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"I, ALSO, AM IN MICHIGAN":
PASTORALISM OF MIND
IN HEMINGWAY'S
"BIG TWO-HEARTED RIVER"

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IN *THE MACHINE IN THE GARDEN* (1964), critic Leo Marx discusses how many of the great 19th and 20th century American writers

invoke the image of a green landscape—a terrain either wild or, if cultivated, rural—as a symbolic repository of meaning and value. But at the same time they acknowledge the power of a counterforce, a machine or some other symbol of the forces which have stripped the old ideal of most, if not all, of its meaning. Complex pastoralism, to put it another way, acknowledges the reality of history. (363)

Marx uses the metaphor of the "machine" with reference to the steam engines that first interrupted the peace of the American pastoral landscape in the 19th century. Against the backdrop of his theory, this paper will offer a reading of Ernest Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" that attempts to explain Nick's reaction to the swamp, where, "in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be *tragic*" (*IOT* 211, emphasis mine).

Most of the extensive criticism on this story agrees that Nick is in a state of shell shock. His solitary fishing trip among the hills and pine plains of rural Michigan seems a form of escapism—a pastoral retreat from reality. In this light, the anti-pastoralism of the long-abandoned town of Seney and its surrounding burned-out landscape, in the first part of the story, serves as an example of "civilization" and its attendant hor-

rors, in stark contrast with the bucolic riverside meadow where Nick finally makes camp. Curiously, however, it is the *swamp*, an element of truly wild nature adjoining the river, that precipitates the eventual emergence of the “machine in the garden,” or the reminder of the world and its realities that Nick tries, and fails, to escape. This paper will argue that because Nick attributes his buried anxieties to the swamp, his own consciousness interrupts the experience of the idyll. In effect, therefore, Nick himself and by implication every human functions as the machine in the garden.

This essay proposes that the role of the swamp in “Big Two-Hearted River” is to unsettle distinctions between the wild and the industrial, the organic and the mechanical, nature and culture, in several ways. The swamp, the apparent threat to the peace of the pastoral retreat and the reminder of the “forces of history,” serves as the symbolic “machine” of Leo Marx’s theory, yet remains in and of itself fundamentally wild. As Marx points out, the pastoral landscape can be threatened not only from the side of civilization but also from that of wilderness. Human activity is not the only force disruptive of the peaceful green world, and nonhuman wilderness may be just as threatening to pastoral security as the military-industrial-political “machine.” Furthermore, as ecocritic Gary Snyder argues, wilderness is not just “other” but also inheres in the human sphere of existence, in the body, perhaps most of all in the uncharted depths of the mind. It may be that Nick, presumably suffering from real psychological distress, identifies with the swamp even as he fears it and, consequently, distorts it symbolically. The depths of the human (sub)conscious are wild, and at the same time the human is the “machine.” All of these ideas are conveyed by the swamp, the symbol that acknowledges the realities of history within the context of the pastoral retreat.

Finally, the association of the human mind with the literal machine that inspires Marx’s theory calls to mind the late 20th century “cyborg theory” of Donna Haraway. Her principle of human–machine hybridity may offer a useful if surprising context for the continuing examination of Hemingway’s proto-ecological consciousness and his attempts to resolve the problems of history that take into account the presence—and disappearance—of truly wild nature.

The vast, ongoing critical conversation about “Big Two-Hearted River” establishes the mentality framing Nick’s fishing trip. In 1939, Edmund Wilson was the first to interpret Nick’s retreat to the countryside as propelled

by his wartime experiences; Malcolm Cowley's introduction to *The Portable Hemingway* (1944) made this a near-definitive reading and the object of competing critical responses over the course of the 20th century. Within the decade, Philip Young contended that Nick, in this story, is an autobiographical character, with a traumatic injury like that suffered by Hemingway in the Great War leaving him permanently destabilized. William Adair subsequently built on Young's argument that the river reminds Nick, by a kind of transference, of the place where Hemingway was wounded on the Piave River near Fossalta, Italy. At the same time, however, Keith Carabine and Robert Paul Lamb hold that only extratextual evidence permits a reading of the swamp in "Big Two-Hearted River" as related to acute mental strain, due to shell shock or otherwise, on the part of Nick or Hemingway himself.

Yet even Carabine, one of the critics to most vehemently reject the "war-wound" thesis, admits to "the odd relationship [in the story] between the power of the emotions and the slightness of the cause and of the vehicle" (44). For example, following a lost battle with a hooked trout, "Nick's hand was shaky. He reeled in slowly. The thrill had been too much. He felt, vaguely, a little sick, as though it would be better to sit down" (*IOT* 204). For some unexplained reason, Nick is unsettled by what ought to be an innocuous event for such an experienced fisherman. Carabine chooses to read "Big Two-Hearted River" as "one of the best accounts of euphoria in the language" (44), yet he challenges and perhaps subverts his own reading by observing "that the psychological meaning of euphoria is 'unfounded feelings of optimism, strength'" (44, emphasis mine). Indeed, Nick's elation seems dangerously tenuous and liable to collapse at any moment. Fredrik Brøgger concludes that the story ultimately evokes "an indefinite but pervasive sense of alienation and insecurity. Its possible sociocultural causes . . . are a non-subject; what is emphasized is the indeterminacy of Nick's angst" (20). While Hemingway himself appears to support the "war-wound" thesis in *A Moveable Feast* (where he says of "Big Two-Hearted River," "The story was about coming back from the war but there was no mention of the war in it" [*AMF* 76]), critics agree that, whatever the impetus for Nick's foray into the woods, it remains indeterminate within the story itself.

