We are pleased to present this special issue on the stories of Ernest Hemingway which was put together by our Guest Editor Rédouane Abouddahab. One of France's leading specialists in Psychoanalysis and literature and a Hemingway scholar, Rédouane Abouddahab is a Maître de Conférences in American literature at the University of Lyon II. We are grateful to him for his excellent introduction to this issue and for so meticulously undertaking the editorial work involved. We hope you will appreciate the quality of this volume.
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A Bibliography of Ernest Hemingway
Rédouane Abouddahab
Introduction: Fiction, Criticism, and the Ideological Mirror

Rédouane Abouddahab

The aim of this Hemingway special issue is not to represent the largest possible range of commentary on Hemingway’s short stories, but to look closely at their rich texture, considering them as coherent wholes and autonomous units that activate their own symbolical potentialities, and liberate under the careful gaze of the reader their poetic energies and ever surprising force of connotation. Hence, the essays brought together in this volume value the textual dimension of Hemingway’s narratives, and eschew in varied degrees and manners the ideological background and the usually underlined alleged links with the reality “out there.” Close in spirit and method, they lay bare the poetic, plastic, fantasmatic matter at work in Hemingway’s short fiction, and minimize more or less radically the illusions of depth and the false mimetic knowledge of the author, in favor of the rich textual network and surface phenomena, overlooked more often than not by Hemingway’s commentators. The essays are indeed off the beaten track as they view suspiciously the overemphasized referential assumptions about Hemingway’s “Code” and its positivist and ideological implications, and his alleged moral, political, or even biographical “messages.” If they acknowledge and synthesize usefully the abundant critical work already realized on the stories under consideration, the contributors propose new ways for reading Hemingway’s (short) fiction.

It may be urged either that we delve among the imaginary “contents” of Hemingway’s work and participate in the conflicting, overburdening and, inevitably, transient ideological debate about his relevance – here the social evolution of ideas is the yardstick against which the pertinence of the work’s signifieds is measured –, or that we usefully uncover the formal scaffoldings of the fiction, and reveal consequently its lasting artistic complexity, its robust syntactic carpentry and sophisticated sub-textual lacework. Engaging in ideological debates about Hemingway, who is usually interchangeable with his fiction in numerous critical comments, sheds no light on the writer’s creative and original work. Used as a pedagogical instrument to teach one’s own ideologies, viewed as a pre-text to value and confront the commentator’s theories on gender, race, religion, or sexuality, and not as a text belonging to the in-between
space conjured up by the dynamic writer-reader dyad, the Hemingway text is inevitably subjected to the ideological changes that the American society has undergone in the last four decades, instead of being valued with the literary (linguistic, rhetorical, plastic, energetic…) matter it is made of, and the artistic attention and intentions it was written with: not to represent reality, but to create one.

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3 Most of Hemingway criticism is ideologically based and heavily influenced by the accumulated knowledge about the life and work of the writer. There are thousands of academic books and articles on Hemingway. Following his suicide in 1961, the 1960s decade saw the publication of almost four hundred serious studies on him, while in the 1970s the number increased to more than seven hundred; and the critical works, far from decreasing, have gained strength throughout the next decades (Beegel, 1996; Wagner, 1998). The most important trend among the critical studies is indubitably biographical. Almost all aspects of Hemingway’s life have been scrutinized in scholarly biographies, from Carlos Baker’s pioneering Life Story (1969) to Michael Reynolds’ detailed four volume biography (1989, 1992, 1997, 1999). Some of them specialize in certain aspects of Hemingway’s life: John Raeburn (1984) deals with the relation between Hemingway and fame, Michael Reynolds (1981) focuses on Hemingway’s private library; some critics have written about Hemingway’s wives (Sokoloff, 1973; Kert, 1983; Rollyson, 1990), his stays in different parts of the world (McLendon, 1972; Fuentes, 1984; Samuelson, 1984). Numerous acquaintance and family biographies have been published, too. Some of these are serious and helpful (Hotchner’s, for example), but most of them are trifling or self-centered.

4 The regular output of biographies testifies to the attractiveness of Hemingway, whose adventurous life fascinated millions of people. What is of interest in the present essay is not the rich and appealing life of Hemingway, but, on the contrary, the damaging encroachments of the writer’s life and fame upon his fiction, not in his own works, but in the texts of his commentators. As Kenneth Lynn shows in his original biography of Hemingway, which, not unlike Meyer’s, demythologizes the writer, the most prominent critics who influenced Hemingway criticism from the 1950s on, saw in him an idealized reflection of themselves. This imaginary identification with the writer determined their reading of him, as they stuck to the culturally reassuring significance they thought Hemingway incarnated, unnoticing the textual subtleties of his works.

5 In much of the criticism that has been devoted to the writer’s life and work from the 1950s to the 2000s, there have appeared numerous and contradictory theories backing up an ideologically oriented interpretation of Hemingway’s work. One can even underline a persistent confusion between the false fiction Hemingway and his popular and academic admirers created, and the true fiction he wrote out of the intimate and precious parts of his being. Till the first half of the 1980s, the Hemingway protagonist as dealt with by most commentators is a full-fledged “white male,” supposedly the vehicle of American individualism, optimism, self-reliance, and manliness. The image conjured up in the studies of Young, DeFalco, Rovit, Baker, or Gurko is entirely determined by ideology. These commentators believed in the “Americaness” of Hemingway, and explicitly or implicitly considered his works as the “natural” reflection and confirmation of mainstream culture. Literary studies were on the whole
dominated by this specific ideological vision, premised upon the Americanness of national literature. As Robert Spiller’s authoritative *Literary History* contends, American literature “is profoundly influenced by ideals and by practices developed in democratic living,” and “has been intensely conscious of the needs of the common man, and equally conscious of the aspirations of the individual.” According to Spiller, American literature is “humanitarian,” “optimistic;” it has been “made virile by criticism of the actual in comparison with the ideal” (Spiller ix-xx).

Prior to the posthumous publication of *The Garden of Eden* in 1986, Hemingway’s work has been discussed by most commentators within this consensual frame of reference. It comes as no surprise then that even the philosophical studies devoted to the writer, such as John Killinger’s *Hemingway and the Dead Gods*, should display the same concern for the heroism of his protagonists. John Killinger’s existentialist interpretation of Hemingway underlines the protagonist’s solitude but also his heroic quest for authenticity, the courageous choices he has to make, the godlike position he reaches thanks to his moral courage: “The ensrealissimum is possible only in the valley of the shadow of death, for it is there that man comes face to face with the uncanny feeling of nada. It is there, in the moment of truth, that the encrustations and accretions of historical man drop away, and the real, ex-sisting man emerges, timeless, Godlike, and free” (32). Ben Stoltzfus (2005) sees numerous analogies between Hemingway’s works and Sartre’s and Camus’s; all three are haunted by the leitmotif of death and nothingness. This commentator sees in Hemingway’s “African stories” the best illustration of his existential philosophy: “Nowhere is this nada (the void, emptiness, meaninglessness) more insistent than in Hemingway’s two African stories, ‘The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber’ and ‘The Snows of Kilimanjaro,’ because the absurd has the potential to reorient the subject toward life, and living life authentically and courageously was and is essential to happiness” (206).

One might object, though, that what is at stake in Hemingway’s fiction is not “nada” as absolute nothingness, but “nothing” as... “something,” i.e. as an object (of fear, desire...). This is precisely what “Three Shots” (*The Nick Adams Stories*) stages when, suddenly anguished, Nick shoots into the silence and ‘nothingness’ of the night, only to feel relieved immediately after. And this is also what occurs in “A Clean Well-Lighted Place” (*Winner Take Nothing*) where the older waiter’s parodic monologue (“Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy wi ll be nada […]”, 383) operates as the verbal symbolization of the void, the transformation of existential “nothingness” into a verbal something and, as such, into an objective meaning. The perspective then is not moral or psychological but energetic and cathartic. There is no meditation on the void or emptiness in Hemingway’s fiction, but a series of actions attempting to symbolize the ontological “holes” that appear in different guises in the work: sexual difference, the ineluctability of death and its attractiveness, the unrelenting passage of time...

If the negative philosophy of existentialism permits the protagonist to reach “happiness,” so does, of course, religious belief, seen by some commentators as an important trait in Hemingway’s work (Isabelle, 1964; Pratt, 1974, 2001; Buske, 2002). The religious readings of Hemingway partake of the same logic. Indeed, the variety of remarks leads to the same alleged signified of the work: certainty. Sam Bluefarb (1971) sees in “A Clean Well-Lighted Place” and “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” a “Manichean split between an Absolute (or perfect) in which God or His equivalent is to be sought,
and a world in which, if God is indeed dead, one must look for an Absolute which might fill the void of His loss” (3). According to the author, the two stories express “a longing for a way out of this impasse, the need to break through to some transcendent purpose—esthetic or religious—without which life seems to have little or no meaning” (Bluefarb 4).

9 Persistently, the dominant ideological reading of Hemingway leads, quite expectedly, to the imaginary plenitude of the signified, even when the emphasis is placed on the themes of concreteness or senses. Joseph Flora contends that “Nick’s approach is to suspect the abstract, to deal with the concrete. Nevertheless, Nick and Descartes are not far apart. […] Nick will rely on his senses, on what he feels. He will start where Descartes started, with what he could absolutely trust. Then—like Descartes—he can move forward, to find—perhaps—what he cannot lose, maybe even God” (Flora, 1982, 153).

10 Philip Young’s psycho-biographical interpretation of Hemingway influenced radically and enduringly many critics, from Earl Rovit (1963) to at least Joseph Flora (1989). For him, the Hemingway protagonist, especially Nick Adams, is but the projection of Hemingway himself, whose writing is considered as the dramatization or even the over-dramatization of the important events that marked his life, starting with his wounding in World War I. Hemingway was, according to Young, “traumatized” by the violence of the injury and so were his protagonists whose scope is delimited by an incident that functions like the primal scene of the whole work.

11 How does Hemingway transform in his fiction a biographical incident into an event? How does the fiction deal with the true primal scene that leads back to one’s earliest childhood and the witnessed or fantasized parents’ coitus interpreted as sexual violence? This is precisely what a story like “Now I Lay Me” stages finely. While external action, which takes place not far from the front, is reduced fittingly to an invisible background, internal action, by far the most important, presents an exploration of the attic where Nick was born. This occurs on certain nights when he cannot fish mentally any more, i.e. escape his own truth. In those nights, lying “cold awake,” he would think of his “mother and father’s wedding cake” (note the rhyme) “hanging from one of the rafters” (365), and probably going stale, symbolizing the problematic relation between the parents and the cold violence it is marked with, as the dramatic burning by the mother of the father’s objects, in his absence, shows. The invalidation of the paternal signifier by the maternal “flames” is nonetheless not complete. Nick Adams, out of the phonematic ruins of the father’s name, will manage to construct his subjectivity in between feminine aggressivity and sovereignty, and masculine passivity.

12 Philip Young approached interestingly the crucial issues of Hemingway’s work (especially the trauma theme), yet he skirted around the uncovered holes to look finally at the mask of “heroism” he named “the Hemingway-Code.” According to Philip Young, what Hemingway once called his “grace under pressure,” corresponds to the “Hemingway-Code,” a sort of heroic system of behavior, “[...] made of the controls of honor and courage which in a life of tension and pain make a man a man and distinguish him from the people who follow random impulses, let down their hair, and are generally messy, perhaps cowardly, and without inviolable rules for how to live holding tight” (Young, 1966, 63). The “Hemingway-Hero” and the “Code-Hero” (Young 6), or the “tyro” and “tutor” (Rovit, 1963, 53-77), testify to a binary approach to the
work that reduces its plurality and productive ambiguity to a set of clear-cut moral judgments and values, which are already “there,” and that the protagonist is supposed to be initiated to.

Initiation is a recurrent notion in numerous studies (DeFalco, 1963; Waldhorn, 2001...); it supposes the integration of a superior, i.e. unquestionable order of knowledge, underlain by the certitudes of the moral majority. In one of the chapters of his Hero in Hemingway’s Short Stories, significantly entitled “Initiation,” Joseph DeFalco makes a dualistic reading of opposed “archetypes” in “Indian Camp” and “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” that leads him to biased conclusions about the white characters, seen as the vehicle for the powers of the light, and the Indian characters, who are, according to this clear-cut archetypal binary symbolism, the vehicles for the powers of the dark: “Hemingway establishes a controlling symbol, the Indian camp itself. As in other stories, the camp is suggestive of the primitive and dark side of life. It is a manifestation of the intrusive and irrational elements that impose upon the secure and rational faculties where order and light prevail. For Nick, whose own home is across the lake, the night journey to the camp has all the possibilities of a learning experience” (Defalco 28). Is there anything in “Indian Camp” (or even in the whole work of Hemingway) that supports this view? One doubts it. Joseph DeFalco could draw these ideological conclusions because the text is structurally elliptic and uncommunicative, not containing any ideological message, but rather exploring the possibilities of creative language, as the narrator’s main concern is how to suggest much thanks to “silent” and deliberately reduced verbal forms.

Hence, since the early scholarly studies realized on Hemingway, critical attention has been fed by ideological considerations that subjected the writer’s art to the critic’s moral, political, or religious concerns or beliefs. When the literary is thus submitted to the ideological, the fertile polysemy of the Hemingway text is reduced to the fake stability of the arbitrarily superimposed ideological signifieds. Strangely enough, Hemingway, the modernist and expatriate writer who preferred from the age of twenty-two to live abroad,7 and whose work testifies to certain doubts about the American way of life, becomes in these studies the conveyor of the vitality of white Anglo-Saxon American ethics. The early prominent critics who created and oriented the Hemingway studies, belonged assuredly to a generation whose excessive patriotic Americanism was ignited by the popular nationwide anti-communist campaigns of the 1950s and the global Cold War politics.

Whatever the context, throughout the last five decades Hemingway’s work has been seen, in varied degrees, as the representation of the writer’s ethical ideas, openly or obliquely communicated to the reader through the narrator or the protagonist, automatically and indistinctly seen as the author’s mouthpiece. This is the specific case of what came to be called The Nick Adams Stories, a posthumously arranged and augmented collection, where the protagonist is seen as the mere projection of the writer.

Hemingway wrote between 1924 and 1933 many stories centered on one of his most original characters, Nick Adams. The order of composition and publication does not follow a chronological pattern.8 In the first of these stories ("Chapter VII," in our time, 1924),9 Nick Adams is a wounded soldier, while “Indian Camp,” written later and published in In Our Time (1925), presents him as a child. The order of the stories within the same volume does not follow a chronological line either. In the Men Without Women
collection, “Ten Indians,” where Nick Adams is a young boy, appears after “The Killers” where he is older, and “An Alpine Idyll” is anachronistically situated before “Now I Lay Me,” which hence closes the volume for evident non-chronological reasons and implicit structural reasons.

The reasons for these “disruptions” are clear enough. Not unlike the modernists of his generation who were familiar with Cubism, who read Proust’s In Remembrance of Things Past, and read or heard of William James’s theories on the “flow” or “stream of consciousness” and Einstein’s theories on time’s relativity… Hemingway, who met in Paris two of the most significant American literary theorists, Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein, and learned much from them, distrusted mimetic writing and strove rather to create in his fiction forms of time that would reveal epiphanically the truths (in the plural) he was striving to write. Those truths, which are equated in Hemingway with objects of desire and not concepts, were looked at and presented from different angles. This is why Hemingway wrote different stories centered on one character, Nick Adams, rather than one novel about him. The apparent disorder of these stories is the manifestation of the “hidden order of art” (Ehrenswig) and Hemingway’s belief in the pertinence of symbolical discourse, rather than in the chronological transparency of realism.

The multiplication of different situations at different periods under this freer form, allowed him to build up the world of this character through situational dissimilarities, favoring hence discontinuity instead of chronological and psychological continuity, subtle verbal and visual links rather than referential unity or emotional coherence. The opacity of Nick Adams, which Philip Young unfairly decries and “amends,” is not accidental but structural. The difference between Young’s chronological Nick Adams and Hemingway’s poetic one, might be illustrated by an imaginary comparison between two portraits of Nick Adams, one realized by Courbet, the other by Cézanne. In truth, Courbet would have had a hard time drawing the picture. Indeed, if not for one very laconic, almost imperceptible reference in “Cross-Country Snow” (The Short Stories, 184), Nick Adams is never described by the Narrator. Hemingway avoids thus the limitations of realistic discourse and heightens the poetic and symbolic potentialities of his narratives. The absence of prosopography but also of ethopea frees the character from the ossifications of psychological depth, and liberates his creative energetic possibilities. Nick Adams remains fundamentally the artist’s voice staged in different familiar-looking situations.

Philip Young does not take into consideration at all the structural part of this “disorder” where meaning is created and recreated thanks to the free association of ideas, images, and even phonemes. Having thus appeared “in jumbled sequence,” says Philip Young, “the coherence of [Nick’s] adventures has been obscured, and their impact fragmented” (“Preface,” v). By not submitting the writing of his stories to the referential logic of chronological time (the time of reality “out there”), Hemingway played deliberately on ambiguity, “obscured” poetically his narratives in order to multiply the possibilities of interpretation, to thicken the symbolical potentialities of these stories based on the simplicity (or even absence) of plot, action, and syntax. “Arranged in chronological sequence, he adds, the events of Nick’s life make up a meaningful narrative in which a memorable character grows from childhood to adolescent to soldier, veteran, writer, and parent—a sequence closely paralleling the
The image of an adventurer conquering the wild and wide open spaces of Africa, the figure of the writer as prizefighter able to “beat” or not other writers (Ross), or as a twentieth-century warrior fighting all the good wars, but also his “minimalist” method, his refusal to comment on his work, the tight-lipped speech of his own characters or the athletic and verbal masks some of them wear, helped create Hemingway’s ideological reader.

When the posthumous *Garden* was published – a novel where the protagonist, David Bourne, presents a much more different image from the “usual” Hemingway protagonist – Hemingway seemed to respond from beyond the grave to his conventional readers and feminist detractors and all those who neglected the work in favor of the man or, rather, the image he himself helped create. The gender issue and the correlated themes of sexuality, androgyny have now become the pivotal topic of any innovative study on Hemingway (Spilka, 1990; Comley and Scholes, 1994...).

In her overview of Hemingway’s critical reputation from the 1950s till 1990, Susan Beegel presents chronologically the important currents in Hemingway criticism from the dominant WASP male-centered critical discourse of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, to the more recent feminist and post-feminist critical responses to him. She even believes that the Hemingway study will take a new direction. The author confidently “predict[s] what new ideas might replace discussion of androgyny and gender as these issues grow stale,” i.e. mainly “ecological studies” (Beegel, 1996, 293). The fiction is thus reassessed not in terms of possible new methods, but new ideas. Whatever the announced renewal, Hemingway’s work continues to be seen as an ideological mirror where “new ideas” are celebrated, debated, and then... forgotten. Clearly enough, Hemingway’s critical reputation is not determined by the intrinsic qualities of his works, but by the aleatory development of cultural studies. As Susan Beegel puts it,

> the dearth of minorities and women in the academy during the 1960s is probably the most significant negative influence on Hemingway’s critical reputation. When potential readers reject Hemingway as indifferent to minorities and hostile to women, they are often responding not to Hemingway’s fiction, but to the indifference and hostility of some of his early critics, and a negative image of the author those influential first admirers unintentionally projected. (277)

The renewed interest in Hemingway has not put an end to the phenomenon, it has only shifted its ideological implications. The debate indeed continues to focus on the man, his personality, his social, moral, historical, and, of course, political significance. The restrictive domination of ideology among the earlier critics is not questioned but, on the contrary, justified as such. The debate about Hemingway has become an inter-ideological discussion or quarrel between two different visions of society, opposing feminists and post-feminists – who have now the upper hand –, to the “patriarchal males” whose views once dominated the Hemingway studies. And except for some few studies, what Hemingway created, i.e., literary forms, has continued to be overlooked.

In spite of its useful critical novelties, Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes’ little yet influential book on *Hemingway’s Genders*, does not value the *Hemingway Text* as the subtitle of the book suggests, but substantiates the firm grip ideology and culturally oriented studies have on Hemingway criticism. The general critical attitude toward the writer does not so much reflect an artistic or literary concern as it expresses the will to
change the cultural and hence ideological appreciation of Hemingway. In this important book, Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes call the Hemingway that his posthumous *Garden* helped surface, "el nuevoHemingway" (146). Here one wonders if Hemingway’s works are a product whose meanings or worth are determined by the evolution of ideology, or, rather, a productivity (Barthes), a poetic force that eludes the ideological closures of meaning, and that can be appreciated according to a dynamic and open process determined from within, from the textual world Hemingway created. Plainly enough, it is not Hemingway who is "nuevo," but the critical literary discourse that has not managed to elaborate an intrinsic reading method of his fiction, drawing instead on the cultural or realistic referent to reach the implicit meanings of the text. Moreover, while Hemingway (like most authors) wrote for cathartic purposes but with the clear intention of being freely appreciated and interpreted, literary criticism is heavily determined by classroom scholarship, and is hence influenced by the pedagogical, not to say ideological restrictive intentions of the teacher. Hemingway, more than any other twentieth-century American writer, reflected sharply, as a cultural symbol, and as an appropriated critical object, the ideals and prejudices of his society. The question of critical appreciation depends hence on the manner his works have been taught and appreciated in the academy.

Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes highlight incidentally (and for the best of reasons) this complex threefold relation between artistic creation, teaching, and ideology, when they claim quite confidently that “the Hemingway [we] were taught about in high school is dead” (146). Whatever the pertinence or impertinence of the observation, it symptomatically shows how the academy has it in its power to create and direct the critical reputation of a writer, and to impose, through oral and written criticism, the manner in which she or he should be appreciated. What makes this possible is the focus on the work’s signifieds, imaginary by definition, which are likely to reflect the reader’s or critic’s own assumptions on the writer. The “ancient” Hemingway (a bragging machismo indifferent or even hostile to minorities…), who himself went through and survived different deaths, has now been replaced by a “new” Hemingway (multicultural and sensitive to the complexities of gender and sexual desire). In fact, the explicit themes staged in the posthumous fiction, especially *The Garden of Eden* and, to a lesser extent, “The Last Good Country,” or “The Strange Country” (written in the 1950s), are structurally similar to those connoted textually in the other works. After all, Hemingway does not have two unconsciouses, one determining the later posthumous fiction, the other the rest of the work! As the textual reader knows, the same unconscious forces are at work in the whole of his fiction.

Recent studies have shown how culturally challenging, especially on the issues of sexuality, race, and gender, the Hemingway text is. One can only welcome this manner of appreciating Hemingway from the margins and not from the center any more. Yet, the persistent focus on the relation between text and culture unavoidably and detrimentally subjects the former to the latter. It is not the Hemingway Text which is actually considered, but what might be called the Hemingway Pre-text, or Hemingway as pretext for cultural debates:

[...] We are concerned with the representation of human character in Hemingway’s writing, especially with how characters are constructed along lines of gender and sexual behavior. Our notion of the Hemingway Text, then, puts Hemingway’s writing and the facts of his life at the center and situates around the center various other cultural elements that must enter into any reading of that writing, starting...
with cultural objects we know Hemingway studied or encountered and extending to other cultural elements that throw light on Hemingway as a writer. (Comley and Scholes xi-xii)

27 Hemingway could be hailed a hero and an anti-hero by “white males” and feminists alike, because precisely his work is not ideological. Hemingway’s textual forms look at the reader almost like visual figures in painting – naked and silent. The image that Hemingway as a public figure strove to create and the life he chose to live were of course ideologically determined, but so was not his fiction. Even For Whom the Bell Tolls cannot be considered as a narrative about commitment, whatever the ethical beauty and humanist promises of its Donnean title. Hemingway went to Spain and fought fascism, but not Robert Jordan the protagonist of the novel. And why should Hemingway “go” there twice, really and through fiction? Because through fiction and the symbolical action realized by his protagonist, the writer confronts death, this time not in the military or physical sense of the word. As dealt with in the text, death becomes an attractive power, an overwhelming desire, a mysterious energy that unites suffering and sensuality. It is the necessary elucidation of this knot that structures the plot of the narrative and seems to have motivated its writing.

28 The ideological reader presupposes consciously or not the realism of Hemingway’s fiction. Hemingway has indeed been hailed a brilliant copyist of nature and society, a realistic writer whose “journalistic,” “neutral,” and “manly” style shows reality “as it is.” The excellent observer and reproducer of human behavior is, in other words, the modern positive version of the devalued Platonist poet, supposedly “imitating an imitation.” Being tightly related to the external world, fiction looks real and becomes hence socially useful. This assumption is reassuring as it permits to skirt around the puritan diatribes against fiction and its useless artificiality and non-spirituality. The biographical link is hence one of the most important elements that justify fiction.

29 Hemingway’s life and work are most of the time checked against each other. According to Robert E. Fleming, the readers of The Garden of Eden “will note biographical sources for characters and events in the novel. Catherine Bourne looks a great deal like Pauline Pfeiffer Hemingway, and her burning the manuscripts echoes Hadley Richardson Hemingway’s accidental loss of a small piece of luggage containing all of Hemingway’s manuscripts in 1922” (Fleming, 1996, 141). I do not deny the existence of these models, but I contest the validity of the referential relationship with the text. Assuredly, there is an epistemological confusion between two different orders or two different codes. Once the alleged biographical “model” has been integrated into the world of fiction that Hemingway considers as being real, he or she functions along an utterly different line of appreciation and valuation. The subjection of fiction to biographical reality, and hence one different code to another, is a recurrent trait in Hemingway criticism. Almost all the alleged biographical models of the characters have been identified and used as reading keys. What might be called concordism is so appealing that many scholars cannot separate the biographical and literary significance of Hemingway’s works even when the analysis concerns textual aspects (Justice, 2001).

30 The general assumption about Hemingway’s realism concerns both his “transparent” style and the earlier determining perception of his work as empowering and not challenging American mainstream culture. This is one reason why his fiction is supposedly representative and his characters considered as types. Carlos Baker sees in Nick Adams a typical American young man: “The story of Nick’s education, so far as we
have it, differs in no essential way from that of almost any middleclass American male who started life at the beginning of the present century or even with the generation of 1920” (Baker 131). The subversive matter at work in the fiction is reduced here or rather normalized as if Hemingway’s works were the substantiation of the social ethos. Dealing with “Fathers and Sons,” which can be read as one of the most subversive stories regarding the theme of paternity, the prominent Hemingwayan scholar argues that “Nick was his father’s son, loving his father (...). From the son’s fictional reminiscences a memorable portrait of Dr. Henry Adams is made to emerge” (Baker 129). Jake Barnes, for sure, is the spokesman for the “Lost Generation,” Nick Adams is a war veteran, and whoever the Hemingway “hero,” he is an avatar or a representation of Hemingway.

The typicality of the Hemingway character is taken for granted. The proper textual identity, i.e. the sole material reality of fiction depends on the supposed referent to produce meaning. For instance, the symbolical force of femininity and sensuality in Hemingway’s fiction can only be appreciated if the character “leaves” the text and “inhabits,” as in the following example, the flesh of the supposed model. According to James Nagel indeed, Brett Ashley (The Sun Also Rises) “is not only a woman but an extraordinary woman for the age, a point not clear unless she is considered in historical context” (Nagel, 1996, 92). The coherence of the character is not textual, cognate with and functioning thanks to the symbolical network created by the fiction, but depends utterly on what occurs in the real world.

Hemingway’s “realism” and “naturalism” are rarely discussed; they are taken for granted by numerous critics who never question but confirm “[...] the powerful naturalistic impulse in the fiction of such literary giants as Hemingway and Faulkner [...]” (Pizer, 1995, 14). When Michael Reynolds says that “Margot [Macomber] looks a lot like Jane Mason” and Francis, her husband, “looks a lot like Grant Mason” (Reynolds, 1996 [“Doctors”], 220-221), the comparison “looks like” presupposes automatically the mimetic intention of the fiction, while, in fact, Margot cannot “look like” a real person, but can only be compared to another Hemingwayan character (Brett Ashley, for example) or a character from the work of another writer, playwright, or painter. Margot is above all a textual form, an artifice, or, better still, an active signifier that sounds like Marjorie of which Margot is a more developed version, in terms of marring and feminine power.

The fiction’s false simplicity, reminiscent of Zola’s ideal “transparent style,” misled many scholars into viewing Hemingway’s method as realistic. Very early essays emphasized the point. Hence, E.M.Halliday, who first sees Hemingway as a “philosophical writer” (Halliday, 1956, 1), considers him as a typical realist (Halliday, 1963, 217). Roger Asselineau, too, views Hemingway as a “true realist” representing “as truly as possible” his and his contemporaries’ “horrible reality” (Asselineau, 1966, xvii). This is also David Lodge’s premise (1981), or Paul Goodman’s who contends that Hemingway’s fiction and “passive style” are naturalistic, though in a “deeper” and more original sense (Goodman, 1974, 154). Bickford Sylvester evokes the “naturalistic surfaces of [Hemingway’s] narratives” (Sylvester, 1989, 91). Elizabeth Dewberry, who in other respects highlights penetratingly the complex relationship between language, history, fact, and fiction in Hemingway’s writing, considers him as a “writer of realist fiction” (Dewberry 16).
The aim here is not to set up an exhaustive list of the realistic readings of Hemingway, but to underline the ideological logic lying behind. In truth, it is not Hemingway’s realism that the commentators praise, but realism per se. So what is meant exactly by realism in Hemingway? Is it a matter of expression or attitude?

In fact, opinions are premised upon both. Hemingway’s style is supposedly “objective,” the depicted situations are unsophisticated and the places are commonplace, characters look like real-life persons, and the author’s image is so reassuring that expression and attitude appear to be easily recognizable. Hemingway’s objectivity, the factuality of his writing are in the following comment attributed to the writer’s ethical and aesthetic beliefs: “Hemingway’s prose, based on his belief in the ability of concrete language to construct an objective reality, his craftsmanlike insistence that language is a tool of the writer, and not vice versa, would prove extremely resistant to the critical method of deconstruction” (Beegel, 1997, 287). Hemingway might have believed personally in this; but if he did, he never said it. He expressed his admiration for the great Russian and French realists, but he also admired Cézanne, Picasso, Pound, numerous musicians, and acknowledged that he learned as much from writers and poets as from other artists (Plimpton, 1958). But he never said that he wrote realistic fiction.

His realism is assumed because his prose is supposedly mimetic (it looks like objective reality), and because as an author he hypothetically controls the language he uses and the totality of the produced meaning. In this perspective, Hemingway seems to expose his craftsmanship and to communicate a set of beliefs and ideas to his readers, to the detriment of signification and ambiguity. The “tool” as such is devalued as it only serves to designate something else that exists beyond the inherent reality of the words. Linguistically speaking, it is the meaningfulness of literary texts which is valued, not its poetic opacity and ambiguity, its power of suggestion, its music and sensuality. The primary aim of writing, says Geneviève Hily-Mane, is “to be read, i.e. understood and assimilated by its addressee” (Hily-Mane, 1983, 99). This is also what E.M. Halliday assumes when he says that Hemingway is “a writer who aims at realism” (Halliday, 1963, 217). He briefly defines realism as a method of representation of life and of distinction between the objective and the subjective:

[Defining realism] includes two limitations. One of these is familiar and, I should think, easily acceptable: that realism in fiction attempts to re-present life, through an artistic illusion, as it is “normally” experienced—that is, with as much probability and immediacy as possible. The other, which I advance more tentatively, is that literary realism, like epistemological realism in the vocabulary of philosophy, should make a distinction between the objective and subjective worlds, presupposing and emphasizing the existence of things independent of our experience of them. (Halliday 217)

Contrary to Proust’s or Woolf’s, Hemingway’s best work does not fuse the internal world and the “world of reality,” as the objectivity of his work “is one of its most celebrated features.” Hemingway “selects his objective facts carefully” and “manages to convey accurately his hero’s subjective states by implications” (217, 218). So doing he avoids brilliantly “the non-realistic tendency to confuse objective and subjective” (219). It is obvious that here realism is not considered simply as a discourse among other literary or artistic discourses possessing specific rules, but as the expression of an ideal realized through the “artistic illusion”: the affirmation of objectivity and clarity.
at the expense of “the stigma of retrospective reconstruction,” i.e. subjective, non-pragmatic fusions and confusions (220)!

Hence, these “technical” observations are in fact buttressed by ideological assumptions about the manliness of realistic discourse, the manliness of Hemingway, and, of course, the manliness of American democracy (Spiller). The objective world or reality that Hemingway constructs represents the ideal social reality, a reality marked with order, coherence, the comfort of hierarchy, and certainty. “Objective reality” correlates here with harmony and intelligibility. Ambiguity, which lies at the root of poetic suggestion, is to be avoided because it is subjective and maybe subversive; the writer, on the contrary, creates a transparent world that looks real, i.e. true.

In brief, what is implied by these assumptions about Hemingway’s realism, is the fact the ideas (or “messages”) and realities to which the words call the attention of the reader, are what really matters, not the words themselves. These are the tools of the writer who creates meaning willingly, and in so doing reassures society. The inherent “identity” of the words (their materiality as signs) is not taken into consideration. Language is viewed as a medium devoid of traces of enunciation that might denote a different order of meaning: seemingly disordered and meaningless, yet coherent and richly connotative.

Underlain by chronological order, psychological and narratological coherence, and objective and documentary knowledge, realism and naturalism present a reassuring mirror to society. Even when they describe social fragmentation, the negative image is “contained within the order of significant form.” Indeed, as Leo Bersani notes, realistic and naturalistic literature gives constantly to society that seems to be severely judged, the comfort of a systematic vision of itself and the security of a structured meaning. The very desire “to be realistic” represents a crucial, albeit obscure aspect of this connivance that binds the novelist and society together. (Bersani 59)

In order to realize these aims and to maintain objectivity, realistic discourse places the emphasis on the protagonist and reduces the role of the narrator to a mere reporting agent, transcribing events that remain outside his own emotional realm. Hemingway’s realistic method has been praised because even an I-narrator like Jake Barnes (The Sun Also Rises) manages to use an “authentic” technical perspective, i.e. “having the tone of an eye-witness report” (Halliday, 1963, 217).

Yet, if one considers the Hemingway narrator as a voice and not simply as a mere witnessing eye, the unconscious desire at work in the narrative becomes manifest. In other words, the Hemingway narrative, because the writing stance is not realistic but poetic, i.e. not concerned with communication and representation, but with signification and verbal enjoyment, makes the reader hear the voices of the unconscious, liberates the repressed elements that come up to the surface to create effects of meaning in the guise of real effects. The volcano figure, connoted through metonymical and metaphorical links, conveys in the following excerpt from “Big Two-Hearted River,” a meaning that goes beyond the limited scope of representation: “[…] On the smoking skillet he poured smoothly the buckwheat batter. It spread like lava, the grease spitting sharply. Around the edges the buckwheat cake began to firm, then brown, then crisp. The surface was bubbling slowly to porousness” (222).

Primary processes with their energetic thrusts appear in the discourse of the narrator and voice the unconscious, testifying hence to the transgression of the symbolic order.
The pressure of the “real” is evidenced by the energetic metaphor but also by the insistence of the plosive phonemes [p] and [b] that correspond to the sudden release of the air after its flow has been stopped. Moreover, the bubbling surface can also be considered as a babble of unconscious phonematic energy, or as a babel of unconscious voices trying to come up to the surface.19

Far from being realistically self-controlled and self-conscious, the language of “Big Two-Hearted River” expands its poetic possibilities toward primary processes, incorporating hence the creative force of disorder. The subject of the unconscious and enunciation seems misleadingly to be expelled from the narrator’s perplexingly “objective” and stripped bare discourse. In the following excerpt from the same story, we are presented with a typical Hemingwayan description, marked with mimetic transparency, impervious objectivity, and “phallic” naturalistic knowledge. The comic theatricality of the scene seems to confirm the realism of action and tone:

He started down the stream, holding his rod, the bottle of grasshoppers hung from his neck by a thong tied in half hitches around the neck of the bottle. His landing net hung by a hook from his belt. Over his shoulder was a long flour sack tied at each corner into an ear. The cord went over his shoulder. The sack flapped against his legs.

Nick felt awkward and professionally happy with all his equipments hanging from him. The grasshopper bottle swung against his chest. In his shirt the breast pockets bulged against him with the lunch and his fly book. (223)

There is much to say about the excessive image of masculinity especially suggested by the multiplication of reassuring objects, all connected to the knowledge of the well-equipped angler! Yet, what is of interest here is precisely what belies this phallic image: the subject of enunciation that musically passes through the discourse of the narrator. The rhyme is arresting: chest/breast. The unity of the two signifiers testifies to the power of desire at work, a desire of totality that challenges the limits of realistic discourse. Yet, the poetic force of Hemingway does not lie only in these epiphanic truths, but in the relation between the double planes of discourse and enunciation. The unconscious meaning suggested by the rhyme chest/breast is produced by the narrator’s discourse, not the protagonist’s speech or action. Yet, it is backed up by the image of the self as conveyed by the protagonist’s action: Nick has filled his breast pockets with his lunch and fly book, making his chest “bulge”.

The rhythmic, plastic, and dramatic force of the passage is enhanced by the pertinent link between the two ‘objects,’ one referring to the oral drive and bodily matter (primary sources), the other testifying to the necessary shift to the realm of the artificial. The passage from the former to the latter is a minimal but intense illustration of the Freudian notion of sublimation.

The polysemic and polyphonic mobility of meaning operates subtly in the narrative and liberates it from the grip of realistic discourse, which is, as Philippe Hamon would have it, a “restrained” discourse. Here, the (sexual) identity theme has no psychological depth. It operates at the surface level and points to the creative possibilities of poetic language, staged by the falsely familiar action of the protagonist, and enjoyed hic et nunc by the narrator.

When the Hemingway protagonist is viewed against the biographical background, which is immediately ideological and fantasmatic in the case of Hemingway, the poetic force of the narrative is suppressed in favor of the moral ossifications of psychologism. This is precisely how proliferating recent studies interpret the sexual theme in
Hemingway's fiction. Here, the false depth of realistic perspectivism discussed above, has an imaginary counterpart, i.e. the biographical and ideological "depth" of fantasy. Indeed, when the commentators deal with the subversive matter at work in Hemingway, the emphasis is heavily placed on Hemingway himself, his characters being recognized as the fantasized auto-biographical projections of Hemingway himself, posthumously avowing his sexual secrets, real or imaginary, in a well-hidden Garden of Eden whose doors he kept shut while still alive.

49 Carl P. Eby “psychoanalyzes” the man and the work alike, shifting from the former to the latter and vice versa. “Elucidating Hemingway’s psychosexuality,” contends the author, is “essential for understanding his own or his characters' unconscious motivations” (Eby, 1999, 2). The purport here is “to better understand the psychology of Hemingway’s fetishism as well as what is at stake in his texts” (Eby, 2005, 79). This method, which presupposes the possibility of psychoanalyzing a person in absentia (i.e. in the absence of the real body, the real voice, and outside any institutional framework), or through his creative work (considered as a psychological representation of the author’s psychic life), is a perplexing shortcut, rather reminiscent of Philip Young’s initial work, except that Carl P. Eby substitutes “fetishism” for “trauma.”

50 Yet, Carl P. Eby’s “psychoanalytical” contentions about Hemingway’s “fetishism” and “transvestism” are all the more puzzling as they mistake erotic imagination for pornography, fantasy for reality, and, what is more, artistic creation for pathology and desire for perversion (Eby, 1999, 2005). Besides, the question of sublimation, central to appreciating Hemingway’s poetics of desire, is completely ignored, while it demonstrates, if need be, that Hemingway’s fiction, contrary to Bataille’s for instance, cannot be associated to perversion in any form (Abouddahab, 2001).

51 Hemingway’s bafflingly alleged perversion is also the focal point of the work of Richard Fantina, who contends that “masochism [...] prevails in much of [Hemingway’s] work” (Fantina 84). Ultimately, this creates a generalized sense of suspicion, as any female character holding a gun becomes “phallic,” and any aggressive act realized by her means an act of penetration of the male character. The idea does not need to be textually demonstrated; it simply needs to be stated: “In ‘The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,’ Margot’s rifle is a phallic projection of sex and death. When she shoots her husband, Margot perpetrates the ultimate act of penetration of the male body” (Fantina 103).

52 The sexual theme, which, since the publication of The Garden of Eden, seems to have broken new ground in Hemingway studies, turns out to be a debate about the ideological meaning of sexuality. In this perspective, Hemingway’s alleged masochism has political extensions, being considered as subversive to the “dominant fiction” of phallic power (Silverman). Hemingway’s fiction, which has been interpreted in early studies as the substantiation of American ethics, continues today to back up the realization of new social projects and new utopias.

53 Ideological readings are the most prominent trend in Hemingway criticism, but there have been interesting studies that have revealed the rich singularity of his art. Charles Fenton’s Hemingway’s Apprenticeship usefully examines the writer’s early years as journalist and the development of his literary style out of this journalistic experience (Fenton, 1954). Other critics have constructively analyzed Hemingway’s narrative pattern (Nahal, 1971; Ficken 1971; Hily-Mane, 1975, 1986...). The style of Ernest
Hemingway attracted many scholars, especially when it became possible to read Hemingway’s manuscripts. The most important works dealing with the writer’s style are doubtless Geneviève Hily-Mane’s who devoted many articles and a full-length study to Hemingway’s stylistic method (Hily-Mane, 1983), where she revealed the linguistic complexities of the writer’s misleadingly simple style. Interesting studies have been devoted to Hemingway’s craft in general (Grebstein, 1973), or to specific aspects of his writing, such as the use of omission or understatement (Brenner, 1983; Johnston, 1987; Beegel, 1988), his rhetoric (Rao, 1983; Tetlow, 1992), or to the tragic dimension of his work (Broer, 1973; Williams, 1981).

An interesting trend in Hemingway criticism concerns comparative studies or “influence” studies. They have evolved throughout the decades to suggest helpfully, whatever the purely “imaginary” dimension of some of them, the literary background of Hemingway’s work. While the legend of “Papa Hemingway” held sway, it was indeed interesting to read studies comparing Hemingway and Flaubert (Engstrom, 1950) or Hugo (Orrok, 1951). Other than the most important American writers of his own and of the earlier generations (Thoreau, Twain, Adams, Dreiser, Stein, Pound, Anderson, Fitzgerald, Faulkner...), Hemingway has been mainly compared to French writers (Maupassant, Stendhal, Flaubert), and to Russian writers (Turgenev, Tolstoy).

In other more important and increasingly pertinent influence studies, the different artistic “sources” of Hemingway have been laid bare. His work has been associated to the arts in general (Watts, 1971; Hermann, 1997), to impressionism or expressionism (Nelson, 1979; Nagel, 1987), or to cubism (Naugrette, 1990; Vaughn, 1994; Brogan, 1998; Narbeshuber, 2006). He has been compared to many painters such as Goya (Haas, 1987), Hopper, and especially Cézanne, whom Hemingway himself designated as a mentor in his posthumous memoir A Moveable Feast (Hagemann, 1979; Johnston, 1984; Nakjavani, 1986; Hermann, 1997; Gaillard, 1999; Berman, 2004; Stanley, 2004).

Important “textual” studies have been devoted to the large collection of manuscripts left by Hemingway at his death, since 1975 when the National Archives in Waltham, Massachusetts, then the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, were trusted with nearly twenty thousand pages of manuscripts. The critics could hence follow the different steps of composition and verify, if need be, the complexity and exacting rules of Hemingway’s craft (Reynolds, 1976; Hily-Mane, 1977; Oldsey, 1979; Beegel, 1988). In truth, bearing in mind Gérard Genette’s austere taxonomy, the manuscript studies should be affiliated with “para-textual” scholarship (Genette 1982), as they focus on the necessary elements that have been left out from the text and have accompanied the genesis of the work without being part of it.

Textual studies in the strict sense of the word (Barthes, Derrida, Genette, Kristeva...) are exceptional in Hemingway studies; they remain one of the most important fields of research that might be developed in the coming years out of the few available studies already conducted on this usually overlooked aspect. The textual dimension is based on ambiguity, suggestion, polysemy, indetermination, and the absence of an absolute meaning. Paying attention to the textual combinations in Hemingway’s fiction allows the reader to perceive and celebrate what the text signifies not what it supposedly communicates.

This is how I personally have read Hemingway’s fiction ever since I started doing research on him (Abouddahab, 1992), as did Thomas Strychacz in his Hemingway’s
It is necessary to consider, as the essays in this volume do, how Hemingway’s fiction does not overlook the relation between the sign and the referent or consider it as ‘natural.’ His fiction is aware of the problematic relation between the two and explores fittingly “the nature of reality and the relationship among reality, representation, and language” (Dewberry 16). To put it differently, Hemingway did not believe in the realistic fallacy and did not consider his fiction as the ideological mirror of his society.

I do not mean that literature or art are not determined at all by culture, or that they can go unaffected by social pressure or change; the question is to what extent? Hemingway is not Faulkner who is not Toni Morrison who is not William Gaddis. My principal premise is that ideological and realistic readings of Hemingway are not totally erroneous; one cannot deny the presence in this writer’s work of some “human” substance, some form of social and historical concern, or biographical background. I see them rather as a fast track, overlooking the actual work done, i.e. all the matter that accounts for the fiction’s literacy (Jakobson, Rifaterre), the formal elements that make of it what it is: simply and uniquely Hemingwayan. The specific identity of the Hemingway text, its singular reality and inimitable vigor, its intrinsic sternly well-built pillars – to use an architectural Hemingwayan metaphor: “Prose is architecture, not interior decoration, and the Baroque is over” (Death in the Afternoon, 170) –, all the artistic elements that make of Hemingway the significant writer we know, should not be reduced or overlooked in favor of the premise of representation and the hackneyed ideological overemphasized issues, but, on the contrary, celebrated.

It is true that some of Hemingway’s fiction, especially the work published in the 1930s, is marked with a pretentious “Hegelian” all-knowing tone. To Have and Have Not, Hemingway’s unique “political” novel, and some of the stories published in and especially after Winner Take Nothing (1933), present certain realistic characteristics (portraits, an obsession with authorial discourse, mimetic descriptions, the rejection of intuitive spontaneity, self-consciousness, references to social discourse…). But these texts are rather exceptional. Most of the narratives in The First Forty-Nine Stories are essentially poetic.

Dealing with Hemingway’s fiction, I have always disregarded the referential dimension in favor of what I consider as the core of Hemingway’s art: its fundamentally poetic force. Indeed, my own view sees the originality of Hemingway’s work as centrally present not in story and diegesis, but in text and poetry: the musical play of the letter, the rigorous construction of the visual sequence, the silent and so significant wake left by the object of desire, evanescent, intriguing, attracting, and disquieting; the subtle interplay between the two planes of story and discourse in a continuous “solidarity” between narrative voice and character, frame and stage.

