Chapter 6

Highlighting the White-Nonwhite Dichotomy

Hemingway has negotiated the issue of race throughout the whole spectrum of his literary works like “Indian Camp,” “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” “Ten Indians,” “The Batter,” “The Light of the World,” “The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” The Garden of Eden, and True at First Light. It indicates that his consciousness about race and racial issues had taken roots from the very beginning of his career till its culmination in True at First Light where he tried to be one with the African race and be like them. This can be considered as the product of his observation and interaction with the people of different races like Indians, African Americans, Africans, and Jews with whom he came in contact. Hemingway has tried to highlight how race is the product of biological origin but people unfortunately try to establish their identity and supremacy on the basis of their race which leads to the development of prejudices, stereotypes and violence.

However, a cursory look at his short-stories and novels gives an impression that he has written only about white-males to the exclusion of others. Nadine Gordimer once said that Hemingway never used black Americans in his writings. Toni Morrison has said that Hemingway “has no need, desire, or awareness of (African Americans) either as readers of his work or as people existing anywhere other than in his imaginative world” (Playing in the Dark 69). But the truth is different. In fact there was an African American who lived in the early twentieth century and he seemed to have made quite a lasting impression on the young Hemingway. His impression on Hemingway seems to be enough to inspire at least three short-stories and a scene from The Sun Also Rises. Growing up as an avid boxing fan in the 1910s and 1920s,
Hemingway knew a great deal about the famous middle and heavy weight champions of his day, a natural interest for a man of his age. Eldridge Cleaver has written: “The boxing ring is the ultimate focus of masculinity in America, the two-fisted testing ground of manhood and the heavy weight champion, as a symbol, is the real Mr. America” (*Soul on Ice* 84).

When Hemingway was a teenager something quite remarkable happened in the world of boxing. The heavyweight champion of the world for the first time was a black man, Jack Johnson. The first African American ever allowed to contend for the heavy weight championship defeated the white Australian Tommy Burns in 1908. Editors of the *Australian Star* presciently wrote: “This battle may in future be looked back as the first real battle of an inevitable race war . . . There is more in this fight to be considered than the mere title of pugilistic champion of the world.”

In subsequent years, the American boxing scene instigated one of American culture’s most famous and perhaps least understood phenomena: the search for a Great White Hope. This fervour for a white man to reclaim the title culminated in 1910, when Jim Jeffries the retired heavyweight champion of the world, agreed to come out of retirement to fight Johnson. The fight not only drew national attention, but became a national obsession. Newspapers all over the nation, from New York to Los Angeles, published editorials on the racial implications of this match. The black newspaper, *Chicago Defender*, wrote: “On the arid plains of the Sage Brush State, the white man and the Negro will settle the mooted question of supremacy” (*Papa Jack* 96). The editorial of the *New York Times* wrote: “If the black man wins, thousands and thousands of his ignorant brothers will misinterpret his victory as justifying claims to much more than mere physical equality with their white neighbors” (*Papa Jack* 97).
Even the American Congress joined in the national discussion. Southern congressmen “talked freely of the danger of the negroes having their heads turned” by a Johnson victory. But in the fight Johnson also defeated Jeffries and at this United States Congress attempted to turn all heads away from the fight by passing a law that forbade importation and interstate transportation of films or other representations of prize fights and one representative, Roddenberry spoke most vehemently against the films: “No man descended from the Old Saxon race can look upon that kind of contest without abhorrence and disgust” (US Congress, Senate, Congressional Record, 62d Cong., 2d sess., July 19, 1912, P. 9305). Therefore, it is not odd to say that the world of boxing at that time would strike Hemingway, first and foremost, as a matter of colour.

On the basis of this background, if we read Hemingway’s short stories and other fictional work, we are bound to find a lot of substance related with the issue of race and racial difference existing in the world created by Hemingway. The notion of racial difference and violence is quite evident in the two earliest Nick Adams stories: “Indian Camp” and “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife.” Through these stories the author has tried to expose the instability of power relations based on racial identity. The Indians in these stories have been characterized often as symbols of darkness and primitivism. The Adamic figure is presented as one whose identity cannot be fully understood without historicizing his relation to these Indians—a relation based on racial domination. What takes place in the two stories is a male-male rivalry, white-male against Indian-male, a topic depicting the issue of racial difference and the resulting violence.