There is no war in the story, at least not on the surface; still the pervasive sense of dread remains all-but-manifestly there. In the full context of

In Our Time, otherwise serene aspects of Nick's surroundings loom particularly ominous. The hints of bloodshed resonate with the extraordinary, precisely controlled savagery of the bullfighting vignettes that precede the story in the collection. In one "Big Two-Hearted River" scene, Nick cleans his catch, "slitting them from the vent to the tip of the jaw. All the insides and the gills and tongue came out in one piece" (*IOT* 212). The depiction inevitably echoes the disembowelling of the picador's horse in "Chapter 10": "The horse's entrails hung down in a blue bunch and swung backward and forward as he began to canter, the monos whacking him on the back of his legs with the rods" (*IOT* 115). In another scene, Nick collects grasshoppers to use as bait:

Another hopper poked his head out of the bottle. His antennae wavered. He was getting his front legs out of the bottle to jump. Nick took him by the head and held him while he threaded the slim hook under his chin, down through his thorax and into the last segments of his abdomen. The grasshopper took hold of the hook with his front feet, spitting tobacco juice on it. Nick dropped him into the water. (*IOT* 200)

His hooking of the grasshopper, detached and anatomically precise though his actions may be, helps to create an atmosphere of latent violence in the story that is magnified by Nick's apparent consciousness of it.

The acts of potential brutality inherent to fishing—a blood sport—also echo events beyond the setting of the story and *In Our Time* as a whole. Nick handles the live fish he releases back into the stream with care: "Years before when he had fished crowded streams, with fly fishermen ahead of him and behind him, Nick had again and again come on dead trout, furry with white fungus, drifted against a rock, or floating belly up in some pool" (*IOT* 201–202), having been touched with dry hands before being released. Adair points out that Nick's memory of the dead fish in crowded streams finds "a gloss in Col. Cantwell's memory" in *Across the River and into the Trees* "of the corpses thrown into the canals, during the June 1918 offensive" (262). The careful hooking of bait and careless killing of trout finally recalls, by extension, all the violence that Nick has himself witnessed, experienced, and alluded to in other Nick Adams stories, published both before and after "Big Two-Hearted River." Perhaps the most

explicit reference is in *Men Without Women*'s "Now I Lay Me" (1927), where Nick confesses that he has been afraid of closing his eyes in the dark "ever since [he] had been blown up at night" (129). Nonetheless, in the very strictest sense, there is no mention of war in "Big Two-Hearted River." Nick rigorously blocks out any memory of his war experience in his determination to find solace in nature and fishing.

To that end, he refuses to let his mind wander. "His reflections on the landscape are goal-directed and limited" (Brøgger 24), focused on the immediate, such as when he pulls "all the sweet fern bushes by their roots. His hands smelled good from the sweet fern" (*IOT* 185). He loses himself, briefly and gratefully, in observing "the trout keeping themselves steady in the current with wavering fins. As he watched them they changed their positions by quick angles, only to hold steady in the fast water again. Nick watched them a long time. . . . They were very satisfactory" (*IOT* 177). His sensations, as Carabine says, "need to be nourished . . . to circumvent 'the need for thinking'" (42). He nurses his senses: "he was not," for example, "going to spoil it all by burning his tongue" on his food (*IOT* 188). But as Jackson Benson puts it, Nick "walks on the edge of chaos. . . . The very details of each sensory moment are so insisted upon, so savoured, that they are like ticks of a time bomb" (137).

In spite of every concentrated effort, his unnamed anxieties repeatedly threaten to break the surface. "His mind was starting to work" after he settled into camp for the night, but he "knew he could choke it because he was tired enough" (*IOT* 191). He determinedly suppresses whatever it is that subliminally plagues him, a technique that fishing the river tests repeatedly. Following his scuffle with a trout, Nick needs time to collect himself: "He did not want to rush his sensations any" (*IOT* 204). The cumulative effect of this caution and deliberateness, this single-minded focus on the preservation of fragile well-being, calls to mind a patient convalescing from wounds physical or psychological—but calls to mind only faintly, not even empirically, until Nick describes the swamp as tragic.

