

# The End of Something Short

## Hemingway's Use of Repetition as a Closing Device in Five Short Stories

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### Introduction

My presentation is about a literary device that Ernest Hemingway used in five of the short stories featured in *The Short Stories: The First Forty-Nine Stories with a Brief Preface by the Author*. (1955) This device, which appears in the conclusion of the stories, involves the use of repetition.

Although much has been written about Hemingway's use of repetition, little has been noted about the repetition used in the endings of his short stories. Recent studies have focused on "zero endings." (Grebstein 2-3) Scholars believe his use of it was influenced by the works of Anton Chekhov (Grebstein 2). Robert Paul Lamb has introduced several new terms in his discussion of Hemingway's endings, which include the open ending, the closed ending, the seeded close, and the float-off. (145-149) Lamb's work, though supremely detailed and insightful, does not address the use of repetition as a closing device in the short story form. Joseph M. Flora notes the similarities between the endings of "The Three-Day Blow" and "Ten Indians. However, he does not elaborate on the repetition of the blowing wind that is used three times in the conclusion of both stories. In his book, *Hemingway's Nick Adams*, he writes: "The ending of the story (The Three-Day Blow) also reminds us of 'Ten Indians' where it was a long time before Nick, hearing the wind on the lake, remembered that his heart was broken." (67)

This study offers a new way of understanding Hemingway's approach to short story endings. It is my belief that critics have not gone far enough in their analysis of his craft. I also believe it is time for a new term and concept for describing this closing device that relates specifically to Hemingway's use of repetition. Having a new concept for current discussions should aid in moving the conversation beyond the "zero ending" and other previously discussed terms on this topic.

The repetition under discussion is found in the following stories: "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," "Up in Michigan," "The Three-Day Blow," "In Another Country," and "Ten Indians." As we examine the endings of these stories, it is important to address three questions about their use of repetition: 1. How is it used? 2. What is it called? 3. Where did it originate?

## **I. How is it used?**

To answer the first question, I will begin with an overview of the closing repetition noted in each of the stories. The repetitional sentences are underlined.

Example #1

### **The Snows of Kilimanjaro**

#### **Repetition of the crying hyena**

Just then the hyena stopped whimpering in the night and started to make a strange, human, almost crying sound. The woman heard it and stirred uneasily. She did not wake. In her dream she was at the house on Long Island and it was the night before her daughter's debut. Somehow her father was there and he had been very rude. Then the noise the hyena made was so loud she woke and for a moment she did not know where she was and she was very afraid. Then she took the flashlight and shone it on the other cot that they had carried in after Harry had gone to sleep. She could see his bulk under the mosquito bar but somehow he had gotten his leg out and it hung down alongside the cot. The dressings had all come down and she could not look at it.

"Molo," she called, "Molo! Molo!"

Then she said, "Harry, Harry!" Then her voice rising, "Harry! Please, Oh Harry!"

There was no answer and she could not hear him breathing.

Outside the tent the hyena made the same strange noise that had awakened her. But she did not hear him for the beating of her heart. (Hemingway 76-77)

Example #2

### **Up in Michigan**

#### **Repetition of the rising mist**

Liz started to cry. She walked over to the edge of the dock and looked down to the water. There was a mist coming up from the bay. She was cold and miserable and everything felt gone. She walked back to where Jim was lying and shook him once more to make sure. She was crying.

"Jim," she said, "Jim. Please, Jim."

Jim stirred and curled a little tighter. Liz took off her coat and leaned over and covered him with it. She tucked it around him neatly and carefully. Then she walked across the dock and up the steep sandy road to go to bed. A cold mist was coming up through the woods from the bay. (Hemingway 85-86)

Example #3

**The Three-Day Blow**

**Repetition of the blowing wind**

They stepped out the door. The wind was blowing a gale.

“The birds will lie right down in the grass with this,” Nick said.

They struck down toward the orchard.

“I saw a woodcock this morning,” Bill said.

“Maybe we’ll jump him,” Nick said.