At the beginning of “Indian Camp” we find Nick, Dr. Adams, and Uncle George going across a lake through a gloomy, misty darkness. Joseph DeFalco points out:
The classical parallel is too obvious to overlook for the two Indians function in a Charon-like fashion in transporting Nick, his father and his uncle from their own sophisticated and civilized world of the white man into the dark and primitive world of the camp. ("Initiation" 161)

Once across the lake, Uncle George gives Indians two cigars which must be a gift. We have no signs that the Indian will give any gift in return. However, as Gayle Rubin explains: “Gifts were the threads of social discourse, the means by which . . . societies were held together in the absence of specialized governmental institutions” (“The Traffic in Women” 172). She further suggests that “gift exchange may also be the idioms of competition and rivalry” (172), using the example of “Big Man” who humiliates another by giving more than can be reciprocated and this form of exchange establishes between cultures a subtle, unequal dynamics of dominator and dominated.

Another example of racial difference and domination is revealed by Jurgen C. Wolter’s article, “Caesareans in an Indian Camp” when he describes the word Caesarean as: “Highly ambitious; in addition to being a technical term in surgery, it connotes authority, imperialism, assumption of power and even tyrannical dictatorship” (92). After this, Wolter explains the familiar theme of the father-son relationship: “Through the unintentionally violent (Caesarean) initiation of his son, the pompous and omniscient Caesar-doctor is reborn as a responsible and humanly imperfect father” (93).

Despite this gesture toward metaphoric imperialism, Wolter reiterates the same story of initiation, adding the Caesarean component to complicate our reading of Nick’s father. But the “violent” Caesarean is not performed on the doctor’s son; it is performed, without anesthetic on a screaming Indian woman. And while the location
of this story may alleviate a severe condemnation of the doctor and his methods per se, since he saves the life of mother and child in an Indian camp distant from civilization, it is precisely the story’s location that highlights the racial inequality between the two cultures with its insistent juxtaposition of light and dark, civilization and wilderness.

As the action of the story proceeds, the doctor appears to be the only person who can remain oblivious to the Indian woman’s screams. All others who don’t have to assist in the operation have moved up the road out of earshot. When Nick asks his father to quiet her screams, he responds: “But her screams are not important. I don’t hear them because they are not important” (The First Forty-Nine Stories 84).

Some have read this as callousness, others as professional distance; either way, Dr. Adams distances himself psychically from the woman to the point that she loses her markers of humanity. Dr. Adams chooses to envision her body as a territory without agency or voice, a kind of uninhabited land he takes possession of and must get under control. The whole scene of the doctor and the men holding the woman down is perceived by the Indian husband as a territory under the complete control of white men and he commits suicide later when the Indian women mysteriously leave the birthing to be replaced by three Indian men, Uncle Gorge, Nick, and Dr. Adams. Dr. Adams’ wish to have this event written down in a journal represents an ultimate authority, a removed, consecrated sign of medical, legal and institutional power of the whites over the non-whites.

The story “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” almost serves as a reply to the doctor’s Caesarian hubris in “Indian Camp,” for here the roles between the whites and the Indians have reversed. The doctor is in need of the Indian men to help him
dislodge the logs and saw them up. Here one Indian speaks and has the last word and consequently the doctor is silenced, though the Indians “could see from his back how angry he was.” Dr. Adam’s verbal threat, “If you call me Doc once again, I will knock your eye teeth down your throat” is returned with “Oh, no, you won’t Doc” (93). Not only does Dick Boulton make the doctor back down, but he uses Ojibway, a language unfamiliar to Dr. Adams, to mock him. This scene presents a complete reversal of power relations, where the dominant language or the language of the dominant has lost its force.