Up to that point, he obeys the simple pastoral impulse, to return to the peaceful backcountry and river he fished in happier times as "a restorative, a flight from the confusion and sorrow of urban life" (Savola 29), a retreat "from some threatening scene on the horizon into the green world" (Love, *Practical* 188). In many ways the pastoral design in "Big Two-Hearted River" so closely resembles the one outlined in *The Machine in the Garden*

that it could almost have served as its template—indeed, when describing his theory of the complex pastoral, Leo Marx comments that “The work of Faulkner, Frost, Hemingway, and West comes to mind” (363). Marx contrasts the complex pastoral or “pastoralism of mind” with the “simple” or “sentimental” pastoral, the ordinary “yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence ‘closer to nature’” (6). The simple pastoral impulse is characterized most significantly by a deliberate turn away from the painful and fundamentally unavoidable realities of society, civilization, and now post-industrial life.

“Big Two-Hearted River” begins by presenting these realities in the form, or at least in the former location, of Seney, an abandoned logging town:

There was no town, nothing but the rails and the burned-over country. The thirteen saloons that had lined the one street of Seney had not left a trace. The foundations of the Mansion House hotel stuck up above the ground. The stone was chipped and split by the fire. It was all that was left of the town of Seney. Even the surface had been burned off the ground. (*IOT* 177)

In “Landscapes Real and Imagined,” Frederic J. Svoboda analyzes how the real environmental history of Seney, Michigan, informs a critical reading of the story. He describes how Seney sprang up and thrived with the rise of the logging industry in the 1880s and ‘90s, its brothels, saloons, and transient population of laborers neatly condensing the vices and dangers of “civilization” into one small town known locally as “Hell.”

There, the Alger, Smith Company and others removed the huge trees of the surrounding white pine forest; when the trees were all gone, by the 1890s, slash fires went unchecked. By the time Nick makes his trip, second-growth pine has begun to grow over the logged, burned, and abandoned swampland near Seney. As critic Susan F. Beegel points out, though, “the Michigan timbering frenzy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [had] permanently damaged the regenerative capacity of the land” (101). Here, then, the contextualizing “city” or evidence of “civilization” in the story, the essential motivating force behind the pastoral retreat, not only represents the social and technological realities of the world but actu-

ally is itself a literal historical reality. Moreover, it is reminiscent, as Svoboda comments, “of the no man’s land of the western front” (36). In this sense, the anti-pastoral landscape of the story’s beginning, altered beyond recognition by human intervention, sets up and adds greater verisimilitude to the eventual emergence of the “machine” in Marx’s sense—the reminder of the realities of history, even in Arcadia.

Hiking through these badlands to the more hospitable terrain beyond it, Nick seeks the unthinking serenity and peace of mind he knew at some point, a kind of Golden Age in the past. His retreat into this American Arcadia initially affords him a “cocoon of freedom from anxiety, guilt, and conflict—a shrine of the pleasure principle” (Marx 28), a bucolic bubble furnished for the sake of comfort with some of the indispensable luxuries of civilized life—among them, coffee. His expert outdoorsmanship and fishing set “a pattern of deliberate and pleasurable behavior. Fishing intensifies the sense of simplicity and control that Nick seeks” (Love, *Practical* 118). In a sense, Nick’s actions recall Ortega y Gasset’s criticism of the *Naturmensch*, which Marx cites in *Machine*: “He wants his motor-car, and enjoys it,”—as Nick does his tinned apricots, bottle of ketchup, and fishing rod in Hemingway’s story—“but he believes that it is the spontaneous fruit of an Edenic tree” (Marx 7). Unlike the *Naturmensch*, though, Nick is not “in the depths of this soul unaware of the artificial, almost incredible, character of civilization” (Marx 7). He recognizes the irony and even hypocrisy of carrying canned food so far into the bush: “‘I’ve got a right to eat this kind of stuff, if I’m willing to carry it,’ Nick said. His voice sounded strange in the darkening woods. He did not speak again” (*IOT* 187).

What troubles him almost from the beginning, marking his journey from the outset as something more complicated than a “simple” pastoral retreat, “is the discrepancy between the shallow stream of recorded thought. . . and the broad tide of dim emotions, ideas, and associations that had been flowing all the while somewhere at the back of his mind” (Marx 14). Nick goes fishing in the backwoods as a form of escapism but discovers that he cannot escape his anxieties—they float into his thoughts unbidden and “qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture” (Marx 25). Thus, a far-off whistle of the machine in the garden is already present and growing more insistent in Nick’s head when it finally, fully manifests itself. What begins in “Big Two-Hearted River” as “a conventional tribute to the pleas-

ures of withdrawal from the world—a simple pleasure fantasy—is transformed by the interruption of the machine into a far more complex state of mind” (Marx 15).