Contrary to his modernist contemporaries (Joyce, Woolf, Fitzgerald…), the poetic force of Hemingway’s writing is not so much palpable in the poetics of the signifier as it is in the poetics of enunciation. I believe that Hemingway’s best appears when the text manifests the consciousness of its own identity, however familiar, athletic, or adventurous the action performed by the protagonist might be, however anti-intellectual or plain speech might sound. In so doing, the reader perceives on the mask
of diegesis the marks of artistic creation, the forces (unconscious, creative, disordered and ordered) at the root of its production. This is the real subject and concern of Hemingway’s fiction.

To be sure, the reflexive consciousness of textual autonomy is not verbally assumed by a character or the narrator through an obvious metafictional discourse; it is, and this also accounts for Hemingway's poetic force, staged by characters evolving in a world reminiscent of the familiar world. The straightforward concreteness of action and expression, the striking simplicity of the exposed ideas and of the verbal medium, give to the fiction the transparent guise of realistic fiction. The misleading “real effect” Hemingway’s writing produces, operates only in diegesis and its chronological development. In text or narrative, one can perceive the artistic consciousness at work, moving the apparent simplicity of theme and action into different patterns of aesthetic complexity. Looking, for example, does not simply describe a pre-existent scene or create the illusion of depth to prove how good a “copyist” Hemingway is, but structures the (disquieting) “real” into a delicately organized and rigorously unified textual world (“An Alpine Idyll,” “Big Two-Hearted River,” “The Light of the World,” “Old Man at the Bridge”...). In Hemingway’s most significant stories, the narrative dramatizes imperceptibly and finely its own artistic constituents.

When the narrator of “Indian Camp” depicts Nick, who is holding the basin for his father, as “looking away so as not to see what his father [is] doing” (93), he seems to present an “incident” illustrating “character” or the protagonist's psychology. In reality, it is not. The varied repetition of the same observation inscribes in the narrative a meaning whose range goes beyond the mimetic function of literature: “Nick didn’t look at it,” “Nick did not watch” (ibid.). The comportment of the protagonist has a discursive counterpart as the narrator remains himself silent on certain events. These silent events are not narrated; they nonetheless take place verbally in the textual world of the fiction. They are not passive blanks designed to alleviate the superfluous weights of description; they are rather active ‘white’ signs testifying to the presence of an implicit subject who functions both artistically and ethically, inscribing in the narrative the aesthetic awareness of the importance of these privative utterances, and at the same time voices from within this aesthetic shelter his own fears and fallibilities.

“Later when he started to operate Uncle George and three Indian men held the woman still. [...]” (ibid.). What happened in between the moment the father asks George to “‘pull back’” the quilt that the Indian woman has been wrapped in so far, and the moment he decides to operate? The text does not simply or accidentally skip a difficult and structuring episode that psychoanalysis calls “castration” (in which case one is liable to speak here of the unconscious process of repression). The text is aware of its productive manipulation of silence. It has the power to transform repression into structural omission. The text, in other words, shows what it omits, and in so doing reveals its artistic structure.

Omission operates also at the level of enunciation: it appears in the text as an act of veiling and unveiling the unbearable truth, which is not pretentiously or philosophically presented as the truth, but the protagonist’s truth as it appears at one specific moment. This is how the Hemingway text “pulls back” its own curtain, a curtain of “mist” that the reader goes through from the outset, and that leads analogically to the mother's quilt, and finally to the husband's tragic blanket, i.e. a blank it.
The child cannot face certain difficult or tragic aspects of human reality (sexual difference or violent death...). But what lacks at the level of diegesis becomes structural at the level of narrative or text. The incapacities of Nick are used by the narrator as sculpturing devices, allowing him to negatively highlight his text, creating thus, like a sculptor, negative, dark, empty zones in order to endow the “visible” parts with intensity and a striking sense of truth. Hence, the Hemingway narrator makes of his protagonists’ fallibilities, foibles, or capacities, productive elements. Taken into consideration, the fine association between the two planes of diegesis and text (or discourse), utterance and enunciation, shows how action, while appearing to illustrate “character,” stages in fact the artist’s vision. Only paying attention to the diegetic world corresponds to forgetting precisely the seven-eighths of the textual iceberg, i.e. the actual work realized. Self-reflexive textual awareness is not static, nor is it expressed, but impressed in the verbal matter.

Not unlike Nick in “Now I Lay Me” who is daydreaming, the writer is within and without, conscious of what happens to him unconsciously, simultaneously (and mysteriously) in control and out of control. The subjective position from which writing is produced remains ambiguous and inexplicable, and, as Jacques Derrida once admitted, no one can honestly say what writing is (Derrida, 1980), because in order to answer this question one has to determine where the writing occurs or, rather, where it leads to. The sylleptic structure of the following excerpt from The Garden of Eden dramatizes well this voyage through the words:

> When he sat down the sun was not yet up and he felt that he had made up some of the time that was lost in the story. But as he reread his careful legible hand and the words took him away and into the other country, he lost that advantage and was faced with the same problem and when the sun rose out of the sea it had, for him, risen long before and he was well into the crossing of the gray, dried, bitter lakes his boots now white with crusted alkalis. He felt the weight of the sun on his head and his neck and his back. [..] (138)

What is at stake here might be called a sylleptic consciousness. David, who dissolves as an ego to become a writing force, reaches a level of consciousness that makes him not only see but feel what he invents, and, what is more, believe in it. This is the objective reality Hemingway’s fiction presents; not the reality “out there,” but the reality within, a world that becomes objective to the writer and that writing, literally a vehicle, leads to or at least makes true: “He went on with the story, living in it and nowhere else, and when he heard the voices of the two girls outside he did not listen” (107). In this perspective, creating has nothing to do with representing reality, but reaching a level of creativity that transforms psychic reality into an objective one, and it is this shivering sense of the real that Hemingway’s fiction gives to the reader. The writer invents his own world – “[...] he was inventing all of it. It was all true now because it happened to him as he wrote [...]” – (94), and so doing he at once becomes and manipulates the forms he creates – human, vegetal, animal; male and female.

What Hemingway writes fundamentally is not reality but the real, i.e. what lies at the core of reality and is negated by it: death, sexual inadequacy, otherness, silence... Modern culture, modern reality denies death, devalues silence, rejects slowness, non-productivity, failure. Hemingway’s fiction, on the contrary, highlights those dark matters that modern reality strives to expel. What is more, these dark matters become the structural pillars of Hemingway’s fiction.
By focusing on the poetic dimensions of the Hemingway text, by placing the emphasis much more on discourse than on story, or by completely leaving aside the diegetic plane, the essays in this volume reveal new textual dimensions of Hemingway’s fiction. Taken together, they complement the important scholarship already available, and suggest modestly new manners of reading Hemingway.

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The leading article sets the tone of this volume whose main aim is to unveil the (purely) literary and formal dimensions – poetic, plastic, parodic...– of Hemingway’s stories, regardless of indefatigable conjectures about the ideological referentiality of the work. Claude Maisonnat’s reading of “Hills Like White Elephants” pertinently rejects binary considerations and the moral, social, if not biographical assumptions they are often premised on. The focus of the study is precisely not the ideological conclusions one can draw from the implicit theme of “Hills Like White Elephants”, nor the way Hemingway deals in this much-debated story with the clichéd theme of gender. The freshness of Claude Maisonnat’s essay results from the emphasis he places throughout his study on the way the narrative incorporates artistic themes, while the story seems to implicitly deal with abortion. His textualist approach in the proper sense of the word, helps him disclose the inferred threefold relation that structures the narrative; the dual relation established by the two characters is dealt with in relation to a third element: the narrative voice. The meaning of the story lies in the dynamic relations finely established between these three agents.

Bearing this in mind, one can interpret the story metaphorically: “Hills Like White Elephants” is not about having an abortion or not, but about literary creation. The mimetic or realistic function of discourse is assumed by the man, while the creative and metaphorical use of discourse is conveyed by the girl. The dialogue about abortion, the “omitted” theme of the story, turns out to be in Claude Maisonnat’s convincing and rigorously built interpretation, a discussion about abortion as a metaphor for problematic literary creation, in a complex textual organization involving the three aforementioned agents. Taking into consideration the contained discourse of the narrative agent, the apparently contradictory and conflicting relation between the man and his partner becomes on the contrary productive.

As the title of her study suggests, Alice Clark-Wehinger deals with the notions of deviation and in-betweenness or entre-deux in “The Sea Change.” Her essay acknowledges the numerous studies devoted to the story and helpfully assimilates some of their conclusions. Yet, she distances herself from the conventional readings that view the story’s “sea change” as an identity crisis or a conflict between heterosexual and homosexual wills, leading eventually to the triumph of the latter. The explicit theme of loss is minimised in favor of the theme of sexual “completeness,” considered by the author as the true outcome of the story. The notion of rupture does not operate at the level of sexual choices or identities; it is above all a question of form as Hemingway’s story breaks with conventions at the thematic, compositional, and structural levels. “The Sea Change” is considered here as a subversive love story that departs from the literary tradition, not only because homosexual feminine desire challenges a marital or at least heterosexual relation, but also because the narrative is structured around an obscure unnamed other.
The author demonstrates her conclusions by a sensitive analysis of Hemingway's narrative method: the dynamism of silence, the use of dialogue as a substitute for action, the absence of plot, the assimilation of two important inter-texts... It is especially the latter that retains Alice Clark-Wehinger's critical attention. The Pope and Shakespeare “hypotexts” (Genette, 1982) help highlight the story’s implicit meanings and re-orient its exposed themes. While Pope, unsuccessfully quoted by the male character, Phil, suggests his initial division, the reference to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* in the very title of the story substantiates the implicit *entre-deux* motif, viewed not as a conflicting, albeit dialectical, relation between opposites, but as the common space where these opposites merge together. Not unlike the young woman’s role in “Hills Like White Elephants,” the girl’s role in “The Sea Change” is most fundamental: she is the agent through which this rich *seachange* occurs, prompting her partner to liberate himself from the ossifying bipolarity he has been the prisoner of so far.

The first two studies value the active presence of what could be called a “feminine voice,” and demonstrate how creative and intricately related to the artist’s vision the voice is. The following study highlights the feminine voice from the angle of silence and its narrative and ethical use by Hemingway.

Cassandre Meunier’s study explores the feminine theme and shows, if need be, how Hemingway made of female characters “positive” figures. This once innovative area of scholarship might seem to have lost its fine edge, which is true unless one eschews psychological and ideological considerations, and looks at the text and the way it creates meaning. This is precisely the case of Cassandre Meunier’s essay: it does not present a set of predictable remarks on the important place Hemingway’s fiction gives to female characters; it rather relates the theme of femininity to textual phenomena, mainly silence, assuredly a multifaceted notion considered here as an identified linguistic fact. Deploying a methodology that draws mainly on the theoretical works of Ihab Hassan, Adam Jaworski, Deborah Tannen..., she analyzes the different oral and literate strategies in the text (verbal and non-verbal communication, reader response, description...), and explores the interplay between silence and social processes, and especially between silence and/or discourse and the exercise of power.

Hence, silence is not only considered as a linguistic phenomenon or a literary device inventively used by Hemingway to heighten the suggestive possibilities of his fiction – the “iceberg principle” is, as we know, the hub of Hemingway’s style; it is also construed as the illustration of an ethical quality, namely dignity and moral courage. Thanks to the ethical use of silence, the female characters are not only equal to their male counterparts, they are especially cognate to the artistic and ethical vision of the writer himself.

One of the salient, albeit inchoate, traits of this essay, lies in the interesting connection established between the levels of story and narrative (or text). It would be interesting to pursue the argument further and include the dimension of enunciation in the analysis of silence, and see how Hemingway’s work problematizes the question of communication and fictionalizes both the possibilities and limits of language. Furthermore, if the study rightfully argues that the seeming interest Hemingway exposes with respect to “men’s worlds” is not absolute, as his fiction shows that female identities are in accordance with the moral values that structure his fiction, then, here again, one can skirt the hackneyed issue of gender and expand the question of femininity toward the themes of literary or artistic creation.
In truth, what is at stake in Hemingway’s fiction, as in Proust’s or Woolf’s, is not gender as such, but identity; the behavior or emotional response is determined by the subject of enunciation, i.e. the subject of the unconscious which is both female and male. The analysis of the poetics of silence in Hemingway can usefully help surface this “subject” not as a deep psychological entity, but as an energetic, creative, and imaginative force.

The conclusions drawn in the three preceding studies about the feminine voice and its relation to artistic creation and the writer’s ethics, presuppose a rupture with moral and literary conventions. They also presuppose Hemingway’s awareness of the imaginary and symbolical construction of the human identity. This is why his fiction, as the three following essays show, uses reality in order to reveal the “real,” ethically defined in Horst Breuer’s study, psychoanalytically in Elisabeth Bouzonviller’s and Eléonore Forrest’s.

Horst Breuer’s essay, straightforwardly if not simply entitled “Past and Present in ‘Cat in the Rain’ and ‘Old Man at the Bridge,” is not, as the title might well suggest, a dualistic reading of two opposed categories; it rather aims to analyze the ambivalent appeal of tradition and modernity. The past denotes a sense of security and assurance while the present is, on the contrary, associated with the notions of decenteredness and unpredictability. In reality, the relation between past and present creates a permanent tension and testifies to continuous encroachments. One can even speak of a form of in-betweenness that marks the relation between tradition and modernity, as the freedom provided by the latter means the loss of security and certainty ensured by the former.

Hemingway’s artistic method is reminiscent of the figure-ground process in Gestalt psychology, and Horst Breuer discerningly spotlights the surface effects in these stories without yielding to the illusions of depth. The author’s fine textual observations highlight some of the important aspects of Hemingway’s art, such as the strategic use of omission and silence, polysemy, the composition of space and motion, and other literary devices that account for the timelessness of Hemingway’s art.

This essay shows that Hemingway’s perspective is neither idealistic nor nostalgic. The young woman in the cat story and the old Spanish peasant in the war story, romanticize their past, but the narrator suggests the deadlocked irrelevance of their wistful longings. What Hemingway fundamentally writes are not the easy promises of life, but the “real,” what lies at the core of reality and is unalterable and impassable. This is the focus of Elisabeth Bouzonviller’s essay.

In his famous Education, Henry Adams makes an insightful remark about 19th century American art which, Adams thinks, is unable to cope with sex:

Adams began to ponder, asking himself whether he knew of any American artist who had ever insisted on the power of sex, as every classic had always done; but he could think only of Walt Whitman; Bret Harte, as far as the magazines would let him venture; and one or two painters, for the flesh-tones. All the rest had used sex for sentiment, never for force; to them, Eve was a tender flower, and Herodias an unfeminine horror. American art, like the American language and American education, was as far as possible sexless. (385)

One had to wait for the “wild” autobiographies of Henry Miller to see an American writer deal frankly with eroticism. In between Whitman and Miller, the modernist writers did not belie Adams’s appreciation. American modernist literature shies away from a healthy presentation of sexual desire. In his famous Love and Death in the
American Novel, Leslie Fiedler deals with “the failure of the American fictionist to deal with adult heterosexual love” (xii). He nonetheless acknowledges that Hemingway’s fiction “is much addicted to describing the sex act. It is the symbolic center of his work [...]. There are, however, no women in his books! In his earlier fictions, Hemingway’s descriptions of the sexual encounter are intentionally brutal, in his later ones unintentionally comic; for in no case, can he quite succeed in making his females human [...]” (304). If the first part of the quotation is insightful, the second one is rather hasty and inconsiderate, and straitjackets Hemingway in order to prove a general theory about American literature.

Considering “The End of Something” as a paradoxical love story, Elisabeth Bouzonviller’s close textual analysis of the story demonstrates the force of the sexual theme in Hemingway’s fiction. Indeed, the sexual issue plays an important thematic role and operates efficiently, like the rest, beneath the surface. The story under consideration is viewed as a subverted fairy tale, not only departing from but sometimes inverting traditional sexual roles. In fact, what is dramatized in the story is the inevitable sexual otherness and the tragic solitude of the sexualized human being. This is the “truth” staged in the story: the impassable gulf that separates the sexes. The writer’s non-nostalgic, non-idealistic approach permits him to lay bare the truth of sexual difference. Hemingway writes what lies at the root of reality: man’s original division, the impossibility of love to make up for what has been lost forever at one’s birth. The feeling of wholeness that love gives is but a mirage.

Elisabeth Bouzonviller’s premises are backed up by a very precise and rigorous textual analysis that uncovers the fine workings of the narrative, at the syntactic, semantic, symbolical, and visual levels of this often overlooked story. What “The End of Something” stages beyond the misleading familiarity of the exposed theme (the end of a love affair in a natural scenery) and its topicality (female ascendency), is what lies beyond words: the unspeakable, both as a mark and as an act.

It is the same unspeakable “real” that Éléonore Lainé Forrest perceives at the heart of Hemingway’s early masterpiece, “Indian Camp.” Her micro-textual Lacanian reading highlights the zones of silence and failure in what she considers rightfully as a “story in disguise,” the essential meanings being enunciated in discourse or narrative, i.e. the poetic verbal structure of the story. The essay suspects appositely the apparent and misleading dualism of the story. Contrary to Manichean readings opposing Whites to Indians, men to women..., the author looks at the zones of tension where contraries merge together. The crossing of the lake leads to the “Other Scene” (Mannoni) or unconscious. The quest then is not seen in terms of initiation; it is viewed as a self-discovery, an elucidation of one’s ignorance. “Indian Camp” stages the early phases of the subject’s education when s/he needs to acknowledge her or his human, limited condition, and accept the symbolic order. The narrative reveals this necessary sacrifice at the root of one’s development into subjectivity.

Hemingway once said about “The Light of the World,” one of his favorite stories, that there is much more to it than meets the eye: “It is about many things and you would be ill-advised to think it is a simple tale” (Hemingway, “The Art,” 92). Assuredly, Émilie
Walezak is a well-advised reader who brilliantly uncovers the complexity of this story whose apparent simplicity of theme and structure is perplexing. The picaresque dimension and the conflicting themes of innocence and initiation are only red herrings allowing the “ill-advised” to identify psychologically and culturally with the story. In truth, the artistic force of “The Light of the World” lies in its surface quality or form: its visual geometry, rigorous structure, its theatricality that reduces psychology and enhances performance, its implicit and yet enriching inter-textuality, and in the... anonymity of its narrator. Synthesizing the most prominent and typical studies of the story, drawing on Todorov, Bakhtine, and the linguistics of enunciation, Émilie Walezak tackles what she convincingly considers as the key to the story’s interpretation, i.e. the very anonymity of its narrator or “enunciator,” usually and hastily identified as Nick Adams by the commentators. The author’s admirably accurate and careful reading of the narrative challenges critical opinion as she not only problematizes the question of anonymity, but shows that the unidentifiability of the enunciator becomes the key hermeneutic element of the story.

Who speaks in “The Light of the World”? Such is the elementary question that leads to the complex structure of the narrative. In fact, the interest does not lie in the practical side of the question – identifying who speaks –, but in the theoretical aspects it involves – how does it speak in literary texts? The question of enunciation is then of the first and foremost importance in this exacting analysis that considers Hemingway’s story as a verbal construction primarily concerned with the inherent reality of language. This helps her highlight the workings of the narrative, eschewing the alleged psychological or moral depth, valuing on the contrary performance, the circulation of the gaze, the theatricality of movement... Consequently, the misleadingly “objective” eye that registers the world it merely seems to observe, turns out to be a subjective ‘I,’ a subject trying to cope with his desire and the unnamable “thing” at the core of an uncertain reality. So while presenting the readers with a familiar place (train station) and familiar American figures (Indians, lumberjacks, prostitutes...), the text creates a subtle feeling of uncertainty and indeterminacy, the logic of which is pertinently unveiled in the essay.

If Émilie Walezak’s essay attends to the enunciative problem of who speaks?, Shigeo Kikuchi’s theoretically robust study of “Cat in the Rain” problematizes the question who sees and how?. However superfluous it might seem, the question is in fact very apt and leads the author to reveal Hemingway’s ethical vision at the root of the strategic and formal choices he had to make in terms of space, motion, and gaze. Taking into account the nature of perception and its fictionalized context, it appears that the object of perception, a cat, is not at all a stable object (as many commentators think), but a blurred, hesitant, purely verbal object, a linguistic creation or “fiction.” One might well remember George Berkeley’s claim that esse est percipi (“To be is to be perceived”). Indeed, the existence of the cat depends on its very perception. This suggests that, while writing this story, Hemingway was not interested in the description of a stable realistic object, but a buoyant sign.

Not unlike Émilie Walezak’s essay, Shigeo Kikuchi’s shows relevantly how the detail in Hemingway’s fiction, far from creating the illusion of reality (which is philosophically an illusion of certitude as the referent is supposedly there), questions its supposed certainty and reveals...
its imaginary scaffoldings. This quite short and yet so complex story as Shigeo Kikuchi demonstrates, stages Hemingway’s ideas about the limits of language. Hemingway is aware of “what lies beyond words,” as Georges Bataille would have it, and knows that fiction will never reach it.

If the two previous essays highlight the symbolical importance of the narrative in regard to the use of linguistic and narratological devices (unidentifiability and indeterminacy), the three following essays, all concerned with early Michigan stories (especially “Big Two-Hearted River”), look at the textual organization of the stories from poetic, syntactic, plastic, and, to a lesser extent, cultural perspectives.

Is “Big Two-Hearted River” to be viewed as the young Hemingway’s *ars poetica* or as a culturally oriented story, deeply rooted in the nature-writing tradition in America? Is landscape to be considered as a scene, a mere artifice skillfully used for staging the protagonist’s inner tensions and artistic will, or is it a “human territory” appropriated and built by the protagonist according to his own ethics? Does the aesthetic and ethical value of nature partake of the realm of the protagonist considered as the vehicle of the finely narrated artistic vision, or does it belong solely to the narrative stance? These are among other important questions that the three following essays raise in this final section. This does not mean that they are paradoxical, nor opposed in terms of methodology. All of them value the textual intricacies and the structural force of detail. They differ rather in emphasis.

Marie-Christine Agosto’s essay deals with the “poetics of the homely” in the story. She rightfully refutes the critical approaches that see in Nick Adams a historical type or the mere autobiographical projection of Hemingway. Nick is rather involved here in a process of self-invention through the invention of nature. According to the author, the story represents a *bildung* process, the aim of which is the constitution of oneself and the attempt to reach a form of wisdom. The author’s stance is cultural and philosophical. She situates Hemingway’s narrative in the wider realm of the American pastoral tradition, both modernized and internationalized by Hemingway. Following Clément Rosset’s theories on the idea of nature as an “ideological fantasy,” and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception, she analyses Nick’s perceptive experience as the manifestation of his presence in and to the world. The protagonist’s is a quest for vital energy, and his presence in the narrative is made to be felt sensually not meditatively.

Dealing with “Up in Michigan,” “The End of Something,” “The Battler,” and “Big Two-Hearted River,” Marie-Odile Salati insightfully unveils the subtle structures that interconnect these early stories all centered on the experience of loss and underlain by repetition. If the theme of repetition has been abundantly dealt with, at least since Philip Young’s famous “trauma theory” (Young, 1952, 1966), the discussion of the theme is yet unsatisfactory as most critics focus on the signified of repetition, not its signifier. What is of interest in Marie-Odile Salati’s essay is not what is repeated, but how it is repeated. To put it differently, it is not the level of *énoncé* that retains the attention of the author, but the plane of enunciation where repetition, as an *act*, is the means allowing the writer to approach the central experience of loss, and the critic to reveal the structure of these narratives that take the shape of concentric circles revolving around a “central void.”

The author does not say what this “void” is, and she is right not to do so as the aim of the analysis is not the imaginary signified, but the way the symbolical signifier operates
on the surface. She reveals in this close analysis the poetic coherence of these stories. The fundamental combinations at the prosodic, syntactic, lexical, and narrative levels are pinpointed and analyzed with much precision and rigor. This textual analysis helps Marie-Odile Salati demonstrate how repetition is in these early Hemingway stories the manifestation of the unspeakable experience of loss, released and defused at once. Thus, the experience of loss becomes productive and can, consequently, be dealt with in terms of artistic creation.

As it has already been noted above, many interesting studies have been devoted to the “influence” of Cézanne on the young Hemingway, or to inter-textual links between Hemingway and the post-impressionist master. But Monika Gehlawat’s article on Cézanne and Hemingway is very original and suggests new keys for a much more adequate appreciation not only of the early stories but of some general aesthetic aspects of Hemingway’s work. The Cézanne hypotext helps Monika Gehlawat reveal fundamental aspects of the story related to plasticity and visuality. The experience of looking is not re-productive but creative in “Big Two-Hearted River.” Phenomenologically speaking, the examined story is about how to see the world and about the renewal of one’s perceptive experience of the world, which eventually leads to its recreation. Looking goes here with making; it has a productive power, and the protagonist is granted a sort of “painterly vision.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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NOTES


3. We can also mention the popular biographies. Singer Kurt’s Life and Death of a Giant is a fair example: “May this book help to describe for the young and old generation the great individualist—one of the last men with guts and courage; a human being who was all man in a world where automation, luxuries, and wealth shine brightly in a gutter of hunger and confusion; a world which without Ernest Hemingway, will never be the same” (12).

4. Hemingway could rival in terms of fame any Hollywood star: “He alone of his generation enjoyed the double distinction of being a respected novelist and a celebrity. His fame was so large
that Look editors could legitimately place him beside Charlie Chaplin, Cary Grant, President Eisenhower, Marlon Brando, and other luminaries from the worlds of politics and entertainment. Hemingway was a ‘star,’ he was a culture hero to millions of his compatriots, not all of them intellectuals or even readers of books” (Raeburn 1).

5. I do not mean to discuss the point in this introduction beyond a limited definition of ideology, which is a very controversial notion. Ideology is not considered in my discussion as political doctrine, but as a social system of beliefs, which is, as Talcott Parsons has it, “held in common by the members of a collectivity, i.e., a society, or a subcollectivity of one—including a movement deviant from the main culture of the society—a system of ideas which is oriented to the evaluative integration of the collectivity, by interpretation of the empirical nature of the collectivity and of the situation in which it is placed, the processes by which it has developed to its given state, the goals to which its members are collectively oriented, and their relation to the future course of events” (Parsons 349, emphasis mine). Saying that Hemingway criticism is ideological means that his works are systematically referred to the general system of beliefs of the American society, and associated to its cultural symbolisms, ideals, aspirations, and evolutions. The writer’s work is hence considered as the positive or else negative mirror of his society.


7. Hemingway lived in Paris from 1921 to 1928. After eleven years in Key West, Florida (1928-1939), he moved to Cuba to live in a house – “Finca Vigia” – near Havana, where he spent the rest of his life.

8. See the bibliography at the end of this volume.

9. “Chapter VI” in subsequent editions where the in our times vignettes were added.

10. Jackson J. Benson contends that this chronological order is one of the major unifying devices of the In Our Time collection: “Hemingway must have decided to proceed roughly chronologically, filling in with stories from Nick’s childhood, through his adolescence, to young manhood. This personal chronology becomes the second major unifying force in In Our Time.” See also Linda Wagner (1975) and especially Joseph Flora’s full-length study of The Nick Adams Stories (1982) that matches perfectly Philip Young’s theories.

11. The following anecdote, as reported by John Clark Pratt, is quite relevant: “As a Dartmouth undergraduate in 1952, I had read a reasonable amount of Hemingway, but never before in a college course where the professor seemed determined to destroy otherwise fascinating fiction by harping on structure, theme, style, sources and, of all things, symbol. At that time, I saw all literary works so much as realistic depictions of the way life really was that I resisted (although I did pass the course) most of my professor’s efforts to increase the maturity of my approach to fiction. As for Hemingway, the professor said one day, ‘He’s finished. Just look at Across the River and Into the Trees.’ That was also the year that Philip Young published the statement in the preface to his fascinating, code-defining book Ernest Hemingway that he is part of our reading past,” a comment that Phil later told me over a cocktail that he really wished he had never made” (Pratt, 2001, 78).

12. See, for example, the book edited by Linda Wagner (1998), which brings together interesting essays dealing with Hemingway from this angle.

13. To Have and Have Not is certainly an exception, and so are some rare stories written in the same period like “The Capital of the World,” a narrative that draws on the authority of mimetic knowledge. The story stages a mimetic bullfight that leads to “real” death, creating thanks to this structural embedding a powerful “real effect.”

14. The mimetic function of literature, or mimesis, was originally defined by Plato and Aristotle. The two philosophers saw in mimesis the mere representation of nature. According to them, the poet cannot convey the truth, but only copy it. Truth is the concern of the philosopher only. What is more, for Plato nature itself, the physical world are an imitation of the Ideal which is the
essential truth. Consequently, the poet and, by extension, the writer are nothing but the
imitators of an imitation.

15. I am referring here to the two stories “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” (1936),
and “The End of Something” (1925). The same shift from one realm (the page, the symbolic, the
unconstrained) to another (the flesh, the limited) appears in many other commentaries,
especially on stories that play on the “referential illusion.” “The Battler” is interpreted through
external links – namely the identification of the “real” boxer whom Ad Francis is supposed to be
the representation of. Textually speaking, Ad Francis might be read rather as the symbolization
of the mutilated and horribly suffering and violently enjoying figure of the double. The same can
be said about the other boxer Steve Ketchel who plays a pivotal role in “The Light of the World.”
Numerous critics have checked the Annals of boxing to verify who says the truth and who does
not in the story.

16. For the relationship between realism and masculinity in American literature (especially in
the works of Dean Howells), see Phillip Barrish (2001).

17. Realistic discourse, which generally shuns self-reflexivity, creates a “real effect,” i.e. the
impression or illusion that what lies under the gaze of the reader is not a discourse with specific
rules but reality (Barthes, 1968).

18. Amy Kaplan views realism as “a strategy for imaging and managing the thrusts of social
change – not just to assert a dominant power but often to assuage fears of powerlessness”
(Kaplan 10).


20. A sufficient knowledge about Hemingway’s secret life is arbitrarily presupposed from the
outset: “[…] this too helps to explain why heterosexual sodomy and the ‘psychotic flash’ seem to
have become key elements of Hemingway’s erotic rituals in the last decade of his life. But most
importantly, this can help us to understand the very different treatment of the erotic—a
difference between a comparative reticence and a comparative openness—in early and late
Hemingway” (Eby, 2005, 90).

21. See also Wolfgang E. H. Rudat who believes that Jake (The Sun Also Rises), despite his wound,
can engage in “anal homosexual intercourse” (176).


23. See also Wendolyn Tetlow’s brief, yet interesting “lyrical” reading of In Our Time (1992).

24. As Frederic Jameson has it, “once upon a time at the dawn of capitalism and middle-class
society, there emerged something called the sign which seemed to entertain unproblematic
relations with its referent. [That was the] initial heyday of the sign – the moment of literal or
referential language or of the unproblematic claims of so-called scientific discourse” (Jameson
95-96). Modernism strove precisely to disjoin the sign from the referent, as a distance was
introduced between language and the objective reality it was supposed to represent
unproblematically. The sign entered thus a moment of autonomy or, at least, “semi-autonomy”:
“This autonomy of culture, this semi-autonomy of language, is the moment of modernism, and of
a realm of the aesthetic which redoubles the world without being altogether of it” (ibid.).

25. It is worth noting that Hemingway did not belong to any esthetic or ethical school and, To
Have and Have not and some other exceptional posthumously collected stories apart, never spoke
in his works on behalf of a social or historical group.

(1936) and certain passages from “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” (1936).

27. Metafictional discourse appears relevantly in posthumous works such as “On Writing” or The
Garden of Eden.

28. According to Henry James, the ideal realistic novel subjects action to character: “What is
character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?
What is either a picture or a novel that is not of character?” (James 6).
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Falling into the Embrace of the Muse: Pregnancy as Problematic Creation in “Hills Like White Elephants”

Claude Maisonnat

“It is always a hard ride when the Muse pays her visits,” I replied – “She must do whatever lies in her power to father her offspring.”

J. M. Coetzee, Foe

1 Judging from the mass of critical comments elicited by a story that is one of the shortest in Hemingway’s whole literary output, it stands to reason that the mystery that lies at its core must be particularly resistant. It is, indeed, a tribute to the literary quality of the story that such a limited textual space can accommodate so many different, not to say contradictory, interpretations. If all readers readily agree, even though the fact is never mentioned as such, that the subject of the story is a discussion between a nameless man and a “girl” called Jig about the advisability of getting an abortion, there are as many opinions as there are heads about the exact outcome of the story. To mention but a few, some will argue that the man – a generic American – eventually has it his own way and, more or less perversely, manages to convince the girl to go through the ordeal, while others, on the contrary, will maintain that Jig stands her ground and has made up her mind to have the child whatever the consequences may be.

2 Clearly, the text of the short story functions as a sort of screen, of projection space, on which readers are too openly invited to represent their own fantasies or allowed to voice their ideological biases. In this essay, my aim is not to deny the relevance of the moral and ethical issues raised by the story, but to suggest that there is a possibility of eschewing the trap of endless binary oppositions by foregrounding its reflexive dimension. In short, instead of emphasizing the cultural contents of the text, I propose
to study its purely literary dimension by showing that it is mostly a story about creation, inspiration, and the process of writing.

3 For a start, the very title of the short story functions as a signal that what is at stake here is a purely linguistic game. The title “Hills like White Elephants” presents itself as a standard simile in which tenor (the hills) and vehicle (the color white) appear to be the very subject of the incipit: “The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white” (259). Significantly, the narrative voice in charge of the story deliberately takes up the same theme again a few lines down: “The girl was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry” (259), the better to pave the way for the introduction of the simile: “‘They look like white elephants,’ she said” (259, my emphasis), thus vindicating the formulation of the title itself. As a result, three elements are clearly brought into play, and they are explicitly correlated: the fact that the subject of the enunciation is now the girl (“she said”), then the speech act of the comparison through the mediation of the preposition “like,” and, finally, the seemingly incongruous image of the elephants.

4 Therefore, where the narrative voice is flatly descriptive, the girl introduces the unexpected element of the elephants which retroactively implies that the key word of the title is the comparison “like elephants” and not so much the “white elephants” as a reference to a supposedly valuable possession whose maintenance cost is too high to warrant the necessity of keeping it any longer. Of course, it is tempting to connect this newly discovered liability with the unwanted baby, but to my mind, it is a deceptive jump toward a conclusion that prevents the reader from considering the textual strategy implemented by Hemingway. At all events, what is undeniable is that the girl’s statement triggers off an argument that does not bear on the meaning of the image but on its relevance. No sooner has she rephrased the narrator’s descriptive statement into a figurative one than the man comments on her choice of a vehicle:

“They look like white elephants,” she said.
“I’ve never seen one.” The man drank his beer.
“No, you wouldn’t have.”
“I might have,” the man said. “Just because you say I wouldn’t have doesn’t prove anything.” (259)

5 By drawing our attention to the way Jig uses language, the man exposes to the full view of the reader the gap between the actual hills and the imaginary elephants, and by so doing he, more or less consciously, raises the issue of the mimetic representation of reality. To him the metaphor is not acceptable because it is not realistic enough, he has never seen such a rare animal as a white elephant, but when Jig argues that the reason he did not see one is precisely because what she meant was that it was not a visible elephant but an image, an elephant made of words only, he sticks to his guns maintaining that such animals do exist in other parts of the world, and seeing one is consequently a distinct possibility, even if it is not actually realized.

6 This amounts to a refusal to lose face, but what this confrontation betrays is the fact that what he resents is the potential, not to say inborn, metaphoricity of language. Evidence that this “literary” debate is more than a bickering over words but reaches deeper into the textual fabric, is to be found in the fact that it is continued on a different mode. Indeed, it is the girl herself who resumes the discussion by suggesting that literary creation in the form of the production of verbal images is meant to afford pleasure, emotional and intellectual enjoyment and gratification:
“You started it,” the girl said. “I was being amused. I was having a fine time.”
“Well, let’s try and have a fine time.”
“All right. I was trying. I said the mountains looked like white elephants. Wasn’t that bright?”
“That was bright.” (260)

7 Let us note, in passing, that the literary theme is associated by contiguity with a network of references to drinking and flowing liquids. Initially, they are sitting at a table drinking beer when the argument begins. It is abruptly interrupted when the girl’s attention is drawn to the bead curtain with its advertisement for Anis del Toro, which leads to a conversation on drinks with a taste of licorice, the debate is resumed a second time with the following conclusion in the shape of a reconciliation: “Should we have another drink?” (260). More unexpectedly, a third bout is launched just after the man has broached the subject of the abortion, arguing that it is a perfectly simple and safe operation that will restore their threatened love. At this juncture, the topic of the literary image crops up in the context of love, as if acceptance of a successful simile acted as a guarantee that the man really loved the girl:

“And if I do you’ll be happy and things will be like they were and you’ll love me?”
“I love you now. You know I love you.”
“I know. But if I do it, then it will be nice again if I say things are like white elephants, and you’ll like it?”
“I’ll love it. I love it now but I just can’t think about it. […]” (261)
Isn’t it a strange query for the girl to make, as if literary creation was more important than giving life?
Or maybe she means that creative writing, as emblematized by the invention of a beautiful image, is the same thing as giving life?

8 At any rate, the conclusion that I draw from this situation, and which is the key to my interpretation, is that what the girl means is that it is abortion in the story that must be considered as a metaphor. She is indeed a something of a metaphor herself, as her name openly suggests, since in the turn of the century slang of sailors, the phrase jig-jig is a graphic translation of sexual intercourse. This sexual link indubitably casts the girl in the role of a succubus – a female demon reputed to have sex with sleeping men –, or more precisely of the more literary version of the demon, the proverbial Muse, as metaphor of the inspiration of the poet.

9 In this perspective, the central question of abortion in the short story becomes a metaphor for problematic literary creation, involving three agents, the girl, the American, and the narrative voice. To simplify outrageously, one could say that the girl stands for the Muse because of her interest and love of refined language: she is pregnant and wants to keep the baby, she is the origin of the story. Thus is the stage set, to replay the very old debate about the function of language in literary creation.

10 The American stands for the would-be writer who, as a disciple of Cratylus, believes in the possibility of accurate rendering of reality. His refusal of the baby suggests sterility and the impossibility of creation. Eventually, the narrator, following in the footsteps of Hermogenes, is the one who heeds the desire of the girl as Muse and who rescues the baby, or more accurately, he is the one who fathers the story. Quite significantly, the outcome of the dispute on procreation in the diegetic world of the short story is resolved at the level of the enunciation: the baby becomes the story itself. In the end, there is a happy resolution of the dilemma, whether the diegetic abortion took place or not becomes immaterial, the good news is that a textual baby is born. It is the triumph of the Muse over the death drive.
From this point of view, it is not illegitimate to assume that the story makes use of a few biographical elements, but they are, perhaps, not to be found exactly where one would expect them. The fact that the male protagonist is merely referred to as “the American” leaves sufficient room for readers to assume that he might stand for Hemingway himself in the story, and thus the conflicts that he was going through at the time. It is common knowledge that, during the period he was involved in the writing of the story, Hemingway was married to Hadley Richardson and yet was simultaneously conducting an affair with Pauline Pfeiffer. In the complex sentimental imbroglio that ensued, it is claimed that Hemingway expressed his divided allegiance to each woman by saying: “I think that when two people love each other terribly much and need each other in every way and then go away from each other it works almost as bad as an abortion” (Baker 176). On top of that, the news that his first wife Hadley was pregnant, which made the situation even worse, may have found its way into the unconscious implications of the story. Moreover, the fact that Hemingway was uneasy with his desire for paternity transpires from a network of references in his whole œuvre, to father and son relationships, principally in the stories centered on Nick Adams, such as the emblematic “Fathers and Sons,” in which he distinctly connects the question with the act of writing: “He could not write about him yet, although he would, later, but the quail country made him remember him as he was when Nick was a boy [...]” (459).

And yet, more than the sentimental and ethical problems, expressed in terms of a problematic pregnancy, that Hemingway had to face, it seems to me that such biographical elements function as a thin veil to disguise the anxiety of a writer not wholly convinced of his mastery of the craft he had chosen, wondering about the tenets of his artistic creed and consequently in need of reassurance. My argument is precisely that it is such a quest for the origin of writing that “Hills like White Elephants” explores in an oblique way. It is worth remembering here that the story allegedly opposes a masculine principle associated with virility and confidence in the practical powers of language, and a feminine principle associated with procreation and a more pregnant, i.e. poetic, relation to language. It is remarkable that the end of the text remains open, and that there is no way of ascertaining whether the abortion will take place or not.

What remains certain however is that the voice that takes charge of the narrative cannot be said to be nameless and sexless because it is literally composed of the other two. In short, it is both masculine and feminine, so that making a case for androgyny becomes a plausible alternative. Hemingway falls back on the old tradition of the writer as androgynous creature, the artist being defined as the agent who allows both his feminine and masculine parts to merge into the act of creation. On Hemingway’s own terms, if the story “Hills like White Elephants” is so successful it is because the man’s and the girl’s voice become fused into the voice of the androgynous narrative agent, thus making their contradictory desires productive.

Consequently, femininity in the short story definitely appears as the prime mover that enables creation to take place. If we accept the assumption that the American is a figure of the double for Hemingway, then the end of the story acquires a new layer of significance. Jig is indeed the agent who jigs him into action – that is to say, she triggers off the writing process in him –, and it is no wonder that the excipit should remain her privilege as she expresses both relief and satisfaction that their story comes to its end.
as narrative: “‘I feel fine,’ she said. ‘There’s nothing wrong with me. I feel fine’” (263). The circularity of her last statement, induced by the repetition of the phrase “‘I feel fine,’” is also quite meaningful as she is the alpha and the omega; she is, as it has been noted earlier, at the origin of the story. As far as the dialogues that constitute the text are concerned, Jig has the first and the final words, but as a figure of the Muse it is also her end (fine) that is inscribed in the narrative. Her task has been completed and the writer appears for what he is, the medium through which creation is allowed to take place. At a symbolic level, her pregnancy has not been terminated and, ironically, it is the end (death) of the story that guarantees her survival.

Once the potential reflexive dimension of the text has been identified, then many other elements in the short story appear to confirm that through the theme of pregnancy and abortion, Hemingway was trying to come to terms with his doubts concerning the aesthetic of representation through language that was to become the hallmark of his writing process, namely the notorious, allegedly objective, understated, unemotional style, so congenial to detachment and anonymity, of which “The Killers” was supposed to be the finest example. “Hills like White Elephants” provides a clear demonstration that beneath the anonymous, non-committal voice of the narrative agent there lies the feminine voice of Jig and the masculine voice of the American. It is small wonder that “Hills like White Elephants” found its place among the seven stories that, in the preface to *The First Forty-Nine Stories*, Hemingway claimed he loved best (V).

That Hemingway specifically strove to make the narrative voice as neutral as possible is perfectly illustrated by the first paragraph of the short story, which can be compared to the painting of a landscape. It is strictly descriptive as far as the setting is concerned, and plainly factual as far as temporality is concerned. In this static scene the two protagonists are barely distinguishable. For this scene to become meaningful it has to be followed by a dialogue, but even the dialogue remains elusive because they only talk about drinking beer in the heat of the day, and nothing can be deduced about the why and wherefore of the presence of the two characters. The second element that will suggest that it is possible to assume that the scene has a hidden meaning, is Jig’s introduction of the unexpected elephant metaphor, which triggers off both the protagonists’ argument and the readers’ speculation about the image itself and the reason why Jig and the American embarked on this discussion.

Arguably, in this short story, Hemingway dramatized the predicament of the writer in quest of inspiration, by adding a layer of reflexivity to a narrative whose symbolic contents are already so complex, in spite of their simplicity, as to stimulate its readers’ exegetic desires. Thus, the spatial framework of the short story becomes relevant in a different way. The station, the train become metaphors of the text itself, while the railway tracks symbolize the signifying chain (or linguistic network) with all the other images of linearity in the text (the lines of hills, the river Ebro, etc.). The long wait at the station which stands at a junction, is a fitting occasion for the protagonist to decide what kind of writer he is going to be, to choose whether he will heed the warnings of the Muse or not, as between Barcelona and Madrid, he stands at a crossroads in his career.

The same holds water for the obvious opposition, noted by all critics, between the dryness of the barren landscape suggesting the idea of sterility and the proliferation of signifiers associated with the liquid elements (the river, the various drinks, water, beer, *cervezas*, absinthe, *Anis del Toro*), which all suggest thirst, thirst being a metaphorical
substitute for the desire to write. Further evidence of the fact is provided by two
decisive textual elements, namely the two stages noticeable in the progression of the
narrative. In the first half of the text the main topic of conversation is drinks and the
desire to try new ones, while in the second half, the understated but massive topic is
clearly the abortion itself.

However, if the subject of drinks seems to act as a cover not to mention the more
delicate subject of the abortion, what is remarkable is the connection established, as it
were subliminally, between the two by the use of the empty signifier thing, either on its
own or in composition (nothing, anything, everything), so that in fact while they are
talking about drinks they are referring to the abortion. Secondly, out of the twenty-six
occurrences of the signifier “thing”, two, including the first to appear in the text, refer
to the elephant metaphor, while the rest replace more or less directly either the words
‘drinks’ or ‘speech’ or ‘abortion,’ unambiguously linking the three together, and adding
the necessity of making a choice. In this perspective, even the ominous phrase “to let
the air in,” used two times and which is alleged to suggest the technique used for the
abortion, takes on a different coloring. Instead of understanding it as a euphemism for
bringing death, it is possible to reverse its import and to read it metaphorically as the
breath of inspiration necessary to the poet. In this case, the crucial paradox – but we
are within the wider context of the androgynous nature of the artist – is that it is the
writer himself who has to let the air in, to allow room for the music of the text as it
were, which may also mean to sacrifice the follower of Cratylus that lies in his breast.

As for the second half of the text, which centers round the argument about the
abortion, it is worthy of note that the conversation does function as an illocutary game
of distribution of symbolic places in which the American wishes to be recognized as
having the upper hand, while Jig is supposed to comply with his desire, and pretends
that she does not mind the abortion. Not without a perverse streak, the young man
wants Jig – the very verb is used over and over again – to voice openly her desire for the
abortion, while he appears to be reluctant to force her, as we can see for ourselves in
the following statement: “‘You’ve got to realize,’ he said, ‘that I don’t want you to do it
if you don’t want to. I’m perfectly willing to go through with it if it means anything to
you’” (262). His “‘I don’t want you to do it’” which actually means “I want you to do
it,” sounds like Bartleby’s “‘I’d prefer not to,’” while it is clear that it is Jig who would
prefer not to as her echoic answers and her vague, weary and generalizing acceptance
testify: “‘I’d do anything for you’” (263).