“You can’t shoot in this wind,” Bill said.

Outside now the Marge business was no longer so tragic. It was not even very important. The wind blew everything like that away.

“It’s coming right off the big lake,” Nick said.

Against the wind they heard the thud of a shotgun.

“That’s dad,” Bill said. “He’s down in the swamp.”

“Let’s cut down that way,” Nick said.

“Let’s cut across the lower meadow and see if we can jump anything,” Bill said.

“All right,” Nick said.

None of it was important now. The wind blew it out of his head. Still he could always go into town Saturday night. It was a good thing to have in reserve. (Hemingway 125)

Example #4

**In Another Country**

**Repetition of the man and the window**

He looked straight past me and out through the window. Then he began to cry. “I am utterly unable to resign myself,” he said and choked. And then crying, his head up

looking at nothing, carrying himself straight and soldierly, with tears on both his cheeks and biting his lips, he walked past the machines and out the door.

...In front of the machine the major used were three photographs of hands like his that were completely restored. I do not know where the doctor got them. I always understood we were the first to use the machines. The photographs did not make much difference to the major because he only looked out of the window. (Hemingway 272)

Example #5

### **Ten Indians**

#### **Repetition of the wind and waves**

After a while he heard his father blow out the lamp and go into his own room. He heard a wind come up in the trees outside and felt it come in cool through the screen. He lay for a long time with his face in the pillow, and after a while he forgot to think about Prudence and finally he went to sleep. When he awoke in the night he heard the wind in the hemlock trees outside the cottage and the waves of the lake coming in on the shore, and he went back to sleep. In the morning there was a big wind blowing and the waves were running high up on the beach and he was awake a long time before he remembered that his heart was broken. (Hemingway 336)

In reviewing these stories, we can see that the repetition is used in different ways. As Jackson J. Benson notes, “repetition in Hemingway’s work is used in a number of different ways and often very subtly.” (284) But to fully appreciate its use, I think it would help to look at Hemingway’s general use of repetition in other parts of his stories. Scholars agree that he used it for emphasis and to establish mood, as well as to paint pictures for the readers. (Lamb, “Art Matters” 134) Frank O’Connor suggests that the repetition is incantatory and has a hypnotic effect on the readers. (116, 155) Among other things, he explains, it has the ability to cement images and emotion by helping readers to see what the author sees, and to feel what the author feels. In other words, repetition can help readers experience what the author experiences. (O’Connor 116)

Repetition, as seen in the short story endings, is shown to depict or highlight a person’s emotional and psychological state, foreshadow a future event, emphasize a particular mood, dramatize an experience, and illuminate a story’s meaning. Of course, other uses may also exist. As Benson reminds us, “the use of repetition by Hemingway is an exceedingly complex subject, worthy of an extended study in itself.” (284)

## **2. What is it called?**

I have searched for terms and ideas that may best describe this closing device. I initially wanted to call it a “Repetitional Close,” but I decided a better term would be “Echo Ending.” I define this ending as one in which a repetitional phrase or sentence is used to foreshadow, dramatize, or

emphasize an incident (or scene) in a way that illuminates a story while creating a lasting memory of a character or situation in a story's conclusion. On a certain level, it does with words what an audible echo does with sound: It presents a lingering quality in which the repetitional phrase appears to trail off into the distance. My selection of the term "echo" is based on the uses and effects of the repetition used. I have tried to incorporate these uses into the definition. My selection of the term was also inspired by its use in the literature. In his book, *Reading Hemingway's Men Without Women*, Joseph M. Flora makes an interesting comment about "Ten Indians." He writes: "The concluding paragraph carries great lyrical beauty as it echoes many of the images of the story." (Flora 120) Sheldon Norman Grebstein, in his book, *Hemingway's Craft*, observes: "He (Hemingway) quite frequently creates a subtle echo-effect or a muted rhyming as the spontaneous product of the method of repetition." (136)

Robert Paul Lamb discusses the "echo scene," a term used by Michael Reynolds. (245) In Lamb's *The Hemingway Short Story*, he explains it is as a scene "in which Hemingway runs a particular scene past the reader for a second time. In the second or echo scene, Reynolds observes, 'the emphasis of the scene will have shifted slightly so that the reader is invited to make a comparison between the two scenes. The result of such a comparison is frequently irony.'" (81) Interestingly enough, the term "echo" also appears in a category of poetry known as "echo verse." It focuses on the repetition involving the end of a stanza which is arranged to mimic an echo.