The Leo Marxian “machine” brings “a world [that] is more ‘real’ into juxtaposition with an ideal vision. It may be called the counterforce” to the pastoral dream, evoking “a larger, more complicated order of experience” (Marx 25). An anecdote in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Sleepy Hollow” notes inspired Marx’s “machine” as the counterforce to the pastoral fantasy. As Hawthorne sat peacefully in the woods one day, contemplating nature, the sound of a train whistle interrupted his thoughts and reminded him of the reality of the world beyond his pastoral retreat, “the great world of political and institutional change” (Marx 28). By coincidence (perhaps), Nick travels to Seney by railway in Hemingway’s story; its very first line reads, “The train went on up the track out of sight, around one of the hills of burnt timber” (*IOT* 177). The burnt timber is a symptom of the “progress” made since Hawthorne’s day in the mid-19th century—trains made the woods accessible and their near-total despoliation possible; sparks from the rails in some cases ignited slash fires even as locomotives removed the felled trees. I submit, however, that in “Big Two-Hearted River” it is paradoxically the swamp, not the train or any other literal machine, that later announces the presence of Marx’s figurative “machine.” The swamp therefore corresponds roughly to the train’s whistle in the Sleepy Hollow notes: swamp-as-whistle alerts Nick (and the reader) to the “machine” itself.

In Hemingway’s story, the swamp does not pierce the tranquility of the pastoral retreat with any suddenness but, rather, creeps up on Nick and the reader. As Nick settles into camp on the night of his arrival by the river, “The swamp was perfectly quiet” (*IOT* 191). Relieved of the need to think, he sinks into sleep, deeply satisfied by the restorative experience of camping after hiking alone through the Michigan backcountry. Over the course of the next day’s fishing, however, the swamp gradually invades his consciousness. He knows the landscape from previous trips, and he knows the swamp is there but avoids thinking about it. “There was the meadow, the river, and the swamp,” he notes without editorializing. “There were birch trees in the green of the swamp on the other side of the river” (*IOT* 195). He gives it as little thought as possible or necessary but keeps his eye on it as he fishes: “on the left, the lower edge of the meadow; on the right

the swamp" (*IOT* 202). More and more this natural feature of the landscape comes uninvited into his thoughts.

As Nick rests from another bout with the trout, the sight of the swamp finally dominates his attention:

The river became smooth and deep and the swamp looked solid with cedar trees, their trunks close together, their branches solid. It would not be possible to walk through a swamp like that. The branches grew so low. You would have to keep almost level with the ground to move at all. You could not crash through the branches. That must be why the animals that lived in swamps were built the way they were, Nick thought. (*IOT* 210–11)

The swamp thus penetrates his thoughts like "an alien world encroaching from without" (Marx 21): "In the swamp the banks were bare, the big cedars came together overhead, the sun did not come through, except in patches" (*IOT* 211). When Nick admits the full force of the swamp's troubling effect on his peace of mind, the almost perfect objectivity of the rest of the narration falls apart: "in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic. In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure. Nick did not want it. He did not want to go down the stream any further today" (*IOT* 211).

Brøgger explains, "Nick fears complication and disorder, projected here by deepening water, the lack of landing sites, the overgrowth, and the scarcity of light. Complexity equals uncertainty, which equals tragedy" (26). This moment, Nick's acknowledgment of what the swamp represents to him, is analogous to the moment in Marx's complex pastoral design where the two modes of consciousness—simple and complex pastoralism—diverge (11). Nick discovers a metaphor—that of the swamp. Like Nathaniel Hawthorne in the *Sleepy Hollow* notes, he "seizes upon the symbolic property or meaning in the event itself—its capacity to express much of what he thinks and feels about his situation" (Marx 11). The presence of the swamp finally undoes Nick's hard-won but illusory feeling of distance from the reality he wishes to escape. "Although he manages to regain some of his earlier sense of peace"—he carefully, composedly cleans and guts his fish before heading back to camp—"the encroaching forces of history have compelled him to recognize its [peace's] evanescence" (Marx

31). Nick's reaction to the swamp parallels Hawthorne's reaction to the sound of the train, thus fulfilling the conditions of the complex pastoral by demonstrating that any respite nature may appear to offer is necessarily fleeting.

Further, this "reminder of the forces of history" causes Nick's personal experience of war and probable state of shell shock to take on greater significance. In "complex" pastoralism, as Marx says, "the rural myth is threatened by an incursion of history," the reminder of "organized power, authority, restraint, suffering, and disorder" (Marx 21). According to this essay's interpretation of "Big Two-Hearted River," Nick unconsciously attributes the terror and anxiety that characterize his implied state of post-traumatic stress to the swamp. Its "tragic" nature also recalls the shadow of death that declares itself in Arcadia (*Et in Arcadia ego*, or "I [Death], also, am in Arcadia"). In this oblique way, then, the swamp effectively embodies, for Nick, his experience of the recently ended Great War, an historical moment that would psychologically define the Western world in the decades to come.