Hemingway’s very subtle tour de force here is that he succeeds in reversing the meaning
of both positions, so that contrary to Melville’s hero whose general refusal was
symbolic of the end of the desire to write, the young man eventually renounces the
lures of the naïve belief in the mimetic powers of language and accepts that the very
basis of literariness is the creation of ambiguity, ambivalence, hesitation, uncertainty,
indeterminacy, on condition that they are not due to shortcomings or absence of
craftsmanship, but to aesthetic, and in this case it also means ethical, positions. The
uncertainty inherent in the blurred textuality of the short story will never allow us to
decide for sure whether the young man will become a writer or not, but the only thing
that is certain is that the narrative voice, standing here for Hemingway himself, is on
the way of achieving the trick. Moreover, we know that a new start is made possible if
the American stops talking (and starts writing instead?). Jig’s repetition of the word
“please” to make him keep quiet is an illustration of the kind of textual paralysis that
threatens him if he does alter his views both on the abortion and on language. In short, the ethical question does not so much apply to the justification of the abortion in the diegetic world of the short story, as it concerns the very nature of textuality and art.

One rarely commented way in which Hemingway produces ambivalence in the short story is precisely the problematic recourse to a foreign language, Spanish for the occasion. Beyond the local color element, a certain amount of confusion is introduced by the way the Spanish language is used in the text, because it implies that an unmentioned activity of translation is going on, and, as translation inevitably entails losses, not to say possibilities of mistranslation, the effect created is that of a gray area in which invisible textual negotiations take place. For instance, the American logically orders their beer in Spanish: “‘Dos cervezas,’ the man said into the curtain” (259). But strangely enough, the Spanish waitress answers in English and the rest of the dialogue takes place in English. Stranger still, when the waitress returns with the drinks and wants to collect the money, she uses a mix of English and Spanish: “‘Four reales’” (260), where one would have expected something like “quatro reales.” Similarly when the waitress comes with the last drinks she addresses the protagonists in English directly, but the text says: “‘What did she say?’ asked the girl” (263), which implies that the initial statement was delivered in Spanish, a language that Jig does not understand.

A close textual analysis reveals that the narrative voice is regularly playing the role of an unacknowledged translator, thus leaving its imprint on the textual fabric. What is highlighted here is the fact that writing is, in its essence, an activity of translation. Images, ideas, actions, plots..., are all mediated by language, i.e. translated into words.

No wonder then if the story opens with the discussion of a metaphor which is, by definition, an act of translation of an image into another.

When all is said and done, it seems difficult not to accept that “Hills like White Elephants” presents us with a self-portrait of the artist as a young restless father-to-be, by obliquely representing the plight of the writer confronted to the aleatory nature of inspiration and the difficulty of aesthetic choices. I would like to argue that contrary to what happens in “Bartleby,” the figure of the writer in the short story is on its way to redemption and creativity, because he has become aware that the significance of a metaphor does not lie in its meaning but in the metaphoric act itself. If literature is a journey then the end of the short story can be read as a new beginning, the prospective writer forging ahead with greater power and insight after a salutary questioning of his art.

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ABSTRACTS

Despite the immense critical success of “Hills like White Elephants,” its reflexive dimension has not been given proper attention. The aim of this essay is to focus on the way Hemingway dramatizes in an oblique way the predicaments of an inexperienced writer questioning the tenets of his art, unsure of himself and of his creative powers, and consequently in need of reassurance. The central argument is based on the implications of the “white elephant” metaphor which does not so much require an interpretation in terms of contents as in terms of strategy. Close textual analysis and stylistic considerations will confirm that the subtext of the short story invites a meta-fictional reading of the text, to the effect that what happens under the reader’s gaze is the metamorphosis of the problematic baby into a textual offspring.

Malgré le grand succès de “Hills Like White Elephants”, sa dimension réflexive a été négligée par les critiques. Cet article étudie la manière utilisée par Hemingway pour mettre en scène implicitement les difficultés rencontrées par un jeune écrivain, lequel s’interroge sur ses principes artistiques, peu sûr de lui-même et de ses capacités créatives, et qui, par là, a besoin d’être rassuré. L’idée centrale est basée sur les implications de la métaphore “éléphants blancs”, laquelle nécessite une interprétation non pas tant en termes de contenu que de stratégie. En accordant une attention rigoureuse au texte et à certains aspects stylistiques, il apparaît en effet que le sous-texte de la nouvelle convoque une lecture méta-fictionnelle du texte, qui montre que ce qui se déroule sous le regard du lecteur est la métamorphose du bébé problématique en un fruit textuel.
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Deviation and In-Betweenness in “The Sea Change”

Alice Clark-Wehinger

Hemingway sets up the dramatic content of “The Sea Change” (1931) as a contest of wills between a man, Phil, and an unnamed woman, which culminates in a moral conflict between ‘virtue’ and ‘vice.’ The dialectical movement between these two opposing forces is sustained up until the moment that Phil gives into the woman’s plea for a deviant form of sexual liberation. At this point the tension begins to dissolve and clear-cut distinctions between virtue and vice, like male and female gender, break down. “The Sea Change” testifies to Hemingway’s talent for creating a style whose devices (ellipsis, understatement, silences) deviate from traditional narrative techniques. The obliqueness of his writing is reflected in character, subject, and plot structure. The plot itself is nonexistent and motives are never clearly explained.

The story consists of a tense conversation which takes place between a couple sitting in a bar in Paris. Hemingway drafted, pruned and reworked the text until it finally boiled down to 1260 words. Out of 1260 words only about two: “perversion” and “vice,” provide explicit information about the nature of the argument going on between the handsome young man (unnamed at the outset; later we learn he is called Phil) and his pretty girlfriend or wife. The narrator peppers the narrative up with elliptic allusions which have the effect of peaking the reader’s interest. But on the whole he gives the reader minimal clues for understanding the couple’s peculiar relationship. The very open-endedness of the text, its befuddling lack of plot, and its insistence on deviant behavior have often led to flights of fancy in critical assessment, many of which defend the idea that Phil’s deviant sexuality will lead him to probable homosexual pendants. The majority of critics tend to interpret the story as a struggle between heterosexual and homosexual wills, with Phil finally embracing the latter, thus declaring the death of his heterosexual identity.

My understanding of the text departs from many of these critical observations which assume that “The Sea Change” is about the main character’s move toward homosexuality. I find these assumptions awkward and have endeavored to restrict my own critical insights to illuminating the way in which literary devices and processes in
the story deviate from traditional narratological methods. Further inter-textual observations will enable us to understand in greater depth how the title of the short story, taken from Ariel's song in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, elucidates the meaning of the text. I propose to explore “The Sea Change” not so much as a loss of, but as a search for the restitution of sexual completeness. I will consider this in light of the competing forces of vice and virtue, and male and female distinctions which surface and then finally collapse with Phil's change and with the girl’s declaration of undifferentiated sexual experiences. Here, the Shakespearian subtext will shed light on the in-betweenness motif inherent in the short story.

“The Sea Change” starts out as something decisively “rich and strange.” Structurally speaking, it breaks with traditional narrative techniques by omitting expository information concerning character and setting. The reader is plunged headlong into the middle of a dispute between Phil and his partner. The detached third-person narrator provides scant information from past events which could elucidate the crisis. Even more perplexing, the direct speech of Phil and the girl rarely unveils any display of their inner feelings, thus cloaking the characters' personalities, past, and their peculiar quarrel in mysterious darkness. Their crisis, as Erik Nakjavani has noted, is presented *in medias res*, and sustained by silences within the dialogue.

Hemingway sets up the exposition scene as a series of questions that revolve around an undefined impersonal pronoun 'it.' By centering the argument on an unspecified ‘it,’ Hemingway's narrative strategy constantly deviates from a central course. This hide-and-seek strategy, which reveals as much as it conceals, constantly dodges potentially illuminating responses by having the characters give elliptic answers, or by simply answering a question by another question:

“All right,” said the man. “What about it?”
“No,” said the girl, “I can’t.”
“You mean you won’t.”
“I can’t,” said the girl. “That's all that I mean.”
“You mean that you won’t.” (397)

Thus, the exposition scene sets the tone for the peculiar voice specific to “The Sea Change,” a short story which comes across as a slippery statement about how fundamentally polyvalent and changing the sense of meaning is, particularly in terms of human communication. It is of particular interest to note that the medium in which Hemingway develops this sense of uncertainty is dialogue. Descriptive details are reduced to the strict minimum. The story itself makes up five scant pages, most of which comprise a dialogue which reads more like a script than a narrative. An atypical form of narration, Hemingway's technique adroitly avoids closing itself into the traditional method of introducing characters through readily identifiable personal details, time, and location.

The contraction of information concerning the characters' physical appearance, feelings, and surroundings reflects Hemingway's minimalist technique, a method of writing which reduces textual content to its bare minimum. In so doing, Hemingway deviates from mainstream story telling techniques, namely through the use of ellipsis, contraction, and dramatic dialogue. Dramatic occurrences in “The Sea Change” are not evoked as a series of events or actions, but rather as a continual movement of words exchanged between two people. Fortunately, the flow of dialogue does not lapse into a pattern of stasis as it might under the pen of a less talented writer. Hemingway's ingenious use of dialogue and cues (voice, eye contact, gesture) creates a heavily
dramatic atmosphere which maintains the reader’s attention throughout the story. Hemingway saw that dialogue could essentially be used to sustain and even act as a substitute for action, a view Shakespeare adopted himself in staging many of his plays as verbal duels.4

“The Sea Change,” it should be noted, underwent several revisions before it became comprised essentially of dialogue. At every stage the changes would enable Hemingway to weed out descriptive details from the text.5 The trimming away of excess information would have significant consequences on Hemingway’s writing. Inserting silences in the dialogue, for example, provided him with a medium for sustaining suspense. Suspense, in “The Sea Change,” depends largely upon the holding back of information as in: “Then they did not say anything for a while” (398). Charles Nolan, regarding this point, has remarked: “Ultimately, Hemingway saw the power of starting with dialogue, withholding our understanding of what the quarrel was about” (Nolan 55). Norman Grebstein also insists on the importance of Hemingway’s dialogue technique in short fiction:

Among the most radical and yet most noticeable features of Hemingway’s short stories is their heavy reliance upon dialogue. […] No other important American writer of short fiction gave more weight to dialogue or used it with greater frequency. No one had so fully exploited the dramatic method nor does anything written before Hemingway explain the form of such stories as “The Killers,” “Hills Like White Elephants,” or “The Sea Change” which are composed almost exclusively of dialogue. […] It follows that upon dialogue falls much of the burden of setting, plot, character, and theme. Unlike conventional stories where plot is integral to the narrative, here what happens is subordinate to what is said, the end result being that plot has relatively little importance. (Grebstein 99-100)

Dialogue, it is true, has a primary function in “The Sea Change” – it is, in fact, the driving force of the narrative. It has a theatrical quality about it which departs from more conventional verbal exchanges, and points to a new aesthetic approach in short story telling which uses the speech act to convey a character’s mental state: a technique capable of eliciting nuances and changes in emotion through gestures, glances, and voice. Hemingway creates a highly theatrical medium with his dialogue technique by introducing furtive glances, telling gestures, portentous looks and strange changes in tone of voice. Body cues (the gaze in particular) are one of the narrative devices that provide cues for the reader’s response, functioning in much the same as stage directions in a play. Phil’s desire and agitated ambivalence towards the girl is communicated through the way he keeps darting looks at her hands: “She had very fine hands and the man looked at them. They were slim and brown and very beautiful” (397).

The theatrical overtones of the text are equally palpable in voice modulation. Eagerness and even elation characterize the girl’s voice: “She could not believe him, but her voice was happy” (400). In counterpoint, the man’s voice displays a vast and confused panoply of emotions. To emphasize this point, Phil’s conflicting desires are projected as a mixture of jealousy: “‘I’ll kill her’” (397), authoritative machismo: “‘Let’s not talk rot’” (398), and finally in peculiar voice inflections as he changes his mind and gives into the girl: “‘All right […]. All right’” (400). Throughout the story, Phil’s voice is continually faltering, modulating and changing, depending on his feelings toward the girl. In depicting Phil’s disconcerted sense of desire, attention is thus focused on his enigmatic change of voice which is associated with the inner change he undergoes at the end of the story. These voice cues (inflection and tone of voice) are integral to
narrative strategy. Hemingway uses these devices to dramatize a quality that cannot be seen in, or perhaps even understood by Phil: “His voice sounded very strange. He did not recognize it” (400). Inner thoughts concerning voice, much like stage directions in theatre, are filtered through the detached third person narrator who continues to stress the increasing anxiety of Phil’s physical and mental state: “His voice was not the same, and his mouth was very dry” (400). The text, in essence, reads much like a scenario with its multiple references to voice and to the gaze.

The last two paragraphs crescendo into a series of optical referents corroborating the significance of the visual register in the closing scene:

[...] He looked out the door. He saw her going down the street. As he looked in the glass, he saw he was really quite a different-looking man. [...]

The young man saw himself in the mirror behind the bar. “I said I was a different man, James,” he said.

Looking into the mirror he saw this was quite true.

“You look very well, sir,” James said. “You must have had a good summer.” (401, italics mine)

The last words, spoken by James, the bartender, have the decisive effect of truncating the abrupt ending, and call into question the necessity of a resolution scene.

The story, as such, reads much like an act taken from the middle of a play, and leaves the reader with the distinct sense of being an observer: watching and listening intently like a spectator who has arrived too late to catch the exposition scene. Concurrently, the lack of a straightforward resolution in the story is paramount to missing out on the end of a play’s dénouement. This is all a part of Hemingway’s narrative strategy which plays on the power of insinuation as we can see through his use of dramatic devices and staging effects. The staging of character in the short story follows a similar dramatic approach. Characterization of the girl demands highly visual narrative components; we know, for example, that she is sun-tanned, beautiful, and young. Everything in the characterization of the girl hints at a stagey form of irony. Her personal identity is kept anonymous via the personal pronoun “‘she.’” Only her sexual preferences are proof that the girl deviates from the norm. In dress code and in speech Hemingway has conferred ironically normative behavior upon her. Her coded behavior and her language, more precisely, stand in striking contrast to her otherwise deviant desire to engage in a sudden homosexual adventure. Phil’s direct manner of putting a precise name, “‘vice’” (399), onto deviance is politely berated by the girl: “‘Let’s not say vice,’ she said. ‘That’s not very polite.’ ‘Perversion,’ he said” (399). With no name to fill in her identity and a vivid, yet normative physical description, the young woman is the focalized fetish object of the narrative, notably through the metonymy of hands: “She had very fine hands and the man looked at them” (397). Yet, despite all this, Phil remains strangely detached from the object of his desire: “‘He looked at her hands, but he did not touch her with his’” (398).

Object of desire, fetish object, and object of love, the girl fulfills multiple functions in the story which was initially intended to be for The Forum’s editor who had requested Hemingway to write a story about love (Bennett 228-229). Hemingway’s exploration of the topos of love did not correspond to traditional love stories; nevertheless, “The Sea Change” is undeniably a story about love as the onomastics of the protagonist’s name, Phil, from the Greek (love), suggests. This is corroborated by the fact that the story was to be part of a trilogy of love stories to be published in The Forum.7
Although the story is ostensibly about love (“‘I love you very much.’ [...] ‘Don’t you really believe I love you?’” 398), the lovers’ relationship does not reflect a typical love story since Hemingway structures the narrative around a shadowy Other. From the exposition scene on, clues point to a triangular conflict: “‘I’ll kill her,’” Phil threatens, “‘Couldn’t you have gotten into some other jam?’” (397). “‘If it was a man—’” [...] ‘It wouldn’t be a man. You know that. Don’t you trust me?’” (398) the girl exclaims, clarifying the homosexual nature of her conquest. “The Sea Change” presents a departure from the traditional love story by placing a heterosexual love relationship in the critical context of homosexual desire.

The conflict here calls upon an absent other to set the stage for a homosexual adventure which will fuel a love story heavy with irony. As Bennett has remarked: “Hemingway has taken the conventional triangle plot – man versus man for girl – with its conventional resolutions, and inserted a character in the triangle who should traditionally be ineligible: the other woman” (Bennett229). Thus, “‘I’ll kill her’” has an ironic ring for the reader. The revenge motif in Hemingway’s love story diverges from traditional formssince Phil cannot take on the other woman as a rival in the way he could challenge a man. This set-up enables Hemingway to avert the customary resolution which would result in retaliation by substituting a female rival for someone of the same sex.

The peculiar twist gives the story an ironical touch by skewing the representation of traditional binary relations. This is quite apparent in the story’s ironic focalization on couples. Hemingway dismantles stereotyped images of men and women in the narrative through the ambiguous representation of couples. The semantics of the couple is stressed incessantly, similarly the number two and the pair are made ample reference to throughout the story. James’ thoughts, for example, are about couples: "He had seen many handsome young couples break up and new couples form that were never handsome for long” (399). The clients in the bar are all couples: “Two people came in the door and went up to the bar” (399). Furtive glances are exchanged between couples: “The two at the bar looked over at the two at the table, then looked back at the barman again. Towards the barman was the comfortable direction” (399). And when Phil goes to the bar to pick up the “two checks,” the “two at the bar” move down “to make room for him” (401). Despite this insistence on couples the waiter is alone, and the two clients at the bar are paired off, but they do not form a heterosexual couple. Finally the text suggests that the young man is about to become engaged in a homosexual relationship. The subject of the short story is ostensibly about sexual deviation and a look at the subtexts (Pope and Shakespeare) will shed light on this point.

At the end of the short story, in what is considered as the resolutionscene, where Phil finally relinquishes his sexual authority over the girl by giving his approval, so to speak, of her homosexual adventure, she responds with characteristic irony: “‘Oh, you’re too sweet.’ ‘You’re too good to me.’” (400). Phil retorts caustically: “‘And when you come back tell me all about it’” (400). It is at this point in the story that the narrative voice, focalizing on Phil, calls our attention to the strange change he is about to undergo: “His voice sounded strange. He did not recognize it” (400). This change, encapsulated semantically in the title, “The Sea Change,” provides a clue to grasping a deeper understanding of what seems to be Phil’s change.

Let us start out by putting more precise terms on this change which may be viewed as an identity crisis as such. Phil’s crisis is evoked through the dramatic device of voice
and through the motif of the mirror. Decrypting this change is problematic due to the acute contraction of unnamed events which culminate in the protagonist’s crisis. And the narrative voice, as we have noted, provides only a few elliptic explanations for what led up to, or what instigated this transformation – notably in the extract which makes allusions to “perversion” and “vice.” On this occasion, textual references to the couple’s sexual practices are evoked in very loose terms by the girl as “‘the things we’ve had and done’” (399), and then in Phil’s oblique reference to Alexander Pope: “‘Vice is a monster of such fearful mien, […] that to be something or other needs but to be seen. Then we something, something, then embrace’” (399). These two exchanges both reveal and conceal crucial information about the couple. Characteristic of Hemingway’s strategy of deviation, Phil’s convoluted literary quotes substantiates the context of profound ambiguity and deviance in which the couple’s story is steeped. This has led many critics to draw striking conclusions both about the couple and about Phil’s change in the “resolution scene.”

20 Warren Bennett, for example, interprets the girl’s remark about “‘the things we’ve had and done’” (399), as proof that the couple’s deviant sexual practices, which he qualifies as cunnilingus, have had the perverse effect of emasculating Phil: “Recognizing that what Phil and the girl have ‘had and done’ refers to cunnilingus and to Phil’s having been the girl’s girl opens a new dimension in regard to Phil’s attempt to quote a passage about vice from the neoclassic Essay on Man by Alexander Pope” (Bennett 233). Bennett sees cunnilingus as both a deviant act and as the basis for the argument that Phil has become “the girl’s girl.” This leads him to the conclusion that the resolution scene is about Phil’s desire to embrace homosexuality. Bennett views Phil’s voice changes as “the destruction of his masculine sexual identity” (Bennett 239), and is persuaded that the true resolution of the short story is “the psychic death” of Phil. 10

21 The resolution scene, Bennett affirms, can be read as Phil’s “sea change,” which is “Eliotic, not Shakespearean – Phil’s sea change is a psychic purification in a symbolic death by water which will extinguish the fires of his sexuality. The lust of the flesh will be gradually washed away, as the sea washes the flesh from the bones” (Bennett 240). Bennett seems to have conflated images from Eliot’s poem, The Waste Land, with images from the subtext taken from Ariel’s song:

Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange. (The Tempest, 1.2.400-405)

22 It seems more likely, as Charles Nolan has remarked, that “Phil is merely reflecting on the irony of his situation and expressing his own bitterness” (Nolan 63). Nolan exercises caution in his critical assessment of Phil’s transformation, but fails to consider how this change reflects an inner conflict, and similarly how the conflict is reflected in the subtexts. Robert E. Fleming notes, in particular, that these literary allusions have a logical organic relationship to the story when the reader realizes that Phil is a writer. [...] The negative aspects of Pope’s words and the positive connotations of Shakespeare’s provide symbolic poles for the conflict and the nature of the artist. Both allusions are implicit in the words of Phil’s mistress: “We’re made up of all sorts of things. You’ve known that. You’ve used it well enough.” (Fleming 216)
Indeed, diametrical oppositions: male/female, vice/virtue, good/bad, orchestrate the entire text. These oppositions are reiterated in the literary subtexts with the excerpt from Pope supposed to represent the radical pole of Phil’s division, and Shakespeare representing the entre-deux possibility of transforming these opposites into a coherent whole.

In contrario, the girl’s position reflects the Shakespearean pole since her speech expresses a desire to overcome these contradictions. She refuses to acknowledge vice as a common denominator of her relationship with Phil and thus distances herself from the quote taken from Pope’s Essay on Man, wherein the human condition is defined by the negative pole of vice. Phil, in giving a name to their so-called deviant sexual behavior, incites the girl to protest: “‘You don’t have to put a name to it’” (400). She urges Phil not to speak of ‘it’ as a negative quality inherent in their relationship. However, Phil insists: “‘That’s the name for it.’ But this time, he is careful not to use the term “perversion,” or “vice.”

The narrative voice begins to yield to the girl’s point of view at this stage as she reassures Phil: ‘We’re made up of all sorts of things,’ and then goes on to remind him that he practices this philosophy of entre-deux himself and there is nothing morally condemnable about it: “‘You’ve used it well enough’”. Phil begins to change over to the girl’s perspective: “‘All right,’ he said. ‘All right’” (ibid.). However, the girl’s interpretation of Phil’s response is potentially befuddling in light of the fact that she has just won a victory by swaying him over to her point of view. For a brief moment, she goes on to assess their relationship – in terms of the negative factors she had formerly denied: “‘You mean all wrong. I know’” (ibid.).

The conflicting assumptions that both Phil and the girl make concerning their relationship – as either a good or a bad one – is never truly resolved. And the attempt to surmount the pathological split on the moral level may never be resolved entirely, but there is a definite will to abolish these distinctions: “‘But I’ll come back. I told you I’d come back. I’ll come back right away’” (400), the girl says reassuringly, suggesting that she is embarking on an ephemeral conquest which will terminate, unlike her relationship with Phil which is inscribed in a long if not perpetual duration. Indeed, the girl seems to have triumphed in her quest for a polyvalent accord with Phil where distinctions between fidelity and infidelity, vice and virtue no longer exist. Her affirmation of love and devotion to Phil is outwardly contradictory, but inwardly concordant with her desire to experience an ephemeral sexual affair. After all, she is transparent enough to ask his permission, suggesting there is nothing in this fling that need be hidden. The girl’s demands reflect a desire to break with the dialectical split which plagues Phil. She represents the agent by which his change, his liberation from duality, may come about. The girl then is concurrent with the notion of change in terms of the possibility of eradicating distinctions between vice and virtue, right and wrong.

The text’s insistence on change cannot go unnoticed; it surfaces first in the words of the title, and again in the resolution scene in Phil’s voice (“‘His voice was not the same,’” 400), and in his reflection in the mirror (“As he looked in the glass, he saw he was really quite a different-looking man,” 401). The narrative voice states that the change Phil is undergoing occurs as a result of the girl’s departure: “He watched her go. He was not the same-looking man as he had been before he had told her to go” (400-401).
The elliptic style of voice in the resolution scene is puzzling; it brings up the question as to what sort of change is being alluded to. Phil’s assertion: “I’m a different man” (401), when the girl leaves, suggests that he has retained his manhood, but in the sense that his manhood has just been transformed into something different, something “rich and strange.” Hemingway’s elliptic reference to Phil’s change finds new meaning when placed in the context of Ariel’s song of death and metamorphosis in *The Tempest*.

Shakespeare’s play, set in a Prelapsarian context, calls up Edenic scenes of creation. *The Tempest* dramatizes a world where the pagan impulse reigns, where the writer-artist, Prospero, possesses regenerative powers commensurate with the magus that can bring on polymorphic changes. Ariel, the fine spirit of the air, can show himself in different appearances. The play’s tribute to the self as a space for reconciling contraries, echoes the girl’s sense of mutability as she knows that people “are made up of all sorts of things.” In *The Tempest* mutability can sweep away dialectical imperatives determining life and death so that Ferdinand’s father appears to be “undrowned” (2.1.234). Ferdinand hears strange, haunting music, including the evocative song of death and metamorphosis in Ariel’s song which refers to the father’s sea change as something “rich and strange.”

The possibility of opposite poles coexisting together is reflected in the philosophical thought of the Renaissance expressed as *coincidentia oppositorium*. According to this concept, polarities exist simultaneously rather than conflictually. Many of Shakespeare’s plays function within a context of *coincidentia oppositorium* where the question of power, identity, and sexuality comes to the fore. *The Tempest*, for example, dramatizes the doing and undoing of Prospero’s all powerful creative forces as a liberating experience, just as *Antony and Cleopatra* stages the temporary dismantling of Antony’s masculine power by Cleopatra as a potential liberation. The hyper-virile warrior, Antony, mythically related to Hercules, relinquishes himself to Cleopatra one night in a drunken stupor. Cleopatra brags to her messenger about how she got Antony drunk, took him to bed and proceeded to exchange her head-dresses and mantles for his sword: “I drunk him to bed, / Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst/ I wore his sword Philppan” (2.5.21-22). The implied deviant sexuality and the exchange of gender roles in *Antony and Cleopatra*, recall the *entre-deux* pattern of male/female relationships in “The Sea Change.” The short story vibrates with the fascination and fear of unnamable forces directing sexuality and gender.

Hemingway’s preoccupation with change in the short story recalls *entre-deux* motifs in Shakespeare’s work, which, like Hemingway’s, evolved in a period of great social change where deviant codes tended to subvert the norm. The girl’s cropped hair and show of sexual emancipation in “The Sea Change” are indicative of changing gender trends in the post-war period of Europe and the United States.

The work of both Shakespeare and Hemingway portrays the woman’s move toward masculinity as dangerously empowering, and the man’s move toward femininity as potentially disempowering. In “The Sea Change” this tension is expressed in Phil’s initial discourse characterized by binary oppositions, unlike the girl’s. Yet, when the girl leaves the bar Phil looks at James and makes a strange statement which seems to be directed toward the girl, but this time without the purely negative connotations associated with the term “vice.” At the end of the story Phil associates “vice” with something which allows for an open-ended interpretation of the word, and consequently of his relationship with the girl as an *entre-deux* experience which
integrates opposites. “The Sea Change,” in these terms, suggests the possibility of human relations as something “rich and strange,” powerless in their power to change, and yet ever changing in their vast potential for interchangeability.

Finally, the title’s reference to the sea endorses the fantasy of a return to the source of primordial and polymorphic origins. This is echoed in suggestive homophonous pairs: sea/see; she/he. The insistence on polyphonic changes in voice: “His voice was not the same” (400), and on the multiplicity of selfhood, further substantiates the polyvalent meanings inscribed within the text which functions as a palimpsest, undulating, ebbing and flowing, holding back and releasing, revealing and concealing, as the narrative voice seeks new ways of challenging dialectical imperatives. This quest for change in the short story can be read as a manifestation of the author’s own bold, yet incomplete quest for more open-ended sexual and artistic horizons during the post-war period.

Some half of a century later, in The Garden of Eden, Hemingway reveals what he had sought so intensely to conceal over his lifetime: his search for an all-embracing sexual and creative energy. The Garden of Eden, a novel published posthumously, reiterates the fantasy of a return to origins as a search for polymorphic sexuality, a theme Hemingway had touched on earlier in “The Sea Change.” In the novel, this fantasy is brought to its fulcrum in the figure of David, a writer, and his wife, Catherine, who exchange sexual roles. The vivid description of Catherine’s metamorphosis towards maleness (she cuts her hair shortlike the girl in “The Sea Change” and pursues a relationship with a younger girl which evolves into a triangular relationship), shows the extent to which the entre-deux motif had infiltrated Hemingway’s late work. Fetish themes like triangular love and homo-hetero relations and androgyny, which were only sketched out in earlier works like “The Sea Change,” resurface in The Garden of Eden. Hemingway’s more mature work is designed so that dualities collapse, which has the function of allowing the protagonist to tap into formerly unheard of sexual and artistic energy.

Though The Garden of Eden is thematically linked to Judeo-Christian myths of the Fall, it dispenses with the notion of sin and in so doing creates space for David’s new creative matrix. His strange metamorphosis at the end of the novel corroborates the beginning of new artistic and sexual completeness. The renewed creative powers which David becomes endowed with after having been disempowered are akin to those of the magus, Prospero, in The Tempest. Hemingway’s fascination with the return to the origins and primacy of being is inevitably the expression of a desire to link artistic and sexual impulses into a common bond. It is of particular interest that this primal creative impulse is what instigates David’s artistic transformation, enabling him to cross a threshold into the sphere of oneness: at one with his poetic voice, in a state of plenitude, whole and complete. Thus Hemingway reflects the American voice of writers, like Walt Whitman, who sought to express the experience of an undifferentiated sexual and artistic self in literature. The state of wholeness, which Phil and the girl seem to be aspiring to in “The Sea Change,” is finally achieved in The Garden of Eden as the closing lines suggest:

David wrote steadily and well and the sentences that he had made before came to him complete and entire […]. Not a sentence was missing and there were many that he put down as they were returned to him without changing them. By two o’clock he had recovered, corrected and improved what it had taken him five days to write originally.
He wrote on a while longer and there was no sign that any of it would ever cease returning to him intact. (247)

BIBLIOGRAPHY


1. This short story was first composed between January and June of 1930. A signed typescript of “The Sea Change” is dated September 22, 1931. It was then published in Paris by Edward W. Titus in the December issue of This Quarter. However, it was not originally intended for Titus’s magazine, but rather for The Forum.
2. “Let us see what we can do in 1260 words,” Hemingway noted somewhat ironically as he contemplated how he would be able to make his story meet The Forum’s editor’s demands for a well-delineated plot (in Bennett 229).
3. Eric Nakjavani notes that the story begins “right in the middle of a conversation that has seemingly been going on for some time between Phil and the girl. [...]” He adds: “The reader experiences the overwhelming desire to mount an imaginary search and seizure operation to recapture this lost beginning. But this loss is obviously irrecoverable in its entirety. The reader has to be consoled by realizing that every authentic beginning or origin is likely to remain shrouded in mystery. Only traces of the story’s problematic beginning [...] can be partially recuperated and reconstructed through the reader’s listening to the text’s silences” (Nakjavani 164-165).
4. Volumnia’s adage: “Action is eloquence” characterizes a Shakespearian motif which associates discourse with action (Shakespeare, Coriolanus).
5. In assessing the revisions the story underwent, Charles Nolan notes that Hemingway’s amendments were, on the whole, intended to eliminate a major impediment: description. Nolan explains that Hemingway removed almost all description, paring the text down until it was constituted almost essentially of dialogue: “In the original manuscript, Hemingway gave a fuller description of the woman, detailing aspects of her hands, face, throat, mouth, and cheek bones [...]. In the second version, the description of the man is cut entirely” (Nolan 54-55). The reference is to the Ernest Hemingway manuscript of “The Sea Change.”
6. S. Norman Grebstein has noted the theatrical quality of Hemingway’s writing: “It is as though the reader were presented with a bare scenario which retained only the actors’ speeches, and asked to do the work of writer and director in order to reconstruct the scene fully and dramatize it. Thus, it is left to the reader to add the pauses and interpret the dialogue for tempo, volume, tone, and inflection, and to decide the proper emphasis for setting, action, and gesture. The secret of Hemingway’s dialogue is just this demand it sets on the reader, while at the same time it allows him to stage the scene in his own head [...]” (99).
7. Bennett cites a pencil manuscript headed “Three Love Stories”/ by Ernest Hemingway, (Item 681, John F. Kennedy Library). Of the three love stories in the pencil manuscript one is entitled “The Sea Change”. Bennett concludes: “Apparently [The Sea Change] was intended to be one of the three planned stories for a magazine called The Forum” (228).
8. Bennett concludes that the two men are catamites and corroborates this assumption by calling attention to Hemingway’s use of affected language: “The two clients are homosexuals, which is revealed in the language they use. One ‘addresses’ the barman, which implies an affected formality; [...] they also force an affected familiarity by calling the barman ‘old James’ and by discussing his appearance when James’s ‘Yes, sir’ does not indicate such a familiarity. The one client’s instruction not to ‘neglect to insert’ the brandy is a pretentious and exalted rhetoric similar to the language Hemingway uses in The Sun Also Rises when dramatizing the homosexuals with ‘white hands, wavy hair, white faces, grimacing, gesturing, talking,’ using rhetoric such as, ‘I do declare’ [...]. The textual evidence of the language in the story is supported by a deleted manuscript fragment in which Phil refers to the ‘clients’ as ‘punks,’ that is, catamites or male prostitutes” (Bennett 237).
9. “Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,/ As, to be hated, needs to be seen;/ Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,/ We first endure, then pity, then embrace” (Pope, Epistle II).
10. Bennett affirms: “Hemingway intends from the outset to establish the true conflict invisibly, in the arena of Phil’s mind, like dynamite hidden under a bridge, and to make the true resolution the psychic death – the ironic killing – of ‘poor old Phil’” (229).

11. “Musing upon the king my brother’s wreck” (Eliot 191) – Eliot’s Poem, “The Fire Sermon” (The Wasteland), makes a passing allusion to The Tempest (1.2.389-405).

12. Prospero’s island is evidently in the Mediterranean, and he represents the figure of the magus who could bring on strange changes in the natural and the supernatural world. Shakespeare’s contemporaries were fascinated by this figure of creative change and regeneration.

13. Ferdinand is the only son of the King of Naples whom Prospero has secretly chosen to be his son-in-law. Ferdinand bewails what he assumes is his father’s death by drowning. Ferdinand is the only one of the shipwrecked company to encounter the magician, Prospero, directly.

14. Coexisting opposites in Renaissance thought correspond to the notion of coincidentia oppositorium. This term is often associated with the philosopher and humanist, Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464). Unlike Aristotle, Cusa not only perceives the contradictions at the limits of the expressible, but endorses them.

15. This scene from Antony and Cleopatra was inspired by Ovid’s Metamorphoses which recounts Hercules’ enslavement by Omphale, the queen of Lydia – it relates sexual deviance with tragic-comic consequences. Like Antony and Cleopatra, Hercules’ and Omphale’s roles become inverted when the queen of Lydia takes the warrior’s club and lion skin mantle and dresses him in her robes, obliging him to weave with her other maidens stooped at her feet. See Lucas Cranach’s painting of Hercules and Omphale (1532) which focuses on the disempowering of the great warrior.

16. It is true that in this scene Antony’s appropriation of Cleopatra’s feminine attributes is not an entirely conscious decision since he is in a state of inebriety. The Philippian sword was used by Antony at the Battle of Philippi in which he and Octavius defeated Brutus and Cassius.

17. Hemingway’s readings in the 1920s reflect an interest in deviant sexual codes. After the war he began to read up on sexuality in terms of “variant behavior.” This subject was becoming a fervent topic of conversation at the time. Hemingway endeavored to understand the social import of the sexual changes taking place: “I thought that I had lived in a world as it was and there were all kinds of people in it and I tried to understand them, although some of them I could not like and some I still hated” (A Moveable Feast, 19). In the 1920s Hemingway was reading Havelock Ellis’s Erotic Symbolism. The book discussed female orgasm and the erotic nature of hair which would become a fetish in Hemingway’s writing. In 1921 he sent a copy to Hadley, his first wife and they exchanged essays on male and female roles, a subject of interest at this time when sexual liberation had spread to Paris (Bennett 226-227).

18. Bisexuality and homosexuality were incarnated by outspoken artists, many of them women whom Hemingway met in Europe, notably Gertrude Stein. Hemingway told Edmund Wilson in 1952 that “The Sea Change” was written from the knowledge he gained about lesbianism from Gertrude Stein in 1922. (See Bennett 227.) Bennett quotes Edmund Wilson, November 8 1952, Letters, 795: “Gertrude Stein talked to me once for three hours telling me why she was a lesbian, the mechanics of it, why the act did not disgust those who performed it… and why it was not degrading to either participant. It was this knowledge, gained from Gertrude Stein that enabled me to write ASea Change [sic.], which is a good story, with authority.” However, Gertrude Stein would contend that she had no influence whatsoever on Hemingway (Young 173). In the end, did Gertrude Stein’s female homosexuality truly inspire “The Sea Change”? If so, why is Hemingway cited in 1922 as having attributed the genesis of the short story to his “hands on experience”: “I had seen the couple in the Bar Basque in St. Jean de Luz and I knew the story too, too well, which is the squared root of well, and use any well you like except mine” (Flora 131). The question arises as to whether Hemingway knew “it” – the story of the couple – through first hand
experience – or from someone else – vicariously, Gertrude Stein, for example. Hemingway maintains a constant ambiguity of meaning, designated in the polyvalent use of “well” which can be a metaphor for the artist’s inkwell, and for the artist’s change of sex from male to female, “use any well you like except mine.”

19. The Garden of Eden is the last uncompleted novel by Ernest Hemingway, which he worked on from 1946 until his death in 1961. It is set on the Côte d’Azur in the 1920s.

ABSTRACTS

“The Sea Change,” mainly a dialogue between a couple sitting in a café, is a very brief short story with almost no action. The elusive nature of Hemingway’s narrative strategy, which constantly holds back information from the reader, acts as a substitute for “real action” and gives the impression that the short story could be staged for theatre. Hemingway sets up the dramatic content of his short story as a contest of wills between a man, Phil, emblematic of ‘virtue,’ and an unnamed woman, symptomatic of ‘vice.’ Yet clear-cut binary distinctions break down. This is corroborated by the symbolic implications of the title, “The Sea Change,” taken from Shakespeare’s The Tempest, where death and life are absorbed into one common state of metamorphosis. From this perspective, “The Sea Change” can be viewed as a dramatization of Hemingway’s poetic search for a prelapsarian locus where distinctions no longer exist.

“L’Éveil,” composée essentiellement d’un dialogue entre un jeune couple attablé dans un café, est une très brève nouvelle ne présentant pratiquement pas d’action. La nature insaisissable de la stratégie narrative de Hemingway, qui cache constamment au lecteur des informations importantes, fonctionne comme le succédané de la “véritable action”, et nous donne l’impression que la nouvelle peut être mise en scène. Hemingway présente le contenu dramatique de sa nouvelle comme une dispute entre un homme, Phil, censé représenter la ‘vertu’, et une femme innommée, qui est le symptôme du ‘vice’. Néanmoins, les distinctions binaire nettes ne tiendront pas. Ceci est confirmé par le jeu de l’intertextualité présente dès le titre, “The Sea Change”, lequel renvoie à The Tempest de Shakespeare, où mort et vie ont partie liée en un seul état de métamorphose. Dans cette optique, la nouvelle peut être lue comme une dramatisation de la quête poétique chez Hemingway d’un lieu paradisiaque où les différences s’évanouissent.

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The Values of Silence in “Fifty Grand,” “A Day’s Wait,” and “Nobody Ever Dies”

Cassandre Meunier

1 There have been numerous attempts to analyze Hemingway’s “terse tone and muted tension” and “laconic and carefully controlled conversation” (Young 195, 205). The general trend of criticism has emphasized the parallelisms between style and theme or between narrative style and the narrator’s state of mind. Philip Young argued that Hemingway’s technique of understatement reflected “the rigid restraint the man felt if he were to survive,” and that the controlled narrative style fitted the author’s subject, i.e. life, which was to be “constantly forced under the most intense and rigorous control, for it is savage and can get out of hand” (Young 208-209). On the other hand, Gerry Brenner analyzed Frederic Henry’s laconic narrative discourse as a symptom of his lack of comfort due to his vulnerability and his defensive stance (Brenner 34-35).

2 While many critics have thus tried to analyze the effects and reasons for Hemingway’s “evasive,” “terse,” or “laconic” style, Peter Messent was among the first of his critics to associate it with an identified linguistic phenomenon: silence. Comparing Gertrude Stein with Hemingway, he alluded to the use of silence by both writers:

   Epistemological coherence is a myth in Stein’s work. A stress on immediate perception and knowledge is foregrounded at the expense of any full sense of larger unity – of a complete and ordered historical narrative. Although she moves much further than Hemingway in this respect and in her consequent representation of the dislocation of the subject, they both work from similar starting points. Stein’s preoccupation with silence [...] also connects up crucially with Hemingway’s writing practice. (Messent 13)

3 This assumption made it possible for criticism to apply to Hemingway’s work serious text analysis theories related to silence, and to discover, like Messent, that “the deceptive simplicity of his writing masks his careful control of narrative technique” (Messent 22). In the tradition of the works by Romeo Giger, Frederic J. Svoboda and Susan F. Beegel dedicated to the study of omission, silence was recently used as a new tool to understand literary works that seem to resist interpretation. Silence became to
poetics what omission had earlier been. Thanks to the critical works of Ihab Hassan, Steven R. Portch, Adam Jaworski, Deborah Tannen, and Muriel Saville-Troike, to name only a few, silence has become a new key to better understand fiction. A few articles (Aboudahab, Herndl) have considered silence as a key to Hemingway’s literature. In this essay, I intend to investigate this assumption and establish a clear relationship between the values embodied by Hemingway’s fictional characters and their – and the narrator’s – silent attitude. I will be reading the characters of “Fifty Grand,” “A Day’s Wait,” and “Nobody Ever Dies” as performances of endurance, to show how verbal or non-verbal attitudes are connected to physical control and function as ideals of behavior.

When, in his study of *The Sun Also Rises* George Cheatham explained that “as a defensive response to both the war’s excess and the threat of [...] nothingness, Jake embraced exactitude” (Cheatham 103), his remark could also describe Hemingway’s narrative attitude since the publication of *Three Stories and Ten Poems* in 1923. Ever since Hemingway started writing fiction, he began experimenting with the use of silence, not only because silence is part of a reality Hemingway wanted to render as truly as possible, but also because the use of silence would strengthen the narrative and make it more powerful to readers. In 1925 Hemingway tested this assumption with his attempt at omission in “Cat in the Rain.” Less than ten years later, he associated this technique to the physical phenomenon of the iceberg because of its main characteristic: its “dignity.” Hemingway believed that a story shaped like an iceberg would convey implicit meaning “as strongly as though the writer had stated” the unmentioned facts:

> If a prose writer knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water.

A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places, in his writing. (*Death in the Afternoon*, 192)

As Earl Rovit analyzed, there is a connection between the dignified attitude embraced by Hemingway’s heroes and the quality of style Hemingway was trying to achieve (Rovit 64). The fact that Hemingway justifies the dignity of the iceberg with its hidden part clearly indicates that concealment (Brenner) and understatement can be perceived as moral values as well as stylistic qualities.

In a remarkable article about the “markedness theory,” Sobkowski Wlodzimierz analyzed the definitions of silence in generalist English dictionaries and concluded that “silence is either acoustic or pragmatic”:

> Let me remark [...] that silence appears to be a linguistically non-autonomous concept *par excellence*: it is best defined acoustically and/or pragmatically. As a matter of fact, the five definitions of *Webster Collegiate* fall rather neatly (though unevenly) into these two rubrics:
>  - the state or fact of keeping silent; a refraining from speech or from noise (pragmatic/acoustic),
>  - absence of any sound or noise; stillness (acoustic),
>  - a withholding of knowledge or omission of mention (pragmatic),
>  - failure to communicate, write, keep in touch, etc. (pragmatic),
>  - oblivion or obscurity (pragmatic). (Wlodzimierz 43)

In the collection *In Our Time* silence seems to belong to the first category rather than work as a narrative strategy: silence is witnessed and simply reported. In “Indian Camp,” “The Three-Day Blow,” and “A Very Short Story,” silence is the voice of those
who cannot communicate because of suffering and shame. In “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” “The End of Something,” “Soldier’s Home,” or “Cat in the Rain,” the absence of speech characterizes the main character’s resignation and loss of illusions. Romeo Giger draws a parallel between the author and his characters: “Like Krebs, the protagonist of his short story ‘Soldier’s Home,’ Hemingway soon realized that true emotions defied words. Krebs, having returned from the war, is unable to communicate his deepest feelings. Trying to put them into language would inevitably distort them [...]” (Giger 20).

Indeed, in his early short stories, Hemingway seems to have tried to represent the role of silence in dialogues with dialectic pauses or non-verbal communicative acts as in “Cross Country Snow” or “My Old Man.” In the chapters of in our time, the less information about context there is the more powerful narratives are (Giger 28). If there was already an acknowledgement that speech was limited, Hemingway soon realized that silence was unlimitedly meaningful, and began to make use of silent responses and postures in his short stories.

In Men Without Women, Hemingway enlarged the use of silence to scenery description and as a way to communicate with the reader. This technique is particularly relevant in “Fifty Grand,” and was first described by Romeo Giger who called it “A New Way of Communicating with the Reader” (Giger 37). In his study of “Hills Like White Elephants,” he observed:

We are not told [why the girl looks at the floor] – at least not explicitly. Where other writers of the same period would have wished to explain what the girl was thinking and feeling at this particular moment, Hemingway purposely refrains from doing so, knowing that the emotional impact is much more intense if the emotion has to be supplied by the narrator. (Giger 40)

Later on, with Winner Take Nothing (1933), Ernest Hemingway raised cognitive and communicational issues: first, is there a difference between silence and the absence of words, i.e. is silence a characterization of the presence or the absence of a communicational act? Second, what are the consequences of a lack of dialectic response, and what kind of communicational exchange is possible in this case? Like a good number of stories published in Winner Take Nothing, “A Day’s Wait” explores the taboos of death, and silence is here used to evoke internal conflicts to which characters are strongly holding.

Much criticism has associated Hemingway’s style with male values. One latest example is Thomas Strychacz: “The overarching of a trajectory of a journey to manhood now appears as the hidden meaning and value of each one of [Nick’s] early encounters. Put differently, we understand the hollowness of boyhood experiences by figuring back from whatever value – discipline, courage, holding tight, suffering wounds, enduring pain – is held to characterize man” (Strychacz 63). Stories like “Up in Michigan” and “The End of Something” certainly call this assumption into question, since Liz and Marjorie, the two female characters, embody the values mentioned by Strychacz much more than do Jim Gilmore and Nick – their male counterparts –, the first falling asleep after a brutal sex experience with Liz, and the latter accusing Marjorie for her extended knowledge as a way to delay breaking up, which he eventually does by saying it to her back. Both girls are forsaken by their male companions in a rude or coy way, and retire alone. While the one “straightened her skirt and coat and tried to do something with her hair” (62) and walks back home in a “cold mist” after having covered Jim with her
coat, the other makes arrangements for the two of them: “‘I’m going to take the boat’ [...]. ‘You can walk back around the point’” (81), thus stating their split in a practical manner, which he was not able to do: “‘I feel as though everything was gone to hell inside me. I don’t know, Marge. I don’t know what to say’” (ibid.).

