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# "Circles Breaking the Smooth Surface": Repetition and Narrative Folds in Hemingway's Early Michigan Stories

Marie-Odile Salati

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- 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<sup>1</sup> and provides access to an understanding of deep patterns of meaning. "Circles breaking the smooth surface"<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.

- 3 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.
- 4 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 *b* alliteration echoing the word "bay": "The bay blue and bright and usually whitecaps on the lake out beyond 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 *b* 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.
- 5 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.
- 6 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.<sup>4</sup>
- 7 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 skinning 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.
- 12 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."<sup>5</sup> 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,<sup>6</sup> 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).
- 13 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).

- 14 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)
- 15 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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)
- 16 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.<sup>9</sup>
- 17 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.<sup>10</sup>
- 18 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.

- 19 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,<sup>11</sup> 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 [Λ] 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*.
- 20 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.



- 21 "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."<sup>12</sup>
- 22 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, [Bill]...[Bill] 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.
- 23 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.
- 24 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").<sup>14</sup> 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 **bbf** 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 [ʌ] 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 *deep* and *water* 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.

- 31 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 *h* sound combines with the jerky rhythm to bring the sentence to the point of breathlessness.
- 32 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 *ck* alliteration.
- 33 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 *rod*, *holding*, 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.*).
- 34 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.

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## 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. <sup>68</sup>...<sup>69</sup> 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. Modellmog (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.

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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.

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 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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