Few events in history have more violently disillusioned the societies that experienced them than the First World War. Gertrude Stein included Hemingway himself in what she called the "Lost Generation," a term that has come to describe the young literary modernists haunted by a sense of betrayal and emptiness brought about by the war's destructiveness and its approximately fourteen million dead. Nick's own loss of faith in civilization can be inferred from his determination to escape it. In *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), Paul Fussell discusses how, in literature, "[r]ecourse to the pastoral is an English mode of both fully gauging the calamities of the Great War and imaginatively protecting oneself against them" (235). The pastoral mode, he writes, "is a way of invoking a code to hint by antithesis at the indescribable" (235) and "the only repository of criteria for measuring fully the otherwise unspeakable grossness of the war" (268). The pastoral thereby serves as "*implicit* description through antithesis" (Fussell 238, emphasis mine), as in "Big Two-Hearted River," where the nature of Nick's need for escape is all the more vivid for being unspoken. In Fussell's reading, the entire pastoral scheme becomes a vehicle for addressing the obscenity of industrialized murder—a code for communicating something beyond words. In the same way, paradoxically, the remote, unspoiled swamp speaks of the world's first fully mechanized

war, and of tragedy. The swamp is a wild place and yet, in this context, is troublingly evocative of human industry in its ugliest form.

"The anti-pastoral forces at work in our literature seem indeed to become increasingly violent as we approach our own time," writes Marx in 1964, the year of *Machine's* publication. "For it is industrialization, represented by images of machine technology, that provides the counterforce in the American archetype of the pastoral design" (26). Marx points out that the *Sleepy Hollow* episode of 1844 took place concurrently with "that decisive stage in [the United States'] economic development which W.W. Rostow calls the 'take-off'. . . when the old blocks and resistances to steady development are overcome and the forces of economic progress 'expand and come to dominate the society'" (26-27). Nothing, Marx comments, "quite like the event announced by the train in the woods had occurred before. A sense of history as an unpredictable, irreversible sequence of unique events makes itself felt even in Hawthorne's notes" (Marx 31). Hawthorne's locomotive in the woods therefore serves in that context as "a presentiment of history bearing down on the American asylum" (Marx 27). More than half a century later, the First World War marked the end of a U.S. policy of isolationism and the early beginnings of a second "take-off" that would see America become a global military and economic superpower over the course of the 20th century. When *In Our Time* was first published in 1925, nothing quite like the war summoned up by the swamp had ever occurred before.

Nick's private interpretation of the swamp as a reminder of the forces of history marks an abrupt and problematic shift in the narration from apparent objectivity to total personal subjectivity. Brøgger observes that, for most of the rest of the story, we read through "an anonymous narrator who tries to describe nature as directly and accurately as possible. The narrator's relationship to nature is marked by a refusal to impose meaning on it; his literary reticence when evoking the landscape through language seems to reflect a respect for the factuality and many-facetedness of nature itself" (24). Conversely, to make the swamp a symbol, especially of war and mechanization, is in a sense to deny the swamp's essential nature, which, indeed, this essay itself runs the risk of doing.

My argument's imposition of subjective meaning onto the swamp comes perilously close to making the kind of human-centric assumptions that Gary Snyder condemns in "Is Nature Real?", where he attacks oppo-

nents of wildlife preservation. He writes, "What I fail to find in the writings of the anti-nature crowd is the awareness that wilderness is the locus of big rich ecosystems, and is thus (among other things) a living place for beings who can survive in no other sort of habitat" (388). He laments that his antagonists are "under the illusion that [wilderness] isn't really *there*" (389, original emphasis). Accordingly, much as "[t]he river was there" (*IOT* 177), the swamp is really *there*, whatever it may symbolize to sportsman or reader. As Hemingway's fellow modernist Stein might put it, "Swamp is a swamp is a swamp is a swamp."

After all, the swamp, as an element of truly wild nature, remains the opposite of a machine in the most literal sense. Indeed, it more closely resembles the "encroaching marshland" in Virgil's *Eclogues* that Marx describes as threatening the pastoral ideal just as much as civilization, human development, and history (22). The pastoral ideal "is located in a middle ground somewhere 'between,' yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and nature" (Marx 23). Conventional pastoralism in its most hackneyed form "valorizes the garden landscape, depicts an anthropocentric vision of the natural world, and endorses the subjugation of wild lands to human uses" (Savola 41). In "Big Two-Hearted River," however, the swamp stands in sharp contrast with every other feature of the landscape in that it is literally untouched by human hands and human history. In this story, the swamp is the one truly wild space in Nick's physical environment.

In addition, just as the "ideal pasture has two vulnerable borders" (Marx 22), the river in this story has two banks, the meadow and the swamp. "We should understand," says Marx, "that the counterforce may impinge upon the pastoral landscape either from the side bordering upon intractable nature or the side facing advanced civilization" (26). The swamp in this story literally embodies raw nature, real untouched wilderness, and Nick intuitively feels the danger it represents: he "did not want to go in there now. He felt a reaction against deep wading with the water deepening up under his armpits, to hook big trout in places impossible to land them. In the swamp the banks were bare, the big cedars came together overhead, the sun did not come through, except in patches" (*IOT* 211). The swamp possesses uncertainties equal in danger and complexity to the violence of human civilization and offers a terrifying glimpse of "the complexity, vitality, and unpredictability of the natural world" (Savola 41).