Here girls have discipline and courage and they hold tight when suffering pain. They are even able to show concern for the other (Marge thinking of an alternative for Nick to go back without the boat, and Liz covering Jim). This demonstration is useful to show that the values of discipline and dignity are not gender values but character and narrative values.¹

In “Fifty Grand,” “A Day’s Wait,” and “Nobody Ever Dies,” three characters prepare for the end of something, and adopt significantly similar postures although they differ in age and gender. Ann Putnam connects the story “A Pursuit Race” with many others and labels them as studies “in the art of waiting, [choreographies] of holding steady.” Taking place “toward the end,” stories like “Hills Like White Elephants,” “A Day’s wait,” “Now I Lay Me,” and others “dramatize the failure of action to materialize in any paraphrasable form, portraying as they do a world where significant action is impossible. [...] In a world such as this, the best one can do is to learn strategies for not running away – strategies for holding still with some dignity and pride” (Putnam 187). Indeed the protagonists of these stories all try to keep their misery unknown and stay immobile, a recurrent image that symbolizes, as Ann Putnam suggests, a struggle to hold on to one’s dignity.

One of the features associated with dignity is control over oneself. In “Fifty Grand,” the boxer Jack Brennan is about to fight for the last time and “doesn’t feel too good about it.” The reader attends his training at a farm in the week preceding the match: all Jack can do is little work-out and much “lying down.” The image of “holding tight” is recurrent in the story: Jack needs to keep his weight and check what and when he eats (241, 243-244), control the money he spends (242-244), and keep his mouth shut about his bet on his own competitor. Also, he will have to hold himself up during the match, especially after Walcott’s foul blow.

Susan F. Beegel showed Jack’s lucidity and smartness throughout the story, first when she referred to an episode when Jack is mocked in a diner: “Jack’s rhetoric is double-bladed; whether they answer yes or no, the ‘broads’ will brand themselves as either casually or professionally promiscuous. [...] There is nothing of the punch-drunk slugger about Jack Brennan” (Beegel 16). She also considered his attitude in the ring:

> When Walcott fouls him, Jack must become a ‘smart boxer,’ must begin to think in the ring. [...] Because Jack refuses to accept the foul, the fight goes on before Jack has time to recover from the blow and consider how to preserve his investment. [...] Jack nevertheless has the guts to withstand two hard punches from Walcott, while plotting to save his money and preserve the natural outcome of the fight by fouling Walcott himself. (Beegel 17)

Such physical and mental endurance entails demonstrations of admiration and awe at the end of the fight: “Freedman just looks at [Jack],” “‘You’re some boy, Jack.’” Jack held tight all right. But he had actually prepared for that: when we look back, little work-out and much sleeping might be considered as the best preparation for what he had to face.

Throughout the whole story, both Jack and the narrator seem to avoid small talk as a way to protect themselves from calumny. At the beginning of the story, Jack gets
people to shut up twice: once to “broads” who insult him in a diner, then to Soldier Bartlett, a “kidder” who accompanies Jack to Danny Hogan’s health farm. Soldier keeps kidding Jack “rough” and “sour” by making allusions to Jack’s being beaten up by Walcott. Jack coldly asks him to “go back to town”: such talk is ineffectual for his preparation. Not only does Jack reject useless talk, but so does Jerry, the narrator: when he hears that journalists said that “they oughtn’t let [Jack] fight,” he dismisses them just as Jack did Soldier Bartlett and the “broads”: “They’re always wrong, ain’t they?” “What the hell do they know? They can write maybe, but what the hell do they know?” (234). When journalists turn up, neither Jack nor Jerry is willing to talk to them.

When at Danny Hogan’s farm, Jack occupies himself mainly with silent activities and limited movement during the whole week preceding the match: walking (two occurrences), writing letters, sitting (three occurrences),3 leaning back, shutting his eyes, moving around, shadow-boxing a few rounds, skipping the rope a little while, lying down, lying asleep, digging deeper in the pillow, taking a drink, standing up, looking at people (three occurrences), pouring out drinks (232-241).3 More, the way Jerry describes Jack’s schedule indicates a complete lack of activity: “We didn’t do any work” and “He couldn’t sweat.” Jack is also physically held and taken care of by Jerry as he is unable to move his body: “Well, about eleven o’clock Jack passes out and I put him to bed. Finally he’s so he can’t keep from sleeping. I helped him get his clothes off and got him to bed” (240).

Jack suffers from insomnia and shutting his eyes in daylight seems to enable him to overcome his fatigue. His recurrent minimalist moves all seem to belong to a global strategy to preserve his interests: he needs to save his energy for the fight, avoid knock-out and get the money for his family. One of Jack’s major values is that he “doesn’t waste any juice”: during the fight, the same economy of movement will enable him to last in order to preserve his honor. “I think I can last […]. I don’t want this bohunk to stop me,” (247) Jack says. Even though he knows he is going to lose, he still wants to do his best to damage the other boxer.

Not wasting any juice is, of course, characteristic of the author: the narrative choice for this story reflects Hemingway’s wish to preserve secrets until characters accept to unveil them and thus create a suspense in narration that parallels the mystery about the outcome of the fight. This verisimilitude between depicted action and stylistic strategy is reached when Jerry is excluded from the private talk between Jack, John Collins, and two other unnamed characters. When he is back and knocks on the door, Jerry is commanded to “wait a minute”: narrator and readers are temporarily unwanted where the action is discussed and therefore occurs. Hogan intervenes and seems to speak the reader’s mind: “To hell with that stuff,” and threatens characters to quit (237). One of them unlocks the door: there can be no story with external focalization if there is nothing to focus on. After being excluded from the situation of communication and eventually let inside the room, the narrator and the reader along with him are driven to make up for their lack of information and be aware of meaningful details like the postures of characters and their gazes at each other. In fact, all these meaningful details correspond to what Hemingway relied on: the underlying structure of the text, the submerged seven-eighths of the iceberg. The author here provides the reader with what Steven L. Bindeman called “an empty stage for […] words,” that is the unutterable presence of the unutterable in what is uttered: “This is
because silence reflects us back to what has been uttered before. And if we are able to provide an empty stage for the words we hear or speak, then we may enable these words to become more than mere gestures or intended meanings” (Bindeman 5).

21 The narrator being ignorant of the outcome of the preceding conversation, both he and the reader are urged not to judge the decisions made by the characters, but to understand them. This is exactly what Hemingway advised a young writer to do in an article published in *Esquire*:

 [...] Get in somebody else’s head for a change. If I bawl you out try to figure what I’m thinking about as well as how you feel about it. If Carlos curses Juan think what both their sides of it are. Don’t just think who is right. As a man things are as they should or shouldn’t be. As a man you know who is right and who is wrong. [...] As a writer you should not judge. You should understand. (*By-Line*, 219).

22 Another passage counterpoints this scene, when the two boxers are about halfway in the fight: “It goes like that for three rounds more. They don’t talk any. They’re working all the time” (246). Here the same kind of exclusion takes place although Jack and Walcott do not exchange words but blows, and the room is not locked but watched by a very large audience. Still, the reader has no indication from Jack about what he is going to do and the outcome of the fight, just like in the preceding scene. His curiosity thus aroused, the reader will supposedly examine every piece of information, every move and word Jack makes or utters between rounds in order to decide whether Jack is going to lose the fight and gain money or give up money for his last victory.

23 This strategy of economy of movement is echoed in Jack’s speech: all the time he controls his movements, he hushes too. The first episode shows Jack as a man who “could say what he wanted to when he wanted to say it” (232). The reader then knows that it is Jack’s own choice to reject speech when he avoids the company of talkative people and retires into silence when his manager visits him (“Jack doesn’t say anything [...] He ain’t with the others. He’s all by himself,” 237), after the visit (“We put our coats and started out. [...] Jack didn’t say anything,” “We had a couple of drinks without saying anything,” 238), in the train (“Jack didn’t talk,” 242), and during the meal on the day of the match (“Jack didn’t talk much,” 243).

24 Except for the night before the fight when Jerry stays with Jack pouring himself drinks and confiding in Jerry, Jack generally keeps silent. During the fight, the noise prevents dialectic communication (“You couldn’t hear on account of the crowd”) and the two fighters are working so that they “don’t talk any” (246, 247). Jack’s willingness to keep silent is twofold. First, he needs to keep the secret about his bet on his adversary, because it could cause him trouble. Then, it allows him to reach his goals: when he keeps from telling the truth to the referee, he avoids winning the match and losing his money. Also, lying down and shutting his eyes or just remaining, still seem to allow Jack to focus on his goal after he has identified it and to build up confidence. Numerous passages confirm this hypothesis: when Jack sits in the train, immobile and silent, he then talks about the notice he gave his wife about the hotel’s address and the fact that he would be home the day after. Later on, John makes a remark about his weight during a meal when Jack is described as quite silent and the latter boasts “I could make it with my clothes on” (243). Once they are back at the hotel, Jack wants to “lie down a while” (243), Jerry then describes him: “He was lying perfectly still but every once in a while his eyes would open” (244). When he sits up, Jack suggests that they play cribbage and he wins three dollars from Jerry and a dollar and a half from John. Finally, Jack lies down just after the fight is over: “Once we got inside the dressing-room Jack lay down
and shut his eyes.” Then after a brief talk the narrator repeats: “He lies there with his
eyes shut.” Then again: “He lies there, his eyes open now” (249). In this scene, Jack
shows signs of satisfaction. Each time he seems to curl into himself, Jack alludes to or
does something helpful to gain hope (e.g. family meetings, physical well-being, games,
no consideration for others’ negative ideas, self-satisfaction and coy comments). The
impression is that Jack finds confidence in private places: it is not necessary to explain
to anyone what is good for him and his family; just shutting his eyes and cutting
himself off from the external world gives him the confidence that his choice is – and
eventually was – the right one.

In “A Day’s Wait,” a nine-year old boy waits for death to come to him, unaware that his
disease is harmless. He too seems to gain confidence and courage by limiting his
movements: he first talks his father into leaving (“’You don’t have to stay’” is repeated
twice), then refuses to see anyone. His attitude is very rigid, reminding us of Jack “lying
perfectly still” (”He lay still in the bed and seemed very detached from what was going
on,” 333). Besides, the boy’s aspect echoes Jack’s lying “with his eyes open”: “I […]
found him in exactly the same position I had left him, […] staring still, as he had stared,
at the foot of the bed” (ibid.); “’I’m taking it easy,’ he said and looked straight ahead”
(334). It is worth noticing that the bed has an important function in these two stories. It
works as a place of relief where characters can “curl inside” and gain confidence – a
recurrent image in Hemingway’s stories.

The evolution of the boy’s gaze from “the foot of the bed” to “ahead” is another
indication of his boldness in front of death: at first his beliefs were limited to the end of
something, now he considers death as what lies “ahead,” without any fear. He has
gained confidence by remaining by himself, and silence has helped him just the same to
eventually wonder not about the horror of his death but about a practical aspect: the
time he still has to live before dying. After he is reassured, neither silence nor physical
control are needed anymore and the boy can “relax” and “[cry] very easily” (334).

I argued earlier that it was probably wrong to consider that values of courage and
dignity were always considered as men’s values in Ernest Hemingway’s fiction.
Actually, the fact that an author probably spent more time in men’s worlds than in
women’s does not exclude his sensitivity to the coexistence of female identities and the
moral values cited above. “Nobody Ever Dies,” published in 1939, encourages this belief.
Hemingway achieved an emotionally intense short story about two young Cubans
enrolled in the resistance movement who find themselves trapped in a watched house,
then escape, and eventually get shot or captured. The one captured is a girl named
Maria.

The narrative structure of “Nobody Ever Dies” is composed of three parts: the first one
shows Enrique trapped in a house where “comrades” have left him with only a
password. The second part starts when Maria knocks on the door to bring him food,
and ends when they hear police car sirens and are forced to escape through a vacant
lot. The last part focuses on Maria, alone in the grass and prey to only one fear: that she
might not die and give away information.

After a brief physical embrace, the two lovers start at once a debate over speech. The
starting point is Enrique coldly informing Maria that her brother is dead, as he eats and
enumerates at the same time the names and death places of his fellow soldiers. From
then on, Maria’s posture changes: before this revelation, she was “sitting tight against
him […] with a hand on his thigh and with the other she stroked the back of his neck”
The effect of Enrique’s words is immediate: she “sat stiff and alone now, her hands away from him” (474). Driven by political ideals, Enrique denies the special family bonds and the specific values between individuals. As Maria alludes to Vicente as “the flower of the party,” he answers that “the thing to do is to think how we can work to take their places,” and he reacts to her desperate mourning of her lost brother saying “we are all brothers. Some are dead and others still live” (474). Enrique exercises power over Maria through speech and silences her questioning (‘he is dead?’ “It is not just a report?” “It is not worth it,” “I never heard of it,” “[...] you say such things are justified?”) by a threefold strategy. First, he tries to silence her by direct commands: “It does no good to discuss it. They are dead,” then later: “Don’t cry.” Secondly, he speaks more than her and opposes her pain to theories that exclude fatality (“But sometimes the people on our flank would not attack. [...] Sometimes we were ordered to do things not in sufficient number”), and that he carefully develops with connectors, thus refusing the possibility that something could end, both grammatically and existentially (“so,” “otherwise,” “now,” “if”). Finally, he remains in control of the conversation when she starts crying, only to repeat himself: “No. It is worth it,” and “the thing to do is to think how we can work to take their place,” then: “They are just a part. [...] But in the end, it was not a failure,” “Don’t cry, Maria,” “What has happened has happened. We must think of what there is to do. There is much to do,” “We must check all romanticism [...] so that we will never again fall into revolutionary adventurism.” All of these verbal interventions seem to cancel each other out in an endless series of repetitions. Enrique’s self-assured statements (“Yes. It is worth it,” “No. It is worth it,” and the references to what “there is to do”) sound pointless when we know that they are in a watched house (474, 475).

Although Maria underlines his mechanical, rhetorical speech and accuses him of talking “like a book,” she seems to have given up the debate. Just like Jack and the boy in “A Day’s Wait,” she avoids taking turns and thus becomes silent as her gaze goes fixed: “She said nothing and he could see her face in the light [...] looking straight ahead,” or: “The girl still said nothing”. This control over her speech and gaze seems to have the same effect as previously described: she is able to concentrate on what bothers her and matters to her. She makes her point clear, and facing the strength of her position, Enrique has to “eat” his own words and surrender to the acknowledgement of loss by commenting: “There was a bird” (475).

In this passage, the opposition between Maria and Enrique obviously reminds us of that between the protagonists of “Hills Like White Elephants”: here again the woman refers to human casualties (“they were so happy,” “we could have everything” ”‘you never take it back’”) and the man to concepts (“to let the air in,” “). Toward the end, the woman, nicknamed Jig by her companion, begs for silence and then surrenders but seems to overcome her frustration as she sounds perfectly good-humored (212-214). For Stephen R. Portch, she is the best at using silence:

Train time shows that 35 minutes have passed as the two talked – occasionally. If spoken as a continuous dialogue, their exchange would consume no more than 3 or 4 minutes of clock time. Therefore, at least 31 unaccounted minutes have passed [...] the time has been spent in deafening silence. This silence confirms what the dialog suggests: they fail to communicate on all but the most superficial level [...] But we do know who makes the best use of silence: the woman. (Portch 102)
Shortly after Enrique’s surrender and their reconciliation, they can hear police sirens and have to flee. The narration focuses on Maria until the end of the story. As she is first lying in the weeds, then sitting in the police car, the omniscient narrator shows that the values Thomas Stryczacz considers as “male” can also apply to women in Hemingway’s work.

Although the passage displays many loud statements, Maria does not address anyone around her: she takes refuge inside herself and tries to find comfort. Curling up inside, she shows postures similar to those described above. She straightens up and concentrates on what is going on in her body and mind:

The girl lay flat against the ground [...]. she could feel her heart beating against the ground. [...] In the field the girl lay, her hands clasped across the top of her head. “Help me to bear this,” she said into the weeds, speaking to no one, for there was no one there. Then, suddenly, personally, sobbing, “Help me, Vicente. Help me, Chucho.” [...] “Help me not to talk if they take me,” she said, her mouth against the weeds. [...] She brought her hands down from her head and clenched them by her sides. (479)

The whole physical and mental preparation takes place within herself. Indeed she speaks into the weeds and is lying on the ground, so her voice returns to where it originated: again, silence functions as a way of creating “a place of one’s own.” She thus gains enough confidence to make the decision to run in order to get killed, which will prevent risks that she might reveal secret information to the police. Just like other Hemingway characters, she uses silence and physical control to find enough confidence to face her own end. By making herself rigid, she becomes undefeatable.

We can notice the same determination that was hers when she talked with Enrique, but now she repeats negative words to reject the possibility of talking (“’Help me not to talk,’” repetitions of “’No,’” “’No one dies for nothing,’” 479, 480) and summons dead people to strengthen her. She rejects death as a loss: the dead are still alive and are a part of herself and can support her like live friends (“’Many, many people are helping me now,’” 480). This consideration enables her to face her own end with a “strange confidence.”

Even policemen and their “Negro” stool pigeon wearing a voodoo necklace, fall into a silent awe: “[...] all of the policemen in the car felt uncomfortable about Maria now as she sat very straight with her face shining in the arc light,” “[The Negro] sat without speaking [...]. Looking back, [he] saw the girl’s face, shining proudly, and her head held high” (480).

In the three stories, Hemingway’s protagonists find in the “inward terrain” (Hovey) the only possible escape when they are trapped. Hemingway’s short stories are powerful because they confront viewpoints, which the dénouement ultimately challenges. Just like in a boxing match, the one still standing at the end impresses the reader most. This is exactly what happens in “A Natural History of the Dead,” which Susan F. Beegel brilliantly commented on: “The doctor’s statement is triply ironic. He and the lieutenant have been arguing about nothing – a moot point of no practical importance – and nothing – the terrifying emptiness of death. The lieutenant cannot ‘see’ anything – the doctor has blinded him with iodine – but the lieutenant can see ‘nothing’ [...]” (Beegel 40).

In the three short stories studied above, weak mental or physical characteristics are first attributed to silent characters: Hogan says about Jack that “’He’s nothing,’” and
the boy’s father assumes that his son is “perhaps [...] a little lightheaded.” As for Maria, she is first forced to surrender to Enrique’s ideological speech. Then Enrique slaps her and policemen walk her “steadily toward the car” before referring to her as “‘silly’” and “‘crazy’” (234, 333, 480). But the morals of the short stories eventually change sides when characters are confronted by a trial: fouled by Jack, Walcott is on the ground, unable to rise to his feet or answer Jack’s apologies. The father’s unconsciousness of his boy’s pain is counterpointed by his son’s over-consciousness and dignified reaction. Finally, Maria’s confidence makes policemen uncomfortable and impresses the voodoo believer, confronted by “an older magic” than his own.

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NOTES

1. Thomas Mann’s *Magic Mountain* raises similar questions in the comparison between Hans Castorp, his cousin Joachim, and the latter’s mother. The sanatorium’s surgeon general attributes male values to Joachim, i.e. silence associated to manners, reserve, and sense of responsibility, which work as counterpoints to Hans Castorp’s attitude but also characterize his mother at the end of the novel. As she visits her dead son, she is described as showing courage, reserve and holding tight with composure and strength (Mann 528-534).

2. On the occasion of his manager’s visit, Jack is described three times by Jerry as “sitting”: “Jack was sitting on the bed [...],” “[Jack] just sits there on the bed [...],” “Jack sat there looking Irish and tough.”

3. Three other action verbs describe Jack handling glasses and eating a fruit (“put down the glass,” “eating a grapefruit,” “spit [the seed] out”).

4. Ann Putnam includes this element in her analysis of “A Pursuit Race” and compares it to the café of “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place”: “When William Campbell can no longer ‘stand the pace,’ he drops out of the race and retreats to a peculiar kind of clean, well-lighted place, [...] marked only by the arrival of the ‘wolf’ at the door, his reach for the whiskey bottle under the bed, and the tender mercies he finds at the end of a needle. Out of these and a hotel room and a bed with a very peculiar top sheet, William Campbell fashions his own clean, well-lighted place” (Putnam 187). Analyzing “Fifty Grand,” we saw earlier that silence and the refusal to talk worked as a form of protection.

5. The relationship between speech, silence, and power in mixed-sex couples is minutely analyzed in a wonderful empirical study by Bessie Dendrinos and Emilia Ribeiro Pedroin “Giving Street Directions: The Silent Role of Women” (Jaworski215-239). Dendrinos and Ribeiro refuse the implication that “male discourse is intrinsically more authoritative than female discourse,” and argue that men “employ various methods to gain [linguistic] privileges and use language to exercise their institutionally bestowed power over women [...] [Power] can be exercised by someone who interrupts her/his
interlocutor in such a way as to make the interruptee feel that she/he has no right to the floor, and
that what she/he is saying is less valuable than what someone else has to say [...]” (217). The authors
also consider how silence may be an expression of power or powerlessness depending on the
situation (218-219).
6. From the beginning of the argument about Maria’s brother (“‘Vicente is my brother,’” 474),
to the first mention of her silence (“She did not answer and he finished eating”), Maria
pronounces 165 words and Enrique 346 (475).
7. Enrique’s crawling in the grass then being shot occupies one page of the story whereas Maria’s
arrest is described in more than two pages.
8. We can notice here the [h] alliteration which reminds us of Maria’s focus: that the dead help
her so that she can hold herself.

ABSTRACTS
This essay considers the interworking of movement and control, and speech and silence in the
moral development of Hemingway’s characters. After a brief overview of the use of silence in
Hemingway’s first collections of short stories, this article proposes a close textual study of three
stories that perform a representation of values generally attributed to Hemingway’s male
protagonists, namely endurance, courage, and holding tight. Nevertheless, as this essay shows,
women can also embody these values. In an effort to keep their dignity when facing their own
end, the protagonists have to enforce a control over themselves by avoiding small talk and
limiting their movements. These behavior patterns build up an ideal of the self as a silent and
impregnable fortress. In addition, this article suggests that these values of silence can also be
found in the writer’s style.

Cet essai démontre l’implication des contrastes entre mouvement et contrôle, d’une part, et
discours et silence, d’autre part, dans le développement moral des personnages des nouvelles
d’Ernest Hemingway. Après avoir exercé un survol de l’utilisation par Hemingway du silence dans
des premiers recueils de nouvelles, je propose d’étudier trois nouvelles qui mettent en scène des
valeurs que l’on attribue généralement au héros masculin: l’endurance face à la souffrance, le
courage et la maîtrise de soi. Cependant, cet essai montre que les personnages féminins peuvent
aussi endosser ces valeurs. En effet, alors que chacun est confronté à sa propre fin, les
protagonistes parviennent à faire preuve de sang-froid en évitant les discours inutiles et en
réduisant leurs mouvements. Ces modèles de conduite participent à la définition d’un idéal de
l’être comme forteresse silencieuse et imprenable. Cet article met également en évidence le lien
entre ces valeurs de silence et le style de l’auteur.

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Past and Present in “Cat in the Rain” and “Old Man at the Bridge”

Horst Breuer

1 The theme of historical change is not a major topic in Ernest Hemingway's writings. The author's sense of history is not particularly acute. The more remarkable it appears, then, that there is an emphatic contrast between past and present in two of his finest short stories. In “Cat in the Rain” and “Old Man at the Bridge,” bygone days stand in irreconcilable opposition to the world of actuality. The two narratives allude to this confrontation of epochs without explicitly discussing historical developments. Rather, they create an atmosphere of nostalgia, a blurred – perhaps even faulty – recollection of former times. A sense of irretrievable loss informs these superbly compact texts, a tension between then and now, between traditional life and the modern experience. The past meant security and stability, the present is volatile, de-centered, unpredictable.

2 Still, this historical antithesis is far from simple. It is not shaped after the commonplace notion of the old Indian chief caricatured in Hemingway's “Fathers and Sons,” whose philosophy goes: “Long time ago good. Now no good” (498). Hemingway's outlook is more sophisticated. In his works, the state of modernity is represented ambiguously, as a loss of certainties, but also an exhilarating condition of independence and risk, of individualism and autonomy. Existentialist freedom has two faces in the author's texts, depending on minute shades of mood and situation. In this indeterminacy, his narratives resemble the trick pictures of Gestalt psychology, which may be perceived as either figure or ground: the novels and stories depict modern autonomy as the daring challenge of unconfined self-projection – or as paralyzing doubt and futility, as spiritual emptiness and the brittleness of social and emotional bonds. This latter aspect is most vivid when accompanied by the above-mentioned sense of loss and nostalgia. I propose to read “Cat in the Rain” (1925) in the light of works like The Sun Also Rises (1926), “Hills Like White Elephants” (1927), “The Sea Change” (1933), and particularly the writer's posthumously published unfinished novel The Garden of Eden (1946-1959). The author's technique of textual minimalism and his strategic omission of comprehensive information necessitates such a form of analogizing. In all these
narratives, we find a similar chain of motifs: rootless cosmopolitan characters traveling without real destinations; hedonism as a manner of experimentation and distraction; young women wearing their hair short; and the crises of personal relationships, indicating a general collapse of values and orientation. The “lost generation” of expatriates live transient lives, temporarily sojourning in provisional places like hotels, bars, railway stations, cafés. Restlessly they try on new ideas, styles, ways of living: journalism, poetry, story or novel writing; wine, brandy, aperitifs, long drinks; boxing, fishing, skiing, bullfighting; short-lived affairs, marriage, love triangles, lesbian episodes. Women have short-cut hair, like boys (flappers, garçonnes). Enigmatically, they cross the sexual borderlines – drifters, protean beings with multiple identities. This is stimulating and exciting in several respects, but it also heightens the general impression of nervousness, incoherence, and a lack of secure footing.

This context serves to highlight the historiography of antagonistic life-styles in “Cat in the Rain.” The chief character and narrative focus of the story is the nameless young American woman (called “wife” or “girl”). She and her young husband have not been married for long and are yet in the midst of a marital crisis – which in Hemingway’s works is invariably also a crisis of existential uncertainty and impasse. The couple is having a brief stopover in a nameless North-Italian seaside resort, in February perhaps, clearly very much ‘out of season.’ In the midst of their nomadic traveling, they have come to a precarious halt – in a, of all places, decent, traditional, well-managed old-time hotel. (In those days, Rapallo had a somewhat faded, antiquated charm.) The central location and shining façade of the hotel are expressly mentioned in the story. The padrone is a courteous hotelkeeper of the old school whose care, dignity, and self-respect point to the pleasant, well-mannered deportment of former times. He stands in marked contrast to the purposeless young woman who lacks a firm framework of existence – she has only her narcissistic mirror-image to observe and her vague yearnings to cherish. As is characteristic for her type and class, she is able to express dissatisfaction merely by nagging and complaining, like a spoiled child: “‘I want some new clothes,’” “‘If I can’t have […] any fun,’’ “‘I want it to be spring’” (170). The padrone appears a father figure to her; meeting him makes her feel like a little girl: youngish, but somehow of importance.

At present, however, she is outside any family alliances. When she sees the cat under their window and wants to ‘rescue’ it, her husband offers help, but does not make a real effort and keeps himself uninvolved. His part in the narrative is not fully developed, and so some recent readings have found him to be a selfish, unconcerned brute. One critic, for example, speaks of the husband’s “callousness” and “immaturity” (Stewart 72). Considering Hemingway’s overall world of characters, though, this does not seem to be justified. The text gives us the young wife’s perspective for the most part, but refrains from any sort of idealizing or sentimental attitude. The husband’s dispassionate “‘Shut up’” is not a sharp rebuke, but at closer consideration equals something like “Stop it” or “Give yourself a break”. The young man finds his girl-wife attractive (“You look pretty darn nice,” 169), but does not think much of her fits of bored caprice and cannot take seriously her shallow and short-lived crises.

The female protagonist of the story is cut off from all active participation. She remains, as it were, behind glass-panes. All she can do is look out of the window, gaze into the mirror, sulk, be moody and petulant. If, in her moneyed but feeble existence, she tries to do something, attempting to be helpful and caring, she is screened and safeguarded
by servants, and the goal of her efforts, the wet kitten, remains inaccessible. She fashions her longings into a little daydream about a polite, traditional world of yore, a belle époque like the American ‘Gilded Age’ (“ [...] I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles,’ “ ‘I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel […]. I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her’ ” 169). She fantasizes herself into a serene and graceful environment, protected by firm rules, when dining tables were laden with candle-sticks and silver cutlery, testifying to a bourgeois life of peaceful domesticity. In those remote days, women used to wear their hair long and men theirs short; everybody had an unequivocal identity and a stable social position. Women twisted their hair into a bun, and in their elegant homes led lives which knew neither insecurity nor doubt, cats purring cozily in their laps. It is too simple to understand the wife’s search for the kitten as no more than a metaphor of her wish for pregnancy (although child-bearing clearly may be seen as crucial to former female fulfillment). Rather, the cat, the well-stocked dinner-table and the dignified old-school hotel owner represent a static, neat, orderly world of the past. The young couple, on the other hand, travel light, going without household stuff or domestic animals. They embody the radically different modern form of an existence without any deeper ties.

The cat of our story, however, is an ambiguous, multi-faceted symbol. Purring in the housewife’s lap, she signifies home and security; but straying about in the rain, she indicates homelessness and exposure. She mirrors the young wife, but is also her counter-image. She represents the American girl’s wishes, but also her feeling of dislocation. The chilly season and the winter rain of the story’s title carry multiple meanings, too. They point to the uncomfortable weather outside as well as the dreariness and ennui inside, and altogether they stand for the frigidity of modern life.

In our present text, the chief symbol for the alienated life-style of modernity is the girl’s cropped hair – an unobtrusive but significant detail. The characteristic feature of literary symbolism is its double nature of being and meaning: the symbol is part of the realistic world of the text, and simultaneously transcends it by referring to an abstract field of ideas beyond. In Goethe’s and Coleridge’s conception, the symbol points to a universal context, but is also an empirical (if ‘eminent’) part of the textual reality. The particular represents the general ‘summarily,’ as a kind of abbreviation. That is why we may enjoy a literary work on a concrete plane without being aware of its symbolism – which is nevertheless there and secretly informs our responses, although we may recognize this only belatedly, in a second or third reading. In this manner, the girl’s bobbed hair inherently belongs to the imaginative territory of the text, but at the same time represents a broader field of meaning: namely the loss of social belonging and identity. “ ‘Ha perduto qualche cosa, Signora?’ ” the puzzled chamber-maid asks the American girl. This loss of attachment and orientation is the theme of the story.

The girl-protagonist with the boyish hairstyle has undergone the risk of blurring firm gender-boundaries. In Hemingway’s writings, this is accompanied by, as may be seen in “The Sea Change” and The Garden of Eden, disturbing and confusing erotic adventures; they seem to include a kind of active, ‘male’ sexual behavior on the woman’s part which is apt to undermine firm contours of identity. This is admittedly not the theme of “Cat in the Rain,” but as a context it points to the spiritual muddle which engulfs the young wife of the story, and which forms the basis of her wish for long hair and for a more ‘womanly’ way of life (“ ‘I get so tired of looking like a boy,’ ” 169). Her pronounced
desires are vague, arbitrary and unrealistic (“‘I want it to be spring,’” etc., 170). The
girl’s lack of self-awareness indicates that the loss of order and orientation is deep-
rooted and irremediable. What is left is “a heap of broken images,” in the words of
T. S. Eliot’s The Waste Land. There is no way back to the Good Old Times, as the ending of
the story suggests: the attentive padrone sends the maid with “a big tortoiseshell cat” to
the American girl – but this is not the cat she was looking for; it is full-grown and
requires no loving care. “You can’t always get what you want,” as the song lyric has it
forty-five years later. The snug, simple world of the past remains a dream, and Ersatz
will not bring it back or make it real – particularly not Ersatz of Ersatz. The present is
characterized by chilly, wet weather, deserted squares, falling dusk, bored listlessness,
and frequently – though not in this work – by dazed distraction through alcohol, love-
affairs, and dangerous sports.

9 “Old Man at the Bridge” (1938) is an utterly different kind of story as to its theme and
narrative mode. But it also comprises an aspect of the temporal arrangement of the two
world stages of Then and Now. The text of “Old Man at the Bridge” even surpasses the
former piece as to brevity, condensation and suggestiveness. The setting is a pontoon
bridge near Amposta in the Rio Ebro delta. The time is that of the decisive military
victories of the nationalist troops in the Spanish Civil War (April, 1938). The defeat of
the Republicans is close at hand. The nationalist army is about to attack from the south,
from Vinaroz. The Republican troops retreat from the exposed front sections south of
the River Ebro. Together with them, many civilians make their way out of the region,
forming a northward-bound flow of refugees. Men and vehicles have to pass the
provisional bridge. It is Easter Sunday, presumably late morning. War disregards
religious customs and holidays. The lead-colored sky is low. The first-person narrator
of the story seems to be a Republican fighter of the International Brigades, operating
all by himself. His task is reconnoitering (“it was my business […] explore the
bridgehead beyond,” 78). His mission, however, is not clearly explained, in the author’s
typical narrative manner of concentration and omission (“I did this and returned over
the bridge,” ibid.).

10 The story’s composition of space and motion is an admirable example of Hemingway’s
art. At first, the scene is governed by tumultuous hustle: “Carts staggered up,” “trucks
ground up and away,” “peasants plodded along.” The 1-narrator is also mobile in an
unspecified way (by motorcycle or some other sort of vehicle? – the author’s stylistic
economy leaves this kind of guesswork to the reader’s powers of visualizing the
events). The speaker is a combatant and military specialist; consequently, he is free
from feelings of panic and is capable of disciplined, level-headed vigilance. Gradually,
the crowded turmoil of the scene subsides (“There were not so many carts now […]”,
78). Talking to the exhausted old man, the narrator perceives attentively the “few last
carts” rolling towards the bridge. And finally we read, in menacing verbal repetition:
“[…] now there were no carts” (79). The theatre of war is cleared; at any moment,
disaster is going to strike (“[…] listening all the while for the first noises […]”).

11 This impending doom is never particularized, only ominously referred to as “it”: “the
trucks […] heading out of it all,” “they [the old man’s animals] ‘ll probably come
through it all right” (italics added). We read that the fascist troops are advancing, we
hear about their artillery and about the looming danger which is in wait for the old
man’s animals, but are not given full information about the situation. Hemingway’s
narrative vignette remains fragmentary, a snippet, a glimpse of one short moment in

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the catastrophic upsurge of war. In the last sentences of the story we learn, as a final intensification of the menace, about the superior air-power of the enemy. The tight-lipped narrator holds back any comment of his own, which gives the more weight to his few pressing words urging the old man to move on: “This is not a good place to stop” (79), “If you are rested I would go” (80). As with other dialogues in Hemingway’s writings, the reader has to work out for him/herself the affective underside of this conversational exchange, has to sense the imminent crisis, the nervous tension close to breaking-point. There is no authoritative voice to tell us unmistakably what to think. The story describes a timeless moment of standstill between two stages of hectic bustle and uproar, between retreat and attack, reconnaissance and hurrying back; a vibrating moment of calm before the storm breaks loose. The provisional bridge between the river-banks – passage of escape now, but soon the center of the fighting – is the precise symbol for this stage of suspense.

12 The fatigued old man from San Carlos de la Rápita, eight miles south of Amposta, is placed in the midst of this treacherous quiet. He cannot walk any further. He is dressed in his Sunday best, or may be a widower (he is wearing “black dusty clothes”). He belongs to the traditional rural class of peasants, like the other refugees who are uprooted and overwhelmed by warfare. The old man is part of a static world of kinship, neighborhood, and family clans (“I know of no one in that direction,” ”79), a world which is close to nature, relying on a customary subsistence economy, including the keeping of goats and – again – cats. Pigeons, too, have been in his care (the conventional emblem of peace and love). In this contented, bucolic world, there was also room for the elderly and the simple-minded. Now this customary life is breaking up dramatically. The old man is so confused and exhausted that he has not even the strength for emotional reactions (“He looked at me very blankly and tiredly,” “he said dully”). Apathetically, he remains behind the throng of refugees and will be crushed by the juggernaut of military action – as his goats will be. Again, the bridge symbolism is significant: he is incapable of ‘passing’ to a new and more flexible form of existence (“There was nothing to do about him,” 80). The narrator cannot help him; he has assignments of his own, and the old man is not fit for a fresh start elsewhere. He himself seems to be aware of this. His immobility gives the impression of self-surrender, of a half-conscious death-wish.

13 It is important for the configuration of the story that the narrator, in his role as cosmopolitan (American volunteer in the Spanish Civil War) and war specialist (“my business”), is part of the military scene and of the modern sphere of the text. He belongs to the world of machinery, fire-arms, strategic knowledge, mobility, not to the backward-looking rural world of standstill and imbeddedness in nature (“taking care of animals”). His conversation with the old man is friendly and compassionate, and he is taking his time for the talk, tuning in to the simple man’s way of thinking – attentively observing the enemy territory, however – but he does not belong to his historical sphere and tradition-oriented mentality. The collision of epochs, then, is not only present in the war events, in the confrontation of a technological civilization with pastoral life, of destruction with reproduction, but also in this personal encounter with an old man.

14 At this point, “Cat in the Rain” should be included in the discussion again. It is significant that in the two stories the static world of the past is evoked only in connection with a discontented middle-class girl or a stupefied old man (or a
disgruntled Indian chief elsewhere). It is presented as a counter-culture of communitarian security which, however, has no deeper insights to offer to the author's so-called 'code heroes' who profess an ideal of masculine self-sufficiency and individualistic freedom. In both narratives the old world is conjured up as a nostalgic fantasy, but it remains, in characteristic ambivalence, the domain of Victorian housewives and picturesque peasants. The young American fighter of “Old Man at the Bridge,” on the other hand, seeks “that ever mysterious event called contact” (79). His mirror-image is the “enemy;” this antagonist is, as it were, the scout's double in determination and soldiership; on him the American's attention focuses, for all his concern about the unfortunate civilians. Consequently, the narrative leaves out all political issues (“What politics have you?” – “I am without politics,” ibid.); and similarly, the text does not consider if the narrator might possibly do something for the helpless old man. The war-game is dead earnest, but at bottom it has no moral or historical message to impart. The young man lives a life of unfettered modernity, and the reader is not meant to call this into question.

Both stories, “Cat in the Rain” and “Old Man at the Bridge,” seem to play dubiously with a mood of nostalgia which they themselves do not take quite seriously. One deals with a melancholy which lacks existential confirmation; the other suggests a critique of war and violence whose impact, however, remains superficial and without real consequence, as it comprises many elements of thrill and fascination. The young men of both stories are uninvolved observers, stoic witnesses (‘expatriates’ in an unexpected double meaning). By their perspectives, the reader's attitude to the historical polarity of the texts is guided. Through their eyes we regard the confrontation of past and present with nihilistic indifference.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

1. The old Indian's original statement is more graphic: "Long time ago good, now heap shit" (Selected Letters, xii).

2. The setting of The Garden of Eden is mainly Southern France, in the 1920s. The novel was begun in the 1940s, revised and roughly concluded in the 1950s, but never completed to the author's satisfaction. A heavily cut version was published by Scribner's in 1986. See, e.g., R. E. Fleming, (129-58), and R. M. Burwell (95-128).

3. For further reading, see J. DeFalco (1963), J. J. Benson (1975), P. Smith, (1989); J. J. Benson (1990), and S. Donaldson (1996). No extensive commentaries on the two stories treated here are to be found in the volumes edited by S. F. Beegel (1989) and P. Smith (1998).

4. For biographical aspects, see Carlos Baker (105-107). For "Old Man at the Bridge", see ibid. (327-328). See also C. M. Oliver, and B. Kert (133-134).

5. Cf. Erika and Klaus Mann, who write in their 'anti-Baedeker' travel guide that Rapallo is "old-fashioned," "peacefully bourgeois," "very much nineteenth-century" (172, my translation). Hemingway's impression was downright unfavorable: "The sea is weak and dull here and doesn't look as though there was much salt in the water. The tide rises and falls about an inch. When the surf breaks it sounds like someone pouring a bucket of ashes over the side of a scow. The place aint much" (Selected Letters, p. 79). Hadley and Ernest Hemingway's hotel was the Splendide (Baker 158). The 1922 Treaty of Rapallo (an agreement between Germany and Russia which caused much international alarm) was negotiated at the Hotel Palazzo Imperiale.

6. In an earlier version of the text, the wife was given the name 'Catherine.' Pet-forms are 'Kitty' and 'Cat.' 'Kitty' is also the girl's term of endearment for 'kitten.' The name 'Catherine' is present, too, in Hemingway's novels A Farewell to Arms and The Garden of Eden.

ABSTRACTS

The two stories are based on a time scheme which confronts customary life and the modern experience. In “Cat in the Rain,” the American girl dreams nostalgically about a ‘womanly’ lifestyle in an old-fashioned, well-ordered world of yore. The couple’s restless traveling, on the other hand, without household things and domestic animals, represents the modern form of existence, individualistic and without deeper ties. The chief symbol of the incoherence of modernity is the young wife’s boyish haircut, indicating a lack of stability and reliability - but also highlighting the daring challenge of unfettered self-projection. Similarly, the exhausted peasant of “Old Man at the Bridge” stands for a static culture of kinship and embeddedness in nature, which is about to be destroyed by modern mechanized warfare. The first-person narrator of this story is part of the modern sphere, too: a cosmopolitan fighter who basically belongs to the realm of machinery and mobility, not to pastoral life and to a tradition-oriented mentality. When all is said and done, Hemingway’s protagonists are thrilled by modern uprootedness, freedom, and nihilism, and they do not take seriously the nostalgic hankering for the Good Old Times.

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“There isn’t going to be any Mrs. Wemedge”: Hemingway’s Elusive Mermaid in “The End of Something”

Elisabeth Bouzonviller

1. “A writer’s job is to tell the truth,” said Hemingway in 1942 (Men at War, XV). A few years before, his contemporary F. Scott Fitzgerald had written in capital letters in his Notebooks: “AN AUTHOR SAYS ALL” (113). These were ambitious writing schemes. However Jacques Lacan points out that telling the whole truth is beyond the power of language: “I always tell the truth: not all of it, because one cannot tell it all. Telling it all is materially impossible: words are missing. It is precisely through this impossibility that truth sticks to the real” (Télévision, 9, my translation). Thus, this truth that evades words might be beneath the surface, in the dark recesses of the texts, beneath what Conrad called “the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage” (12).

2. In Théorie des exceptions, Philippe Sollers declares: “Why do we read novels? Let us be frank, to get informed about sexual situations” (Sollers 299, my translation). Following the moral and sexual revolution at the beginning of the 20th century, D. H. Lawrence pondered over the “old gulf between the sexes” in a literature that dealt openly with this issue (97). On the other hand, F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose fiction mainly evokes the impossible quest of the “golden girl” in the America of the Roaring Twenties and focuses repeatedly on an “Alpine crevasse between the sexes” (Tender Is the Night, 144) recalling Lawrence’s “gulf,” created a “chaste” literary “universe” (Le Vot 182), with references to sexuality going no further than the lips, as has often been noticed by critics. In another evasion of the subject, Faulkner’s protagonist in The Wild Palms, Harry, dreams of a sexless universe – “males and females but without the pricks or cunts” (45) – that would be devoid of trouble and worries, and his convict from the “Old Man” chapters concludes rudely: “Women, shit” (287). In Hemingway’s “Summer People,” which includes the unsatisfactory, yet explicit, intercourse between Nick Adams, nicknamed Wemedge by his friends, and Kate, Nick declares: “‘There isn’t going to be any Mrs. Wemedge’” (222), and imagines an ideal mermaid recalling Harry’s impossible wish.
In Hemingway’s short stories, even when men are among themselves for their typically “men without women” activities, like fishing, hunting or skiing, the sexual issue is still there beneath the surface, to be guessed at according to his famous iceberg theory mentioned in Death in the Afternoon. In his chapter entitled “Love and Marriage,” Joseph M. Flora concludes: “The great Nick love story remains ‘The End of Something,’ and that shows Nick breaking away from Marjorie” (211). This apparently paradoxical assessment is then a clue that this short story might lead us beneath the surface, and help us perceive what endless wonderings are at stake in Hemingway’s work, and what deathless song elusive mermaids produce about the unavoidable sexual difference and the fundamental isolation of human beings.

“‘Oh, Jake,’ Brett said, ‘we could have had such a damned good time together.’ [...] ‘Yes.’ I said. ‘Isn’t it pretty to think so?’ ” (The Sun Also Rises, 247)

In “The End of Something,” Nick shares a fishing outing with his girlfriend Marjorie. This usually male sports activity becomes the stage of a kind of subverted fairy tale where sexual roles seem sometimes to be inverted. In this “Sleeping Beauty” environment of silence and immobility, it is the prince who eventually falls asleep, or at least lies childishly on a protective blanket, and no happy ending occurs since the two lovers part in an abortive attempt at understanding and explaining what has gone wrong (204). The story starts with the time marker “In the old days”, which recalls the traditional “Once upon a time” (200), as the heterodiegetic narrator describes the once busy Hortons Bay. This temporal reference is then quickly followed by the vague “Then one year” and, finally, by “Ten years later,” which sets the narrated time of the story (200). Deserted by its workers, the dismantled factory described in the first two paragraphs heralds the silent war of the sexes between Nick and Marjorie. “The big mill” has been reduced to its “foundations” (200) and if Marjorie romantically calls it with affection “‘our old ruin,’” comparing it to a “castle” and using a possessive adjective sentimentally linking their couple with the place, on the other hand, Nick acknowledges its presence briefly – “‘There it is’” (201) – only to remain silent in the end about its fairy tale aspect: “‘It seems more like a castle,’ Marjorie said. Nick said nothing” (201).

Freud has noticed that, in dreams, a house is “the one typical [...] representation of the human figure as a whole” (196), and many writers ranging from Poe to Hawthorne and Fitzgerald, have used this type of representation (Antolin). Here, obviously, the “deserted” mill, qualified by the lexical field of disappearance and disintegration through words and phrases like “no more,” “removable,” “away,” “taken out,” “moved out” or “sawdust,” mirrors the couple and its “ruin.” The title of the story suggests both the “end” of a relationship and the “end” of Hortons Bay’s activity as the word “something” in the title bitterly echoes the ironic and vague “everything” in the last lines of the first paragraph – “carrying with it everything that made the mill a mill and Hortons Bay a town” – and its antonym “nothing” in the following sentence: “Ten years later there was nothing of the mill left except the broken white limestone of its foundations [...]” (200). Even fish has disappeared in this desolate landscape where minnows recall violent death as they “sprinkl[e] the surface like a handful of shot.”
the lovers argue about fishing techniques, they poorly hide the fact that in this ruined environment more serious disagreements lie beneath the surface (201-202).