The threat of violence centers on the half buried logs that lie along the lake’s shore. One is reminded again of Kolodny’s work, which shows a clear link between the virgin woods and the female body as a primary site of contestation. Dick Boulton, described as “half bread,” dares to accuse Dr. Adams of stealing the logs. The log in this scene of the story bears the mark of its possessor, White and McNally, just as the doctor’s marks was left on the Indian woman’s body. Symbolic value of the name, White, is very important here. Thomas Strychacz’s article “Dramatizations of Manhood in Hemingway’s In Our Time and The Sun Also Rises” offers a useful reading of the scene’s significance:

The mark of the scalar’s hammer in the log shows that it belongs to “White” and McNally. In the same way, the fence around the white doctor’s garden marks the extent of his domain in the forest, the Indian’s traditional space, from which the three Indian’s appear and into which they disappear. The recognition that the land is stolen as well as the logs deepens the significance of the doctor’s shame - it becomes his culture’s shame too - and begins to explain why he fails to protect the integrity of his space. The doctor has no
ground to stand on because the ground is, morally speaking, not his; the
fence around the garden is as morally indefensible as stealing the logs. (250)

If we read these two stories as a unit, then the progression of violence from
“Indian Camp” to “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife” moves from the obscured to
the overt; “Doc” sits on his bed cleaning a shotgun: “He pushed the magazines full of
the heavy yellow shells and pumped them out again. They were scattered on the bed”
(The First Forty-Nine Stories 93). Strychacz has pointed out that: “The rifle . . .
signifies the technological superiority that hastened the appropriation of the Indian
lands” (“Dramatizations of Manhood” 36).

Obviously, we can easily decode the sexual metaphor of shells pumped through a
shaft and then left scattered on the bed, wasted and impotent. The scene where
violent, sexual, and racial markers all coincide most completely is during the climatic
confrontation between “Dick” and “Doc”:

“If you think the logs are stolen, leave them alone and take your tools back to
the camp,” doctor said. His face was red.

“Don’t go off at half-cock, Doc,” Dick said.” (The First Forty-Nine Stories
92)

The scene quoted above contains not only a sexual, but also a racial metaphor that
finally dislodges the most stubborn racial marker of all—skin colour. During the
confrontation, the doctor’s face, presumably because of his embarrassment and anger
has turned red. A fight between Dick, the Indian and Doc, the white man, must also
be read in reverse: as a confrontation between Dick, “many of the farmers around the
lake really believed he was a white man,” and Doc, whose “face was red” (92). A
climatic scene between the “great man” and the “big man” forces social relations into
the realm of violence, at once exposing and challenging the artificiality of power
relations based on essentialist notions of racial difference, like those presented in
“Indian Camp.” Here, in the second story, the racial markers continually shift and we
in turn must shift our perception of race in Hemingway’s stories.

Through these stories Hemingway has tried to represent race as an “unstable and
decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political
struggle” (Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant 55). “Indian Camp” presents a
biologically based view of racial difference and implies almost unwavering success
for power relations that rely on white male dominance and it is reflected by the words
of Nick that he will never die as the Indian has died. But the other story “The Doctor
and the Doctor’s Wife” seriously complicates Nick’s hyper-essentialist notion that we
are so different, even the ultimate levelers of humanity – death – divides the races.
Dick defies racial categorization, co-opts from of literacy valued by Dr. Adams,
challenges him based on the law, and therefore reverses the power relations based in
an authority ordinarily accessible to whites only. All these incidents highlight the
social contractedness of racial difference, undoing the hierarchy of power in “Indian
Camp” and creating of parallels between Dick and Doctor and, to some extent,
between Dr. Adams and the Indian husband. Hemingway, therefore, has shown that
the whites, due to their political superiority, try to establish their racial hegemony
over the blacks who continue to defy it through their activities and comments.