Based on these uses of the term, including the actual idea of an echo, the term "echo ending" seems to be an appropriate phrase to describe what Hemingway does in some of his short story endings.

### **3. Where did it originate?**

In answering this third question, I am interested in knowing who or what is the inspiration for Hemingway's use of this device. While I cannot say for certain, there appears to be a number of possibilities, each of which deserves consideration. One possible source of influence is Anton Chekhov. In the book, *Anton Chekhov's Short Stories*, critic A.B. Derman writes: "Of the three classical compositional elements – exposition, development, and conclusion – Chekhov seems to have concerned himself most with the conclusion." (Derman 304) An analysis of Chekhov's stories shows his use of repetition as a closing device in at least two stories.

In "The Huntsman," we find a repetition of a farewell: "Good-bye, Yegor Vlassich." (Chekhov 11) It is mentioned three times in the story's conclusion. The third mention appears in the very last paragraph which consists of a single sentence. In "The Lady with the Dog," there is the repetition of a romantic realization between Dmitri Gurov and Anna Sergeyevna. The first mention of this moment begins with a plea to stop crying:

"Don't cry," he said.

It was quite obvious to him that this love of theirs would not soon come to an end, and that no one could say when this end would be." (Chekhov 234)

The second mention of this moment also includes a comment about crying:

“Stop crying, my dearest,” he said. “You’ve had your cry, now stop .... Now let us have a talk, let us try and think what we are to do.” (Chekhov 235)

Then in the final paragraph, we find:

“And it seemed to them that they were within an inch of arriving at a decision, and that then a new, beautiful life would begin. And they both realized that the end was still far, far away, and that the hardest, the most complicated part was only just beginning.” (Chekhov 235)

Another possible source that may have inspired Hemingway’s use of repetition in this manner is the King James Bible. According to Joseph M. Flora, “The rhythms of the King James Bible were a powerful influence on Hemingway’s style....” (“Ernest Hemingway” 20) He says he “can hardly overemphasize its importance in Hemingway’s arsenal.” (Flora, “Ernest Hemingway” 40) One biblical passage that seems to bear resemblance to Hemingway’s writing is in the first chapter of Genesis (emphasis/underscore added):

<sup>5</sup> And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

<sup>6</sup> And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

<sup>7</sup> And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

<sup>8</sup> And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day. (Genesis 1:5-8)

Notice the repetition of: “And the evening and the morning were the \_\_\_\_ day.” It is repeated throughout the chapter. In the final verse of the chapter, we find:

<sup>31</sup> And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31)

## **Conclusion**

This presentation has focused on Hemingway's use of repetition as a closing device in five short stories. It examined how the repetition is used, what it may be called, and where it may have originated. It also introduced the "echo ending" as a new term and concept for describing Hemingway's use of repetition in his short story endings. Further study is needed to determine if this repetition is used in this manner in other Hemingway stories. It would also be helpful to determine whether this repetitional technique is used by other writers who had an influence on Hemingway's craft.

Although critics have noted the impact of the King James Bible on his work, further research into Hebrew Parallelism, which is used in various parts of the Bible, may also prove useful in understanding the repetition. Another area worth investigating is the repetitive motion in Hemingway's favorite sports and how it may have inspired him, informed his writing, or possibly shaped his ideas about the use of repetition.

These areas, including the "echo ending" concept, should be further examined in order to advance the conversation on Hemingway's craft. After all, the presentation given here is only the tip of the iceberg.

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