6 The narrator mentions first that “it was not quite dark” (203). Thanks to the fire and then to the moon this twilight is never completely replaced by the darkness of night in a perfect replica of the “dark water” where “night lines” are set (201, 203). The two characters choose to sit “between the fire and the lake” (202) to avoid the smoke; therefore, the light of the fire is behind them as they watch the moon rise (203). At first, they both deliberately choose to avoid shedding light on what troubles them. The recurring references to the moon (203, 204) come then as an ironic comment upon femininity and romanticism. Indeed, after they have watched together the moon “coming up,” in a parody of a sentimental scene, their story ends on an almost silent separation. Marjorie leaves alone “in the boat on the water with the moonlight,” and Nick remains behind, avoiding light, “his face in the blanket” (203-204).

7 Against this dark backdrop, fishing itself tells of the end of the affair in a “swampy” and “sandy” setting reflecting the emotional stalemate of the couple caught in treacherous waters (200). Nick and Marjorie are in search of “rainbow trout” (201), a colorful species suggesting a last reconciling attempt after the storm of a disappointing relationship, but the fishing expedition does not prove successful, a fish is as difficult to find as the ideal lover; it is as unattainable as what Lacan calls “the One (l’Un) of universal fusion” (Encore, 15). The fishing vocabulary mirrors the violence of feelings: trout “break” the surface, but they refuse to “strike.” Imitating Nick who has already done so with three perch, Marjorie catches one and “cut[s] its head off and skin[s] it” (201-202). Both characters’ violent expertise is obvious in their parallel gestures, but Nick’s prevails as shown by the difference in the number of caught fish – three for Nick, one for Marjorie – and by his rapidity which is suggested through the syntax and vocabulary. Nick is more efficient as the subordinate clause introduced by the conjunction “while” demonstrates; moreover the use of the verb “chase” and the adverb “finally” applied to Marjorie, imply a later success for her. Nick’s bad feelings towards her are to be perceived in his sharp master-like criticism that follows the girl’s apparent careful imitation of his technique, reflected in the repetitive quality of the sentences with minor variations:

Nick caught three of them with his hands and cut their heads off and skinned them while Marjorie chased with her hands in the bucket, finally caught a perch, cut its head off and skinned it. Nick looked at her fish.

“You don’t want to take the ventral fin out,” he said. “It’ll be all right for bait but it’s better with the ventral fin in.”

He hooked each of the skinned perch through the tail. There were two hooks attached to a leader on each rod. Then Marjorie rowed the boat out over the channel-bank, holding the line in her teeth, and looking toward Nick, who stood on the shore holding the rod and letting the line run out from the reel. (201-202)

8 As “his hands” echo “her hands” in this excerpt, Nick then “hook[s]” the “skinned perch” and Marjorie reveals her carnivorous “teeth” while holding the line between them (202). The fish is submitted to a violence that seems to parallel the one endured by the powerless lovers. All this fishing and hooking conveys sexual implications for the two protagonists; fishing for and hooking the proper partner is obviously a hard and violent game directly involved with death. This becomes all the more obvious if the sexual overtones of the slang word “tail” are taken into account. A sense of wrenching is to be noticed here which suggests that wholeness through the other shall remain impossible. If their fishing is a metaphor for the capture of the proper lover with whom
perfect fusion should be achieved, Nick’s answer “‘Let it go’” to Marjorie’s question “‘Should I let it drop?’” clearly heralds their final rupture due to an impossible quest (202).

**Colloque sentimental**

Dans le vieux parc solitaire et glacé,
Deux formes ont tout à l’heure passé.
Leurs yeux sont morts et leurs lèvres sont molles,
Et l’on entend à peine leurs paroles.
Dans le vieux parc solitaire et glacé,
Deux spectres ont évoqué le passé.

- Te souvient-il de notre extase ancienne ?
- Pourquoi voulez-vous donc qu’il m’en souvienne ?
- Ton cœur bat-il toujours à mon seul nom ?
- Toujours vois-tu mon âme en rêve ? – Non
- Ah ! les beaux jours de bonheur indicible
Où nous joignions nos bouches ! - C’est possible.
- Qu’il était bleu, le ciel, et grand, l’espoir !
- L’espoir a fui, vaincu, vers le ciel noir.

Tels ils marchaient dans les avoines folles,
Et la nuit seule entendit leurs paroles.

(Verlaine 104)

As the narrator weaves the threads of the story, the parallel fishing lines point out the distance between the former lovers, although they first work as a team setting these lines along the shore (201-202). The reels can no longer bring back anything and indeed the story ends without their having caught anything. “Driftwood” is used both for fishing and burning in another suggestion of solitary wandering and drifting apart (202). The hooks only imply painful catching and endless questionings through their symbolic question mark shape, and the metal rods stand apart in their solitary stiffness. Symbolically, the equipment is double: there are two hooks for each rod and two rods with one line each (202-203). The recurring figure necessarily echoes the divided couple, all the more so as, by the end, they sit apart looking at the two steel rods as stiff and separate as themselves, an obvious ironical inversion of the sexual slang that the term “rod” implies:

[...] They could both see the two steel rods at an angle over the dark water. The fire glinted on the reels. [...] They ate without talking and watched the two rods and the firelight in the water. [...] They sat on the blanket without touching each other [...]. (203)

Although the fire is behind them, “the firelight [goes] as far as the water” (203) and is now reflected on the surface of the water, shedding light on the rods; confrontation is looming for the lovers, they are in the open now. By the end of the story, Bill, who has come to inquire about his friend’s situation, “walk[s] over to have a look at the rods” just as he has come along to question Nick about the break-up, the parallel between the two rods and the two lovers is thus emphasized to the end (204).
Bill imagined there would be “a scene” but the lovers’ parting was almost a silent one, recalling Verlaine’s poem, in which separation and the end of love are suggested through silence, the lack of response one of the lovers gets to his or her cherished memories of the past, and through the significant use of the intimate French pronoun “tu” by one of them opposed to the polite, distant “vous” of the other. In the same way, Marjorie addresses Nick using his first name four times in a sign of intimacy and desire to establish communication (201, 202, 203) whereas hers is mainly used by the narrator. Nick calls her familiarly “Marge” only once, when he has confessed their relationship “‘isn’t fun any more’” (204). The narrator calls them “Nick and Marjorie” when he first introduces them to the reader in the third paragraph (200), but then this intimate denomination is left aside suggesting the drifting apart of the two protagonists. The couple then becomes “Nick,” “Marjorie,” “she,” “he,” more rarely “they,” which itself disappears completely after the following sentence: “They sat on the blanket without touching each other and watched the moon rise” (203). Moreover the pronoun “they” is alternately used to allude to the couple and the fish, thus heralding the couple’s dark fate and producing an extended metaphor linking fishing and loving:

[...]

They rowed on out of sight of the mill, following the shore line. Then Nick cut across the bay.

“They aren’t striking,” he said.

“No,” Marjorie said. She was intent on the rod all the time they trolled, even when she talked. [...] (201, emphasis mine)

The overwhelming repetition of the separate first names by the narrator seems to hammer the fact that these two are not the loving couple one might deduce from the initial expression “Nick and Marjorie,” and Bill’s immediate use of “she” when he first arrives leads to imagine that the break-up had been planned by Nick and debated with his friend: “‘Did she go all right?’” (204). Furthermore, whereas Marjorie uses the pronoun “you” to establish contact with Nick, his use of the second person pronoun always implies criticism, except in the last occurrence when separation is effective since Marjorie is about to leave: “‘I’ll push the boat off for you’” (204). As in “Colloque sentimental,” repeatedly, Marjorie’s carefree, affectionate remarks are checked by Nick’s negative or terse answers, if not his complete silence.

Marjorie is keen on fishing, she has learned well from Nick, even though he is still more skilled, as the repetitions with slight modifications show: “Nick pulled hard on one oar so the boat would turn [...]” (201). “She pulled hard on the oars and the boat went up the beach” (202). If she manages the boat and the lines like a man, there is no complete reversal of gender roles since she also plays the part of the well-organized wife and mother when she takes care of the camp with the blanket and the food as if it was their home. She, then, resembles a wife waiting for her husband to come back after fishing but also a caring mother encouraging her child to eat (202-203). For her, fishing has definitely to do with loving as is obvious in the following short quotation which links Marjorie, fishing, love, and Nick: “She loved to fish. She loved to fish with Nick” (201). These two concise sentences are an ominous allusion to love difficulties they both reveal and conceal. Marjorie’s interest in fishing is an obvious sign of her love for Nick, yet this confession remains veiled and already suggests obstacles to the expression of feelings; what matters remains unsaid, buried in between the lines of the narrative. Moreover, whereas a love relationship is at stake in the story, the verb “love” itself is only used here with “she” as its subject, and in Marjorie’s exclamation “Isn’t love any
fun?” (204), whereas Nick himself avoids the term and the narrator never attributes it to him.

Marjorie enjoys fishing and answers Nick “happily” (203), on the other hand, he is in a “swampy” (200) situation of uneasiness resembling the environment. His speaking difficulties are first to be perceived in the fishing descriptions that the narrative includes in between the short dialogs in direct style, thus creating an impression of pause in the discussion and of uneasy silence. These delete the confrontation between the lovers and suggest the lack of communication stemming from Nick’s insecurity and malaise. Marjorie is serious about fishing, just as she is serious about her relationship with Nick: “She was intent on the rod all the time they trolled, even when she talked” (201). Her enthusiasm is to be felt in the way she energetically goes back and forth with the boat to set the lines while Nick remains on the shore, but this is precisely a kind of prolepsis of their final separation when she rows away for good on her own (202-204).

“There were no more wise men, no more heroes” (This Side of Paradise, 238)

Nick has lost his appetite for all pleasures; he does not feel like eating and it is Marjorie who urges him to share food with her (203). Although he is the one who wants to break up, he is unable to talk. Marjorie feels his uneasiness and eventually launches the argument. Once again, loving and fishing are intertwined and meaning remains blurred as problems can equally concern the couple or the fish: “‘What’s the matter, Nick?’ Marjorie asked.” “‘I don’t know,’ Nick said, getting wood for a fire” (202).

It is the question of knowledge which stirs Nick to speak. Whereas the narrator mentions Marjorie’s self-assurance – “‘I know it,’ Marjorie said happily” (203, emphasis mine) – Nick repeats four times “‘I don’t know,’ ” as if he desperately avoided what worries him (202-204). Her “it” is as vague as Nick is unsure about life, death, sex, and love. But what does Marjorie know actually? That the moon is “coming up” as Nick has announced, that a separation is looming, that the unbearable limit to fusion cannot be suppressed? In fact, this neuter pronoun echoes the “it” used when Nick answers Marjorie who urges him to say he wants to leave her:

“Go on and say it.”
Nick looked on at the moon, coming up over the hills.
“it isn’t fun any more.”
He was afraid to look at Marjorie. Then he looked at her. She sat there with her back toward him. He looked at her back. “it isn’t fun any more. Not any of it.”
(204, emphasis mine)

In fact, there is a discrepancy between the importance of the discussion leading to breaking up and the explanation given thanks to the trifling term “fun.” Obviously, Nick cannot voice what is really at stake. Through his silence, through his repeated acknowledgment of his inability at expressing “‘[w]hat’s really the matter’” (203), there is much more than mere fear at facing Marjorie’s anger and disappointment. Hemingway not only tells the reader about Nick’s personal incapacity at telling the truth, he also suggests the unspeakable that preys on all human beings. Through those silences and behind this vague “it,” the reader will guess at the endless division that is everyone’s lot.
The end of Hortons Bay echoes the devastated state Nick is in when confronted with the shattering perception of man’s original division. He is unable to bear the feeling that love will never repair what has been lost at birth forever. Nick has come to feel that love provides only the mirage of perfect wholeness achieved through the other. Acting like a mother who insists on food and is careful with the make-believe home symbolized by the blanket (201-203), Marjorie stresses even more what preys on Nick: the sense of loss and lack that stirs up a desire never to be fulfilled. In her maternal ways Marjorie makes Nick feel more acutely that, as Lacan puts it, “woman plays a part in the sexual intercourse only as the mother” (Encore, 36). Love is only a poor substitute that cannot make up for what is irretrievable, and fusion remains unattainable even with the beloved chosen one. Through Nick’s failure at voicing what worries him, Hemingway conveys the tragic intuitive perception of what Lacan summed up in his provocative phrase: “There is no sexual intercourse” (ibid. 39), namely there is no harmony, no complementarity between the sexes; men and women remain structurally apart as sexuality proves and literature keeps claiming even when it is under cover of love stories.

Marjorie’s exclamations, interrogations, imperative sentences, and angry colloquial verbs and phrases – “‘shut up,’” “‘cut it out!’” “‘you don’t have to talk silly’” (203-204) – are unable to stir Nick to speak with her. He can only talk to her laconically and vaguely from behind. Her back is mentioned twice in the previous excerpt. Then, after she has decided to row away, Nick still avoids looking at her and only hears her departure:

[…] Nick went back and lay down with his face in the blanket by the fire. He could hear Marjorie rowing on the water. He lay there for a long time. He lay there while he heard Bill come into the clearing walking around through the woods. He felt Bill coming up to the fire. Bill didn’t touch him, either. “Did she go all right?” Bill said.

“Oh, yes.” Nick said, lying, his face on the blanket. (204)

This movement recalls two other Hemingway protagonists who surrender to their inner, unspoken fears by avoiding direct confrontation and reverting to a kind of fetal position, ignoring eye contact by lying in bed and looking at a wall. As a child, Nick witnesses the suicide of the Indian husband in “Indian Camp”: “The Indian lay with his face toward the wall. His throat had been cut from ear to ear” (20). As a teenager, in “The Killers,” he is revolted when he sees “Ole Andreson rolled over toward the wall,” ready to be murdered by two men from Chicago (67). His conclusion is: “‘It’s too damned awful’” (69).

Whereas the two previous scenes take place inside homes, “The End of Something” is an outdoor story, yet Marjorie has managed to create a home atmosphere with the “blanket” and “the basket of supper” (202-203). The blanket echoes the beds in the previous stories and is once again a place of despair and solitude, thus subverting its sexual potentialities. Like “the two steel rods,” the lovers are close but not touching each other (203). By the end of the story, the touching theme is emphasized again: “Bill didn’t touch him, either” (204). Alien from touch, Nick collapses on the blanket and demands to be left alone at a time when he is precisely overwhelmed by an unavoidable sense of isolation: “‘Oh, go away, Bill! Go away for a while’” (204). Nick feels he is doomed, like Hortons Bay. Marjorie has eventually left him in the same way the “schooners” have left the place and he collapses physically on the blanket, whereas she
decisively stands up and goes away (204). The verb “lie” is used four times to describe him after Marjorie’s departure (204). On the other hand, “afloat in the boat on the water with the moonlight on it,” Marjorie manages her vessel without his help and seems to embody a certain typical female power to be found in many American texts of the period.

21 More than D. H. Lawrence’s reversal of gender roles, Nick’s behavior and silence testify to the essential separation between the sexes and to the impossible wholeness to be reconstructed through love and sexuality. Beneath the surface where Hemingway’s iceberg floats, there lies indeed truth about sex and writing, a truth contained in the aforementioned Lacanian formula. Joël Clerget notices: “[...] there is no sexual intercourse, that is to say it cannot be written. This sentence places sexual intercourse on the side of what is impossible to write, as what never stops not being written – and yet sets up the writing possibility – and honors, in the writing act, an act other than coitus” (Clerget, my translation).

22 When Nick dreams of his mermaid in “Summer People,” it precisely bothers his uneasy friends as it stresses the sexual issue that worries them too:

Odgar and Kate were down there. Odgar with that fried-fish look in his eye everytime he looked at Kate. Didn’t Odgar know anything? Kate wouldn’t ever marry him. [...] She couldn’t bear to have him touch her. It was all in his eyes. [...] Odgar could never get it and it meant everything in the world to him. Every summer he was worse about it. It was pitiful. [...] Odgar thought just love would do it. Odgar loved her enough, God knows. [...] Love was frightening. (217-218)

“You’re the most wonderful diver, Wemedge,” Kate said, touching his back with her foot. Nick tightened under the contact. (221)

“[…] I wished I was a fish,” Nick said.

“That’s a good joke,” said Odgar.

“Sure,” said Nick.

“Don’t be an ass, Wemedge,” said Kate. […]

“You’re nice, Odgar,” Kate said. Nick felt Odgar glow.

“I’d like to be Wemedge,” Kate said.

“You could always be Mrs. Wemedge,” Odgar said.

“There isn’t going to be any Mrs. Wemedge,” Nick said. He tightened his back muscles. Kate had both her legs stretched out against his back as though she were resting them on a log in front of a fire.

“Don’t be too sure,” Odgar said.

“I’m awfully sure,” Nick said. “I’m going to marry a mermaid.” […]

“Don’t bother me. I’m thinking of her.”

He lay there thinking of his mermaid while Kate’s insteps pressed against his back and she and Odgar talked. (222-223)

23 In the end, Nick’s apparently romantic imaginings are very close to Harry’s crude daydreaming in Faulkner’s The Wild Palms. Indeed, his mermaid is a sexless female with whom only a form of courtly love can be envisaged. Nick imagines this mythic creature is a harmless embodiment of seduction in contrast with flesh and blood, sexed Kate whose touch against his back, through her pressing “insteps,” suggests desire and the sexual issue at stake. However, through her hybrid body combining a seductive naked bust and a sexless fish tail, the mermaid definitely embodies “the absence of sexual intercourse.”
In “The End of Something,” Marjorie has managed, thanks to Nick’s teaching, to become an experienced aquatic companion who can fish and row boats, but she has also proved to him that mermaids are never harmless but tell the truth about seduction, love, and sexuality. Though the heterodiegetic narrator never lets the reader know about Nick’s precise feelings and motivations, his fears and disappointments become obvious and acquire a universal touch through the act of reading in a process which Flannery O’Connor skillfully analyses in Mystery and Manners: “The fiction writer states as little as possible. The reader makes this connection from things he is shown. He may not even know that he makes the connection, but the connection is there nevertheless and it has its effect on him” (99).

Thus, “The End of Something,” not only tells of the end of an affair and of a certain topical female superiority, it suggests the unspeakable, it retraces in its blanks and silences the unavoidable lack that prompts writing as Georges Bataille demonstrates: “Indeed, the moment of truth lies in silence and, in silence, consciousness is evasive [...]. What would we be without language? It has made us what we are. Only language can possibly reveal the final stage when it is no longer in use. But in the end the one who talks must admit his powerlessness” (Bataille 306, my translation).

Hemingway’s story gains force by “leaving out,” and once again tells the reader what René Girard provocatively sums up in Le Bouc émissaire: “We are all possessed by sex and language” (228). Hemingway intended to “tell the truth” in his fiction, but this did not mean producing an exact replica of observable reality. For him, as demonstrated in the story “On Writing” – which once again stages a metaphor of writing through one of Nick’s fishing expeditions – the quest for truth involves imagination: “Talking about anything was bad. Writing about anything actual was bad. It always killed it. The only writing that was any good was what you made up, what you imagined. That made everything come true” (237).

Eventually, truth is to be found in what could be called Hemingway’s “zero degree of writing” (Barthes). Nick and Marjorie’s silent, undramatic separation might be “the end of something” but, like the banal episode of the rabbit in “On Writing,” it is also the beginning of “something,” the beginning of a writing that tells the reader about life, death, suffering, a writing that never supplies any definite answers but constantly feeds on imagination:

Nick picked up the rabbit, limp, with dull button eyes, and put it under a sweet fern bush beside the trail. He felt its heart beating as he laid it down. The rabbit lay quiet under the bush. It might come to, Nick thought. Probably the ticks had attached themselves to it as it crouched in the grass. Maybe after it had been dancing in the open. He did not know.

He went on up the trail to the camp. He was holding something in his head. (241)

Nick, the heterodiegetic narrator, and Hemingway intertwine in “On Writing,” and the following conclusion about literature is reached: “You had to do it from inside yourself” (239). Through its emotional impact, the rabbit episode is a writing incentive for Nick who relies on emotions and not on certainty as the terms “might,” “probably,” “maybe,” and the sentence “He did not know,” imply. Writing is definitely a wrenching, intimate experience that relies on loss.

Hemingway’s deceptively straightforward style involving a restricted vocabulary and an apparently simple syntax, requires in fact what Toni Morrison calls the reader’s “participatory reading” (Tate 126). Then only can the “iceberg” be discovered. Not
simply that purposely hidden part Hemingway knew about and meant us to search for, but also a much more secret one, the existence of which the author himself had probably barely surmised, if not missed, as it evades every human being. This mysterious side of the iceberg is to be guessed at in the depths of the fictional text where mermaids whisper their deadly song about human fate. Hemingway’s writing definitely conceals through its simplicity and blanks, but it precisely reveals this way too, as Genette’s precept suggests: “[n]arrative always says less than it knows, but it often makes known more than it says” (213). In “The End of Something,” the unsaid and the unspeakable become blatantly perceptible and confirm that “to write is to tear oneself away from impossibility” (Blanchot 267). Beneath the surface of Hemingway’s simple words and syntax, there lies indeed an elusive mermaid whose frightening song tells of man’s unavoidable division stemming from language and the sex drive. Through erasure and apparent simplicity, Hemingway tells the reader about what evades language; he apprehends what baffles rational understanding, thus producing light from darkness and meaning from lack, eventually creating a meaningful “literary space”: “The work of art produces light from darkness, it is linked with what bears no relations, it meets being before meeting is possible and where truth is missing. A main risk. There we reach the abyssal depth” (Blanchot 324).

Whereas they deceptively seem to talk of fishing outings and other simple daily events in a rather basic syntax, Hemingway’s short stories “appeal[] to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom” (Conrad 11), and, despite the limits of language they may help to approach truth, thus proclaiming the surprising power of fiction and the novelist’s tremendously “serious” task, as Nick eventually understands in “On Writing”:

He, Nick, wanted to write about country so it would be there like Cezanne had done it in painting. You had to do it from inside yourself. There wasn’t any trick. Nobody had ever written about country like that. He felt almost holy about it. It was deadly serious. You could do it if you would fight it out. If you lived right with your eyes. It was a thing you couldn’t talk about. He was going to work on it until he got it. Maybe never, but he would know as he got near it. It was a job. Maybe for all his life. (239)

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NOTES

1. Georges Sarotte considers that, for Amory Blaine, as for Fitzgerald’s other protagonists, “sexuality remains at the level of the face.” He also quotes Maxwell Geismar according to whom the libido of Fitzgerald’s characters “is centered on their lips” (233). Maxwell Geismar talks of “the profound sexual revulsion of Fitzgerald’s heroes” (334), and Joan Allen says: “There is a
profound revulsion to expression of sexuality in him [Fitzgerald] that surfaces in this sort of fictional situation" (75).

2. “To Chase tail,” in American informal English, means “to try to get a woman to have sex with her” (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English). See also “a bit of tail,” “a piece of tail,” and “to look for some tail.”

3. “Sentimental Dialogue”: “In the lonely, frozen old park,/ Two figures just now passed by/ Their eyes are dead and their lips are limp,/ And their words can hardly be heard/ In the lonely, frozen old park,/ Two specters evoked the past./ – Do you remember our old rapture?/ – Why on earth should I remember that?/ – Does your heart still beat at my very name?/ – Do you still see my soul in dreams? – No./ – Ah! Those fine days of ineffable bliss/ When we joined our lips! – It may have been so./ – How blue the sky was, and how great was hope!/ – Hope has fled, defeated towards the black sky./ Thus they walked, along the wild oats,/ And only the night heard their words./ (Translated by Gilles de Seze, http://www.pierdelune.com/verlaine.htm.)


5. “Man has assumed the gentle, all-sympathetic role, and woman has become the energetic party, with the authority in her hands. The man is the sensitive, sympathetic nature, the woman the active, effective, authoritative. So that the male acts as the passive, or recipient pole of attraction, the female as the active, positive, exertive pole, in human relations. Which is a reversal of the old flow. The woman is now the initiator, man the responder. They seem to play each other’s parts” (97).

6. Incidentally, this unutterable sexual difference is to be guessed at in the etymology of the term “sex,” coming from the Latin “secare” which implies separation and cutting.

7. Lacan notices that “for the man, whose lady was entirely his subject, in the most servile meaning of the term, courtly love is the only way of getting away elegantly with the absence of sexual intercourse” (Encore, 65).

8. Lacan claims that the subject’s division has a double origin: it is a consequence of the sex drive, as demonstrated by Freud, but also of language (Miller 17).

ABSTRACTS

“The End of Something” relates the end of Nick and Marjorie’s love affair. This sentimental break-up is rather a silent one, but it is precisely through those blanks that the narrator manages best to convey Nick’s malaise and, beyond his particular case, the novelist’s attempt at voicing the unutterable about the relation between the sexes, but also at defining a writing process based on the strategy of silence and the practice of omission.

“The End of Something” présente la fin de la liaison entre Nick et Marjorie. Cette rupture sentimentale est plutôt muette, mais c’est précisément par ces blancs narratifs que le narrateur parvient à suggérer le malaise de Nick et, au-delà de son cas particulier, la propre tentative de l’écrivain de dire l’indicible à propos des relations entre les sexes, mais aussi de définir un processus d’écriture basé sur la stratégie du silence et sur la pratique de l’omission.
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“Indian Camp” – A Story in Disguise

Eléonore Lainé Forrest

1 When I first read “Indian Camp,” I was but a child. A child who tried at each new paragraph not to see or hear what Ernest Hemingway’s words had to reveal. A child whose curiosity, as she advanced in the story, lessened little by little.

2 While growing up, I read most of Hemingway’s prose, carefully avoiding rereading “Indian Camp.” However, if “Indian Camp” had been prudently hidden in my bookcase, this short story’s ghostly meaning kept on reappearing on the threshold of my mind, as if its significance were longing to be acknowledged.

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3 Writing but simple sentences, avoiding both an excessive use of adjectives and adverbs and subordinate clauses, Hemingway’s prose is “stripped to its firm young bones” (Parker 460). A style, many critics of his time described as the mere fruit of his journalistic pen. As Dorothy Parker explained in her review of Men without Women: “Most reviewers discussed the volume with a tolerant smile and the word ‘stark,’ ” and Mr. Mencken, she continued, “slapped it down” saying that the stories were “‘sketches in the bold, bad manner of the Café Dôme’” (Parker). Accustomed to classical plots, those critics expected, perhaps, in “The Killers” a gunfight or Ole Andeson to run away; in “The End of Something” Marjorie to at least cry, or in “Big Two-Hearted River” a bear if not a “big bad wolf” to appear.

4 To make their stories attractive to readers, authors usually map out their writings with climactic events, organized in such a way as to create a reality effect for the readers to believe that their metaphorical representations of the world and the men who live in it are plausible and that the actions they describe follow one another in a chronological course of time.

5 If Hemingway’s simple prose gives the impression that his short stories can be easily understood, his plots do not follow a classical pattern of events. His prose is not built on a framework punctuated by an ever-changing wheel of fortune. Hemingway’s short
stories seem to describe life as it is, but they do not search to reconcile the discordant events of life. They simply present life: most of the time anti-climactic.

However, if Hemingway were merely describing life’s meaningless events, he would not be the author he is known to be. As Dorothy Parker said: “The simple thing he does looks so easy to do. But look at the boys who try to do it” (Parker 461). The apparent simplicity of Hemingway’s prose and the anti-climactic stories he tells, veil symbolical and “fundamentally poetical narratives” (Abouddahab) in which the questions he asks are those which have been tormenting men ever since Eve took a bite of the tree of knowledge’s forbidden fruit.

Assuredly, Ernest Hemingway’s short stories encompass many levels of understanding. A variety of meanings the reader might miss if she or he only analyzes their first diegetic layer. For, as Hemingway’s short stories are often told through an external third person narrative voice which, being cut off from involvement in the story, seems solely to be serving as dispensing information, one could decide to apprehend this author’s narratives as neutral descriptions of the outer world. In other words, as Hemingway’s writing contains no evaluative terms to indicate his own personal judgment, one could mistakenly decide to rely only on the reality effect produced by this author’s short stories to understand their meaning.

However, even if it seems that Hemingway’s neutral descriptions only serve to describe the outer world, seemingly with no structural role in the unfolding of the narrative’s truth, one will come to realize, on the contrary, that they are elements essential to the creation of the poetical dimension of this author’s short stories, a poetical structure through which one is to discover Hemingway’s desire to reveal the individual’s odyssey through life, or, in the case of “Indian Camp,” the beginning of a young boy’s symbolical journey through existence. Hence, as one will see through the study of “Indian Camp,” the discordant events of life Hemingway seems to describe stand as the different metaphors constituting the writer’s organized poetical narrative, revealing the whole, or what Lacanian psychoanalysis defined as the real, from which man is born but has to exit if he wants to ex-sist.

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The first part of “Indian Camp” describes Nick Adams, his father, Uncle George, and two Indians crossing a lake to reach an Indian camp where Nick’s father, Dr. Adams, is to help an Indian woman to have her baby. Reading the first paragraphs of this short story, one could easily say that they are but a description helping to create a plausible context for the understanding of the story. However, more than a simple description, Hemingway invites the reader to see the opening part of “Indian Camp” as the dramatization of a rupture suggestive of the passage from the physical world to a symbolical one. By depicting Nick Adams, his father, and Uncle George crossing a lake, then a beach, a meadow, a wood... to reach the Indian camp, the narrator underlines that those characters have been symbolically separated from the world they know, though, by describing this scene through Nick Adams’s eyes only, the narrator insists on the fact that it is mainly through the vision of a child that he is to depict this moment of rupture.

To signify the rupture Nick is to experience, or the beginning of the poetical journey the latter is to accomplish, the narrator creates what one could call a mirror structure
between the world of Nick, his father and uncle, and the Indian camp, a mirror structure the reflective aspect of the lake establishes. In the same way as Alice passes through the mirror in *Through the Looking Glass*, Hemingway brings Nick to enter a world which resembles his, stripped of its disguise of modernity: the Indian camp’s aspect, as one may imagine, being devoid of the modern world’s attributes. Indeed, from the moment Nick, his father, and Uncle George arrive at the Indian camp (after having crossed the lake in *rowboats*), the narrator insists on the primitive aspect of the place, pointing out, for example, that the Indians are living in shanties which have no electricity, as implied, for instance, by the description of “an old woman standing in the doorway [of the shanty] holding a lamp” (84). The narrator also emphasizes this rudimentary appearance by suggesting the shanty’s lack of hygiene, underlining its terrible odor: “the room smelled very bad” (*ibid*). However, more than understanding the contrast between the world of the Adamses and the Indian camp as a way to describe “the origins of a bitter racial conflict between Native and white American” (Strychacz 61), or to announce the representation of “a male to male rivalry, white male against Indian male” (Lovell Strong 30), this opposition is to be regarded in terms of its symbolic significance.

By representing these white people in the Indian Camp, Hemingway is confronting them with a world different from theirs, a world bereft of its modern disguise, revealing hence the nakedness of human truth. Thus, more than the description of this place’s primitive aspect, the Indian camp’s appearance reminds one of the representation one conjures up of the world of man’s origins in which the absence of what is known as modernity and its counterparts - knowledge and science - permits, as will be seen, Nick’s as well as his father’s state of ignorance to be revealed.

If Hemingway highlights the separation from the world that Nick, his father and uncle know by means of his words, the structure of his narrative also helps to signify it. By breaking up his sentences, only dispensing neutral pieces of information which are not coordinated with each other, this author emphasizes the rupture Nick is to undergo. In other words, the silences in between the sentences shed light on Nick’s ignorance as to where he is going and for what purpose. He is described as capable only of stating the little he can see or hear.

The use of repetitive sounds and structures is also revealing of Nick’s break with his world or the state of ignorance in which this separation leaves him. For example, by saying: “Nick and his father got in the stern of the boat and the Indians shoved it off and one of them got in to row” (83), and then: “Uncle George sat in the stern of the camp rowboat. The young Indian shoved the camp boat off and got in to row Uncle George” (*ibid*), the narrator highlights the limit Nick Adams is confronted with when trying to say what is happening: the parallel the narrator draws between the structures of those sentences showing that Nick, unable to see beyond what is taking place, can merely describe the repetitive actions the other characters are depicted carrying out.

Hence, more than just expressing a notion of rupture, by suggesting Nick Adams’s state of ignorance, Hemingway brings the reader to imagine the symbolical limit this child character will have to go beyond in order to advance in his discovery of the Indian world, which is the mirror of his own. As Rédouane Abouddahab has explained in his study of “in-betweeness” in the story, where he considers diegesis and discourse as two closely interconnected planes:
“Indian Camp” immediately places us on a limit (“shore”) and makes us perceive through the use of repetition, the urgency of a punctuation, a scansion. From the outset, indeed, begins a play on assonance and on repetition whose very persistence is the sign of the anguish [Nick] is to soothe [...]. (Abouddahab 91)

The atmosphere of mystery Hemingway creates around Nick’s trip to the Indian camp also participates in highlighting the latter’s state of ignorance as to the knowledge his odyssey is to unfold. Indeed, starting from the first line of this short story, Hemingway describes Nick and his father and uncle getting into two boats, rowed by Indians, with no indication as to where they are going. It is not until the fourth paragraph, when Nick is described asking his father where they are heading, that we learn they are going to an Indian Camp. The description of the prevailing darkness also helps to feed this mysterious atmosphere. By setting the beginning of this story at night, Hemingway underlines Nick’s, his father’s and uncle’s incapacity to find their way to the Indian camp without the Indians’ help. The narrator also emphasizes this incapacity by adding a mist to the obscurity, making it quite impossible for them to know where they are. Thus, Nick can only hear “the oarlocks of the other boat quite ahead of them in the mist” (83). Furthermore, by multiplying the number of places through which his characters pass: “the lake shore,” “the river,” “the beach,” “the meadow,” “the woods,” “the logging road,” and by enumerating the various directions they take through the use of prepositions such as: “up,” “from,” “to,” “into,” “on,” “along,” “around,” “out,” Hemingway gives the impression that the path leading to the Indian camp is a labyrinth through which only the Indian characters can find their way. This difficult access to the Indian camp suggests that it is a protected, secret place and the dogs which come running to bark at the characters, like Cerberus guarding the entrance to Hades, add to the secrecy of the place.

By signifying Nick’s state of ignorance both through the structure of the narrative as well as through the description of the pervading mysterious atmosphere, Hemingway evokes the limits man encounters when apprehending the world of his origins, or the world of the Other, a world which holds “the order of a knowledge that the subject conveys but is unaware of” (Nasio 28). The image of the lake is again extremely significant of that powerlessness man is a victim of. Indeed, by representing the two rowboats crossing from one shore to another, Hemingway symbolizes man’s incapacity to embrace the wholeness of his condition on earth. Imprisoned in the chronological course of time, he can only navigate the stream of his life, from birth to death, not knowing what hides on the banks of his existence. Hence, one could say that the lake stands as the poetical symbolization of the unconscious: a structure, as will now be seen, whose contradictory co-existing drives Hemingway reveals.

As Rédouane Abouddahab has noted, crossing the lake corresponds to crossing the symbolical limit between the conscious and the unconscious, gaining access to the Other Scene, where the subject’s truths, dramatized through metonymic displacements and metaphoric substitutions, are linked to the radical and fundamental reality of sexuality and death (Abouddahab 91). Through the description of Nick Adams’s symbolical journey, the narrator stages the moment when a man first experiences the sign of his human condition, a moment when confronted with the swan-song of his mortal destiny, he will have to make a choice: he can either let himself be attracted to the perspective of going back to when he was not, or when he had not yet undergone the separation from the world of his origins, or he can decide to live, i.e. to symbolically
go through that rupture over and over again in order to exit the real from which he was born, i.e. to exist.

18 As soon as Nick, his father, and Uncle George are represented in the Indian shanty, the narrative focuses solely on the Indian woman’s body and her screaming, and on the way the other characters react to this “audible sight.” If Nick’s father and the different Indian male characters are, each in their own way, trying to deny the terror this scene evokes, the narrator shows that Nick cannot but see and hear the Indian woman and the fundamental “knowledge” her body and her screaming are symbolical of.

19 As with the crossing of the lake, the trip to the Indian camp, and the camp itself, through the image of the Indian woman’s body, the text signifies, once again, the dimension of the real. Or, through the description of this female body in labor, Hemingway symbolizes the place where the mysteries of man’s existence are kept, a place from which man is separated once he is born, obliged to live with this primeval loss. The different occurrences of the verbs indicating the woman’s screaming, i.e. the inarticulate sounds she produces: “She screamed just as Nick and the two Indians followed his father and Uncle George into the shanty,” “Just then the woman cried out”(84), remind one both of this painful primeval separation and of the limit before which man stands when he tries to decipher the significance of that split. The characters, however, are described trying hard to ignore that significance. Hence, the men are sitting in the dark and smoking “out of range” of the screams, while Nick’s father is described as shielded by his scientific knowledge.

20 Indeed, from the moment they are in the shanty, the narrator presents Nick’s father concentrating solely on the preparation of the room for the Indian woman’s operation. Through this presentation, the narrator suggests not only the doctor’s professionalism, but also, on a symbolic level, the imprisonment his science as a doctor constitutes. Dr. Adams does not waste a second. When he is described explaining to his son what he is doing, it is while waiting for the water to heat, or while washing his hands: “While [the water] was heating he spoke to Nick” (84), “While his father washed his hands very carefully and thoroughly, he talked” (85). Nick’s father is depicted as an automaton carrying out the surgical procedure to the letter, not worrying about anything else: neither the screaming of the Indian woman nor the reactions of his son. For Nick’s father, the screams of the Indian woman “are not important” (84). They only indicate that the woman is in labor and that she needs care. Paradoxically, his science as a surgeon seems here to be but the trompe l’œil of his fundamental ignorance. Although he knows what to do to deliver this woman’s baby, he seems incapable of understanding the symbolical meaning this scene carries. In other words, his scientific knowledge appears to be a phantasmic phallus significant of a power he is devoid of.

21 In parallel with the presentation of Dr. Adams’s scientific knowledge preventing him from hearing the Indian woman’s screams or the understanding they are significant of, the narrator specifies, as we have just seen, that the men of the village have “moved off up the road to sit in the dark and smoke out of range of the noise [the Indian woman] made” (84). This relevant remark not only reveals that they are trying to avoid the sound of the woman’s screaming, but that they are trying to repress the significance it is symbolic of by trying to hide in the darkness, sucking at their pipes as an infant would at his mother’s breast. This image, if not announcing the ineluctable separation of a mother and her child at the moment of birth, reveals the passage from man’s alleged innocence to the knowledge the screams of the Indian woman signify.
Contrary to the men fleeing from the noise, or his father whose science prevents him from hearing it, Nick cannot but hear and watch the Indian woman, his father having wanted him to attend the operation. As Nick's father is represented unaware of the woman's screaming, the narrator describes him thinking he can make his son watch this birth through the prism of his medical eyes. Hence, from the moment they enter the shanty, Dr. Adams explains to his son what this woman is going through and, while operating on her, describes to him the different stages of the surgical procedure. Paradoxically, by describing Nick's father doing so, the narrator highlights the protective attitude the latter has towards his son, a protective attitude he also points out right from the beginning of the short story by describing Nick's father putting his arm around his son while in the boat. Hence, as the recurrent expression “Nick’s father” implies, more than a doctor, this character has to be seen above all as a father. However, the narrator, by depicting Nick’s father bringing his son to witness the Indian woman’s operation, suggests that this father is perfectly incapable of preventing his child from seeing and hearing what he has learnt, through his medical science, to repress: the “dying mementos” of man’s mortal destiny.

Indeed, the narrator shows that, far from watching this delivery through the eyes of a surgeon, Nick is incapable of ignoring the brutality of the scene, even though he is described trying hard to repress it. Even if, when entering the shanty, he pretends to understand what is going on, soon afterwards, the narrator represents him asking his father to give the Indian woman something in order to “’make her stop screaming.’” In the same way, while referring to the operation, the narrator repeats Nick’s incapacity to watch: “He was looking away so as not to see what his father was doing,” “Nick didn’t look at it,” “Nick did not watch” (85). Nick tries not to see or hear the Indian woman’s screaming body, yet Hemingway shows that this child character cannot but witness the meaning this scene is symbolical of. Through the screaming of the Indian woman, Hemingway symbolizes what the Greeks defined as the Phthoggos, i.e., the siren’s song.

[...], a chant sounding like a scream [...], at the heart [of which] there [is] the extreme of jouissance and of death. The scream [...], seems to bring us back to the real dimension of the voice. This passage to the inarticulate that reduces the whole significance to a scream, coagulates a jouissance that confounds life with death. It can be seen both as the death rattle in its raucousness as well as that of the orgasm.

(Bentata 2)

Hence, by confronting this child character to the screaming of the Indian woman, Hemingway signifies the moment before the voice of the subject has evolved into language, or before one part of the self has become unconscious, and the unconscious is, as Lacan says, “structured like a language”, a language which allows both the subject to construct himself and his drives to be put into place.

The image of the Indian woman’s body is also significant of that symbolical stage. Or to be more accurate, through the images of this body, as well as those of the lake, the trip to the Indian camp, the Indian camp itself, and the screaming of the Indian woman, the text reveals the different metaphors which, through their metonymic linking, constitute the structure of the unconscious. Hence, through the linking of those different images, Hemingway signifies the structural functioning of the unconscious, or he shows that “the unconscious is a knowledge which, stirred by the force of jouissance, works as a metonymic chain in order to produce a fruit: the metaphorical signifier; and an effect: the subject of the unconscious” (Nasio 78). Moreover, by
renewing those different images, symbols of the “metaphorical signifier,” Hemingway highlights the repetition to which man is subjected to permit the structure of the unconscious to function and suggests the tragic consequences (Liny) this repetition can engender; this repetition being the sign of man’s incapacity to grasp the wholeness of which he is a part.

26 By placing Nick Adams in the immediate presence of a body “‘in labor,’” the narrator signifies the moment when the child, whose personality is not yet constructed, is confronted with the wholeness of the real from which he comes, or with the necessary understanding of his condition: this child, a writer to be, is to see the physical if not the symbolical whole/hole from which flow the mysteries of existence. After the image of the body of the Indian woman, the synecdoche that constitutes this woman’s hole, in other words her vagina, symbolizes the wholeness of the real but also the hole that the signifier has left empty, significant of the primeval separation the subject is to undergo when he or she starts ex-sisting. And even if Nick is, after a while, unable to look at the Indian woman’s body, the basin he holds for his father is but the metonymical reminder of this primeval separation. As Rédouane Abouddahab has noted, “the basin Nick holds for his father, receptacle into which are thrown the undesirable signifiers of jouissance, can then be apprehended as the signifier of the fathers’ gaping fault: BAY/SIN” (Abouddahab 94). Indeed, as this critic has brought to light, in Hemingway’s narratives, the real fathers are guilty of not being the adequate avatar of the symbolical father, who is universal and unique, efficiently structuring the real and naming the holes of existence.

27 “Indian Camp” reveals the contradictory reactions man may have when confronted with the knowledge of his fallible condition. On the one hand, the text sketches the men hiding in the dark and Nick’s father performing his task, denying the screams of the Indian woman with his medical jargon, on the other hand, it describes Nick, especially in the beginning, unable to repress the naked truth he is witnessing. However, if Nick seems to be the only character incapable of blocking out the Indian woman’s screams, the silence of the Indian husband lying wounded on the upper bunk of the shanty, seems also to be revealing of man’s incapacity to ignore or to transcend what those screams are significant of. Not only by representing the Indian husband keeping silent, but by emphasizing this palpable silence, opposing it to the screams of his wife, Hemingway suggests that this man is unable to pierce the real in order to exist. Or, to be more precise, because the Indian husband is hurt and has to lie on the upper bunk, he cannot but witness the scene which is taking place in the lower bunk. A scene, as one may imagine, which is all the more significant for the Indian husband as he is, at least theoretically, the father of the baby to be born. As such, he is a powerless, tragic witness of a global truth whose meaning he cannot grasp and it is his powerlessness which leads him to commit suicide by cutting his throat. Through this tragic act, the story highlights the tragic consequences man’s drives may have. Because the Indian husband could not go beyond the real as dramatized in this scene, he remained the toy of his own drives or death instincts that convey one’s desire to return to an inorganic state.

28 By confronting Nick with the problematic birth of a boy and then with the suicide of the Indian husband, one could say that Hemingway signifies the symbolical stage when the child realizes the presence of the other who lives in him, an other whose recognition signifies the child’s definitive loss of “innocence.” Indeed, as the narrator
reveals through his representation of the father discovering the body of the dead husband before the eyes of his child, this state of innocence is gone forever until one is to lie down in death’s bed. By underlining that Nick “had a good view” (86) of the dead Indian’s open throat – a view that is improved not only by the lamp Nick’s father is holding over the Indian man, but because he can see his father “tipp[ing] the Indian’s head back” (ibid.) –, the narrator reveals that Nick can never be the same again. Once one has gained that fundamental knowledge, one can never recover one’s lost innocence. The story symbolizes this truth by representing Nick’s father stripped of his own medical disguise after having seen the body of the dead Indian.

Indeed, if Nick’s father says boastfully to his brother after the success of the operation: “‘That’s one for the medical journal [...]. Doing a Caesarian with a jack-knife and sewing it up with nine-foot, tapered gut leaders’” (ibid.), excited by what he has accomplished, he is described in a radically different manner after discovering the body of the dead Indian, as “all his post-operative exhilaration” is now “gone” (ibid.). It is only when he finds out that the Indian husband killed himself while he was operating on his wife that Nick’s father seems to understand the significance of the scene he has, until then, been witnessing with a surgeon’s eyes. In other words, after the discovery of the dead body, he behaves like a father, trying to prevent his son from seeing the dead Indian. Though he wished his son to witness a birth, i.e. the beginning of one’s existence, he certainly did not want him to be the witness of death, and what is more, a suicide, i.e. the violently tragic signification of one’s mortality. However, as the description of Nick seeing the dead body indicates, it is useless: not even a father can prevent his child from having the sign of his mortal condition signified to him.

Through the last part of this short story when Nick and his father are crossing the lake again, the narrator reveals that both characters have reached the threshold of an understanding: Nick hearing for the first time the swan-song of his mortal destiny, his father comprehending he is incapable of preventing his son from hearing that terrible sound. Hence, when on the boat going back Nick asks his father questions about the meaning of what he has just witnessed, the father cannot truly answer them. The reader is presented with Nick’s passing questions while his father’s answers become shorter and shorter throughout their brief dialogue. Furthermore, if Nick and his father are depicted sitting together in the boat taking them to the Indian camp, the father’s arm around his son, in the final scene, on their way back, they are significantly separated as Nick is sitting “in the stern,” while “his father [is] rowing” (87). This scene, taking place at dawn, clearly shows Nick’s passage from innocence to the awareness and recognition of his original selfhood. Nick has indeed found his own response: “In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die” (ibid.).

