Dr. Hemingway. Hemingway wishes he had been able to do all this so that his father might have died, as Renata expresses it, "‘with the grace of a happy death.’"

I suppose the major objection to this interpretation is that there is little in Hemingway’s background or known attitudes toward women that would explain a wish to transform himself into a woman. Yet just a few years before writing Across the River he had consciously flirted with the idea of transferring the sexual identities of Catherine and David Borne in his unfinished novel, Garden of Eden. And his several stories that explicitly deal with homosexuality signal reaction formation, suggesting his attraction to homosexuals and to the idea of receiving the favors of a man whose love and approval he sought. Ultimately, Hemingway’s wish to take his mother’s place—to be female and to care properly, tenderly, for his dying father—would derive from his impression, while still an infant, that to win his father’s approval he needed some female attributes. He would wonder if the trio of sisters who were born into the Hemingway household after him reflected a boy’s lesser value and acknowledged parental preference for girls. And he would have been confused by his mother’s efforts to make him and his older sister look-alikes, bobbing their hair so that they were neither clearly male nor female children. Finally, Hemingway’s ability to create subservient, selfless women like Catherine, Maria, and now Renata shows his wish to provide good men with tender, caring women. His ability, then, to imagine such relationships vouches for his carrying them in his unconscious as variations on his wish to provide his father with such a woman.

Hemingway’s wish for a last weekend with his father is full of guilt feelings. He wants to make amends for what he feels was his betrayal of his father. I realize, of course, that Hemingway consciously believed that his father had betrayed him by committing suicide. And so Cantwell’s remorse for the three errors that brought death to those under his command is Dr. Hemingway’s remorse for committing suicide and being treacherous to his dependents. But the doctor’s act did not directly cause anyone else’s death. So it is more likely that Hemingway felt that it was his own treacheries that contributed to his father’s suicide. Like Cantwell, remorseful for assuring his best friend, George, that it was safe for
the two of them to venture into enemy terrain, Hemingway had overconfidently assumed that his father would be safe when left at home, enemy terrain too. He concludes otherwise by the time he writes this novel and projects his remorse upon Cantwell, who doubles, then, as Hemingway's self and father. Similarly, Cantwell rationalizes the deaths of the men under his command during the Hurtgen Forest and Schnee-Eifel assaults by claiming that he was obeying SHAEF orders. Hemingway wants to excuse himself from being responsible for his father's death by claiming that he too had been obligated to obey superior orders: to pursue his destiny as an expatriate writer and to follow his instincts by divorcing Hadley and marrying Pauline. But by the time he writes *Across the River* his obedience to those orders undoubtedly causes further remorse, which he again projects upon Cantwell. I find compelling the belief that Hemingway shared his own son's brooding thought: "I never got over a sense of responsibility for my father's death and the recollection of it sometimes made me act in strange ways.""^^15^^

Fortunately Hemingway's desire to "beat dead men at what they have done" died with *Across the River*. Public response to the novel may have taught him that literary experiments, however nobly conceived, were not going to sell—at least two out of three times. And he must have found little gratification in deceiving nonplussed critics, even though he may have secretly exulted. After all, greater gratification would come from divulging the secret of his imitation to someone else, from sharing a private joke. But that was not his way, his last wife declaring that during their seventeen years together he never talked about his work with anyone, even herself."^^16^^

Hemingway must also have stopped competing with the "dead" because he realized the inferiority of his efforts. None of these last three novels stands up well when compared with the genre they compete in or the predecessor they compete against. And even if he did not accept that, then surely he realized that each time he competed with the dead he risked getting caught in his surreptitious efforts. Once caught his three novels would be compared and found wanting. And critics would quickly conclude that all of his works must derive from some predecessor's model—as, I confess, I concluded at an early stage in studying him. That conclusion would deny Hemingway all originality.

The ultimate reason Hemingway stopped competing with his
predecessors was, I think, that his experiments did not give him the psychotherapy that, among other things, he sought in writing them. To the extent that his writing was prompted by his need to please, exorcize, or relate to his father, he had to get some deep gratification from the displacements that his imagination and unconscious created. Though I may have discerned some of those displacements, I think that they were so opaque to himself, so screened by transformation, so overwrought by the modes and models he was working from, that he was not getting the gratification that simpler narrative constructs could give him. His own subtlety was repressing, rather than releasing, his deeper wishes and anxieties, defeating a primary motive for writing in the first place. The work of the fifties better serves those wishes and anxieties, deeply flawed though it is.