But Hemingway’s stories do not allows such a simplified resolution, and if we
take up Joyce A. Joyce’s charge that “to deconstruct ‘race’ is to abdicate, negate or
destroy black identity” (“The Black Canon” 341), we cut to the heart of my interest in
these two stories as a unit, because Hemingway does not deny the essentialist notion
that some kind of inherent racial identity remains lodged in the body. While denying the corporal reality of lived racial experience, these stories also demonstrate that individuals can slide back and forth between the larger categories of race. In the first story racial essentialism comes from the fact that characters are clearly defined as white or Indian, and their roles don’t shift or change in any way. The white dominates and the Indian remains silent, passive and under control of the whites. The only hint of role reversal comes when the Indian woman bites Uncle George’s arms and the other Indians laughs at him, conscious of the incongruity and unexpectedness of her act. This laugh is translated into the outright mockery in the second story. In this story the roles get reversed and to show this the author has his character’s faces change colour – to be humiliated is to be red and to be victor is to be white. In this scenario, then, the tag “race” remains stable, since “white” equates with power and “red” equates with submission, but the individuals fluidly move between markers.

In an interview with George Plimpton in the Paris Review, Hemingway spoke of writer’s “unexplained knowledge which could come from forgotten racial or family experience” (Plimpton 85). His stories may have been spurred by an autobiographical “family experience,” but we cannot ignore their relations to a larger forgotten racial experience” in American history. What happens in the confrontation between Dick and Doc represents nothing less than a crisis of authority that betrays the unstable foundation upon which the white man has built his power. When relying on the institutional authority of the medical profession, Dr. Adams worked on stable ground. But in the second story, his power rested on the speech act, a threat, and Dick derails its authority with the simple but devastating retort, “Oh, no, you won’t.” The beauty of this reply is that it not only offers an implicit counter threat, but it exposes the creaky machinery behind the doctor’s earlier dominance. Stripped of institutional
authority, textual authority, or witnesses, the doctor’s standard mechanisms of power are laid bare: without complicity, power cannot be effective. And this brings us full circle, because that, I believe is the moral of Toni Morrison’s story as well.

Morrison believes that concerns about race are found in the majority of our American literary texts. Seemingly “white” works of fiction carry within them a strong and abiding black presence, and this black presence often lies deeply embedded in the narrative’s structure, hidden well beneath the surface. As if playing into Morrison’s hands, Hemingway touts the iceberg principle as a crucial element of his own narrative technique, a method of composition in which the author consciously excludes significant material. Now the question arises: is Hemingway’s fiction structured by an invisible or nearly invisible racial presence?

As such the notion of racial difference dominates the two earliest Nick Adams stories: “Indian Camp” and “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife.” Another story in this context which indicates the racial consciousness of Hemingway is “The Battler.” This story gestures towards the earlier stories in two conspicuous ways – by its original title, “The Great Man,” and by its lead character’s name, Ad, a diminutive from of Adams.

Hemingway has derived the contents of the “The Battler” from the stories of the two boxers, Ad Wolgast and Oscar “Battling” Nelson. Hemingway also drew on the story of Ad Wolgast’s trainer, a white man, who cared for him in the later years of his decline. But the story “The Battler” depicts an African American caretaker named Bugs instead of Jack Doyle, a white American.

As the doctor in the earlier story whose face becomes red as a testament of his own humiliation and defeat, Ad Francis, the lead character in “The Battler” wears the
evidence of his battles on his face. Ad’s altered, putty-like features result in an eraser of his whiteness. A sunken nose, slit eyes, and queer-shaped lips remove him from identifiable Caucasian features; his color is no longer white, but “putty,” which might best be described as non-color. Nick, likewise, comes on the scene in an almost literal performance of blackface; his whiteness is masked by the black eye.