Brøgger points out that, for Nick, “enjoying nature is not a matter of competence only; it is a matter of accepting and tolerating the other side of its pulsating heart, its unexpected snarls and entanglements, as represented by the swamp. The challenges of nature, after all, are not different from those of culture” (27). The presence of the swamp and its role in thwarting Nick’s escapism are jarring reminders of pastoralism’s wild side.

For *wilderness* was originally at the heart of pastoralism. David Savola explains that “the tradition out of which Virgilian pastoral grew had a vital connection to the wildness of nature, through its connection to the cult of Pan” (42). Ecocritic Glen A. Love adds, “The Greek god Pan is an Arcadian and, for the Greeks, Arcadia symbolizes the original life. The ancient Arcadians were seen in Greek life as rough, bestial, wild primitives who occupied their barren and forbidding region as ‘Pre-Selenians,’ that is, older than the time when the moon rose for the first time” (*Practical* 75). Here, in Hemingway’s version of the American pastoral, the swamp recalls for the protagonist not only the destruction that humankind visits on itself, for example in the case of war, but also the very real and often insurmountable dangers that the forces of nature can pose to human societies warring and peaceable alike. History, in effect, inheres in “the green world” as much as in the machines we build to traverse it. In restoring the essential wildness to the pastoral setting, “Big Two-Hearted River” further complicates the complex pastoral by inviting a possible ecocritical reading of “the problems of history” as including our relationship with nature.

If, however, the swamp allows the invasion of the pastoral dream by the forces of history, it is only because Nick mentally constructs it as such: the true machine in the garden resides within the escapist’s head. In *The Machine in the Garden*, Marx initially emphasizes the role of the literal machine—of which the locomotive is the dominant example—and the cognitive dissonance of “noise clashing through harmony” (17) that such machines create in examples of American literature that substantiate his theory. However, as he elaborates further he elevates the importance of the observer over that of the metaphor:

Although Hawthorne’s account includes an element of representation. . . his chief concern is the landscape of the psyche. The inner, not the outer world, is what interests him most as he sits there in the woods, attempting to connect words and

sense perceptions. His aim, as he says, is to represent the broad tide of dim emotions, ideas, and images coursing through his mind. When he seizes upon the auditory image of the train it is because it serves this purpose. The primary subject of the *Sleepy Hollow* notes, then, is the contrast between two conditions of consciousness. (Marx 28)

Similarly, Nick seizes upon the visual image of the swamp because it serves the purpose of expressing his covert thoughts.

Moreover, if the real action in "Big Two-Hearted River" occurs in Nick's head and finds expression only in his doggedly detached mental play-by-play, as many critics argue, then all nature in the story is presented as through a filter. The story positions Nick "totally as Centre of Consciousness At no point in the story does the focus come from any observer other than Nick. . . . There is nothing else to feel and see except what Nick feels and sees" (Ficken 106). However, his effort to remain detached and unemotional continually fails—we hear "a character's voice we can identify by its insistence on spotting metaphorical connections with his own 'case' everywhere he looks" (Summerhayes 24), such as in the trout, admirably "keeping themselves steady in the current with wavering fins" (*IOT* 177) as Nick longs to be able to do. Rather than composedly observing the landscape, Nick actually composes both the landscape and his place in it. Robert Gibb notes that Hemingway's economical style "serves to fuse the [perceiver] with the perception, making the [features of landscape] extensions of Nick's consciousness, of his state of emotions. It is only a matter of degree to suggest that the entire landscape of the story is a mental one" (257). Brøgger agrees; nature, he says, is here "defined not in terms of itself but in terms of Nick's needs . . . the significance ascribed to nature [is] refracted through Nick's consciousness" (21).

As a function of this consciousness, the "machine" in "Big Two-Hearted River" departs from the machine described by Marx as "a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction. . . invariably. . . associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness in contrast with the tender, feminine, and submissive attitudes traditionally attached to the landscape" (29). Locating the counterforce in Nick's mind not only complicates Marx's (now facile) distinction between the natural world and the human world, but also reinforces the complex pastoral's insistence that escape

from the anxieties of reality is impossible. Nick's view of the swamp adds new meaning to Glen A. Love's declaration, "Pastoral's ancient and universal appeal—to come away—requires new examination in an age in which there is no away" (*Practical* 67).

"Big Two-Hearted River" thus anticipates a postmodern critical reading of the pastoral world in two important ways: first, by situating Marx's "machine" in the human psyche, the story demonstrates the futility of attempted physical retreat from the civilized world; and second, by indirectly associating historical reality with the swamp, the story restores wilderness to the complex pastoral equation, reminding readers of the catastrophe that potentially awaits us in its disappearance. The impact of the fires on the landscape around Seney evinces the real tragedy of this loss. Here, ego-consciousness segues into eco-consciousness.

