

WEATHER

accumulates at compound interest here in the City of London, reminding us of the Biblical condemnation of money as filthy lucre. The Lord Chancellor described at the beginning of the passage (in a series of terse statements like headlines from "News at Ten") presiding over the court of Chancery, seems also to preside over the weather, and the equation is clinched some paragraphs later: "Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth."

19 Repetition

In the fall the war was always there, but we did not go to it any more. It was cold in the fall in Milan and the dark came very early. Then the electric lights came on, and it was pleasant along the streets looking in the windows. There was much game hanging outside the shops, and the snow powdered in the fur of the foxes and the wind blew their tails. The deer hung stiff and heavy and empty, and small birds blew in the wind and the wind turned their feathers. It was a cold fall and the wind came down from the mountains.

We were all at the hospital every afternoon, and there were different ways of walking across the town through the dusk to the hospital. Two of the ways were alongside canals, but they were long. Always, though, you crossed a bridge across a canal to enter the hospital. There was a choice of three bridges. On one of them a woman sold roasted chestnuts. It was warm, standing in front of her charcoal fire, and the chestnuts were warm afterward in your pocket. The hospital was very old and very beautiful, and you entered through a gate and walked across a courtyard and out a gate on the other side. There were usually funerals starting from the courtyard. Beyond the old hospital were the new brick pavilions, and there we met every afternoon and were all very polite and interested in what was the matter, and sat in the machines that were to make so much difference.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY "In Another Country" (1927)

them may have made their lives not worth living anyway. It is a story about trauma, and how men cope with it, or fail to cope. The unspoken word which is a key to all the repeated words in the text is "death".

The American word for autumn, *fall*, carries in it a reminder of the death of vegetation, and echoes the conventional phrase for those who die in battle, "the fallen". Its juxtaposition with *cold* and *dark* in the second sentence strengthens these associations. The brightly lit shops seem to offer some distraction (an effect heightened by the fact that there is no lexical repetition in this sentence) but the narrator's attention quickly focuses on the game hanging outside the shops, further emblems of death. The description of the snow powdering in their fur, and the wind ruffling their feathers, is literal and exact, but tightens the association of *fall*, *cold*, *dark*, *wind*, *blew*, with death. Three of the repeated words come together for the first time in the last sentence with a poetic effect of closure: "It was a cold fall and the wind came down from the mountains." The mountains are where the war is going on. Wind, so often a symbol of life and spirit in religious and Romantic writing, is here associated with lifelessness. God is very dead in these early stories of Hemingway. The hero has learned from the trauma of combat to distrust metaphysics as well as rhetoric. He trusts only his senses, and sees experience in starkly polarized terms: cold/warm, light/dark, life/death.

The incantatory rhythms and repetitions persist in the second paragraph. It would have been easy to find elegant alternatives for "hospital", or simply to have used the pronoun "it" occasionally; but the hospital is the centre of the soldiers' lives, their daily place of pilgrimage, the repository of their hopes and fears, and the repetition of the word is therefore expressive. It is possible to vary the route by which the hospital is reached, but the terminus is always the same. There is a choice of bridges, but always you have to cross a canal (a faint suggestion of the river Styx in the underworld, perhaps). The narrator prefers the bridge where he can buy roasted chestnuts, warm in the pocket like the promise of life — except that Hemingway doesn't use that simile, he merely implies it; just as in the first paragraph he manages to make his

IF YOU HAVE the time and inclination, get some coloured pens or pencils and draw a ring round the words that occur more than once in the first paragraph of Hemingway's story, a different colour for each word, and join them up. You will reveal a complex pattern of verbal chains linking words of two kinds: those with referential meaning, *fall*, *cold*, *dark*, *wind*, *blew*, which we can call lexical words, and articles, prepositions and conjunctions like *the*, *of*, *in*, *and*, which we can call grammatical words.

It is almost impossible to write English without the repetition of grammatical words, so normally we don't notice it as such, but you can't fail to notice the extraordinary number of "ands" in this short paragraph. This is a symptom of its very repetitive syntax, stringing together declarative statements without subordinating one to another. The repetition of the lexical words is less evenly distributed, clustering at the beginning and end of the paragraph.

Lexical and grammatical repetition on this scale would probably receive a black mark in a school "composition", and quite rightly. The traditional model of good literary prose requires "elegant variation": if you have to refer to something more than once, you should try to find alternative ways of describing it; and you should give your syntax the same kind of variety. (The passage by Henry James discussed in Section 6 is rich in examples of both kinds of variation.)

Hemingway, however, rejected traditional rhetoric, for reasons that were partly literary and partly philosophical. He thought that "fine writing" falsified experience, and strove to "put down what really happened in action, what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced" by using simple, denotative language purged of stylistic decoration.

It looks easy, but of course it isn't. The words are simple but their arrangement is not. There are many possible ways of arranging the words of the first sentence, but the one chosen by Hemingway splits the phrase "go to war" in two, implying an as yet unexplained tension in the persona of the narrator, a mixture of relief and irony. As we soon learn, he and his companions are soldiers wounded while fighting on the Italian side in World War I, now recuperating, but conscious that the war which nearly killed

want to go to bed with her. When does it happen? When don't I want to go to bed with her? When she wants to go to bed with me. I like going to bed with her when going to bed with me is the last thing she wants. She nearly always goes to bed with me, if I shout at her a lot or threaten her or give her enough money.

It hardly needs to be pointed out that the frustrations and contradictions of the narrator's sexual relationship with Selina are rendered all the more comic and ironic by the repetition of the phrase "go to bed with" for which any number of alternatives were available. (If you doubt that, try rewriting the passage using elegant variation.) The final sentence also illustrates another important type of repetition: the recurrence of a thematic keyword throughout an entire novel — in this case, "money". It is "money" not "go to bed" that occupies the crucially important last-word space in the paragraph I have just quoted. Thus one kind of repetition, belonging to the macro-level of the text, functions as variation on the micro-level.

description of the season as emotionally powerful as any example of the pathetic fallacy (see the preceding section) without using a metaphor. The line between charged simplicity and mannered monotony is a fine one, and Hemingway didn't always stay on the right side of it, but in his early work he forged an entirely original style for his times.

Needless to say, repetition is not necessarily linked to a bleakly positivist, anti-metaphysical representation of life such as we find in Hemingway. It is also a characteristic feature of religious and mystical writing, and is used by novelists whose work tends in that direction — D. H. Lawrence, for instance. The language of the opening chapter of *The Rainbow*, evoking a lost agrarian way of life, echoes the verbal repetition and syntactical parallelism of the Old Testament:

The young corn waved and was silken, and the lustre slid along the limbs of the men who saw it. They took the udder of the cows, the cows yielded milk and pulsed against the hands of the men, the pulse of the blood of the teats of the cows beat into the pulse of the hands of the men.

Repetition is also a favourite device of orators and preachers, roles that Charles Dickens often adopted in his authorial persona. This, for instance, is the conclusion to his chapter describing the death of Jo, the destitute crossing-sweeper, in *Bleak House*:

Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day.

And of course repetition can be funny, as in this passage from Martin Amis's *Money*:

Intriguingly enough, the only way I can make Selina actually *want* to go to bed with me is by not wanting to go to bed with her. It never fails. It really puts her in the mood. The trouble is, when I don't want to go to bed with her (and it does happen), I don't