Like Uncle George in “Indian Camp” and Dick Boulton in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” Bugs functions as a third character who acts as observer, commentator and judge. Unlike the fluidity represented in the two white characters, however, Bugs strongly projects his race in the subtlest nuances of his being. Nick recognizes him as a “Negro” without even seeing him by just hearing his voice and watching the way he walks. Strangely these two qualities, voice and gait, are perhaps the two most noticeable aspects of one’s identity. Actors train themselves to develop accents, mimic voices and imitate gestures especially when playing a part that differs in nationality or cultural background from their own. But Bugs’ voice reflects a conflicting set of possibilities. Unlike Ad who speaks in slang-filled phrases, “Don’t you like my pan?” Bugs oozes politeness and refined gentility at every turn. Whether this stance of Bugs reflects a respectful servitude or a conscious adoption of high-minded gentility remains unclear, and in fact this manner seems to encapsulate both. It is precisely the instability of such racially based categories that Hemingway explores in this story.

Ad’s racial status is quite fixed at the outset. As the events in the story unfold, it becomes more fluid and changeable. Quite appropriately, his face begins as putty and quickly transforms, as putty will do, into other things. Just before Ad asks Nick to give him his knife, Hemingway draws attention to Ad’s downtrodden state, calling him “the little man whom Nick new by na me as a former champion fighter” (In Our
Being denied the knife, Ad is put in a frame of mind that draws him back towards the violence that had given him a powerful position in society. He begins glaring at Nick from beneath his lowered cap, a cap that masks his deformed facial features, particularly his eyes; much more significant, however, is the new adjective Hemingway attaches to his description of Ad: his face becomes white.

When Nick refused to give him the knife, Jack is described as “the little white man looked at Nick.” Once Ad begins to physically threaten Nick, the story reads, “He stared at Nick, his face was whit and his eyes were almost out sight” (53). In the original book, this overt attention to whiteness ends there. In the manuscript version of the story, however, Hemingway included two more references to Ad’s white face. After Bugs knocks him out, the manuscript reads “his face was white, eye open” and Bugs “sp lashed water on the white face.” Like Dr. Adams who has none of the trappings of his profession to buffer him in the Indian Camp and he proceeds to carry out the operation in a very private and aggressive fashion. Ad realizes that even without the ring and his manager, he can enact some semblance of his profession right there in his own camp site. He can indeed be the great man. And all at once, his affiliation with whiteness exists. The tags of whiteness, redness, blackness and mutilation have the same importance as these gender tags in Hemingway’s work. They demonstrate the fluctuations of identity and of cultural power in the world of his stories.

What is so interesting about the early stories of Hemingway is that their plots hinge on racial issues, differences and transformation. For example, “A Matter of Colour” establishes the broad theme of racial transformation and pushes the issue of racial difference into the forefront. Danny, a white boxer with a strong right hand and a weak left, has an upcoming fight with Joe Gans, a black man. While working out
Danny busts his right hand on a punching bag and his manager can’t see how he will win the fight against Joe Gans. They get the idea to hire a Swedish man who will hide behind a curtain beside the boxing ring and the clobber, Joe Gans over the head with a baseball bat so that Danny can win the fight and plenty of money. As the white boxer backs the black boxer up against the curtain, nothing happens. In a quick turn of events, the black boxer then sacks the white boxer against the curtain and Swede knocks out the white boxer with the baseball bat. When asked, the Swede replied: “You no should talk at me like that – I bane colour blind” (49).

In “The Light of the World,” the scene is set with a racially diverse cast of characters: white, African American, and Native Americans. The two prostitutes, Alice and Peroxide, fight over their claim to a man named Steve Ketchel, over the protests of the cook, who suggests they might be thinking of Stanley Ketchel. The characters are quite right to feel confused in their discussion of two fighters, Steve Ketchel and Stanley Ketchel. Contrary to Peroxide’s memories, it was Stanley Ketchel who fought Jack Johnson and lost in 1909. Steve Ketchel interestingly enough, fought none other than Ad Wolgast in 1915. What is it that Ketchel represents for these two women? In short, he seems to represent a fictional version of their own identity that empowers them: visions of domesticity and whiteness. The racial aspect here is so intense that Peroxide stresses the whiteness of Stanley Ketchel almost to the point of absurdity: “I never saw a man as clean and as white . . . He was the greatest, finest, whitest, most beautiful man that ever lived” (44).