This short story as well as all his others are but the different metaphors created by Hemingway to make do with the real. If man cannot grasp the wholeness to which he belongs, artistic creation permits the writer to metaphorically expose the hole at the core of existence and at the same time cover it with original words and images. Through the image of the bass “jump[ing], making a circle in the water” (ibid.), Hemingway symbolizes his power as an artist to signify the real on a poetical level. Even if man is the prisoner of Chronos, he can, through the art of fiction, act upon the temporal dimension of which he is a captive. Hence, contrary to some authors for whom writing is the representation of reality, Hemingway’s narratives are organized
poetical wholes in which the fundamental drives are transformed into words, keeping him safe from being sucked in by the real.

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32 Reading Hemingway’s “Indian Camp,” the child that I was felt betrayed. Relying on this author’s simple way of writing, I lowered my guard trusting this short narrative not to go beyond the simple words that were used. And I got hurt. Badly hurt by the truth it unfolded.

33 No, Hemingway’s short stories do not follow the pattern of events of classical plots. No happy or sad endings are to allow the reader a cathartic reading. No reversals to make the latter believe in his power to change what cannot be changed: one’s mortality. Hemingway’s simple prose reveals life as it is, “a dream and folly of expectation,” and it forbids the reader to ignore this “folly” by constantly reminding him, through the nakedness of its words, of his condition. Hence, if Nick is described “feeling quite sure that he [will] never die,” the reader is left with “dying mementos.” In other words, he is left with simple if not inoffensive words Hemingway stripped of their imaginary disguise to reveal the real they are the vehicles of.

34 Because they have been hurt by Hemingway’s fiction, some readers may decide not to reopen this author’s books ever again. However, this decision is again but the symptom of one’s desire not to admit the simple, though violent truth Hemingway’s words carry and which exhorted this author to write other stories. If he could not fight against what could not be fought, his writing, however, had the power to sublimate man’s “folly of expectation” by changing it into the enduring reality of art.

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NOTES

1. As the definition of the Dictionary of Critical Theory explains, according to Jacques Lacan, “the real is one of the three orders that structure human existence, the others being the imaginary and the symbolic. The real is not simply synonymous with external reality [...]. It exists outside or beyond the symbolic, is menacingly homogeneous, and is not composed of distinct and differential signifiers. The real is described as that which resists symbolization and signification” (324).

ABSTRACTS

The ambition of this article is to raise the curtain on the poetical stage of “Indian Camp.” We will endeavor to highlight how, through the apparent neutrality of his writing, Ernest Hemingway signifies the limit with which man is confronted when, like Oedipus, he has to answer the Sphinx’s enigma. More precisely, we will show how, by making his young protagonist witness both a birth and a suicide, he represents the moment when the subject becomes aware not only of his mortal destiny but of the drives that inhabit him as well.

L’ambition de cet article est de lever le rideau sur la scène poétique d’ “Indian Camp”. On s’appliquera à mettre en lumière la façon dont, à travers l’apparente neutralité de son écriture, Ernest Hemingway manifeste la limite à laquelle l’homme se heurte quand, tel Œdipe, il doit répondre à l’énigme du Sphinx. Précisément, on montrera comment, en rendant son jeune protagoniste le témoin d’une naissance puis d’un suicide, il représente le moment où le sujet prend conscience non seulement de sa destinée mortelle, mais aussi des pulsions qui l’habitent.

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The “I” and the Voice: Interpreting the Narrator’s Anonym in Ernest Hemingway’s “The Light of the World”

Émilie Walezak

1 Hemingway’s “The Light of the World” tells the story of two teenage boys, the enunciator and his companion, Tom, passing through a town. They first stop in a bar from which they are expelled because of Tom’s provocative behavior. They then go to a train station where they meet with a number of characters: a homosexual cook, prostitutes, white lumberjacks, and Indians. The discussion prompted by their arrival eventually centers on the figure of a dead prizefighter, Steve Ketchel, whom two of the prostitutes, Alice and Peroxide, claim to have known and loved. The two protagonists depart when Tom notices the enunciator’s attraction to Alice.

2 The story is told in the first person by a narrator who remains unidentified all through the text, either by name or psychological features, though most critics assume that he is Nick Adams, a recurrent character in Hemingway’s short stories. This was prompted by Philip Young’s rearrangement of the stories in a collection entitled The Nick Adams Stories. In it Philip Young assembled the short stories that allegedly had Nick as their protagonist and sometimes narrator, and presented them in a chronological order – going from childhood to adulthood – that was originally absent. As reflected in the collection he created, his conception of the dispersed stories as the quest narrative of a hero struggling through initiatory experiences to achieve maturity, has influenced subsequent readings of the stories. Most papers have thus concentrated on a psychological reading of Nick’s character or discussed Alice’s and Peroxide’s claims to truth in terms of psychological verisimilitude.

3 No critic has ever questioned the enunciator’s unknown identity, as most commentators have simply assumed him to be Nick Adams, and on the few occasions when they have acknowledged the fact that his name never appears in the text, they have dismissed the problem as irrelevant in a brief sentence between brackets or in a
footnote, which makes explicit the little importance they have attached to it (Martine 196, Young, 1975, 31, Hannum, 1990, 321). In a more recent article dedicated to the Nick Adams stories at large, Howard L. Hannum continues assuming that the narrator of the story is Nick Adams (Hannum, 2001). Though Philip Young’s method has since been largely criticized and his chronological rearrangement of the stories is no longer considered valid, his choice to catalogue “The Light of the World” as a Nick Adams story still influences the critics’ approach of the story. The focus on Nick as narrator has elicited the problem of a stripped narration sounding objective in the essentially subjective first person.

The aim of this paper is to present a different approach that will not envisage the narrator as Nick but will focus on his unknown identity as a structural element in the story. By evacuating Nick from the scene of the story, this study proposes to follow in Rédoane Abouddahab’s wake and do away with the psycho-biographical approaches to Hemingway as well as with the approaches focusing on the so-called realism of Hemingway’s stories (Abouddahab 589-591). In keeping with such enunciation theories as Bakhtine’s, I will not focus on the representation of reality but on that of language. I feel comforted in this choice by the bareness of the story itself. As often in Hemingway’s short stories, the reader has trouble deriving a satisfying meaning from the diegesis itself. The stakes are not in the story proper but in the way it is told. In “The Light of the World” the point is all the more important as the narrator is a character. What is more, though it mostly consists in dialogues, the story stages the failure of language in its communicative function. Whether it be the heroic code praised by former critics, or language as a code, they are undermined in “The Light of the World” which repeatedly directs the reader’s attention to the textual workings of the text, the story as text, for which no ready code applies.

My study will focus more particularly on the anonymous first person enunciator and the effects of his bare distinctiveness on the structure of the text, the thematic layers it helps surface and the all the more blatant moments of subjectivity it serves to highlight. Indeed it is the very reticence to construct the narrator as ego that makes the text almost read like a third person narration. This reticence in turn contaminates the other characters and accounts for the theatrical aspect of the text in which the protagonists are not psychological entities but actions and bodily presences. The very bare eyewitness account of the enunciator enlightens the theme of testimony that links the title, the central episode of Steve Ketchel, and the problematic first person into a coherent web of echoes. The subjectivity of the speaker is to be located precisely in his eye and his other sensory organs that focus on Alice’s body. The specific use of the first person here serves to make the enunciator appear as a desiring subject reduced to its essentiality, which is consistent with Hemingway’s overall poetics of desire’s processes in the whole of his fiction.

The limited information about the narrator available to the reader is that he is a teenage boy of seventeen or nineteen. This lack of information regarding his identity combined with his stark Hemingwayan recording of facts make of the narrator a purely linguistic function, a mere point from which discourse is enunciated. The narration is minimal. The narrator is content with recording the bartender’s moves, the characters’ position in the station, whether they are seated or standing, as well as their attitude, whether they are quiet or “getting ready to say something” (42), and is careful to acknowledge the various speakers, including himself, in the dialogues. This he does
again very minimally by using the verb say all through the text, hardly commenting on
the dialogues except for scarce indications on the tone used by Peroxide once she has
been characterized as a performer “who said all this in a high stagey way” (367). The
narrator’s account reads almost like stage directions. His narrative is not psychological.

7 The characters are described as actions in themselves or triggers to possible actions,
what Todorov calls, dealing with Shehrazad’s Arabian Nights, “des hommes-récits.” 8
Tom and the narrator’s entrance in the bar and then in the station starts the action:
“When he saw us come in the door the bartender looked up and then reached over and
put the glass covers on the two free-lunch bowls” (363), “As we came in nobody was
talking and the ticket window was down. ‘Shut the door, can’t you?’ somebody said”
(364). Steve Ketchel, though he is absent, gets the prostitute going “as though the name
had pulled a trigger in her” (367). Developing Todorov’s idea, Réduane Abouddahab
has described the characters in the text as potential stories, each one of them holding
the possibility for a new plot to build up (Abouddahab 601, 609-610). This is what makes
“The Light of the World” a particularly unsettling short story as it initiates various
potential narratives without developing them. It is relevant then that most of the
action should be set in a station where the characters are waiting for their story to
continue in some other place. Tom and the narrator are just passing through the town:
“We’d come in that town at one end and we were going out the other” (364). If indeed
they are on a trip, the text focuses on a suspended moment in a waiting room. The text
offers several leads to the reader, which accounts for the studies’ various focuses on
one of the characters, either Alice, Steve or the narrator, and the temptation to look for
extra-textual clues to produce a coherent narrative out of the various stories, as when
some re-contextualize the story in the Nick Adams narratives, or search for the “real”

8 The story reads like a sketchy composition on the art of the short story, highlighting,
by reducing them to an essentiality, the crucial stakes of narration and enunciation.
The theatricality of the text and the non-psychological narrative make of the story a
stage on which to dramatize the critical issues in text production: not what to tell in a
story but how to tell a story, a question which encompasses those of enunciation,
narration and style. “The Light of the World” could thus very well be read as
Hemingway’s ars poetica.

9 The text’s structural embedding is relayed in the arrangement of the characters in
groups and groups within groups. Of the six white men, two are Swedes, four are
lumberjacks and one is further distinguished as a homosexual. Among the “whores,”
three are “very big,” (including Alice) and the other two, (including Peroxide) are
“ordinary” blondes. The case of the Indians may strikingly illustrate the potentiality of
dormant narratives. Though they are only part of the scenery and never enter the
discussion, the narrator repeatedly acknowledges their presence until they depart from
the scene and from the text. Before they disappear altogether, one of them has already
vanished unaccountably from the text. The narrator first counts four of them 10 but then
notes: “Two Indians were sitting down at the end of the bench and one standing up
against the wall” (365). One has dropped out of sight in the meantime.

10 The text precisely consists in the eyewitness account of its enunciator and the narrator
seems to discover the scene at the same time as the reader. The speaker is positioned as
a spectator recording the elements of the scene as he discovers them, ignoring virtual
stories as his eye goes, not pursuing them as he records the interactions between the characters. The "I" narration is led by the enunciator’s eye. When he enters the station, the first group he notices is the group of whores. Their size makes them the most conspicuous element in the station. He then records “six white men and four Indians”. Rédouane Abouddahab has pointed out the relevance of this perception and presentation, showing how the narrator is not simply describing a scene but logically constructing it (Abouddahab 621). The unidentified almost impersonal first person makes the enunciator into a distant observer and an ideal witness content with recording the facts.

The most developed embedded narrative in the short story concerns Steve Ketchel and precisely interrogates the notion of testimony; it also decidedly echoes the Biblical reference contained in the title. As has already been remarked (Brucoli, Thomas), “The Light of the World” is a Biblical reference to be found in particular in John 1:1-10 and John 8:12. The first instance is the well-known passage comparing the Word to true light in which John defines his mission to bear witness to the light. In the second instance, the reference directly follows the episode of the adulteress; John records Christ saying “I am the light of the world” and then expanding on the reliability of his own testimony.10 These underlying references are further relayed in the text in the story of Steve Ketchel, a Christ-like figure, and his mock apostles, the whores Alice and Peroxide.

That Steve is a mock Christ is made apparent in Peroxide’s pagan worship of him and the text’s playful debasement of the sacred into coarse materiality. Peroxide’s first description of Steve is overloaded with superlative forms equating him with perfection, and she compares him quite irreligiously both to God and to a god. Her speech is saturated with curses invoking God, thus the word god recurs in the text in the form of swearing. She tells the story of his death which obviously refers to Christ’s story, as Steve Ketchel was killed by his father, but then she specifies: “His own father shot him down like a dog” (367). The anagrammatic inversion of god into dog playfully makes explicit the satiric transformation of Steve into a Christ-like figure. Peroxide herself is turned into a mock apostle as her testimony is eventually contradicted by Alice and the cook. She is first interrupted by the cook when he remarks that she has mistaken Steve’s name, who, according to him, is not Steve but Stanley. Then Alice accuses her of lying and gives her own testimony.

Both “apostles,” Alice and Peroxide, claim their story to be true and both insist, to prove their point, on a faithful record of his words, which clearly affiliates them to the apostles. Alice reports what Steve told her and three times swears to the truth of it, she insists on the exactness of her transcription: “I know exactly what he said to me” (368), “That’s truly what he said” (368). She is contradicted by Peroxide who claims that the words used by Alice cannot have been Steve’s: “Steve couldn’t have said that. It wasn’t the way he talked” (369), “It would be impossible for Steve to have said that’” (369). What this possibly goes to show is that the sacred Word to be equated to truth as an absolute is beyond human reach and that there is but the truth of the speaking subject. It is not only impossible but also irrelevant to try and decide which one of them if any says the truth. The end of the story shows them both satisfied with their own version of Steve.

The theme of testimony in the title and Steve’s story problematize the question of enunciation and again turns the reader’s attention to the enunciator of the story.
Indeed, the reader is presented with the “I”/eye-witness account of a first person narrator. The question is not whether the narrator is reliable or not (in which case we would reproduce the afore-mentioned critical debate on Alice and Peroxide), whether he is Nick or not, it is to try and locate his subjectivity that will account for Hemingway’s choice to use the first person. The subjectivity inherent to the first person is not to be located in any psychological characteristic of the narrator, but in what the “I”/eye focuses upon. The bare narration of the succession of events serves to contrast the few occasions when the speaker’s subjective point of view makes itself heard.

When he describes the big whores, the narrator is struck by their size as his excited and unrestrained use of superlatives shows: “She was the biggest whore I ever saw in my life and the biggest woman. [...] There were two other whores that were nearly as big but the big one must have weighed three hundred and fifty pounds. You couldn’t believe she was real when you looked at her” (365). The mention of an impersonal addressee in the second person is unique in the text but then again brings enunciation into the limelight. As Bakhtine has demonstrated, utterance is a drama involving three agents: the speaker, the addressee, and language (Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtine, 75, 83). The uniqueness of the addressee’s mention in the text makes it all the more striking. Though in the impersonal form, it makes the reader party to the narrator’s excitement and draws him into the text as one more potential story in it. In keeping with Bakhtine’s theory of utterance as a dialogue between speaker and addressee but also between texts, it is worth mentioning here the numerous inter-textual references in the text. In addition to the Bible which has been discussed already as an inter-text, the typically American roaming context of the two boys on the road is reminiscent of Mark Twain. Tom’s name may thus evoke Tom Sawyer. Alice’s name may remind the reader of Alice in Wonderland. Hemingway himself distinguished Maupassant’s short story “La Maison Tellier” as an inter-text to his story. These are but a few possible parodic references; they underline the crucial issue of utterance as a dialogical drama that the short story quite literally stages.

The narrator pays particular attention to Alice and more specifically to her body. The unidentified first person stripped to the bone makes the enunciator into sensitive organs bent on sensuality. He observes Alice’s size and her body shaking:

- The whore laughed again and shook all over. (365)
- The big whore shook with laughing. (ibid.)
- She just keep on laughing and shaking. (ibid.)
- She began to shake again. (366)
- Alice commenced to laugh again and to shake all over. (ibid.)

He also feels her body shaking: “Alice was beginning to shake again. I felt it, sitting by her” (367). The insistence on her body shaking hints at her spectacular size, the “mountain of flesh” (365) of her body as the cook puts it, whereas her voice to which the narrator listens intently, contrasts with her corpulence: “Ho! Ho! Ho!” the big whore shook with laughing. She had a really pretty voice” (365). The onomatopoeic rendering of her voice is rather more consistent with her size than with the description of her voice. The adjective used to qualify her voice replaces the superlatives as a sure sign of subjectivity. The narrator will then qualify it using other adjectives, making Alice’s voice her characteristic feature and signaling his attraction to it:

- She said in that low voice. (368)
- Alice said in her nice voice. (369)
Alice said in that sweet lovely voice. (ibid.)
She certainly had a nice voice. (ibid.)

His last description of her combines the three senses of sight, touch, and hearing, and again makes the narrator's subjectivity blatantly apparent: “She had about the prettiest face I ever saw. She had a pretty face and a nice smooth skin and a lovely voice […] But, my God, she was big. She was as big as three women” (369). The bare first person serves to make the enunciator into a bodily presence whose subjectivity makes itself heard in the sensory description of Alice.

This is consistent with the highly erotic energy of the text overloaded with sexual innuendoes. The very presence of the whores is suggestive of sex. One of the men jokes bawdily about them. The cook is also laughed at because of his homosexuality, and his sexual interest in the two teenage boys is obvious. Tom titillates the cook when he answers his question on their age with “I’m sixty-nine and he is ninety-six” (365), the 69 figure alluding to a sex position. The sensual and sexual tension in the text is all the more palpable as the enunciator is defined in terms of bodily perceptions.

Some characters, like the narrator, are not bodies as wholes but rather as metonymic bodies. The cook’s characteristic feature is his clean white hands. Peroxide comes to be named after the color of her hair. Alice is in turn an amount of flesh, a face, and a voice. Such focus on particular body parts that the text, as in a close-up, seems to enlarge so much that the cook becomes a pair of hands and Peroxide a hair color, makes the characters into grotesque figures, again undermining the so-called realism of Hemingway’s text. Their grotesque aspect is consistent with their fight over truth about Steve.11 Again truth as an absolute is undermined. Instead, the fictional “lies” like the whore’s fictions about Steve function as signs of some truth about the subject, which is that he is subjected to the desire of the Other. The subject only emerges through alienation. He needs the other to exist, which is also what Bakhtine’s enunciation theory tries to show. It is only logical then that the subjectivity of the narrator in the story should appear when he becomes interested in Alice.

The epitomized bodies also read like metonymies of desire which, according to Lacan, shapes itself in various “objects,” including gaze and voice, that act as triggers to the drives.12 The bare first person could thus be interpreted as a representation of the desiring subject in its essentiality: a problematic, elusive “I”/eye attracted to a voice. What makes the human being a desiring subject is language which brings division in the subject. As he or she is cut off from the thing itself that words replace, the subject is forever searching for the thing which is truth, forever electing substitutes for it, forever recovering from or covering absence which is a gap at his or her core.

Absence is repeatedly inscribed in the text in the dead figure of Steve Ketchel, in the disappearance of the fourth Indian, in the satiric version of Christ that may well stand for the absence of God. The subjectivity of the first person that the nakedness of the narration serves to enhance, constructs a subject, not a character endowed with psychological features. What the reader is presented with is an enunciator whose very speech act problematizes his relationship to the other, to desire, absence, and truth as mediated by language. “The Light of the World” tells the story of the complex interactions that make the speaker’s subjectivity a product of his confrontation with the other, at the same time as he is the producer of the text we are reading, not forgetting that he is also the product of the writer’s decision.13
The anonymity of the first person narrator is a decisive clue to the reading of the short story as Hemingway’s *ars poetica*. It is because he is anonymous that the first person narrator is put into the limelight. The style used in the short story is characteristic of Hemingway using short simple sentences and a matter-of-fact narration that reads more like an account. It serves to contrast the subjectivity that the reader cannot but expect in a first person narrative. This subjectivity in turn highlights the problematic issue of enunciation as a dialogue with language and with the *other* that characterizes the human being as a speaking subject and therefore a desiring subject. “The Light of the World” is an enactment of Hemingway’s poetics that envisage writing as a powerful and complex act.

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NOTES

1. The linguistic term *enunciator* will be specifically used in this paper to insist on the grammatical function of the first person pronoun as a *shifter*. Émile Benveniste has demonstrated both the characteristic uniqueness of the first person as it can only refer to one being while it is used and its versatility as a shifter as everybody can appropriate the first person (Benveniste 251-257).

2. Philip Young exposes clearly his vision in his Preface to *The Nick Adams Stories*: “Arranged in chronological sequence, the events of Nick’s life make up a meaningful narrative in which a memorable character grows from child to adolescent to soldier, veteran, writer, and parent – a sequence closely paralleling the events of Hemingway’s own life” (5-6).

3. For Joseph Flora, Alice says “the truth” because she talks with her heart (82). Carlos Baker considers Alice as the symbol of love and as the representation of the light announced in the title of the story (140). James F. Barbour contends that Alice says “the truth” because she represents realism while Peroxide invents it because she is romantic (20-21).

4. See in particular Rédouane Abouddahab or Nancy Comley and Robert Scholes.

5. “It is not the image of man as such that characterizes the novelistic genre but precisely the image of language” (*in* Todorov, *Mikhaïl Bakhtine*, 103; my translation). Though Bakhtine in his various studies concentrates on the novel, I feel justified in applying his remarks to the short story as he mainly distinguishes between prose and poetry.

6. Most critics have considered Tom to be the eldest acting as a mentor for the narrator, as they have followed the lead suggested by Young who viewed “The Light of the World” as a story about Nick’s adolescence and his apprenticeship of adulthood, and who enclosed it in a chapter entitled “On His Own.” However the enunciator’s answer to the cook: “‘We’re seventeen and nineteen’” (366), makes it impossible for the reader to decide which one of them is seventeen, which nineteen. He can only conjecture or he can leave the question open.

7. “A psychological narrative considers the action as a way to get to the personality of the character, as an expression or else as a symptom. The action is not considered for what it is but for its transitive value providing information on the subject. Conversely, an a-psychological narrative is characterized by intransitive actions. The action is to be taken at face value, not as a clue to a particular trait of character” (Todorov, *Poétique de la prose*, 79; my translation).

8. “[In *The Arabian Nights*] a character is a potential story that corresponds to his or her life story. A new character introduces a new plot. This is the realm of the narrative-men” (*ibid.*, 82; my translation).

9. Interestingly enough, the cited British edition of *The First Forty-Nine Stories* “corrected” what the editor(s) must have deemed to be an error, by mentioning only three Indians from the beginning (364).

10. “12. Then spake Jesus unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life./ 13. The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself, thy record is not true./ 14. Jesus answered and said unto
them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go."

11. Sherwood Anderson’s understanding of the grotesque contends that people who are infatuated with a truth of their own become “pregnant” with it; it fills them so much as to deform their bodies: “It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood” (24).

12. In Lacan’s theory, the object of desire, which he calls objet petit a, is what causes desire, an object that can never be attained. It is a sort of fictional substitute for the constitutive gap in the subject, that triggers the drives and allows them to circulate forever by never reaching it.

13. “What is dramatized in ‘The Light of the World’ is this peculiar posture of enunciation – the apex of artistic creation – that makes one at the same time a producer, a product, and a production” (Abouddahab 625, my translation).

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**ABSTRACTS**

While the first person narrator in Hemingway’s “The Light of the World” remains unidentified, most studies following in Philip Young’s wake have assumed him to be Nick Adams. The anonymity of the first person and the text’s reticence to construct the speaker as an ego endowed with psychological characteristics has been largely ignored. This study proposes to focus on the bareness of the “I” narrating the story, leaving aside the character of Nick Adams, as a crucial structural element of the text. The very bareness of the unidentified first person accounts for the text’s structure that reads like a play, as well as for its major theme of testimony suggested by the title and developed in the embedded story of Steve Ketchel. It is a relevant clue to an interpretation of the story drawing on the notion of desire that matches Hemingway’s overall poetics in the short stories as well as in the novels.

La nouvelle de Hemingway “La lumière du monde” est un récit à la première personne, et bien que le nom de l’énonciateur n’apparaisse nulle part dans le texte, la plupart des études, dans le sillage de Philip Young qui a classé la nouvelle parmi les Nick Adams Stories, considère qu’il s’agit de Nick. Par conséquent l’anonymat de l’énonciateur et la reticence du texte à lui donner une personnalité, une psychologie, n’ont jamais été interrogés comme tels. Cette étude propose au contraire de considérer le dépouillement caractéristique de la première personne comme un élément structurel majeur de la nouvelle. C’est précisément cette sobriété attachée à l’énonciateur anonyme du texte qui en éclaire la structure, laquelle emprunte à la forme théâtrale, ainsi que la thématique principale centrée sur le témoignage, piste que le titre suggère et que l’histoire enchâssée de Steve Ketchel poursuit sur le mode parodique. Elle se révèle être un élément pertinent pour une interprétation du texte visant la question du désir, au cœur de la poétique hemingwayienne tant dans les nouvelles que dans les romans.
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When you look away: “Reality” and Hemingway’s Verbal Imagination

Shigeo Kikuchi

Few literary texts have been as widely discussed as Hemingway’s “Cat in the Rain.” Among the notable literary critics and linguists who have joined in the discussion are David Lodge, Ronald Carter, and Michael Stubbs. Applying the assertion of Mick Short that “in well-constructed dramatic dialogue, everything is meant by the playwright” (Short 178), I shall examine the effects produced by the use of specific verbal details in Hemingway’s story and the author’s underlying ethical message. In this story, an American couple are staying at an Italian hotel, where they seem to be the only guests. The woman is seen standing at the window of their second-floor room looking out at the empty square below. She makes out a cat crouched small under a dripping table, sheltering itself from the rain. The woman wants the “kitty” and goes down to get it. Once in the square, however, she realizes that the cat has gone away. When she goes back to her room, she finds her husband still reading on the bed. Eventually the maid knocks at the door and comes in with a big tortoise-shell cat for her.

One can wonder why the American woman should look down at a cat hiding from the rain in the square below, from the second-floor room and not from the first or the third floor. Other questions may be asked: why are this cat and the one the maid brought up to the room made difficult to identify as one and the same animal? Why is the cat’s identity questionable, while George’s identity as the woman’s husband is not? These stylistic and narrative elements are considered in this study as purposeful strategies used by the writer. The conclusion one can draw from the standpoint of stylistic and narrative technique can be stated as follows: George’s identity is never questioned because the author places him in the immediate presence of the American woman, and emphasizes his reality by referring to him by name, while “the cat in the rain” is only a linguistically created fiction. The animal is seen only through the American woman’s eyes, and it is neither perceived by the husband, nor objectively presented to the reader by the narrator.

Though Hemingway learned as a professional reporter how to report facts as they were, he felt that there was a limit to representing reality. This is what he conveys through
“Cat in the Rain.” Given this difficulty of reporting reality, two discourse analysts, Ronald Carter and Michael Stubbs, were misled by Hemingway’s verbal technique that makes the cat appear “small.” They both consider the cat in the rain and the one the hotel maid brought up to be different because the latter appears bigger than the former.

Indeed, in his analysis of this short story, Ronald Carter denies the identity of the cat that the maid brought up as the one in the rain: “I do not see a correlation here between ‘cat’ and ‘kitty.’ To me, this is a grotesque outcome to the kind of associations aroused in me by the word ‘kitty’ ” (Carter 76). Michael Stubbs draws the same conclusion in his discourse analysis of this short story, arguing that the maid’s is “a different cat”: “My interpretation is therefore that Hemingway implicates that it is not the same cat. He does this by inserting information which is otherwise irrelevant: that the maid brings a big tortoise-shell cat. Informally, we might say that there is no reason to mention what kind of cat it is, unless this is significant, and unless we are expected to draw our own conclusion” (Stubbs 209). These two discourse analysts are misled to this conclusion about the cat brought by the maid, on account of the stylistic and narrative devices that make the cat in the rain appear “small,” making it thus impossible to identify the two cats as one and the same.

Why does the American woman see a cat from a room on the second floor of the hotel? This question can be answered by considering what effects would have been produced if the room were on the first floor. The woman, or the reader through her eyes, would see the cat very close and could recognize specific details. At the end of the story, the maid appears at the door of the room with a specific “big tortoise-shell cat,” which the reader sees this time through the husband’s eyes. Its appearance is unexpected, because the cat is depicted with the two new epithets “big” and “tortoise-shell.” For this to be “unexpected,” the woman must neither see the cat from the first floor, where she could make it out clearly, nor from the third floor which is evidently too distant as a viewpoint. The second floor is, therefore, suitably distant from the cat for the author’s purpose to make it appear small, while actually leaving it unidentifiable by its size.

The second device which reinforces the apparent smallness of the cat due to the relatively distant location of the room, appears in the following passage:

The American wife stood at the window looking out. Outside right under their window a cat was **crouched** under one of the dripping green tables. The cat was trying to make herself so **compact** that she would not be dripped on.

“I’m going down and get that kitty,” the American wife said. (167, italics mine)

The second device consists in the use of two words: the past participle “crouched” and the adjective “compact.” The cat could actually be small, but with these two words, we find ourselves facing a cat verbally made to appear small. And even at this early stage, the woman’s implicit presentation of the cat’s size when she uses the expression “kitty” is not reliable. “Crouched” and “compact” help make us feel it is quite natural for the woman to refer to the cat as “kitty,” it being a realization of what she wishes the cat to be like: “‘Yes,’ she said, ‘under the table.’ Then, ‘Oh, I wanted it so much. I wanted a kitty’ ” (168).

These two techniques, the moderately distant location of the room and the two words suggestive of the cat’s size, have the effect of concealing from the reader the cat’s true size and sort. Besides, the woman’s use of the affectionate expression “kitty” further makes the reader believe that the cat is actually small. And this effect lasts till the final
scene of the story, when the reader is brought face-to-face with a big tortoise-shell cat. By carefully employing these verbal devices to make the cat appear small, the narrator skillfully created this effect of frustrated expectation. To sum up, these two devices, the location of the American tourists’ hotel room and the use of the two words discussed above, serve to make it impossible to identify the “cat in the rain.”

Another device that makes the cat’s identification difficult lies in the specific position of the husband lying on the bed, reading a book. In this setting, it is not unnatural for the man not to go to the window to look at the cat. Had the husband been sitting on a chair, he might have gone to the window to have a look at “the cat” as a natural course of action. To eliminate this possibility, the narrator had him lying on the bed, creating thus a limited situation in which the husband only sees the cat brought up by the maid towards the end of the story. Hence, the cat in the rain is equated with the fragile reality reported solely by the wife. The narrator apparently made the cat ambiguous by making it exist only through subjective reporting.

To enhance the function of the three devices which produce the effect of unidentifiability (the location of the room, the two discussed words, and single witnessing), the woman takes her eyes off the cat when she goes downstairs to get it and thus she loses certainty of the cat’s identity. It is particularly noteworthy that the woman’s aversion of her eyes from the cat is carefully paired with single witnessing. When she looks away from the cat, it becomes impossible to restore the certainty of identity. In this way, by this carefully created setting and these stylistic techniques, the cat is made impossible to identify. The cat is an unidentifiable cat, effectively named “Cat in the rain” without an article, as justifiably pointed out in David Lodge’s and Ronald Carter’s aforementioned analyses of the story.

Unlike the cat, George is endowed with ample means of identification in the story. The first specification of George comes from the fact he is immediately present in the room with the woman. Because of this presence in the same room, his wife sees his existential reality. Secondly, he is identified by being depicted lying on the same bed and remaining in the same posture before and after his wife goes downstairs. When the American woman goes downstairs she obviously takes her eyes off George. Though she looks away from him, the constancy of the stage setting helps ensure George’s identity. The husband, whom we can identify as “George” lying “on the bed, reading,” retains the situational sameness. The same posture increases a sense of sureness of his identity. This sameness is particularly important since our attention is focused on the identity of the man and his posture, not on the “identity” of a vase or a carpet!

At the level of what Mick Short calls the character–character dimension of discourse, the husband’s sameness of posture symbolizes the woman’s feeling of boredom with him; while, at the narrator–narratee level of discourse, it helps convey greater probability in regard to the stability of the man’s identity.

The story begins with a reference to the two Americans and a description of the general setting, then shifts to the viewpoint of the woman. Reference to the man is from the woman’s perspective. After the woman returns from downstairs, “empathy” (Kuno) is transferred to the man. Even when empathy was with the woman, she was referred to only by the common nouns “wife” and “girl.” After her return, the man is referred to by a proper noun, “George,” one of the highest degrees of empathy (E [George] > E [a wife, a girl]) (Kuno 203–270). From the following excerpt, one can see that the wife is feeling more empathy for her husband than vice versa, because the husband does not
identify the woman using a proper noun, i.e. her first name: “She opened the door of the room. George was on the bed, reading” (169).

The direction of specification is from less specified to more specified, as we see in the reference to the man as “husband” before she goes downstairs, and “George” after she comes back. This follows the same natural course of specification as that which Tuen van Dijk calls “normal ordering of state descriptions” (van Dijk 106) (general → specific, or whole → part / component). This “general to specific” reference does not appear in the sequence from “a cat,” in the early part of the story, to “a big tortoise-shell cat”, at the end, because the initial cat, as I have discussed so far, is not specified as “small” or “big,” “tortoise-shell” or not. Greater specification of a referent is possible only when it has been introduced with less specification.

Yukio Mishima, a Japanese writer who committed ritual suicide in 1970, argues in his last essay that words are able to “shake” reality by giving form to “ghosts,” i.e. words, expressing hence his ideal of the unity of word and deed:

[...] The novel is a genre that originally sprang from a requirement for “verisimilitude”; so it must possess such fundamental power as that which, by making reality tremble, causes the “ghosts” (namely, words) depicted in Tono Monogatari [Tales from Tono] to materialize [...]. Those who seek only confessions in a novel disregard the inner experiences that linguistic expressions impose upon people. (Mishima 79–81, my translation)

In his reference to this collection of folk-tales, Yukio Mishima is emphasizing J. L. Austin’s “perlocutionary force” in language (Austin), the actual effect an utterance with illocutionary intent has on the addressee. Mishima contends that an author, in the act of writing something, should intend not only to convey a meaning but also to evoke a response from the reader. Hemingway and Mishima, one fatally using a gun and the other a sword, both had obsessive feelings about the relationship between words and reality, even if Mishima wanted to make reality “tremble” thanks to a sharp use of words, while Hemingway was well aware that the actual and direct experience was beyond words.

Thus, what Hemingway conveys to us through “Cat in the Rain” is his obsessive feelings about existential reality. And the sureness of his existence in the world of reality, material and palpable, is what he looked for throughout his world-traveling, big-game hunting, marlin fishing,..., and which was always beyond the words he created. To symbolize this slippery nature of reality beyond words, Hemingway created a linguistic fiction in the guise of a “cat in the rain,” using the above discussed stylistic and narrative devices. This is most evident when the cat is compared with George. Though set within the diegetic world of the story, George’s identity is never questioned because he is placed in the immediate presence of the American woman. The existence of the cat in the rain, in contrast, is questioned because it lacks this immediacy.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

1. Dr. Hisashi Takahashi, Professor Emeritus at Hiroshima University, has suggested that all the hotel rooms are situated on the second floor or above. To the device of distant location, as Yoshifumi Saito (1996) points out, we can add the effect of rain that obscures the cat’s real size.

ABSTRACTS

This article discusses Hemingway’s “Cat in the Rain” by examining the effects produced in the text thanks to the specific stylistic and narrative choices made by Hemingway. Why does an American woman look down from the second-floor room at a cat in the rain, and not from the first-floor window? Why can the cat’s identity be questioned, and not George’s, the woman’s husband? The stylistic and narrative technique used in the story, shows in fact how the writer perceives the relation between language and reality, which, Hemingway suggests, cannot be verbally represented.

Cet article étudie “Cat in the Rain” de Hemingway en analysant les effets produits dans le texte eu égard aux choix stylistiques et narratifs spécifiques faits par Hemingway. Pourquoi une femme américaine regarde-t-elle d’une fenêtre située au deuxième étage un chat sous la pluie, et pas d’une fenêtre située au premier ? Pourquoi l’identité du chat peut-elle être mise en doute, et pas celle de George, le mari de la femme ? La technique narrative et stylistique telle qu’utilisée dans la nouvelle, montre comment l’écrivain perçoit la relation entre le langage et la réalité, laquelle réalité ne peut être représentée verbalement.

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- IV -
Inventing Nature in “Big Two-Hearted River”

Marie-Christine Agosto

1 Philosopher Clément Rosset has written that “the idea of nature is one of the major screens that isolate man from the real, by substituting the complication of an ordered world to the chaotic simplicity of existence” (Rosset 5, translation mine). He has defined nature as a “frame,” a “perennial stance,” a “presence,” aimed at comforting man from being “fragile and insignificant.” His definition finds an echo in the American conception of nature, as American thinkers have always tended to see nature not as a man-centered concept but as a gauge of man’s predicament and capacities. Because it was not shaped by history and could only rest on a geographical and tangible reality to derive its own characteristics from, American culture has developed a strong nature bias. Art and literature have grown from such dynamics as is to be found in nature. It started with the early English-modeled Gothic atmosphere nature was invested with, venting anxiety. It evolved into a political and sacred view of nature in the 19th century that founded the national consciousness, nurtured a sense of belonging and ensured the birth of an autonomous literature. The idea of nature in American literature has thus evolved from a dangerous wilderness to be repressed to an optimistic version of a rich and promising nature, and in the late 19th century a justification in nature of the competitive forces of social Darwinism.

2 At the turn of the century, the first world conflict dramatically opened the frontiers and caused a shift in man’s relationship to nature and in human relationships altogether. Doubt and questioning shaped the modernistic experience and subjectivity of perception came as a response to the sense that the world and outside reality were losing stability and coherence. In that context, Hemingway was one of the first American authors to “internationalize” his representations of nature. His fiction travels through various lands, in a nomadic approach to nature, taking vistas on the rivers, the lakes and the forests of Michigan, the green hills of Africa, the snowy mountain tops of Kilimanjaro and the Alps, the Mediterranean landscapes of Italy and Spain. Hemingway's nature is “deteritorialized” and cannot be encompassed within a politically determined sphere. If there is anything to conquer, then, it is no longer a
mythical and national territory but a human territory. Besides, departing from the romantic sense of the divine, Hemingway’s nature is humanly accessible and is given a universal purport. His objective is to define man through a direct contact with reality in a world that is both strange and homely.

In “Big Two-Hearted River,” one of the best known of Hemingway’s early short stories, nature is given a prominent role. The text is a twofold account of Nick Adams’s solitary fishing trip on the Fox River – the actual name of the river flowing by Seney and which Hemingway changed “purposely,” as he puts it in “The Art of the Short Story,” “not from ignorance or carelessness but because Big Two-Hearted River is poetry” (Oldsey 218). The subject matter of the story easily lends itself to being interpreted as a quest of the vital and regenerative forces of nature. Yet the treatment of the subject has given way to various critical approaches. My analysis will come as one more among the many interpretive layers that have been piling up one upon the other in a thorough exegesis of the text, and will focus first on the idea that nature entices one to a tabula rasa. It is a sine quanon for a true relation of man to nature (and his own nature), which will open up to a physical experience and the apprehension of nature as a measure of time. In “Big Two-Hearted River,” inventing nature is not just imagining it, i.e. conjuring up images, but inhabiting it in a process of self-construction and self-knowledge.

A tabula rasa

The contemporary reading of “Big Two-Hearted River” is loaded with the interpretations expanding on the Lost Generation themes that prevailed from the 1930s through the 1950s. The linearity of the text and its non-eventful dimension – at least for non-fishermen – have both led the critics to find its meaning beyond or below the surface. A story in which hardly anything occurs is likely to raise as many or even more questions than a highly dramatic story. Drawing on the theory of the iceberg stated by Hemingway and according to which seven-eighths of the literary text lie beneath the surface, the critics have stressed the submerged tensions, a feeling of ill-being and oppressive shadows, and have related them to the war trauma. They have made “Big Two-Hearted River” a reflection of a “man with a divided heart” (Lynn 102). To give but a few examples of such critical stances, Philip Young underlines the “monotonous” rhythm of the narrative and considers it the product of a “sick” mind (Young 47). Malcolm Cowley refers to the story as a “walking dream” in a “nightmarish” context (Cowley viii). In his recent comparative analysis of “Big Two-Hearted River” and Jim Harrison’s True North, Terry Engel defends the thesis of the “spiritual healing” of World War I veteran Nick Adams, thus following Cowley’s interpretation that Hemingway’s images are “symbols of an inner world” and Sheridan Baker’s interpretation of the devastated landscape symbolizing Nick Adams’s internal scars (Engel 18). Such readings were corroborated by Hemingway’s late assertions in his 1948 letters to Cowley and to The New York Times, at a time when he probably needed a heroic status: “‘Big Two-Hearted River’ is a story about a boy who has come back from the war. The war is never mentioned though. This may be one of the things that help it” (Lynn 108). Further mention of the deliberate omission of the war is to be found in “The Art of the Short Story,” an unpublished piece dated June 1959 in which Hemingway disclosed some of his theories about the writing of fiction (Oldsey 218). This is precisely where the problem lies. The idea of death is kept in check and the text is teeming with signs of life.
and living elements, taken from the animal and vegetal realms: insects, birds, fish, mammals – and a number of tree species and plants. Besides, explicit references to the war being nowhere to be found and no access to the character's consciousness being granted as a result of Hemingway's deliberately non-subjective stance, a void is created in the text, which leaves free room for biographical and symbolic interpretations. On the one hand, such interpretations mostly rest on the burnt-over country the story opens on and that Nick discovers when getting off the train at Seney, and they analyze it as an image of a “shattering experience,” a “physical and psychic conflagration” entailing the character’s “total disorientation” (DeFalco 147). Nature, then, embodied in the “grasshopper turned black from living in the burned-over land,” would lay bare the stigmata of history. On the other hand, such readings take it for granted that Nick might be Hemingway's autobiographical projection or an alter ego, and they refer the text to the author’s excursion to Seney in 1919. An alternative interpretation associates the implicit trauma lying at the core of the story to the one that is expressed in “Now I Lay Me” (126). In the latter, the narrator suffers from insomnia and has a flashback taking him to a childhood episode when he saw his mother burn the personal belongings of his father. In those analyses, nature is endowed with symbolic, psychologically relevant and emotional connotations, in a psychoanalytical reading that makes up for the silence of the character and the reader's difficulty to explore his consciousness. Most of those critics hold nature as an objective correlative or a metaphor allowing indirect access to the character's subjectivity.

I will personally venture to say that if human history is inscribed in nature, it is rather to be found in the image of the railroad cutting through the land. The train is a recurrent motif in the stories of Nick Adams, to be traced back to Thoreau and related to Anderson who associated it with violent death and with the destructive advance of civilization.4 “The train” is the opening word of Hemingway’s story, echoed by “the swamp” (of which more later) in the last line. As a sign of industrialization, domestication and territorial conquest, it stands for the triumph of history over nature, represents a cultural wound, and plays the role of the mythical stream as a dividing line between two spheres: the urban sphere with the difficult social and personal relationships and the consequent divisions, and the sphere of nature where man is confronted to his own self. In this respect, “Big Two-Hearted River” is opposed to “Hills like White Elephants” where the dialogue between the male and the female characters takes place on the platform of the station – certainly not an urban decor as such, but the nucleus of an urban sphere or a link with urbanization – whereas beyond the rail only hills are to be seen, “like white elephants,” thus turning the natural landscape into a stylistic device, a far away and impossible dream. In the 20th century, nature and urbanization have definitely become interdependent themes. In “Big Two-Hearted River” urban centres have literally disappeared: “The thirteen saloons that had once lined the street of Seney had not left a trace,” and only a “chipped stone […] split by the fire […] stuck up above the ground” where the former Mansion House hotel had been (159).

A tabula rasa on a ground made clear of the past and history is a necessary step leading to the process of confrontation with the elements of nature: water and the earth. The fire – in its residual cinders, perhaps a persistence of matter – might be viewed positively rather than negatively, hinting at purification and renewal rather than destruction and nothingness, or at least bringing along the hope of and belief in a
possible rebirth: “Seney was burned, the country was burned over and changed, but it did not matter. It could not all be burned. He knew that” (161). What is to be recaptured then is a reality on which to build oneself, whatever the reason for this bildung, be it the war or a personal crisis. This gives scope and meaning to the invention of nature. The river, flowing on a precise and geographically identified spot, is this reality. The bildung process is contemplated from a distance (a span of five years separates the writing from the experience that fleshed out the story), and from an outside narrative standpoint, a strategy which contributes to its deliberate precision and accounts for the slow rhythm of the narration, attentive not to be distracted by the character’s feelings. The narrative method is a complex one, combining memory striving for accuracy and the artifice inherent in the artistic gesture of re-creation. Inventing nature also fuels the experience of the character as he discovers life in nature and reaches a limit beyond which reality suddenly makes sense. That is why the river is much more than a symbol, “a terrain of the imagination” (Gibb 257) or “a landscape of the mind” (Adair 260). It makes it manifest that there is something perennial in nature. The simple, straightforward and assertive sentence “The river was there,” in the second paragraph, clearly expresses what meets the eye: the river is a token of permanence. It gives sense, literally, as it serves as a guideline through the text and in the marred land surrounding the character, where he might have felt a stranger. The sense of space is suggested by the repetition of the words “burnt,” “burned,” “burnt-over,” “burned off,” occurring eleven times in the first three pages of the short story. Indeed, one cannot speak of the disorientation of Nick who never loses his bearings. The scientific and cultural measurement of space and time is taken over by nature, the position of the sun and the stream of water: “Nick kept his direction by the sun” (162). “He did not need to get his map out. He knew where he was going from the position of the river” (161).

Nature as a structural force

Standing on the bridge, as on the threshold of initiation, Nick spends a long time observing the spurs of the trout in the current through the mist of gravel and sand. The prismatic diffractions of light caused by the kingfisher flying up the stream and the fish shooting through the surface then back into the water, and the intermittent reflections of their shadows, are briefly responsible for a suspension of time and a cubist fragmentation of the real. The “glassy convex surface of the pool” is like a looking glass inviting Nick to go through, but he remains poised between the fantastic and imaginary sweep and a methodical and patient penetration of the real. Thus distorted shapes underwater do not appear as an anamorphosis of the real but as an effort of accommodation of the eye. The same phenomenon is repeated twice, when Nick stares at the far blue hills of the Lake Superior height of land (161) and again when, lying on his back, he looks up at the sky through the branches of the pine trees and has to shut and open his eyes so that the hills do not disappear (163).

