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# "There isn't going to be any Mrs. Wemedge": Hemingway's Elusive Mermaid in "The End of Something"

Elisabeth Bouzonviller

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- 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

- 3 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)**

- 4 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).
- 5 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." As 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.<sup>2</sup> 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  
souviennne?  
- 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 joignons 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)<sup>3</sup>

- 9 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)

- 10 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).

- 11 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)

- 12 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.
- 13 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.

- 14 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)

- 15 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).
- 16 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.



- 17 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),<sup>4</sup> 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.
- 18 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)
- 19 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).
- 20 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,<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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."

- 24 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).
- 25 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).
- 26 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).
- 27 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)
- 28 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.
- 29 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.<sup>8</sup> 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).

- 30 Whereas they deceptively seem to talk of fishing outings and other simple daily events in a rather basic syntax, Hemingway's short stories "appea[l] 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>.)

4. Cf. Miller (79).

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).

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## 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.

## AUTHORS

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Elisabeth Bouzonviller is Associate Professor at the University of St-Etienne, France, where she teaches American literature and civilization. She has published two books on Francis Scott Fitzgerald: *Francis Scott Fitzgerald ou la plénitude du silence* (Les Presses Universitaires du Septentrion), and *Francis Scott Fitzgerald, écrivain du déséquilibre* (Éditions Belin, coll. "Voix Américaines"). She has recently contributed to W.Freedman and J.Assadi's collection of essays *A Distant Drummer: Foreign Perspectives on F.Scott Fitzgerald*. She has taken part in several French national radio programs devoted to Fitzgerald, and is a member of the F.Scott Fitzgerald Society and of the editorial board of *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, where she regularly publishes articles and reviews. She has also written several articles on other American or Canadian writers from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and is currently working on Native American novelists.