While Nathaniel Hawthorne's anecdote "prefigures the emergence, after 1844, of a new, distinctively American, post-romantic, industrial version of the pastoral design" (Marx 32), "Big Two-Hearted River" also appears to prefigure the postmodern (as modernism must), in the sense that "nature" may be said to exist for humans *only* through the filter of the human consciousness. Dana Phillips argues that all aspects of the natural world are, from a postmodern perspective, "subsumed in a new form of social and natural organization in which everything, literally everything, is in one way or another answerable to human need" (218). He explains that our relationship with nature is inevitably mediated by the mind, a mediation that resembles Nick's construction of the landscape in "Big Two-Hearted River" as expressing his mental state. In the film *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, Jean-Luc Godard asserts (paraphrasing Wittgenstein), "Language is the house man lives in." So too is language the (green) world to us: we literally cannot imagine that world without it.

Phillips defines these mental operations, after Martin Heidegger, as "technology." "Technology isn't itself a machine," says Phillips, "but one of the many forms of *logos* itself. The essential tools are intellectual: the binary opposition [e.g. nature/culture] is more important than the opposable thumb" (218, original emphasis). For members of today's late-capitalist society, Phillips claims, the "technology" inherent in our developed, educated consciousness *cannot but* mediate our experience of nature. This mediation by the technology of the mind produces the mind as "machine," in the Leo Marxian sense of the machine as both metaphorical

and literal expression of the problems of history. The technology of the mind, in practice, leads to the devastation of the green world. Phillips continues,

We can't just change our mind about nature, because its problems did not begin just there, and nowhere else. They began . . . in the conjunction of Heideggerian "technology" and technology in the usual sense. They began when the will had the means, in the intersection of the mind and the tool at a point we might call that of no return, of totality: the global mechanisms of nature—the oceans and the atmosphere, for example—are the last frontiers. (218)

The machine, Nick's experience suggests, is us.

"The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment" (Haraway 315), says biologist, feminist, and cultural critic Donna Haraway three-quarters of a century and another world war after the writing of "Big Two-Hearted River." In "The Cyborg Manifesto" (1991), Haraway seeks to express the paradox of human existence in our advanced civilization: "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism. In short, we are cyborgs" (292). Haraway's postmodernist cyborg theory runs with the idea of the mind as a form of mediating technology. In this sense, Nick is both the literal and figurative "machine" in the pastoral garden: he is equipped with a brain, the origin and (according to Philips) prototype of technology. Nick is, therefore, a hybrid of machine and organism; a cyborg.¹ What is more, says Haraway, "Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines" (294). The existence of the cyborg thus collapses the binary oppositions that construct our relationships (e.g. between genders) in the human world and, moreover, our relationship with the natural world—a relationship that is proving increasingly destructive as the 21st century progresses.

Haraway consequently raises the possibility of "cyborg solutions" to some of the fundamental problems of human (cyborg) existence in a rapidly disappearing green world. She proposes the following:

A cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point. (295)

She stresses that a cyborg world effects a “simultaneity of breakdowns”; a multiple breakdown “of clean distinctions between organism and machine and similar distinctions structuring the Western self . . . that cracks the matrices of domination and opens geometric possibilities” (311). Her cyborg manifesto thus encourages a fundamental shift in perspective that would dissolve the false and alienating distinctions that Western civilization historically imposes between nature and humanity, technology and nature, humanity and machine.

Could this explain why, in “Big Two-Hearted River,” the swamp of all things announces and gives rise to the metaphorical “machine”? Nick may project his deeply suppressed anxieties onto the swamp because, in his traumatized state, he involuntarily identifies with the very wildness that haunts him. That is to say, his unrecognized, untreated psychological disturbance is as much “wilderness” as the swamp is. Snyder points out, “Our bodies are wild,” citing as examples the “involuntary quick turn of the head at a shout, the vertigo at looking off a precipice, the heart-in-the-throat in a moment of danger” (“Etiquette” 17). He elaborates,

There are more things in mind, in the imagination, than “you” can keep track of—thoughts, memories, images, angers, delights, rise unbidden. The depths of mind, the unconscious, are our inner wilderness areas . . . The conscious agenda-planning ego occupies a very tiny territory, a little cubicle somewhere near the gate. (“Etiquette” 17–18)

In this the mind resembles Hemingway’s famous iceberg, of which only one-eighth is visible above water. Traumatized by war, Nick recognizes the swamp’s similarity to the wilderness of his mind and recoils from precisely the disorder and danger he is trying to avoid. This is, I think, the machine

in the garden: the terrifyingly powerful, all-but-unmapped human intelligence that we carry with us wherever we go.