Nick’s initiation in nature does not lead him to revelation but to adjustment. There is no symbolic projection in Hemingway’s text though it may convey symbols and archetypes. His vision does not aim at transforming or going beyond the real and does not try to substitute a disembodied world of ideas for the concrete world of the here and now. His distrust of abstraction and symbolism, which he kept insisting upon even after
the publication of The Old Man and the Sea (albeit the highly symbolic import of this novel), stems from a thrust to see the world as it is. It is the vision of a pragmatist who is not tempted to look behind or beyond to uncover what nature might reflect. Hemingway’s world is not one of transcendence: it is rooted in immanence. In “Big Two-Hearted River,” the gaze guides the character to the awareness of what is and the narrator to the memory of what has been, not to the imagination of what might be. By nature, a metaphoric fiction relies on images building up a reality for the reader, but Hemingway’s fictional reality is a capture of the real and not an imaginary denial of it or strategy of evasion. One can refer to Rosset’s study of memory and imagination, both termed by him “surrogates for perception” or “semi-perceptive faculties.” The difference, he says, is that memory appears as a form of “knowledge of the real,” endowed with a cognitive dimension that accounts for its relative infallibility (notwithstanding occasional failures), as opposed to the “indeterminacy inherent in imagination.” That is why memory is able to re-present the past and re-actualize what has been, whereas imagination works as a purveyor of free images, emancipated from the real (Rosset 88-93, translation mine). The process of representation and re-actualization thus defined by Rosset informs Hemingway’s narrative strategy, intent on both technical and documentary precision – when it comes to facts and gestures – and an acuteness of sensations, transferred to the character of fiction. The consequence is that the relation to nature never takes the fiction into the realm of the virtual: hardly any metaphor or comparison is used, thus avoiding the risk of de-centering a discourse that remains matter-of-fact and favors the basic sentence pattern. There is no slipping out of the actual: the stress is on action, not on contemplation. It is not given a phantasmagorical quality either: no escape into dream is allowed when Nick takes a nap in the pine island or during his night sleep between part I and part II of the short story.

To the terms fusion and communion that might come to mind when describing Nick’s relation to nature, both words being reminiscent of Whitman’s pantheistic mysticism and cosmic exaltation of American space, one will prefer communication or circulation. To the religiously connoted idea of “ritualistic gestures” or “ritualized activity,” alluding to his camp site installation and fishing practice in Carlos Baker’s view of “fishing as a ritual of exorcism and therapy” (Baker, 1972, 126), one will rather oppose the idea of a series of carefully thought about and methodically carried out actions, with full awareness of the goal to be reached. Nick’s patient walking up the stream to strike the right stretch of the river, the laying out of his camp, the cooking of his meal, the securing of his equipment, the catching of hoppers for bait, all contribute to the utmost documentary precision mentioned above. The precision is taken to a professional extreme in the second part of the short story where fishing tackle and tactics are described: fixing the reel, threading the line, tying the leader, baiting the hook, casting and tightening the line, lifting the trout over the bank and cleaning “him” thoroughly in the end by the riverside, not to mention the thrill, excitement and disappointment when feeling the tug on the line or fighting the trout against the current. The realism of this detailed account of the fishing party perfectly meets the documentary needs of specialized angling anthologies. The unexpected use of the modifier in “Nick felt [...] professionally happy” (171, italics mine) testifies, without irony, to the seriousness of the whole affair. It does not preclude a poetic vision – apt and brilliant – of epiphanies in nature, as when the trout rising to insects are “making circles all down the surface of the water as though it were starting to rain” (164).
The nature in “Big Two-Hearted River” is not just a setting or a background ornament. Its description does not fill in blanks and pauses in the narrative. It is not a given landscape but one that is being built from the character's experience and simultaneously with it, as shown by the echoes and parallels in rhythm and vocabulary: “The road ran on [...]. Nick went on up. Finally the road, after going parallel to the burnt hillside, reached the top. [...] Ahead of him, as far as he could see, was the pine plain” (161). The landscape is drawn as the character moves along, in a dynamic description in which nature is endowed with a structural function. Yet, the outlining of the landscape appears close to topographical mapping. It is articulated on horizontal lines (the railroad, the road, the river and the horizon), vertical lines (the pine tree trunks) and oblique lines (the bridge, the uprooted elm trees and branches across the river). The dynamism of the character’s walking through nature sets forth and discloses a landscape that comes alive in its paradoxical balance. In other words, the reader is made to perceive a geometrical ordering of space instead of just feeling a subjective atmosphere and vague impressions. Like Cézanne, whom he highly regarded, Hemingway causes nature to take shape and form. Parallel and perpendicular lines suggest volume and fullness, rising up and sloping down, relief, depth – a construction of space that is rhetorically brought to life through parataxis, repetition, chiasmus and the use of deictic words indicating direction and movement (“down,” “up,” “round,” “on,” “ahead”). To quote James Plath and Meyly Chin Hagemann, among other scholars who focused on Hemingway’s debt to Cézanne’s art, the device consists in “reduc[ing] art forms into geometric planes that create tensions when placed at angles with one another [...] contain[ing] the tension by using overlapping dynamic and static plans; and omit[ting] distracting details that invite literary translation so that spatial forms remain pure” (Hagemann 97, quoted by Plath 163). Far from being stripped down, bare and simple, Hemingway’s landscape is thus a complicated description resulting from a careful pattern of “visual-to-verbal transformation” (Johnston 28-37).

Nature and the body

The structural force of nature propels the text and casts light on a phenomenology of perception. According to Merleau-Ponty (who commented upon Cézanne’s work) the body is a “silent guard” and a centre of perspective. In “Big Two-Hearted River,” the organization of the whole perceptive field is made possible because Nick is used as a mediator and focalizer, in a narrative that relies not on his reason and thought but on his physical presence, with the sensorial functions acting as a link between man and the outside world. Nick relates to nature through his body. It should not be read as a glorification of a supposed male strength or superiority, but a sign of a possible integration into nature. All the senses are involved in the process: sight, touch, taste, smell, and, to a lesser extent, hearing. The only noises to be heard are the humming of the mosquito in the silent night (168) and Nick’s words (he speaks to himself aloud three times, a likely detail even though his voice sounds “strange” in the woods). The silence in which the scene is enclosed brings forth the remembering process and retrospective vision. In the hierarchy of senses, sight and hearing traditionally rank first because they are linked to intellectual and cultural faculties and raise man above his natural instincts. Sight can also be deemed an objective sense as it keeps the beheld object at a distance to make it out and throw it into light, and consequently aims at an elucidation and an ordering of the world. This applies not only to Nick who functions as
a focalizer in the story but also to the outside narrator reordering the experience and who seems to contemplate the scene from above, or from a distance granted by time and memory. If there is any beauty in the nature represented in “Big Two-Hearted River,” it is the beauty of the literary representation. In other words, the aesthetic and moral value of the scene pertains to the narrative stance adopted and should be dissociated from the view of the character, whose experience of nature is a pragmatic one, not a contemplative one, and who is in a position to touch and feel it concretely. There is actually nothing like tactile aesthetics, one would rather speak at the utmost of the pleasure of touch.

The prevalence of senses is a corollary of Hemingway’s anti-intellectual attitude. To quote Merleau-Ponty again: “Perception is neither a beginning science nor an early exercise of intelligence. One must do commerce with the world and be present to the world: this comes prior to intelligence” (Sens et non-sens, 105, translation mine). It is highly relevant that Nick’s adventure at the river should begin with erasing thought, intellectual faculties and needs, save the basic ones, like hunger, thirst and sleep (161-162), and even erasing memory (167). The result is a foregrounding of primary and genuine emotions and sensations before consciousness can resurface in the second part and “his mind start[s] to work” again (168). Only then can images reappear, because they derive from an oblique approach to the real. For example, in the second part when Nick is preparing breakfast, the buckwheat batter spreading on the skillet is compared to lava (170). The comparison resorts to a natural phenomenon but the image produced is borrowed from a distant nature making it obvious that the imagination always tends to slide onto a distant stage.

Non-verbal communication is thrown into relief by Nick’s body reactions. They fill in his silence: his muscles are aching from the heavy pack (in which a hollow from his back is moulded), his shoulders are painful, his arms and legs are stiff and cramped when he wakes up (160, 161, 163). Touch, taste and smell are the senses that relate him with his milieu: he feels the earth on his neck and back (163), he feels the ankle-high sweet fern (162) and, in a synaesthetic combination pointing at the unity of perception, the brown and soft needle floor underfoot (163). He feels his hands wet with dew (169), the cold shock of the water and the current sucking against his leg (171), the gravel sliding under his shoes (171). He is even shown “wriggling his toes in the water in his shoes” (175). His immersion into the vegetal and water elements is not necessarily reminiscent of a “baptismal rite” (DeFalco 150), but is significant of a direct intercourse with the natural elements and a coming to terms with their physical properties: hardness, softness, resistance, temperature. It takes part in the cognitive process. The two examples that follow show how language expresses the continuity between Nick and the outside world: “It was getting hot, the sun hot on the back of his neck” (176). “His shoes felt the gravel. [...] The gravel slid under his shoes” (171). In the first quotation, the description of the physical sensation repeats the information first given impersonally, and it introduces subjectivity. The second quotation deals with one and the same fact, but the perspective shifts from the man to nature. In both instances, Hemingway re-establishes a cause and effect relationship, making up for a cumulative syntax which favors the sequential over the consequential ordering of words and gets rid of the obvious chain of causality articulated by complex sentences.

What can be drawn from this is that the character’s simplicity of experience is paradoxically not matched by the simplicity of expression. Minimalism is a language
artifice. Juxtaposition of assertive clauses and the crisscross pattern created by repetition of words and echoes put into perspective the life force flowing through all things in nature, outside any act of will. This is what Nick and the reader are both meant to feel. Nick inhabits the world and he “inhabits his body” – to quote from Thoreau. Knowledge is also brought to him through taste and smell, like the smell of the sprigs of crushed heathery sweet fern (162, 164), the smell of the canvas (165), or the smell of the hot beans and spaghetti (166). His combined reaction to smell and temperature anticipates his reaction to taste: he reacts to the bitterness of the coffee or to the sweetness of the juice syrup of the apricots (167, 168). Such details about his camp site or his food are not superfluous or incongruous with the subject. They underline how the contact with the reality of nature induces heimlichkeit, a homely feeling: “Already there was something mysterious and homelike. […] He was in his home where he had made it” (165). Contrary to the romantic sweep toward the sublime in nature that takes man away from the familiar, everything in Hemingway’s story, including the fishing activity itself, pertains to a down-to-earth experience opened on self-knowledge and the knowledge of the world. In Merleau-Ponty’s words: “Feeling is a vital intercourse with the world: it makes it present and homely” (Phénoménologie, 64-65, translation mine).

Nature as a measure of time

Hemingway’s character is involved in “a vital intercourse” with the elements of nature. To some extent, and quite paradoxically, one may borrow the words used by Deleuze to discuss Whitman’s relation to nature – not in the cosmic poems of Leaves of Grass, but in the fragmented prose of Specimen Days. Dealing with “The Oaks and I,” Deleuze underlines how Whitman and nature “wrestle together.” Whitman is involved in an “athletic intercourse with the trees: it is no fusion or confusion, but an exchange. They go hand in hand” (Deleuze 79). Except for the benefit of virtue to be drawn from nature (as “the sap and sinew rising through [the poet], like mercury to heat” shows), Nick’s relation to nature is of the same kind. His practice of the trout fishing sport is certainly physical, all the more so as the use of grasshopper for bait instead of artificial fly implies a hand contact. Nevertheless, there is no real “exchange” or “interchange” as in Whitman’s nature where, to quote Deleuze: “The notions of fellowship and conviviality […] grow from a network of living relations between heterogeneous living units” (Deleuze 79). Fellowship is certainly not customary in Hemingway’s representation of nature. His fiction integrates an idea of conflict inherent to the law of nature. Yet the story is not a stage of rugged competition or a display of violence, but conveys the acceptation of the law of nature as exhibited in the food chain suggested by the kingfisher watching his prey and the minks feeding on the trout offal – a law of nature which is dramatized in a more tragic way in The Old Man and the Sea. Besides, a necessary respect for the balance of nature is intimated when Nick does not keep the small trout and is careful to wet his hand so as not to disturb the protective mucus (173). Hemingway’s concern is undoubtedly not with the environmental defense but with the truth of existence whose recognition may confer a form of wisdom.

15 Nature as a measure of time

16 In The Old Man and the Sea, Santiago is one element in the vast chain of living species. His fate is linked to that of the marlin pursued by the sharks. He even calls him “my brother.” They are literally in the same boat. In The Old Man and the Sea a limit has been
transgressed which hastens the tragedy. Like Santiago, Nick accepts the hostility of the world but he avoids the swamp. His choice of fishing downstream highlights his determination to face the dangerous current, holes, and obstacles, until he gets to the critical curve, beyond the boulders, where the river becomes marly and where moving is hampered with tree roots and green weed fronds swinging in the current. The swamp feeds the biggest trout, an anticipation of the so long-expected marlin, himself a degraded version of the mythical sea monster. Yet, if the swamp gives life, it is also a place of death and sinking into layers of deposit, where trout feed and grow on vegetable and animal remains, a terrifying tangle hiding the untamed secret of nature: “In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure” (179). At this point of the story, signs of rigidity and the fixity of death come into contrast with the fluidity of the living elements: “The swamp looked solid [...], the branches solid [...] you could not crash through the branches” (179). Nick’s instinctive refusal to fish the swamp originates from a deeply rooted fear of being sucked down, as suggested in the following excerpt: “He felt a reaction against deep wading into the water deepening up under his armpits” (179, italics mine). Here is the submerged seven-eighths of the iceberg: it is the unsaid, hidden truth, under the surface of the swamp, deep down into the unknown and pointing to the reality of death, underneath.

Death is integrated into the representation of nature, partaking in the process of transformation and growth, and in the phenomenon of decomposition and dissolution. Individual human death is put into perspective against a larger background of mineral, vegetal and animal death. Nevertheless, aseptic death (smells do not betray the putrefaction of things) lies beyond the text. It is a future step to take, a third part to be unfolded later, or a new page not yet written, but it is also an inevitable stage hinted at, in a constant development that stands as a modern version of fate: “There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp” (180). The unresolved tension of “Big Two-Hearted River” originates from there. Placed where it originally was, at the end of In Our Time, the story provided the collection with an open ending. Yet, as it is, it definitely holds on to the vital impulse, for it is not a work of maturity but of maturation. With its chronological development, its binary rhythm following the walking tempo or the breathing pattern, and modelled on biological and physiological phenomena, it is a vision of a man embodied in temporality. Nature is what he measures time by, a linear and not a cyclical time, for nature in Hemingway’s work does not lure anyone with a dream of eternity.

As a distant heir to the adamic hero celebrated by 19th century American thinkers, Nick Adams is in quest of his truth, if not the transcendental truth, and he is given birth and learns life in nature. Hemingway’s nature is embodied in the landscape, the biological milieu, the reality of the surrounding world, inevitably incomplete, personal and fragmentary, for his experience of the river is a fisherman’s, not a miller’s or a gold seeker’s. His nature is concrete, tangible and alive, and demonstrates that “the idea of nature is but an ideological fantasy: it does not belong to the realm of ideas but to the realm of desire” (Rosset 25, 311). As such, it combines a desire of order and a call for sense. In Hemingway’s work, from “Big Two-Hearted River” to The Old Man and the Sea, nature is always a stumbling stone, a test of endurance and strength, shaping self-knowledge, self-definition and acceptation of existence, and above all the recognition of life’s tragic ending. Nick’s trout fishing experience is not the story of a solitary escape into nature or a romantic withdrawal into self, but an experience of confrontation and elucidation, in the etymological sense of becoming “lucid”, i.e. calm,
clear and wise. Rather than an abstract or symbolic initiation, it accounts for a salutary process of integration into nature, which necessitates a close and direct contact and leads to a recognition of human nature and a reconciliation with oneself. As in Walden, nature is associated to the human experience, as a positive reference contrasting with the lures of society, and as a guide in man’s individual quest. Taken thus, inventing nature does not only imply making it up or/and discovering it, but re-creating it as a regained paradigm. Above all it implies making it one’s home, in an endeavor to recapture such precious moments as those that were recalled by Thoreau in his Journal when he said: “I can remember that I was all alive, and inhabited my body with inexpressible satisfaction.”

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NOTES

1. Borrowed from Gilles Deleuze, the ideas of “territory” and “detrimentalisation” are to be understood with reference to ethology rather than politics. “Detrimentalisation” means more than moving away from a geographical space or from an objectively delineated and identifiable territory. It has an existential value and implies moving toward and into a “new land,” an area of self-fulfillment and personal involvement.

2. The text was written in the summer of 1924, when Hemingway was in Paris. It appeared in May 1925 in the first issue of Ernest Walsh’s literary magazine, This Quarter, and in October of the same year in Hemingway’s first collection of short stories, In Our Time.

3. In September 1919, Hemingway, although he still suffered from a leg injury received the year before at Fossalta di Piave, on the Italian front, had set out with two friends of his (Al Walker and Jack Pentecost) for the last camping and fishing party of the summer. They had gone up to Seney, in the Northern part of the Michigan peninsula, fifteen miles from Lake Superior. Seney actually was the ghost town described by Hemingway. A former station on the railroad built in 1885 between Saint Ignace and Marquette for the transportation of timber, Seney (so called after the name of one of the company’s managers, George L. Seney, from New York) had quickly developed into an accommodation centre for lumbermen. But the town had been destroyed by forest fires twice in the period from 1891 to 1895. In 1919, the town was deserted. The river flowing through Seney is the Fox River; the Big Two-Hearted River is a smaller one flowing north and east (Baker, 1969, 86). See also and “History of Seney” (Detroit Free Press, June 18, 1963) 4B.

4. In Sherwood Anderson’s Winesburg, Ohio, many characters are killed in train accidents. In Thoreau’s Journal, the train crystallizes the writer’s impatience with his fellowmen’s eagerness to take part in the gold rush (“September 28th”). See Walden (62).

5. It should be noted that if Hemingway’s landscapes have always been inspired by his own experience, he has always described them from a distance in space and time, not only for the benefit of hindsight, but needing the quiet recollection to give sense and meaning to the aesthetic construction. The idea of “photographic realism” with its implication of immediacy, is obviously not adequate (and highly debatable in itself). Yet, memory is not just an act of imagination either, but an act of re-presentation of reality, necessarily subjective and possibly distorted.

6. Hemingway’s admiration for Cezanne is explicit in “On Writing.” This story, now an autonomous one, was initially intended as a conclusion to “Big Two-Hearted River.” Hemingway cut it out before publication: “He knew just how Cezanne would paint this stretch of river. God, if only he were here to do it […]. Nick, seeing how Cezanne would do the stretch of river and the swamp, stood up and stepped down into the stream” (219).
7. In a paper devoted to the role of Nature in literary modernism and postmodernism, Dana Phillips examines Hemingway’s evocations of sport and writes that sport, particularly so-called “blood sport” (bullfighting, big-game hunting, fishing, war), serves Hemingway as a “vehicle for his version of the modernistic project: the affirmation of the self in a transcendent moment of realization in which the dross of culture (language, sexuality, history) is clarified, melting away to reveal the roots of culture in nature, and human nature.” His extensive definition of sport, including war, is questionable, but I will certainly agree with his demonstration that Nick Adams’s trout fishing aims at a basic transformation possible only through the physical presence of nature, and in nature. In postmodernist literature and experience, Phillips argues, “representation has supplanted presence” and also lacks the contemplative quality of Hemingway’s texts, inherited from “an older bygone tradition of sport fishing (Walton, Thoreau), of which Hemingway now appears as a final avatar” (Phillips 206).

8. In “On Writing,” Hemingway presents the creative act not as an act of conscience but as a peristaltic action. Expanding on the physiological image, Chaman Nahal analyses the alternation of action and inactivity, in “Big Two-Hearted River,” as a diastolic and systolic pattern, the pulsation of the heart echoing the pulsation of the universe (Nahal 101-108).

ABSTRACTS

The article re-examines one of the best-known and most controversial of Hemingway’s short stories, “Big Two-Hearted River,” a story that has often been read in the light of the Lost Generation themes, as one step in Nick Adams’s education. As an alternative reading, the present analysis focuses on the representation of nature through Nick’s perceptive experience, but also through the narrator’s and the reader’s. Leaving aside the symbolic analysis of nature inherited from 19th century thought, it stresses the importance of the body and senses in the human relation to the non-human world. It shows how nature, taking shape in the landscape, the biological milieu, the surrounding living reality, determines a cognitive process of apprehension and penetration of the real, and enhances a poetics of the homely in a precise, deliberate working out of meaning. Inventing nature thus implies accepting reality – however incomplete and fragmentary – and adjusting to it and to the reality of existence.

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“Circles Breaking the Smooth Surface”: Repetition and Narrative Folds in Hemingway’s Early Michigan Stories

Marie-Odile Salati

1 A recurrent image in Hemingway’s early fishing stories, “The end of something” and “Big Two-Hearted River,” has more than an accidental ornamental function and provides access to an understanding of deep patterns of meaning. “Circles breaking the smooth surface” of the water, as a trout leaps from the dark depths of the liquid element, may be considered as a metaphorical expression referring to the similar folds bred by repetition in the deceptively simple linear narrative as it enters a phase of emotional turbulence. A close analysis of narrative structure and discourse reveals that the stories proceed through concentric circles narrowing down to the central experience of loss, which can only be approached by means of repetition. The present study focuses on the Michigan stories of the first collection In Our Time (1925), with the addition of the earlier piece “Up in Michigan” written in 1921, initially published in Three Stories and Ten Poems in 1923 and later inserted among the other short stories in The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories (1938), which is quite close in inspiration and composition. After emphasizing the significant presence of duality and duplication in most openings as well as of related images of division, understood as metaphorical expressions of the difference introduced into the protagonist’s inner world by the experience of loss, I will show how a consistent process of repetition sets in to combat the resulting anxiety. On the one hand repetition in the narrative structure eases the final shock through displacement and prolepsis, on the other hand lexical and phonic repetition provides relief through circularity.

2 Duality seems to be the ruling principle at work when the stories open, and significantly it climaxes at the end of In Our Time, since the final piece is conceived as a diptych and flaunts its inner division in its very title, “Big Two-Hearted River.” The pattern is however well established from the earliest stories, in which it is seen to
affect both the composition of the setting and key elements in the diegetic situation. From the outset, the tension, which will come to a head later on, is reflected in the polarity underlying the description of the spatial environment of the protagonists.

The everyday life of Liz Coates, the inexperienced domestic helper in “Up in Michigan,” unfolds between the two opposite thresholds of the front door opening onto a dull standardized main street, and of the back door offering a glimpse of the bay beyond the humdrum world of household chores. Duality in the spatial structure, further supported by that in the time scheme, which shifts from the innocent glory of “the spring and summer” to the anticlimactic “fall” (60) when the crisis breaks out, conveys the tension roused by the intrusion of desire through “the back door” into the life of the conventional girl, in the form of the manly new blacksmith Jim Gilmore.

Yearning is introduced metaphorically through the call of the bay “down the hill” of natural inclination, across the lake to the unknown world “out of sight beyond the point” (60), and makes its way into the text through the symptomatic reverberation of the alliteration echoing the word “bay”: “The blue and bright and usually whitecaps on the lake out/behind the point from the breeze blowing from Charlevoix and Lake Michigan. From Smith’s back door Liz could see more barges way out in the Lake going toward Boyne City” (60, emphasis mine). The initial plosive consonant links together words related to the appeal of the colorful space beyond and to irresistible motion, whether of the escaping barges or of the natural force of the breeze ruffling the smooth surface of Liz’s world.

The opening of “The End of Something,” again set in Hortons Bay, is similarly governed by duality and reproduces the same pattern of opposition between the shore and the world beyond the bay, to which the soul of the lumber town had been conveyed ten years earlier. The end of the town’s activity, which prefigures that of the couple’s relationship, was once signaled by the removal of “the two great saws,” and the scenery now facing the protagonists is only “the swampy second growth” (79). The sequel to this story, “The Three-Day Blow,” also mentions “the second-growth timber” (85) and puts into place a sharply contrasted spatial framework relying on the pairs up/down, front/back, here/beyond, inside/outside. After his unhappy love relationship with Marjorie, Nick tries to find his bearings as the narrative focus sweeps back and forth across the setting before withdrawing into the warm shelter of Bill’s cottage.

A marked pattern of duality is also at work in the conception of the initial diegetic situation. The most striking illustration is to be found in the opening paragraphs of “Indian Camp” (67). Duplication affects the components of the scene – “two Indians,” “two boats” –, the situation in space and syntax. Nick and his father in one boat, Uncle George in the other, occupy the same position in the stern, a symmetry underscored by the near word-for-word repetition of the descriptive statement. Further on, space inside the Indian cabin is structured by vertical division into a “lower bunk” and an “upper bunk” (68), while conflict is heralded by the surface thematic polarity of light and darkness, ignorance and knowledge, man and woman.

In order to stage the unexpected meeting between Jim Gilmore, the sensual horseshoer, and Liz Coates, the tidy nondescript upcountry help, the narrator of “Up in Michigan” introduces the two protagonists separately in two successive paragraphs, along two parallel lines which meet only in the third paragraph under the effect of the girl’s awakening sexuality. Duplication also prevails in the narrative situation of “The End of Something” as tension builds up towards the impending separation. The focus is
repeatedly set on the two fishing-lines, each equipped with two hooks, and the same operations of skimming the bait and of dropping the line are gone through twice in the same meticulous order (80).

8 The motif of duality is further supported by the imaginative suggestions of recurrent images related to the notion of partition. In the Michigan landscape, the surface – of the water or of the land – is often broken through or cut across; it has lost its reassuring smoothness or unity. In moments of emotional strain for the protagonist, attention is drawn to an object forming a straight line across his surroundings. The openings of “The Battler” and of “Big Two-Hearted River” are extremely close in this respect. Nick’s gaze focuses on the railway tracks ahead as he tries to get over his rage at having been kicked off the train by the brakeman, or to recover from his pained surprise on finding the dear old country burnt over. In both cases, he sets off along that dividing line and several mentions are made of the identical landscape on either side: “The swamp was all the same on both sides of the track” (98); “turned off around a hill with a high, fire-scarred hill on either side” (164). In “Big Two-Hearted River,” the sense of division is even more dramatically set off by another line running across the fishing country, the fire-line, which Nick has to walk across in order to leave all tension behind.

9 A similar effect is produced by the fishing-line etched out against the surface of the water. In “The End of Something,” the unhappy lover watches it go taut, an indication of the growing tension that will lead to his separation from Marjorie: “He reeled in the slack line so the line ran taut out to where the bait rested on the sandy floor of the channel and set the click on the reel” (80). Significantly the peaceful mood linked with the smooth sand gives way to a dizzy sensation produced by the circular motion of the reel. The significance of the line is made even more explicit in the second part of “Big Two-Hearted River”: “Nick struck and the rod came alive and dangerous, bent double, the line tightening, coming out of the water, tightening, all in a heavy, dangerous, steady pull. Nick felt the moment when the leader would break if the strain increased and let the line go” (176). The image of the line is thus fraught with suggestions of tension and of the danger of breaking, which are brought to a climactic intensity through repetition a few paragraphs further on.

10 Another version of the dividing line is to be found in the frequently emphasized motif of the edge, occasionally the edge of the track or of the trees (“The Battler,” 97-98), but most of the time the water’s edge. The first words opening “Indian Camp” mention the “lake shore,” which is the starting point of young Nick’s disturbing initiation into suffering and death. Conversely “the edge of the dock,” where Liz “looks down to the water” (62), signals the end of the girl’s romantic illusions after her disappointing experience of male lust. The boat of the estranged couple in “The End of Something” hugs the shoreline, only to be confronted with a metaphoric prefiguration of the impending disaster: “They were trolling along the edge of the channel bank where the bottom dropped off suddenly from sandy shallows to twelve feet of dark water” (79). A sense of threat is conveyed by the association of depth, darkness, and break. It is not fortuitous that the protagonist should be called by the nickname “Wemedge” by his friend Bill in the following story (85), as the second syllable of the word is a reminder of his emotional predicament.

11 The surface of the characters’ environment is affected by another significant accident besides the dividing line – it is broken through in moments of strain. At the precise
moment in “The End of Something,” when the narrator records Marjorie’s enjoyment of fishing, which is about to be ruined by Nick’s accusatory remarks, the surface of the water is ruffled by a trout leaping out. The descriptive statement, with its emphasis on the notion of breaking (“a big trout broke the surface of the water”), follows hard upon the mention of the girl’s contentment, ominously expressed by a stammering syntax: “She loved to fish. She loved to fish with Nick” (80). The addition of the detail that introduces the difference, surreptitiously points to the hitch in the situation and brings the crisis to a head by triggering the youth’s disagreement.

Nick’s anxiety on being confronted with loss in the cherished old country is conveyed much in the same way at the beginning of “Big Two-Hearted River” (163-164). The water surface is suddenly broken by a violent act of partition performed by a leaping trout (“shot upstream”), and connected with the unsettling image of the shadow – the word recurs four times in the paragraph – along with tension (“tightened” used twice). The occurrence is duplicated later when Nick’s evening dinner and then his morning breakfast, sizzling in the frying pan, are strewn with “bubbles.” In both instances, something threatening deep down is rising to the surface and the protagonist’s purpose throughout will be to remain in control. It seems consistent to ascribe the same meaning to the bump which Nick’s violent expulsion from the train brought to his forehead in “The Battler” (97). Significantly he cannot see it reflected in the dark water (“He wished he could see it. Could not see it looking into the water, though. It was dark and he was a long way off from anywhere”, 97), as it is only a symptom of his upcoming confrontation with his fellow sufferer and potential double, Ad the boxer, himself afflicted with similar distortions, which the inverting process of reflection has turned into hollows or missing parts: “His nose was sunken, his eyes were slits”; “where the other ear should have been there was a stump” (99).

Therefore, the recurrence of the adjective “smooth” should not come as a surprise, conveying as it does a character’s yearning for a unified surface unaffected by difference, in other words his wish to abolish the dividing line or the rough edges. Following Freud’s analysis of the displacement of trauma in Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety, I suggest that the split affecting the protagonist’s perception of his surroundings results from the traumatic experience of loss, which manifests itself through displacement in the symptom of repetition and that the consciousness means to erase by returning to an anxiety-free state prior to the difference. A scene from “Big Two-Hearted River: Part II,” the part devoted to Nick’s psychological recovery, seems emblematic in this respect. The character has just been disproportionately shaken by his failure to catch an oversized trout and is taking a rest in order to make up for the loss of the fish, which is twice expressed in terms of breaking, and should be understood as a symbolic repetition of an older, more serious loss. His recovery from disappointment is then prepared for by the repetition of the word “smooth,” in a general mood of pleasant connotations such as harmless shallow waters and warm sunlight. The appearance of the adjective takes him back to an earlier moment before the disturbing episode, when repetition is used to establish the serenity of the water kept under control: “Ahead was the smooth dammed-back flood of water above the logs. The water was smooth and dark [...]” (176).

The attempt to erase difference is explicit in “The Three-Day Blow,” where it is ascribed to Bill, the friend from whom Nick seeks solace after his separation from Marjorie:
“What’s the difference?” Bill said judicially.
“I don’t know. There’s a difference.”
“I don’t see it,” said Bill. (91)

In spite of Bill’s confident denial, the unhappy lover, who has just gone through the painful experience of loss, is vaguely aware of the irreparable rift which means that his life will never be like before, and that the painful event will go on reverberating in his mind, as suggested by the narrative repetitions, which provide an implicit contradiction to the loud conscious assertions of erasure. In Bill’s eyes, the crisis is “over” and he uses the word in a sense of closure, whereas Nick’s use of the term in “all of a sudden everything was over” highlights the irremediable nature of the loss, thus implying the inevitable repercussions that he will have to cope with, in other words the process of repetition in which he is caught and that he symptomatically expresses through analogy: “Just like when the three-day blows come now and rip all the leaves off the trees” (91). This allusion to the title of the story is a reminder that any new experience of loss is nothing but a repetition of a radical and more essential deprivation, whose ultimate form is death. Only drinking, then, can deceptively effect the hoped-for erasure through oblivion. As Nick cannot reconcile Bill’s view and his own, he lamely concludes: “‘All right,’ said Nick. ‘Let’s get drunk.’ ” (91)

Therefore the motifs of duality and division, prevailing in the opening paragraphs of most of the stories under study, metaphorically point to the difference occasioned by the harrowing experience of loss disclosed towards the end. Simultaneously, a distinct pattern of repetition and echoes paves the way for the final crisis, which proves to be the ultimate signified at which all the preceding simulacra have been driving, the central trauma which, according to Gilles Deleuze, can only be confronted through repetition as it is banned from representation.

A consistent strategy of mise en abyme is noticeable before the central event itself is staged. In a number of stories, the theme of loss later to be dramatized is encoded in the setting described in the beginning. As mentioned earlier on, the persistent gale that strips the trees of Bill’s orchard in “The Three-Day Blow” metaphorically introduces Nick’s sense of deprivation on parting with Marjorie. In the same way the act of desertion, which the protagonist is to commit at the end of the preceding story, “The End of Something,” is foreshadowed by the initial sketch of the desolate locale of the episode, the ghost lumber town of Hortons Bay. The emphasis on removal (“carried away,” “taken out,” “carrying with it everything that had made the mill a mill”), ruins (“nothing of the mill left,” “broken,” “our old ruin,” with the unwittingly prophetic use of the possessive adjective) and solitude (“deserted”) suggests that the old town is showing the protagonist a reflection of the situation which awaits him after the cleavage (79). Liz Coates’ awakening sexuality in “Up in Michigan” is similarly encoded in the description of the beckoning bay, which lies beyond the humdrum everyday world and dangles the prospect of escape with its gliding barges.

Another aspect of mise en abyme is to be found in the narrative structure of the stories, which relies on the repetition of the same signified – the experience of loss – dramatized in a variety of peripheral situations until it finally affects the protagonist. Critics have already pointed out that this forms the main connection between each story and the short war vignette preceding it, but the same pattern of echoes is also at work within the main body of the stories. The central crisis never bursts out
unexpectedly, it is carefully prepared for by a succession of proleptic elements, the consequence being that when it actually happens, the meaning is already all there.

The composition of “Up in Michigan” is particularly illustrative in this respect. The successive scenes on which the narrative focuses are nothing but adumbrations of the final disaster: the unromantic seduction scene is prefigured by the episode of the men’s drinking binge, which is itself a repetition of the return from the hunt with its emphasis on the lifeless animals. The strategy is carried out in a subtle way, mostly by relying on the duplicity of language, thus supporting Deleuze’s assumption that repetition implies disguise. The multiple sexual innuendoes of the story have already received critical attention, thus highlighting the thematic unity of the piece. The picture of the deer with “their legs sticking stiff over the edge of the wagon” (60), proleptically turns Liz into the future victim of Jim’s lust, a suggestion confirmed by her own rigidity as he fondles her in the kitchen (“She held herself stiff because she was so frightened,” 61), then, later on, by the focus on his big hand moving “on her leg” (62), itself no surprise after the early mention of the girl’s “good legs” in the second introductory paragraph. The phrase “three big shots” used to refer to the glasses of whisky recalls the animal prey, to which Liz herself draws attention (“Did you shoot it, Jim?” Liz asked,” followed by the equivocal reply “Yeah. Ain’t it a beauty?”” 60), and so does Jim’s effort to heave the jug of whisky, which is reminiscent of his unloading of the wagon, as further underscored by the [ŋ] assonance pairing together “buck” and “jug” (“It was hard to lift such a big jug up; “one was a big buck. It was stiff and hard to lift out of the wagon,” 60-61). At the same time, the precise notations about Jim’s handling and hedonistic enjoyment of the drink could equally apply to the sex act to come (“there was quite a little slopped back and forth in the bottom. Jim took a long pull,” 61), while the men’s toast heralds the final failure through its emphasis on missed opportunities (“Here’s all the ones we missed”). Therefore, from the moment Jim lays his hands on the stiffening girl, the whole story clicks into place and the last event is nothing but a vast repetition, creating an impression of déjà-vu.

Other stories strikingly exemplify the mechanism of displacement characteristic of repetition, since the beginning of the narrative, which records an experience of human suffering and inflicted violence, turns out to be only a prefiguration of a more dramatic event. The center of interest is thus displaced, as if the actual purpose of the tale could not be approached directly on account of its unbearable import, and could only be viewed through the mediation of an emotionally more acceptable avatar. “Indian Camp” is a typical example of this strategy. The caesarian, harrowing as it is, proves to be only a preparation for a more unendurable event, the gory suicide of the father. The apparent return to normal after the sewing up of the incision, which reassuringly erases the gaping wound, is brutally annihilated by a second irreparable incision, the repetitive effect of which is underscored by the duplication in the descriptive phrase used: “His throat had been cut from ear to ear” (69). The disturbing return of the same has moreover been foreshadowed throughout the narrative by the recurrent act of watching, turned into a real leitmotiv by the haunting repetition of the same verb, with a crescendo in the serious nature of the object under observation – the doctor washing his hands, the operation, the sewing, the Indian father’s slit throat.

“The Battler” follows a similar pattern of climactic narrative repetition. The opening of the story misleadingly focuses on Nick’s misadventure on the train; however the dramatic interest is soon displaced to a mirror figure who has been the unhappy victim
of experiences too distressing to involve the protagonist himself. Each new misfortune seems to be the end of the story until it is superseded by a more pathetic one. The account thus rebounds from Nick’s painful expulsion from the train and subsequent bump, to the boxer’s mutilated face after innumerable fights – the reverberating effect between the two being underlined by the common use of the verb “to bust” in the two cases (98, 99) – , finally to the desertion of the wretch by the beautiful woman he loved. The physical maiming then proves to be only an outward reflection of an emotionally crippling process, which relates the stranger to earlier avatars of Nick, in stories like “The End of Something” and “The Three-Day Blow.”

The recurrent narrative pattern of the stories therefore seems to be an attempt to use repetition to draw nearer to the hard core of the experience of loss. The structure of “The Three-Day Blow” specifically takes on the form of concentric circles around a central void, an unbearably painful subject which long goes unmentioned, until it has been sufficiently prepared for and can finally rise to the surface of conscious speech. The purpose of Bill and Nick’s desultory conversation appears to be to hit on topics as remote as possible from the protagonist’s unspoken current concern. They thus start off an idle discussion on baseball until they discard it when they feel safe with the subject of fishing, which is closely related to the sensitive matter of the break with Marjorie: “How did we ever get talking about baseball?” (90). However, when they are supposed to be concerned with baseball, Nick manages to return to the subject of fishing (88), which is a way of talking around Marjorie, the absent figure that haunts his unveiled thoughts, as suggested by his failure to recognize his own reflection in the mirror and his determination to brush aside its blatant difference (89). The conversation also drifts to such perilously close themes as loss and compensation (“He’s missed a lot,” “everything’s got its compensations,” “he says he’s missed a lot himself,” Nick confessed” 89, my emphasis). Finally, by dint of repetition – the same phrases said all over again, the same action of filling the glasses and drinking toasts performed again and again, so as to establish the reassuring order of a ritual – the situation is ripe. The heart of the matter can now be broached (“‘You were very wise, to bust off that Marge business,’” 90), first by Bill only, as Nick remains silent, a fact reported four times. Then Nick himself joins in and eventually warms to the idea or delusion that loss is not irremediable.

Repetition, as it manifests itself in the narrative structure of the stories, thus proves to be the symptom, the displaced expression of the unspeakable experience, and as such, it acts as a form of relief. “The Battler” highlights the necessity of reenacting the initial trauma in a different version. Ad invites Nick to repeat the act that left the boxer maimed for the rest of his life: “‘Hit me,’ he moved his head. ‘Try and hit me’” (101). The young man’s refusal to humor him unleashes his anger and pent-up frustration, and the former sportsman’s reply is pregnant with meaning: “‘You won’t get out of it that way. You’re going to take a beating, see? Come on and lead at me’” (102). The implication is that there is no evading the situation, the earlier scene has to be gone through again whether the protagonist wants it or not, repetition is unavoidable.

Significantly, the act of violence is finally committed again, not by Nick however but by Bugs, the tramp’s faithful companion and nurse, so that repetition may indeed provide its relief while being careful not to deepen the original wound: “‘I didn’t want you to hurt him or mark him up no more than he is,’” explains the black man (102). The purpose is to concede some gentle gratification to the obsessed suffering wretch but
not to renew the trauma itself, to repeat the scene only to avoid representation. Repetition is a means of driving the trauma out of the consciousness: appropriately enough, Nick is encouraged to vanish before Ad comes back to his senses, and Bugs assures him, unsurprisingly “in a low, smooth, polite nigger voice” (my emphasis), that the boxer will have no memory of the blow. The beating, which has come to be the usual solution in similar circumstances, is presented as a compulsive action (“I have to do it”) meant to bring about difference, in order to make life bearable (“to change him when he gets that way.”) It thus has all the characteristics of a Freudian symptom, and it indeed turns out to be the symptom of a more serious experience of loss, from which the boxer seems never to have recovered, the desertion of the woman he loved: “He was busting people all the time after she went away” (103).

25 A similarly soothing effect is achieved through lexical and phonic repetition, which clearly works as an act of reparation in “Big Two-Hearted River: Part II.” The tension, which has built up during the unsuccessful struggle against the oversized trout and climaxed in the loss of the fish, is gradually eased by means of a lengthy elliptic sentence coiling up upon itself in successive folds:

He sat on the logs, smoking, drying in the sun, the sun warm on his back, the river shallow ahead entering the woods, curving into the woods, shallows, light glittering, big water-smooth rocks, cedars along the bank and white birches, the logs warm in the sun, smooth to sit on, without bark, gray to the touch; slowly the feeling of disappointment left him. It went away slowly, the feeling of disappointment that came sharply after the thrill that made his shoulders ache. It was all right now. (177, emphasis mine)

26 The discourse is propelled by the mechanics of repetition as it bounces off new combinations involving the basic elements of the setting (“logs,” “sun,” “woods”) and descriptive adjectives with a positive connotation (“warm,” “shallow,” “smooth”). At the same time, it is sped up by the mere juxtaposition of increasingly shorter segments and by the increasingly elliptic mode of the style, achieved through the cumulation of echoing non-conjugated verbs in the “ing” form, which are eventually dropped altogether to leave only nominal groups. The effect produced comes close to an incantation, further underscored by the alliteration in “back,” “big,” “bank,” “birches,” “bark.” The tension is thus lulled to sleep until the revved-up discourse pauses, as indicated by the semi-colon, and then engages in an anticlimax, signaled by the return to ordinary syntax as well as by the semantic content of the statement. The final repetition materializes the completed loop in the chiasmus of its arrangement, which makes it possible to initiate a backward process leading back to the happy moment before the loss, thus annihilating the turbulent intervening time.

27 Nick is then ready to go through a repetition of the fishing experience that will be crowned with success this time, and will consequently obliterate the unsettling episode. The coming reparation, before he can toss the line “back over his shoulder and forward,” in other words start the process again and move on, is prepared for in a paragraph ruled by phonic repetition. The starting point is significantly the sight of an uprooted elm, which may be read as an objective correlative of the defeated and shattered protagonist, as implied by the profusion of harsh plosive consonants in the description of its helplessness (“its roots clotted with dirt, grass growing in them”). At first, the felled tree is surrounded with ominous images of depth (“deep channels,” “deep water”), and of division (“cut,” “edge,” “ruts”), enhanced by the sharp sound effects of monosyllabic words and of the [ʌ] assonance. Then the suggestions of danger
are undermined by the soothing effect of phonic repetition, which weaves the two together and mingles them with gentler sounds into a subsiding murmur: “Between the ruts of deep water green weed fronds swung in the current” (177). The tense vowel \( i: \) combines with the approximant \( w \) to soften the statement and neutralize the rough [\( \underline{\Lambda} \)] of “ruts” and “current,” or in “swung,” on which the reversal hinges. From then on, Nick is in control and is himself the subject of the repeated verb “swung,” with which the whole experience of fishing is started over again.

28 Another meaningful instance of soothing phonic repetition is found at the very beginning of “The Battler,” after Nick has been kicked off the train: “He went over to the edge of the track down the little slope to the water and washed his hands. He washed them carefully in the cold water, getting the dirt out from the nails” (97). The imaginative situation is surprisingly close to the preceding example, with the common elements of the ominous “edge” and of the dirt connected with the victim. The two key words conveying the desire for reparation, “water” and “washed,” are linked together by the same soft initial syllable and repeated in a chiasmus in the next sentence, in which they frame the harsh \( k \) alliteration in “carefully” and “cold,” thus producing another chiasmus.

29 The circularity established in this way foregrounds the actual meaning of the action, which aims at cleansing the hero of the negative experience of violent loss, as further suggested by his attempt to take the dirt out of his system, in order to return to a former state of integrity. The purpose is the same as the meticulous, ritualistic operation of cleaning the trout in “Big Two-Hearted River: Part II.” This form of exorcism then makes it possible for the protagonist to confront the painful scene again through a flashback, a repetition of the traumatic event, itself signaled by another symptomatic material repetition, that of the sentence which trapped the unfortunate hobo – “I got something for you.” It is not accidental that Nick’s mishap should consist in a negation of this dangled promise of possession and in his resulting realization of the inevitability of loss, and it thus aptly foreshadows the more poignant story of Ad, the ex-boxer.

30 This pattern of narrative repetition building up to the central crisis, which characterizes “The Battler” and has been shown to prevail in most of the Michigan stories, has to be reexamined when it comes to “Big Two-Hearted River.” Unlike the rest, this story is not meant to lead to a crisis through its concentric circles of action, but on the contrary to defuse an unspoken, carefully concealed experience of loss, which is there only in absentia, like a palimpsest. It could be viewed as a negative in the photographic sense of the word, the positive of which would be “The Battler,” with its multiple similar ingredients such as the railroad track, the hike, the food, the swamp. In this case, phonic and lexical repetition serves to shape the negative area which brings out the unmentioned loss. The emphasis on Nick’s wish to avoid the swamp and its deep waters at the end of the second part is an indication of the crisis brewing right under the surface (180). The suggestion is driven home by the recurrence of the words “swamp” and “deep/deepen” in close relation to the negative leitmotiv “did not feel like/did not want to,” in a paragraph mostly made up of negative statements (“a reaction against,” “the sun did not come through,” “impossible”). The whole unit climaxes with the repetition of the adjective “tragic,” which would sound out of place in a fishing situation, were it not for its implicit allusion to a more serious predicament as well as for the reminiscences it awakens of the earlier story “The End of Something.”
which supplies the missing link. The meaning is further supported by sound effects, the return of plosive consonants (“banks,” “bare,” “big” in the same sentence) and the chiasmus of the antagonistic \textipa{[d]} and \textipa{[w]} in “deep wading with the water deepening up,” in which the threat of depth prevails, as it frames the structure and reinforces the notion through the longer version of the verbal form in the second segment.

The manifold repetition turns out to be the symptom of the process of relief taking place at this stage. Significantly, considerations about the shunned swamp give way to the detailed description of the protagonist’s cleaning of the trout, an operation which can be read as a form of exorcism: the dirty insides are taken out of the system of the fish and disposed of. The critical importance of the moment is set off by the reverberation of sounds in the preceding paragraph centering on preparations: “Holding him near the tail, hard to hold, alive, in his hand, he whacked him against the log.” The discourse comes close to choking as the dominant \textipa{[h]} sound combines with the jerky rhythm to bring the sentence to the point of breathlessness.