She describes his opponent, Jack Johnson, in the most vitriolic terms, and always with racial epithets: “big dinge” and “big black bastard” and “black son of a bitch from hell.” Peroxide badly wants to believe that identity is not constructed through performances before an audience. Therefore, she zeroes in on the qualities of Steve
Ketchel that seem incontrovertibly superior: his whiteness. Whether he won or lost that fight is irrelevant in the face of his whiteness, and thus she holds onto the faith that Ketchel would have beaten Johnson if he hadn’t been taken by surprise. She bleaches her hair and the cook bleaches his hands because they want to align themselves as much as possible with the light-skinned of the world.

In a world where the performance of identity creates a fluctuating sense of self, the boxing arena provides a space where winners and losers are as clearly delineated as can be; therefore, it makes perfect sense that both prostitutes would cling to the mythology surrounding Ketchel, who they both view as a white knight. His complements elevate them above their otherwise painful and degraded status in the culture. The story sets up a radicalized dichotomy between “light” and “dark” showing how desperately Peroxide wishes to identify herself with Steve Ketchel, the Great White Hope, that she claims he “knocked down” the African American man, Jack Johnson. It was only his desire to smile at her that left him vulnerable. Just as overtly as “A Matter of Colour,” Hemingway has created a narrative that shows the strains of racial tension that emerges from gender inequality and class status.

As such most of the confrontations that take place in Hemingway’s Nick Adams stories display a white man or woman in conflict with another white man or woman. The Native American and African American characters sometimes speak, react or resist, but most often they withdraw. The arguments between the whites, however, carry a strong subtext of racial identification. The non-white characters that stand around the edges of the room, outside the room or up the road are deeply implicated in these white-white conflicts, though they choose to remain neutral. In “The Light of the World,” the Indian moves outside to the train station’s platform as Peroxide heats up in her exultation over Ketchel’s whiteness. In “The Battler,” Bugs intervenes in the
white-white conflict in order to preserve peace between the two men. Perhaps the African American man in “The Killers” best embodies the attitude towards whites in conflict. He repeats a single refrain throughout the story:

“I don’t want any more of that. I don’t want any more of that.”

“I don’t like it. I don’t like any of it at all.”

“You better not have anything to do with it at all. You better stay way out of it.”

“I don’t even listen to it.” (65-68)

As such any threat of violence always has the immediate potential to spill over into racial violence. Earlier in the story one of the killers asks to have Sam brought out of the kitchen. George, the owner, protests: “What are you going to do with him?” And the killer responds: “‘Nothing.’ ‘What would we do to a nigger’” (61)?

The answer to this question just floats in the air. What wouldn’t they do? What has not been done already? And while the violence is never directed at the non-white characters within the stories themselves, the conflicts are nevertheless structured and informed by anxieties about racial issues.

In a similar vein “The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber” and “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” also treat the racial issue in a subtle way. Robert Wilson reveals himself as a man with imperialist attitude in several ways. He uses the hardest tools to show his authority over the Africans, but that’s only the most obvious way in which he exercises his power. He attempts to teach Francis how to exploit the country through political and economic coercion even when this involves illegal and unethical tactics. He constructs a mythology that encourages Francis to reframe his own identity
and prop up the hegemonic culture of white masculinity. He instructs Francis how to control and dominate his wife. Critics have focused so heavily on this topic, the power struggle between Francis and Margot, that the fate of the Africans has been almost wholly obscured. But we must remember, as bell hooks has argued, gender inequality functions in tandem with racial inequality and other forms of oppression: “We have to understand that patriarchal domination shares an ideological foundation with racism and other forms of oppression, that there is no hope that it can be eradicated while these systems remain intact” (Talking Back 22). If Francis becomes a man like Wilson, there is no question that the Africans, as well as Margot, will be oppressed by his newfound sense of power.