In his novel *Galápagos* (1985), American writer Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., makes the case that our grossly overdeveloped brains “are nearly fatal defects in the evolution of the human race” (8). Hemingway’s story likewise (but faintly) hints that our inability to escape ourselves is a function of evolution. On his way across the second-growth pine plain, Nick turns his attention to the grasshoppers that inhabit it, observing, “They were all black . . . he realized that they had all turned black from living in the burned-over land. He realized that the fire must have come the year before, but the grasshoppers were all black now. He wondered how long they would stay that way” (*IOT* 181). Later, the swamp raises similar questions for him: “The branches grew so low. You would have to keep almost level with the ground to move at all. You could not crash through the branches. That must be why the animals that lived in swamps were built the way they were, Nick thought” (*IOT* 211). Like the grasshoppers and the land itself, Nick is profoundly altered by historical reality—by the industrial-scale environmental devastation of his homeland, and by the war. That is to say, he is permanently damaged by his own, human culture and the physiological evolution that made such human culture possible.

Of this environmental devastation, Beegel writes, “When a disturbance is sufficiently acute, ecologists tell us, the land will not recover, at least not to its original state” (103). Recovery, instead, requires adaptation to changed and changing conditions. Although Hemingway himself saw second growth, for example, “not as renewal but as the aftermath of permanent injury to the land’s generative or procreative capacity” (Beegel 102), “Big Two-Hearted River” offers some hope of recovery and regeneration, perhaps through self-realization as a hybrid being. Svoboda points out, for example, that the fern and jack pines among which Nick makes his camp need fire to reproduce: “Thus, as he camps near them, the fictional Nick is not really out of the fire zone, but in an area in which regrowth after fire is linked with the story’s themes of potential death and potential regeneration” (39). Similarly, Nick’s psychological recovery, and the analogous restoration of our relationship with wilderness, may be possible through adaptation to a changed world, such as through the fundamental reordering of perspective described by Haraway in her cyborg theory.

The complex pastoral, says Marx, “brings the political and psychic dissonance associated with the onset of industrialism into a single pattern of meaning. Once generated, of course, that dissonance demands to be resolved” (30). Like “Big Two-Hearted River,” *The Machine in the Garden* as a text effectively anticipates the ecological crisis that is increasingly asserting its urgency in the present. “Now the great world is invading the land,” Marx writes, prophetically, “threatening, in fact, to impose a new and more complete dominion over it” (31–32). He adds, “To change the situation we require new symbols of possibility, and although the creation of those symbols is in some measure the responsibility of artists, it is in greater measure the responsibility of society. The machine’s sudden entrance into the garden presents a problem that ultimately belongs not to art but to politics” (Marx 365). Cyborg theory lays the possible groundwork for change: as cyborgs, we have “the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked [the tools] as other” (Haraway 311).

In conclusion, Leo Marx’s theory of the machine in the garden illuminates the role of the swamp and Nick’s reaction to it in several ways. First, the overlay of story and theory points to the idea that, possessed as we are of human intelligence, we have become the machine in the garden, the destroyer not only of woods and rivers but also of our own ability to have an unmediated experience of them. Second, due to Nick-as-machine’s intensely personal identification with it, the swamp unsettles the distinction between the organic and the technological. This breakdown of binaries and the idea of the mind-as-machine also suggest a potentially fruitful connection with the human-machine hybridity that Donna Haraway celebrates in her writing. Nick’s involuntary identification with the swamp moreover raises the possibility that he himself simultaneously embodies machine *and* wilderness in Snyder’s sense of the human unconscious as wilderness. Finally, the “machine” as symbol of historical reality and its vital connection to the swamp remind us that nonhuman wilderness is at least equal in power and complexity to the utmost of human enterprise, and that wilderness equally threatens the pastoral refuge we seek out between the two extremes. Hemingway’s story thus exemplifies and tests Marx’s theory of pastoralism of mind in American literature by locating both machine and wilderness in the mind itself without denying that wilderness, as Snyder says, is really *there*. “Big Two-Hearted River,” to put it

another way, acknowledges the reality of wilderness as much as it does the reality of history.

The tragedy of the swamp, however, is not the end of the story. As Gibb writes, "Nick hasn't come all this way to escape, but to prepare for re-entry" (258). Literary pastoralism traditionally presents a "vision of the good, simple life, a vision which will presumably sustain [people] as they *return* at the end to the great world on the horizon" (Love, "Revaluing" 231, my emphasis). In concluding with the phrase, "There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp" (*IOT* 212), the story points not to a simple "return" but to Nick's determination to eventually enter the swamp and face all that it represents. Like the American western version of the pastoral that Glen A. Love praises, "Big Two-Hearted River" reverses "the characteristic pattern of entry and return so that it is the green world which asserts its greater significance to the main character" ("Revaluing" 235). In the end, in a final, Haraway-like collapse of the distinction between civilization and wilderness at the bifurcated heart of "Big Two-Hearted River," the "real" world to which Nick must return includes the swamp.

NOTES

1. In Hemingway's *Men Without Women*, the convalescing soldiers of "In Another Country" fit Haraway's cyborg definition more literally, and more grotesquely, in being hooked up to experimental machines designed to repair their broken bodies, in an Italian sanatorium during the First World War.

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