Then, in a minutely recorded sequence, closely reminiscent of the caesarian in “Indian Camp,” Nick performs an incision, an act of partition (“slitting them from the vent to the tip of the jaw”), after striking the trout unconscious, in the same way as Bugs inflicts a blow to Ad in “The Battler” in order to put an end to the tension. He then proceeds to take out the unwanted matter (“All the insides and the gills and tongue came out in one piece”) and gets rid of it (“Nick tossed the offal ashore”). As a result, serenity is restored as signaled by the meaningful adjective “smooth,” connected with “clean,” and by the ascending rhythm of the gratifying statement “all the insides clean and compact, coming out together,” produced by the increasing number of syllables in the three words linked by the \textipa{[k]} alliteration.

The next paragraph is dominated by the semantic field of cleansing (“washed,” used twice, and “cleaned”) and the knife, responsible for the rending process, is put away, disarmed and purified: “His knife was still standing, blade stuck in the log. He cleaned it on the wood and put it in his pocket” (180). The surgical instrument is removed out of sight and awareness. The rest of the account subsequently takes on the form of an incantation, playing with variations on \textipa{[k]} \textipa{[h]}, and “ing” (“Nick stood up on the log, holding his rod, the landing-net hanging heavy”, ibid.), introducing a circularity that paves the way for Nick’s return to camp after a metaphorical ascent: “He climbed the bank and cut up into the woods, toward the high ground. He was going back to camp” (ibid.). The youth has thus managed to avoid the swamp-like crisis and can safely look back on its mark from a distance through the protective screen of the trees: “He looked back. The river just showed through the trees” (ibid.).

An examination of repetition in its manifold aspects – narrative, lexical, and phonic – in Hemingway’s early short stories reveals the compulsive nature of the device, which cannot be viewed merely as a conscious stylistic figure. It is a symptom of the unmanageable experience of loss, which can only be approached gradually, tentatively through ever narrowing concentric circles. The ripples which break the surface of the narrative are indicative of the pent-up tension released as the threat lurking in the depths momentarily rises into sight. Therefore, upcountry Michigan, connected with happy memories of a smooth past, seems a propitious setting, the place where the trauma may most safely be confronted, with the certainty of relief through repetition, as confirmed in counterpoint by the final piece of the writer’s first collection of short stories.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

1. Just as Gilles Deleuze, using the “concordance” established by Leibniz between the folds on the surface of material objects and the inner “folds of the soul” (6), views baroque folds not as ornaments but as the expression of inner tension: “it is not in a mere concern for ornamentation, the point is to convey the intensity of a spiritual force exercised on the body, either to throw it down, or to set it upright again or lift it, in any case always with the purpose of turning it inside out and shaping its inside” (Deleuze, Le pli, 165-166, my translation).

2. The image is drawn from “Big Two-Hearted River: Part II” (175). All quotations from the stories come from the Finca Vigía Edition.

3. Philip Young has pointed out that Hemingway’s work, and particularly the Nick Adams stories, can be read as a repetition of the biographical trauma of the war wound (Young). This paper examines repetition as a structuring process in the narratives of each separate story.

4. The polarity is only a surface one and is undermined by subtle subversive suggestions, analyzed by Rédouane Abouddahab in “‘Indian Camp’: Nick Adams et l’entre-deux.”

5. “They began to bubble, making little bubbles that rose with difficulty to the surface. The little bubbles were coming faster now” (167-168); “The surface was bubbling slowly to porousness” (174).

6. The prizefighter may be read as a mirror image of Nick on account of the marked emphasis on the theme of specularity effected by the quadruple repetition of the verb “to look” (101). Moreover, the man’s eyes are concealed by his cap, thus making identification possible (“his eyes almost out of sight under the cap”).
7. A similar process of denial is at work in a later story, “In Another Country,” in which a doctor tries to lull the narrator’s feeling of loss to sleep by proffering the illusion that the future will completely erase the disabling war injury of the present: “‘You are a fortunate young man. You will play football again like a champion’” (207). This fantastic vision of the future as the continuation of the past before the difference made by the experience of loss, is implicitly contradicted by the example of the Major’s incurable moral wound due to the death of his young wife.

8. As established by Freud (64) and further developed by Gilles Deleuze in Différence et Répétition: “Death is the ultimate shape of the problem, the origin of troubles and questions, the sign that they persist in spite of all repetition” (148, my translation).

9. Deleuze contends that repression occurs because the only way in which some experiences can be faced is through repetition (ibid. 29). He further explains that material repetition like verbal or phonic repetition is the mask or signifier, on the surface, of a symbolic repressed repetition deep down (371).

10. For a detailed analysis of the introductory setting, particularly the parallel between Liz’s “sexual development” and the barges with “their ongoing movement barely perceived by her,” see Alice Hall Petry (354-355).

11. Alice Hall Petry has noted the sexual innuendo in the expression “big buck, stiff and hard,” the pun on the verb “to die” as well as the use of guns as phallic symbols (356).

12. The continuity in the moral development of the character of Nick Adams throughout the In Our Time collection, has been analyzed by various critics, particularly Debra A. Moddelmog (24-29), Steven K. Hoffman (172-191), and Philip Young (29-55).

13. “What has failed to happen in a manner likely to gratify desire is erased through repetition in another guise” (Freud 42, my translation).

14. Just as “smooth” conveys regained serenity, “shallow” implies the removal of the threat which lurks in the depths of the water and is pointedly avoided when Nick decides to keep away from the swamp.

ABSTRACTS

While the first person narrator in Hemingway’s “The Light of the World” remains unidentified, most studies following in Philip Young’s wake have assumed him to be Nick Adams. The anonymity of the first person and the text’s reticence to construct the speaker as an ego endowed with psychological characteristics has been largely ignored. This study proposes to focus on the bareness of the “I” narrating the story, leaving aside the character of Nick Adams, as a crucial structural element of the text. The very bareness of the unidentified first person accounts for the text’s structure that reads like a play, as well as for its major theme of testimony suggested by the title and developed in the embedded story of Steve Ketchel. It is a relevant clue to an interpretation of the story drawing on the notion of desire that matches Hemingway’s overall poetics in the short stories as well as in the novels.

Cet article étudie les schémas de répétition qui plissent la surface apparemment lisse du récit, dans un certain nombre de nouvelles initiales ayant pour cadre le Michigan. A la suite de l’analyse effectuée par Gilles Deleuze dans Différence et répétition, on considérera la répétition comme le symptôme de l’incommunicable expérience de la perte, en général différée vers la fin des textes.
des nouvelles. Le rôle important de la dualité et du dédoublement dans la plupart des ouvertures, renforcé par des images apparentées de division, souligne la différence intolérable que la répétition tente d’atténuer. Au niveau de la structure narrative, celle-ci, grâce à la mise en abyme, permet de se rapprocher progressivement du cœur de la crise au moyen d’éléments proleptiques, tandis que sur le plan phonique et lexical, elle fonctionne comme un acte de réparation qui délivre le protagoniste de l’expérience douloureuse et, par la circularité du discours, le ramène à la sérénité précédant l’instant de la perte.

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That Ernest Hemingway was influenced in the beginning of his career by Cézanne's paintings comes as a matter of fact to most literary critics familiar with his early writing. I do not intend to dispute that claim or to repeat many of the well-known comments that presumably prove its accuracy. In *A Moveable Feast* and some letters, Hemingway speaks frankly about his debt to Cézanne and most critics go no further than quoting these admissions. In this article, I want to delve deeper – to reconstruct what is usually just assumed and understand what this attention to Cézanne did for Hemingway's short story form. To do this, I will focus on “Big Two-Hearted River,” published in 1925, and Cézanne's late landscape paintings. This study concentrates mainly on the particulars of the story, because I believe that its overall structure is contingent on how elemental factors develop plasticity and tone; the innovation of “Big Two-Hearted River” as well as the influence of Cézanne lie in Hemingway's manipulation of these particulars.

My argument is that, in studying Cézanne, Hemingway learns how to use visuality to reorganize the structural necessities of the modern short story form. He presents the aesthetic project as a moment of world-making; “Big Two-Hearted River” is about how to see the world and, in seeing it anew, how to make it and oneself over. This story has little interest in plot, history, or dramatic action. There are plenty of symbols in the text, if the reader wants to look for them, but I want to consider, rather, the looking itself. Nick’s vision is at the center of “Big Two-Hearted River” – it is what gives this story its paradoxical quality of being at once corporeal and formalized. It is also a clue that illuminates the young Hemingway’s purpose in following Cézanne for this particular story. I believe that some of the fundamental techniques Cézanne developed in his formal aesthetics require certain ways of looking, and that this visuality, when practiced by Nick Adams in “Big Two-Hearted River,” indicates the possibility of arehabilitating sensorium. His attempts to totalize the fractured nature of experience through visual re-imagination also demonstrate a protest to the postmortem conditions of World War I. In other words, Hemingway does not decide to write as Cézanne paints...
simply because he fancies the painter’s handiwork, but because he requires it to tell this story and imbue it with a particular psychic context. After Cézanne, Hemingway relies primarily on landscape, motif, and structure to tell this story. If we focus on these aspects, and how visuality defines and activates them, then the story really communicates itself and makes “people feel something more than they understand” (Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, 75).

In addition to visiting the Louvre, the Musée d’Orsay, the Musée du Luxembourg, and the Jeu de Paume, Hemingway also went to galleries and Gertrude Stein’s apartment to see Cézanne’s work when he lived in Paris in the early 1920s. One late painting, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, now at the Philadelphia Art Museum, was owned by Paul Rosenberg in Paris until 1936. Hemingway quite possibly saw this work, or, at least, ones like it, when Rosenberg had an exposition of his collection of French Impressionists in 1922. This late landscape painting helps me to introduce some elements of aesthetic structure present in Hemingway’s story: the elemental integrity of brushstroke, the notion of depth without penetrability, and a dynamism that inflects the artwork’s structure through resistance. The painting’s vivid greens and yellows, and the offsetting soft sky, a lavender shade of blue, demonstrate how color forms the world of the painting, rather than just filling it in. The bottom half of the canvas is jarring in its short patches of juxtaposing brushstrokes; one nearly forgets the fact of a valley in the blur of these alternating scraps. Were it not for the motif of the mountain, placid and luminous, the notion of depth would be replaced entirely by a kind of toppling stack of color. The painting has dimensions but lacks classical perspective; it is neither bright, nor light, nor dark, and yet it is completely determined by color. It also demonstrates how Cézanne increasingly rid his paintings of representational efforts in favor of visual mobility. The editors of the Philadelphia catalogue write:

> The brushstrokes in this extremely complicated work are very evenly distributed over the surface and retain a fairly similar, smoothed-on, texture throughout. It is as if, during its making, the artist were working to hold together a picture in constant danger of blowing apart. The result, ironically, is a canvas that is perhaps the most formally constructed and least expressive of the sequence. (Rishel 74)

It should be obvious why this comment caught my eye. The creative effort to contain the catastrophic effect of intensity results in a painting that is more self-consciously structured than many of its counterparts. This is what I see happening in “Big Two-Hearted River.” Hemingway “cut[s] out the scrollwork,” as he once said, in order to isolate and magnify the tension of the story generated from Nick’s point of view. The author discards traditional forms of aesthetic control such as plot development or dialogue, so he must crystallize what does remain in the work in order to hold it together. He uses simple motifs – the river, fishing, the trees – just as Cézanne stuck with Mont Sainte-Victoire or the Bibémus Quarry or the Château Noir in order to demonstrate the infinite plasticity of looking and making. Like the Philadelphia landscape of Mont Sainte-Victoire, “Big Two-Hearted River” suggests depth without access. I believe the distinctiveness of these works is that they are deeply immersed in a sensuous world, full of its material slack, and at the same time they are super-aesthetic, super-controlled and formally aloof. One cannot escape the self-consciously crafted quality of “Big Two-Hearted River,” although much of its sophistication comes from the fact that in writing it, Hemingway evolves out of a merely reportorial precision and generates a kind of palpability that makes the story a new thing in the world. He receives guidance from Cézanne in how to handle this contradiction and uses it to
achieve the mutual development of the eye and mind, what the painter called “the logic of organized sensations.”

I want to focus first on the aesthetic side of this equation in the hope that a technical grasp will allow us to gain intimacy to Nick’s sensations and mood. Both Hemingway and Cézanne resist representation and have no illusions about the utterly formal quality of their work. Hemingway says he is “making the country,” that he is “making it all up.” There is a remote tone, or what Adorno calls the artwork’s “inwardness,” that resists the mimetic function in these particular paintings and prose. This cognitive strangeness occurs for instance when the artist leaves space empty, rather than filling the story or painting with material. The bare space that often structures Cézanne’s paintings correlates to Hemingway’s iceberg theory. But rather than mine for hidden meaning below the surface of this story, I want to study the very surface itself. Despite the natural setting of “Big Two-Hearted River,” and Nick’s heightened sensory attention, there are curious absences that indicate the aesthetic control of “an artist trying to hold together a picture.” Namely, there is no life to the story outside of Nick and his reasons for being there. There are fish because Nick has gone fishing, there is a mosquito because he put up a mosquito net, and there are grasshoppers for bait. But it is not a natural world; there is no rustling squirrel, no bird suddenly landing on a branch, no snapping twig. These missing interruptions function actively as negative space which highlights the work’s artistic intentionality and the perspectival dominance afforded to Nick.

In Cézanne’s watercolors especially, the use of bare space carries structural potentials. Consider, for instance, Mont Sainte-Victoire, painted in 1900-1902 and sold to Leo and Gertrude Stein sometime before 1910. Hemingway saw an exhibition of Cézanne’s watercolors at the Bernheim-Jeune gallery in 1924, but could have studied this particular painting in Stein’s salon as well. Whereas Cézanne uses a weighty blue to define the sky, most of the landscape is activated by bright areas that are represented by exposed paper, not paint. This view of Mont Sainte-Victoire appears infinitely closer than others to the motif; volumes of bare space pull the image toward us in an odd reversal of the dynamics of vacancy. Emptiness brings what is there to light. Just so, in “Big Two-Hearted River,” the absence of other perspectives, the sheer lack of a world outside of Nick’s sensory focus, magnifies him and underscores the unrelenting formality of the writing.

Areas of exposed canvas also intimate the atmosphere of tentativeness which surrounds Nick’s sojourn into the countryside. We see Nick take pause in the face of various decisions: to make coffee the Hopkins way or not, to strike out for the river sooner or later, and of course, whether to fish the swamp. In each of these wavering moments, Hemingway allows space into the prose, the unexposed canvas of the story is suggestive but equally resistant to any confirmation of depth. At times, Hemingway emphasizes this spatial patience with visual cues that echo it. On his way to the river, Nick seeks shelter from the sun in an island of trees and lies down to take a nap. Hemingway writes:

The branches were high above. Some interlocked to make a solid shadow on the brown forest floor. Around the grove of trees was a bare space. It was brown and soft underfoot as Nick walked on it. This was the over-lapping of the pine needle floor, extending out beyond the width of the high branches. The trees had grown tall and the branches moved high, leaving in the sun this bare space they had once covered with shadow. (166)
The bare space Nick discovers is like the exposed paper in Cézanne’s watercolor; it exists among other colors and forms, but is recognized as an emergent, shifting absence. Lilion Brion-Guerry describes this quality in Cézanne as a “hesitant breathing.” She explains that when the artwork is “no longer encased within its limits, it may recede or overflow its own volume...The image ‘breathes’ like a living being” (Brion-Guerry 79). This potentiality for expansion or retraction occurs when other traditional outlining factors disappear; in “Big Two-Hearted River” the sense of anonymity that surrounds Nick results not in loneliness but in a kind of shelter for free will.

The brushstrokes that do appear on the canvas or page in these works are short, repetitive, and concentrated. With effort we can spot patches in Cézanne’s late landscapes that stand in for houses or rooftops or trees, but really what they do is break up the view and keep the viewer’s gaze perpetually animated on the surface of the painting. What I find most relevant to Hemingway here is the lack of sequence or ascending order in the concentration of paint; there is connectivity and chromatic modulation without the assurance of linear or classical perspective. In a helpful study devoted to “Big Two-Hearted River,” Elizabeth Wells breaks down Hemingway’s prose style to show how short his sentences are (they average 12 words and almost half are well below that average), and explains that this brevity occurs when Hemingway repeats a subject at the start of two simple sentences, rather than creating a complex one (Wells 131). I agree that Hemingway steers clear of complex sentences but also find that his longer sentences are composed of series of phrases, all short, simple, and highly visual. This frequent use of the compound sentence form allows him to attribute equal weight to all the clauses in a sentence, rather than creating a hierarchy of logic. Hemingway’s use of prepositions and conjunctions I find fundamental to his painterly approach to writing. They function like facets or hooks, or what Kurt Badt refers to as “shadow-paths” in Cézanne. Badt writes:

>Cézanne’s new interpretation of how the boundaries of things appear in space – by means of the shadow-paths placed between them, which sometimes follow the outlines of a thing, sometimes go away out beyond them [...] but which always belong to several solids and are determined by the fact that several solids are existing together. (Badt 52)

Badt’s attention to these shadow-paths allows us to see how, despite the fragmented quality of Cézanne’s paintings, an organic relationship persists among seemingly abstract elements so as to produce a sense of totality. So too, Wells shows that Hemingway consistently writes in a way that emphasizes simultaneity and material immediacy. He prefers conjunctions that propose concurrent action (like “as” or “while”) rather than those that establish causality (“since,” “because,” or “if”). I also believe that Hemingway uses prepositions to make simple sentences longer and more mobile without losing the power of direct expression. He hooks together series of prepositional phrases to form a connective tissue over the landscape.

Hemingway’s use of Cézanne’s painterly technique is quite deliberate here for it allows him to show Nick’s sensorium undergoing a subtle transformation. In his book on World War I, Eric Leed describes some of the destructive, psychic effects of battle on war veterans like Nick. Among other debilitating conditions are a severance of the “thick tissues of connectivity” that weld separate events together, and the elimination of one’s ability to order collective experience in a rational sequence of what comes first and what comes later (Leed 130-131). These two cognitive activities link up the human...
sensorium with the psyche and are treated by Hemingway vis-à-vis the visuality made available to him in Cézanne’s paintings. He shows Nick at a very particular postwar moment; he is beginning to relate phenomena and create an organic image of the world but still fails to register most details in any kind of pattern or sequential order. This explains Hemingway’s preference for conjunctions that suggest concurrent rather than causal relations, as well as his use of either simple or compound (but rarely complex) sentences. He experiments with the prose to approximate a Cézanne landscape which lacks an orderly or classical perspective but achieves a kind of enmeshed vitality regardless. The patches of color or word phrases mesh closely and produce a picture world that is country. Consider a passage from Part I of the story:

Nick stood up. [...] He stood with the pack on his back on the brow of the hill looking out across the country toward the distant river and then struck down the hillside away from the road. Underfoot the ground was good walking. [...] Then it was sweet fern, growing ankle high, to walk through, and clumps of jack pines; a long undulating country with frequent rises and descents, sandy underfoot and the country alive again. [...] He kept on through the pine plain, mounting small rises to see other rises ahead of him and sometimes from the top of a rise a great solid island of pines off to his right or his left. (165, emphasis mine)

Hemingway is not describing a landscape here, he is making one. There is an internally mimetic quality to the passage: rather than mirroring nature, it folds back upon itself to build a natural landscape with language. The compound sentences are incremental but grow with three-dimensional plasticity. Series of prepositions and conjunctions make the prose supple, creating a “long undulating country with frequent rises and descents.” Action verbs get a lot of credit from Hemingway critics, and indeed they do contribute to the dynamism of the writing. But the painterly effect, the Cézanne effect, occurs when Hemingway employs the linear conditions of language in order to circumvent them. This is also what gives the story its lush effect, despite the apparent simplicity of the language Hemingway uses. Like Cézanne’s color patches, his conjunctions and prepositions create contours without sedimenting the image.

The rhythm of the prose also recalls Cézanne’s systematic work with chromatic modulations. In another very late painting of Mont Sainte-Victoire, the buoyancy we perceive in the landscape results not only from small strokes of different color patches but also from their situated tension. A detail of the same painting shows how brushstrokes move in a parallel and perpendicular fashion with respect to the horizontal planes of the painting, so that each patch (and in fact, each stroke within it) collides with the other, rather than merely stacking or lining up. Cézanne also stimulates the painting’s surface by invoking unexpected color marks, like the vertical and nearby horizontal orange brushstrokes that stand out amidst a mostly blue field of tonal development. Similarly, Hemingway evokes formal tension with his use of active verbs but also with repetitive prepositions that jerk and pull the prose in different directions, keeping it mobile and prodding the reader along. Despite the bucolic setting of the story, it is rendered perpetually strange, especially when Nick acts within it. In the following example, notice how present participles and prepositions work together to deliver a new rhythm to the ear and to give the prose a prismatic quality as in painting:

Holding the rod far out toward the uprooted tree and sloshing backward in the current, Nick worked the trout, plunging, the rod bending alive, out of the danger of the weeds into the open river. Holding the rod, pumping alive against the
current, Nick brought the trout in. He rushed, but always came, the spring of the rod yielding to the rushes, sometimes jerking under water, but always bringing him in. Nick eased downstream with the rushes. The rod above his head he led the trout over the net, then lifted. (178)

Let us start with the last sentence because in some ways, it is the most peculiar. The sentence begins oddly with a direct object (“the rod”) of the supposedly omitted verb “holding” followed immediately by the prepositional phrase locating it “above his head,” thus introducing visual juxtaposition and simultaneity. Picture here Cézanne’s orange brushstrokes that run perpendicular to the blue in the previous painting detail. Also, by placing this phrase early in the sentence, Hemingway makes room for another, just four words later. “Over the net” positions the fish just as “above his head” does the rod, so that there are two horizontal planes on either side of the verticality of Nick’s body. The sentence ends with “then lifted,” alternating back again to the vertical. This shifting planar intensity does not describe the thematic tension of fishing, but follows it, as when Cézanne says he wants to paint after nature. The sentences here are nearly all top-heavy (recalling the looming Mont Sainte-Victoire), for Hemingway doubles up on subordinate clauses at the start before concluding with a succinct main clause. The phrases swing the reader’s imaginative eye back and forth across the landscape, “far out toward the uprooted tree” while “sloshing backwards” and “yielding to the rushes.” These swooping angles crisscross to create a totalizing image space even as they fragment and diversify it. As with the previous passage, Hemingway’s writing is clearly self-reflexive here; Nick works the trout as the language itself works exhaustively, the verbs (“sloshing,” “holding,” “plunging,” “pumping,” “bending,” “yielding”) are nearly all present participles and the phrases, as usual, are kept brief. This is Cézanne country.

The odd effect of the writing on the reader’s ear comes from the blend of simple language in irregular form. When spoken aloud, it almost seems natural, but in a hermetic way, as though it sounds right so long as we stay in the story. Yet looking at its surface, the prose appears disjunctive, repetitive, sculptured – in other words, highly formalized. The complete authority of that linguistic style emerges because it is all Nick’s world. Or as Robert Gibb puts it, “[this writing] gives us a world and a point of view. It does even more. It gives us the world as point of view” (Gibb 257).

The immediacy of the third person perspective in “Big Two-Hearted River” brings me to the other side of the artwork equation – from the aesthetic to the organic. Both Hemingway and Cézanne are invested in sensation, in a relationship with nature that is not imitative, but actual and engaging. The artwork’s energy is paradoxical; surface formality is born from a keen (almost spiritual) attention to the natural world. Hemingway initiates the reader into this experiential mode with the vignette that precedes Part I of “Big Two-Hearted River.” Titled “Chapter XIV,” this passage is about the bullfighter Maera. It stands out from the other vignettes or “Chapters” because of its acute focus on sensation. Most of the vignettes take up motifs of war, bullfighting or crime, and are almost brittle in their photographic mode. Their language is distant, precise, and ironic. But “Chapter XIV” immediately shifts from a detached third person voice to subjective proximity, inhabiting the bodily sensations of the bullfighter as he is dying. What is really interesting to compare is how Hemingway manages to maintain the mood of grim inevitability that haunts the other vignettes while accessing a great sensual intimacy with Maera, thereby expressing something like pathos. The language of the vignette is striking both in its materiality and formal experimentation:
Maera lay still, his head on his arms, his face in the sand. He felt warm and sticky from the bleeding. Each time he felt the horn coming. Sometimes the bull only bumped him with his head. Once the horn went all the way through him and he felt it go into the sand [...]. Maera felt everything getting larger and larger and then smaller and smaller. Then it got larger and larger and larger and then smaller and smaller. Then everything commenced to run faster and faster as when they speed up a cinematograph film. Then he was dead. ("Chapter XIV," 161)

Here, Hemingway frequently uses the word “feel,” and modifies it with tactile sensations that invoke the body and bring the reader close to Maera. The language he uses to show how Maera feels is also highly visual so that the combination of the two – “felt” repeated with visual signifiers – has a kind of synaesthetic effect that contributes to the overall sense of tragedy in the passage. We are simultaneously watching and feeling what happens to Maera, going in and out of the canvas, so to speak. Hemingway echoes this movement when he repeats the words “larger” and “smaller” at the end of the passage, in order to alter the rhythm of language and, once again, demonstrates a self-reflexive style so that the writing mirrors the reader’s imaginative movement which mirrors the cinematograph film which in turn mirrors death.

The passage captures the paradoxical structure of “Big Two-Hearted River” in that it is self-consciously stylized and at the same time utterly material and sensuous. “Big Two-Hearted River” also accesses a tangible domain of experience by incorporating language that expresses a synaesthetic response to the world. Not only are Nick’s sensations heightened throughout the story, they overlap and associate with each other. Rocks are “water-smooth,” bark is “gray to the touch,” and the world is seen through the “heat-light” of the afternoon. These word-pairs summon materiality while invoking aesthetic formality through their visual cues. As when he plays with sentence structure and repetition, here Hemingway gives language a kick while operating within the simplicity of motif.

The total body sensorium is activated in the story, but vision is still the predominant experience for Nick. He sees the world in a way that metonymically recalls Maera’s death; that is, his vision zooms in and out of perspective (getting larger and smaller), capturing infinite detail in one moment and landscape in the next. This double vision recalls T. J. Clark’s observation about Cézanne: “The painter’s conviction that in a world made up of matters the being-in-the-eye of an object is also its being-out-there-at-a-distance, known to us only by acquaintance” (Clark, Farewell,159). Clark’s comment seems to represent the reader’s odd experience of being both aloof and near to Maera’s death. In Cézanne, the perspectives of Mont Sainte-Victoire are never simply vistas; the painting surface teems with brushy detail and any small corner of the valley reveals crosshatches of color that from a distance suggest, merely, the edge of a roof or perhaps a red wall amidst the trees. To see like the painter, one must engage the work on both micro and macro levels. Hemingway recognizes this and tries to put such “dimensions” into his writing. This is a daunting task for the prose, like the landscapes, is curiously detached and unadorned. It must maintain a double-edged visuality, itself juxtapositional, and Hemingway keeps us close to Nick to see it.

Early in the story, Nick stands on a bridge and sees the fish in the river below. Here Hemingway explicitly invokes the visual process – each time the prose zooms in closer to the object; the reader is brought nearer to the fish and we see more as Nick does. His vision captures irregularities – shadows that do not fit bodies, shifting planes of water, angles cutting through surfaces. Everything seems denaturalized, formalized, and yet,
all the more real for its magnified sensuality. Likewise, consider Cézanne’s Le Pont de Maincy, which was owned by the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery until 1930, and very likely shown at the exhibition Hemingway attended there in the spring of 1924. One of the few paintings made of this particular motif, it seems a perfect setting for Nick’s study of fish from the bridge. But a merely thematic parallel is dull and does not get at the power of the work, particularly at this early stage in Cézanne’s career. To understand this painting, we must grasp its inconsistencies and work the eye in several ways at once. In Aesthetic Theory, Adorno writes that “dissonance is the truth about harmony,” and this particular landscape, with its strange cacophonous beauty, urges us to see more carefully to locate the balancing power that makes it, literally, work (Adorno 110). The dark shadows and reflections below the bridge capture the gaze immediately like a black hole in the painting’s center. This centripetal pull is helped by the busy world above the bridge as well where Cézanne shows his early experimentation with the short choppy patches of color; their extreme brevity in some cases tempered by the fact that here they all move in the same diagonal direction. Just as they hit the slim horizontal branch overhead, however, the painting changes. To the right are long slender trunks, their black paint oddly smooth, and only occasionally marred by a sketchy green. But to the left, in the upper corner, a strange pale confusion gives the canvas a somewhat unfinished feeling; white and green paint are distressing, they do not fit any particular pattern nor are they patched in like the density of the middle leaves. In fact, they are stretched so broadly that they seem incomplete, only belonging to this painting with its dark center of damp green because of the horizontal branch that connects one side of the canvas to the other. This corner, along with the horizontal peachy brushstrokes below and the mottled stone bridge, catch the viewer off-guard and radicalize chromatic rhythm, so that the eye shuttles busily but also attempts to encompass parts into a whole.

The complexity of brushstrokes in this work really shows how Cézanne builds a canvas from the inside out, creating forms with his brushstrokes so that the painting surface always remains activated despite its geometric composition. In fact, when seen from a distance, this landscape painting uncannily resembles an interior, with trunks for pillars and leaves for wallpaper. The chromatic structure is so embedded and intense that it creates a hermetic atmosphere, bringing the viewer into him or herself as well as into the world of the artwork. The visual effect of the painting’s formal principles is, consequently, paradoxical. It makes the viewer feel both at home and estranged. Put another way, Charles Altieri describes Cézanne’s landscapes thus: “The tonal effects of light seem so tightly woven into the subtlest nuances of feeling that looking out, and looking within, become inseparably linked. This basic a relation between eye and object makes the most delicate of self-reflexive states themselves part of the immanent life of the visual field” (Altieri 175). In a sense, we might be able to think of visuality as a motif for Cézanne as much as the hills or the river. The act of seeing is approached by the artist as an aspect of nature, elemental in its constructive power. Hemingway underscores this subtle bond between the eye and the world by granting Nick a kind of painterly vision. Now let us turn to the bridge scene in the story:

Nick looked down into the clear, brown water, colored from the pebbly bottom, and watched the trout keeping themselves steady in the current with wavering fins. As he watched them they changed their positions by quick angles, only to hold steady in the fast water again. Nick watched them a long time.

He watched them holding themselves with their noses into the current, many trout in deep, fast moving water, slightly distorted as he watched far down through the
glassy convex surface of the pool, its surface pushing and swelling smooth against the resistance of the log-driven piles of the bridge. (163)

The agility of vision here demonstrates the variety of brushstrokes and perspectives Cézanne presents in the painting. The water is both clear and brown because it is colored from below, the pebbles seen through its transparency. In one sentence, Hemingway gives his reader three levels of perspective. This visual complexity is mirrored by the fish who are both steady and wavering, their noses create slight conical breakers in the water, they are still and yet quickly angling. All the water, deep water, fast moving, flows around them. Finally the surface of the water itself sustains a multiplicity of form: convex, glassy, pushing and swelling. These variations exist because of Nick’s visual versatility, as well as a kind of logic that is capable of grasping the whole at once. Similarly, in *Le Pont de Maincy*, Cézanne presents a peculiar landscape made up of disparate, competing elements and yet the picture hangs together, at times by the slimmest branch of connectivity or the mereness of a shadow-path. It is a provocative world because in looking at it, one sees what was necessary to make it; that is to say, it reveals the vision that made it a possibility. About Cézanne, Clark writes: “The world has to be pictured as possessed by the eye, indeed ‘totalized’ by it; but always on the basis of exploding or garbled or utterly intractable data – data that speak to the impossibility of synthesis even as they seem to provide the sensuous material for it” (Clark, “Phenomenality,” 105). This totalizing effort is manifested at the start of the story when Nick gazes down into the river and simply observes that the “the river was there.”

Hemingway also shows Nick seeing the world at a distance; his vision exercises itself on a range of motifs. When hiking to his campsite, at one point, Nick looks out over the countryside as if peering at a view of Mont Sainte-Victoire. Here, his expansive visuality resembles Cézanne’s effort “to picture the world as possessed by the eye,” revealing how, despite its sustained color and completeness, this landscape painting is quite dynamic. The kind of vision required for this undertaking must not fix the particulars it recognizes, but allow them to be mobile and activate different regions of the picture plane. In the story, Hemingway suggests that the sensitive eye can generate this plasticity. He writes:

> Ahead of him, as far as he could see, was the pine plain. The burned country stopped off at the left with the range of hills. On ahead islands of dark pine trees rose out of the plain. Far off to the left was the line of the river. Nick followed it with his eye and caught glints of the water in the sun. There was nothing but the pine plain ahead of him, until the far blue hills that marked the Lake Superior height of land. He could hardly see them, faint and far away in the heat-light over the plain. If he looked too steadily they were gone. But if he only half-looked they were there, the far-off hills of the height of land. (164)

Nick’s perspective here is connective, not hierarchical. His eye sweeps across the landscape and sees how things fit together, the pine trees rising out of the plain or the line of the river as glinting contour. The elements fill in the picture plane both vertically and horizontally so that rather than classical perspective, he creates a lively, moving landscape that achieves Hans Hofmann’s “push-and-pull effect,” generating three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional canvas. Most striking about this passage, however, is the heightened attention to how Nick sees. The world manifests more material for his eye as he produces new ways of looking. Just as in the earlier moment at the bridge when Hemingway repeats the phrase “Nick watched a long time,” here he reiterates the visual act and consequently expands what is seen. By only
“half-looking,” he is able to see what is otherwise “gone”; he uses the synaesthetic mediation of ‘heat-light’ to access the full height of land and gain proximity to the hills. This resourcefulness carries the subjective force of visuality that makes Cézanne or Hemingway’s work both expressive and aloof. Cézanne references the infinite potential of visuality in a letter to his son, writing: “Here on the edge of the river the motifs are very plentiful; the same subject seen from a different angle gives a subject for study of the highest interest and so varied that I think I could be occupied for months without changing my place, simply by bending a little more to the right or left” (Rewald 259).

Simple motifs may provide ample material because the imaginative potential of vision creates the world. The landscape refuses to be seen by just anyone. It requires a skilled eye to exercise new habits of seeing, or to break old ones, and thus to catch glimpses that double as moments of world-making.

Ultimately, this brings me to what I think Hemingway invents in “Big Two-Hearted River” and how Cézanne helps him get there. He is trying to show, through language, how an individual comes back to life. I do not dispute that the story is about coming back from the war, with no mention of the war in it (Hemingway, Moveable, 76). However, I do not think Nick is numb or escaping experience out of fear. True, he does not fish the swamp, but he does a lot before he gets there, and the world of the story cares most about where Nick is, rather than where he is not. He is learning how to live again and to suggest this, Hemingway must show how Nick begins to look and feel again. Those who fought in World War I had lost “the logic of organized sensations.” As Martin Jay puts it, “after this experience, men could no longer believe their eyes” (Jay 213). Nick wants to re-enter the visual field, experience it tangibly and reacquire familiarity with the materials at hand. In the process, he actually stimulates his senses to a new versatility. It is a slow, painstaking process and requires the simplicity of motif.

After Cézanne, the young Hemingway picks for his landscape the unwavering stuff of nature: the river, hills, an island of trees, fish which allow him to test Nick’s awakening sensorium. The familiarity of this terrain enables Nick to open out to sensation (synaesthesia) rather than shutting down (anaesthesia). Susan Buck-Morss writes that “the nervous system is not contained within the body’s limits,” and she also reminds us that “Freud situated consciousness on the surface of the body” (Buck-Morss 12-13). These observations underscore the importance of a careful study of the infinitesimal discoveries Nick makes in the story for it is here that he dwells in a space of “hesitant breathing.” The potential for expansion or retraction made available to color planes in Cézanne’s watercolors, here makes fluid Nick’s interpenetration with other surface phenomena. He is acutely aware of sensations, of his body in space. Predominant among these sensory activities is Nick’s vision, for in its careful and tentative sifting through materiality, it seems simultaneously the safest and most definitive way for him to re-enter the world. Charles Altieri describes the transformative potential of visuality in Cézanne’s landscapes: “What we see depends on how we see, which depends on who we become as we see” (Altieri 174). Sensations in the story allow us to experience how Nick sees in each moment and consequently, who he becomes. Sensitivity, intelligence, comprehension – these qualities emerge – but so does a budding resilience. Consider this moment, just after he loses the big fish in the river:

He went over and sat on the logs. He did not want to rush his sensations any. [...] He sat on the logs, smoking, drying in the sun, the sun warm on his back, the river shallow ahead entering the woods, curving into the woods, shallows, light
glittering, big water-smooth rocks, cedars along the bank and white birches, the
logs warm in the sun, smooth to sit on, without bark, gray to the touch; slowly the
feeling of disappointment left him. [...] It was all right now. (177)

Nick does “not want to rush his sensations;” indeed, with the help of conjunctions and
prepositions, the prose continually circles and floats, landing now on a tactile
sensation, now on a visual discovery. Although this scene is commonly read as the
dramatization of traumatic loss, it could also be a moment of sustenance where the
absence of something becomes a structural necessity for internal change. Nick wants to
take in the moment, not reject it. Before continuing to act, he pauses, dwelling in
sensation, feeling the heat of the sun, the smoothness of the rocks, allowing the
actuality of space to fill his immediate lack. Also, he looks at the world and finds it
dynamic, connective, detailed. This vision is not a flight from life but an exercise in
human being and world-making.

When Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes that Cézanne wanted “to make visible how the
world touches us,” he is attempting to relate visibility and tangibility (Merleau-Ponty
69-70). Hemingway also emphasizes the synaesthetic effects of visuality by recreating
the conditions that allow seeing to be felt. When Nick watches the fish in the river, he is
reclaiming his psychic life rather than fleeing from it. The more angular and subtle
Nick’s vision, the greater the feeling he experiences. After Cézanne, Hemingway here is
making visible how the world touches Nick; by breaking down the elemental process of
seeing, by focusing on the simplest motif, he is able to isolate and magnify experience.
The close third person perspective of the story makes it possible for the reader to see
how Nick produces this visionary world. Who does Nick become as he sees? He becomes
whole again. I believe that Hemingway wanted to show this process in the moment of its
happening which, in a sense, is why nothing much happens in the story. Its most
innovative moments occur in the shadow-paths of action.

T. J. Clark offers an interesting definition of modernism in his book Farewell to an Idea.
He calls it “the art of the time that is not yet ripe” (160). I think that Hemingway hones
in on this quality by allowing his protagonist to see the world as Cézanne might. The
hesitant spaces in which Nick rests or remains reticent, the long curving sentences that
escalate into acute and momentary joy, the subtle nestling of visibility and tangibility;
all these experiences are so newborn, so daring. The fishing trip in “Big Two-Hearted
River” feels like an activity outside of time, or an interlude, before Nick returns to the
world where he is not so nearly cloaked with anonymity. But it is also the revelation of
a time that is not yet ripe. Nick is re-learning the world; his sensorium is not
completely repaired, though it is burgeoning. In A Moveable Feast, Hemingway expresses
his dismay with Gertrude Stein’s charge that the generation who went to war, his
generation, is lost. I think that “Big Two-Hearted River” demonstrates Hemingway’s
challenge to that pronouncement for he shows Nick not only coming to life, but
producing a way to see that makes the world alive for those who inhabit it. Through his
sensations, we, too, see the mountains only when we half-look, as we see the several
layers of pushing water under the surface of the river, as we see the chromatic
structure that builds landscape and makes Cézanne’s world of painting a vivid
experience.
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NOTES

1. Some critics have offered helpful readings on this topic, although few conduct close readings of “Big Two-Hearted River,” using the painterly vocabulary that pronounces Hemingway’s affiliation with Cézanne. See Ron Berman who places great emphasis on visuality but focuses primarily on parallels in imagery, such as bends in the road, mountains, and other forms of landscape seen in both writing and painting. See also Lawrence Stanley who supplies helpful biographical support for the influence of Cézanne on Hemingway, but does not emphasize the short story’s form and provides few close readings that show the reader how theory was implemented into practice. Another relatively recent study is Theodore Gaillard’s “Hemingway’s Debt to Cézanne: New Perspectives,” in which the author extrapolates the psychological dimension of this parallel but does not attend to visuality or the imaginative aspect of the artwork.

ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on “Big Two-Hearted River” and the influence of Cézanne on the story’s structural innovations. Although this aesthetic relationship is often mentioned in Hemingway criticism, scholars rarely conduct a rigorous formal study of these two distinctive Modernist moments, and the creative process involved in carrying out such a cross-disciplinary project. This paper will attempt to delve deeper. Using the principles of post-impressionist art, I show how Hemingway uses visuality to craft dramatic tension and tone without relying on traditional categories of storytelling. This paper also performs readings on Cézanne’s landscape paintings, particular those of Mont Sainte-Victoire. Every element of the formal art-making process becomes functional and innovative – word choice in Hemingway and color in Cézanne create structure, descriptions of sensation decelerate time and expand space, and an emphasis on point of view underscores the formality and aloof tone of the works.

A Bibliography of Ernest Hemingway

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2. Interviews


Selected Recent Critical works about Hemingway

53 Abouddahab, Rédouane. La mort à l’œuvre dans les nouvelles de Hemingway, une poétique de la cruauté. 3 vols. Lille, A.N.R.T, Université de Lille III, 1992. [This three-volume study intends to renew the reading methodology of Hemingway’s (short) fiction. Indeed, it challenges critical opinion, rejecting all kinds of referential interpretations of Hemingway’s fiction and the correlated notions of style as communication, intentional fallacy, representation..., to highlight and celebrate the internal and self-sufficient verbal reality of the Hemingway text. The study develops also “a poetics of cruelty.” Cruelty is not considered as an emotion with psychological and moral extensions, but as a creative energy including the inseparable energies of life and death, whose work affects the very basis of the verbal texture: the letter. Hence, more than the poetics of the signifier, the study explores Hemingway’s poetics of enunciation. Elaborating a methodology drawn largely from Jakobson, Benveniste, Artaud, Bataille, the “Tel Quel” post-structuralist authors, but heavily indebted to Lacan, the work highlights the poetic force of the Hemingway text, to the detriment of the imaginary all-powerful so-called Hemingway-Code, as Hemingway’s writing finely stages otherness and makes the careful reader hear the multiple voices of otherness that intimately speak from within.]

54 “Écriture de soi et soie de l’écriture dans ‘Now I Lay Me’ de Hemingway.” La Lettre et l’écrit, Psychanalyse et recherches universitaires 1 (1994): 165-181. [This article deals with a story that has usually been associated with Hemingway’s supposedly traumatic experience while at war in Italy. Here “Now I Lay Me” is not read as an autobiographical recollection in disguise, but as the dramatization of the writer’s both tragic and epic confrontation with the forces of jouissance (in the Lacanian sense). Nick’s intense mental activity is considered indeed a metaphor of writing, which simultaneously unleashes and contains the attractive and repulsive forces of jouissance.]
55. “‘Indian Camp’: Nick Adams et l’entre-deux.” *Revue Française d’Études Américaines* 67 (janvier 1996): 90-98. [This narrative elucidates an Oedipus situation through metonymic displacement and metaphoric substitution. The other side of the lake is not seen as the place of the Indian, but as a scene where Nick’s unconscious perception of his own parents is staged in a radicalized guise, through the figure of the Indian possessing mother and suicidal father. Theme and structure are considered from the angle of enunciation and poetics.]

56. “Hemingway et l’écriture du silence.” In *Valeurs de contrôle*. Ed. M. Vénuat. Clairmont-Ferrand: Centre de Recherche sur les Littératures Modernes et Contemporaines, Université Blaise Pascal, 1999, 165-182. [Hemingway’s practice of omission implies the esthetic and intuitive consciousness of two dimensions of silence: the unsaid, which is the author’s private secret (esthetic, neurotic, erotic) and falls within the logic of reception; and the unspeakable, which implies the text’s staged awareness of the limits of language.]

57. “Scène américaine et scène textuelle: Hopper et Hemingway.” *Les Cahiers du GRIMH* 1 (2000): 235-250. [Edward Hopper’s *Nighthawks* can be interpreted as a pictorial quotation of Hemingway’s “The Killers.” The article explores also the structural elements that account for the misleading naturalistic “transparency” of the works of both artists, and unfolds the complex network of their surface simplicity.]

58. “L’Œil et le soleil: Bataille avec Hemingway.” *Revue Française d’Études Américaines* 84 (mars 2000): 61-76. [The French philosopher not only appreciated Hemingway’s work, but was also inspired by it while writing his early novel *Histoire de l’œil* and other later works.]


60. “Le Sombre jardin d’Hemingway: jouissance et écriture dans *The Garden of Eden*.” *La Recherche à l’heure de la psychanalyse, Psychanalyse et recherches universitaires* 7 (2004): 139-159. [David’s writing is situated in between two forms of jouissance: Catherine’s, a symbolical figure of the aggressive seducing and daring mother, and the father’s, a figure of the violent Other. The embedded fiction attempts to elucidate the father’s jouissance; in the frame narrative, David goes through Catherine’s jouissance and in so doing goes through his own fantasy.]


80 Kundera, Milan. “À la recherche du présent perdu.” *L’Infini* 37 (mars 1992): 22-34. [Focusing on “Hills Like White Elephants,” the writer decry’s the moralizing readings of Hemingway’s work, premised upon unrelenting and so injudicious biographical interpretations.]


83 Mathé, Sylvie. “‘Qu’as-tu fait de ton talent?’: Hemingway et ‘The Snows of Kilimanjaro.’” *Revue Française d’Études Américaines* 73 (juin 1997): 91-105. [The article focuses on the play of enunciation in “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” and shows how the narrative stages the theme of metafiction.]


91 Salati, Marie-Odile. “La Blessure dans *A Farewell to Arms* de Hemingway.” In *Écriture(s) de la guerre aux États-Unis des années 1850 aux années 1970*. Ed. Anne Garrait-Bourrier and Patricia Godi-Tkatchouk. Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2003, 97-110. [The article analyzes the triple significance of the war wound in the 1929 novel: an individual experience in fragmentation and alienation, the inscription of the period’s shattering event in the soldier’s flesh, and the irruption of contingency and irrationality into the old world.]

—. “La cartographie de la surface dans les premières œuvres d’Ernest Hemingway.” In *La surface. Écriture et représentation*. Ed. Mathilde La Cassagnère and Marie-Odile Salati. Chambéry: Laboratoire Langages, Littératures, Sociétés, 2005, 251-273. [Surfaces are viewed as special zones of significance, the scene of the event in the Deleuzian sense. They prove to be the mind’s rampart against the destructiveness of emotion, a safeguard against nothingness, as they are the only recordable testimonies of the protagonist’s unspeakable experience and a way to restore meaning to the shattered self.]

representation of the act of writing as courting self-loss through ever-renewed attempts to glimpse the traumatic horror scene.]


NOTES


2. Unless otherwise indicated, the publisher is Scribner’s, New York.

3. The critical studies in French have accompanying summaries.

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