The story opens with a host of African men – the cook, the personal boys, the skinner, and the porters – carrying Francis into camp on their shoulders in a mock display of triumph and courage. The African men set Francis down, shake his hand, congratulate him and then disappear. Wilson, the white hunter, pretends that nothing shameful has happened as he raises his glass in a toast and reassures Francis: “You have got your lion and a damned fine one too.” Margot, aghast at Wilson’s false bravado, stares at both men in disbelief, then walks off to the tent, crying. Wilson takes this opportunity to demean her response: “Woman upset . . . Amounts to nothing. Strain on the nerves and one thing’n another” (The First Forty-Nine Stories 5).

The narration tells us that Francis “had just shown himself, very publicly, to be a coward.” But Wilson will not allow a white man to be perceived as such in front of the Africans or a woman. Wilson lays the groundwork for Francis’ initiation into manhood: maintain a brave face and powerful position in front of nonwhites; dismiss women’s feelings and expect them to be weak, fragile and so on. After the event of
humiliation, Francis asks Wilson not to speak of it to anyone, a request that takes Wilson by surprise: “He had not expected this . . . I rather liked him too until today ” (7).

Wilson will keep his secret because he needs to uphold the myth of while male superiority though he is desperately frustrated by this American man who does not seem to know the unspoken codes that bind white men together. He adds, “It’s bad form to ask us not to talk though” and undoubtedly he tells the truth, because such talk exposes the fragile ideology that underpins white male dominance. Faced with Macomber’s weakness, Wilson had decided to make a clear break rather than continue trying to initiate Macomber into his world. But Macomber apologizes for asking Wilson to keep silent and Wilson changes his mind once again: “He (Wilson) was all ready to break it off quickly and neatly and here the beggar (Macomber) was apologizing after he had just insulted him. He made one more attempt” (7).

His next comment is pathetically transparent in its attempt to construct a trumped-up mythology of white male bravery:

“You know in Africa . . . no white man ever bolts.”

“I bolted like a rabbit,” Macomber said.

Now what in hell were you going to do about a man who talked like that, Wilson wondered.” (7-8)

The point “You know in Africa no white man ever bolts” allows Francis the psychological space to revise his sense of self in this African country: a white man among black men, a dominant man among submissive men, women and beasts. Wilson drops the freighted issue of nationality – American versus British – and cuts to
the chase. White man, all white men, do not bolt. They show no fear before man or
beast. Not in colonialist Africa, where white men must occupy a position of
dominance at all times lest they leave an opening for “the natives” to assume that role
for themselves.

And Wilson is ever watchful for the slightest hint of in subordination among the
Africans who work for him. If they show even the slightest hint of independence,
Wilson takes action immediately. He does not miss any opportunity to maintain
control over the African men through economic and political coercion, or, if
necessary, through violence. Macomber asks what he should pay the African
assistants who mixed the drinks, and this exchange follows:

“What had I ought to give him?” Macomber asked.

“A quid will be plenty,” Wilson told him. “You don’t want to spoil them.”

“Will the headman distribute it?”

“Absolutely.” (3)

In addition to being boyish, Macomber shows himself to be a democratic fellow,
concerned about the proper payment due the African workers and careful to ask
whether it will be distributed fairly; at the same time, we learn that Robert Wilson
wants to maintain strict control over the African workers, to ensure that they know
their place, that they do not get “spoiled.”

Wilson’s abusive power over the African men is shown most dramatically when
Macomber’s “personal boy” is caught “looking curiously at his master.” The African
learned the truth about that morning’s lion hunt – that Francis bolted in sheer terror –
and he stares at the cowardly white “master,” something that Wilson will not abide. Wilson snaps at him in Swahili and “the boy turned away with his face blank.”

“What were you telling him?” Macomber asked.

“Nothing. Told him to look alive or I’d see he got about fifteen of the best.”

“What’s that? Lashes?”

“It is quite illegal,” Wilson said, “You are supposed to fine them.”

“Do you still have them whipped?”

“Oh, yes. They could raise a row if they chose to complain. But they don’t. They prefer it to the fines.” (6)

Does anyone believe that Wilson canvassed his African employees to see whether they preferred lashing versus fines? He believes in the use of physical violence because it is the most direct and visible form of domination available to the white master. Robert Wilson is the white hunter, head of the outfit, while the African gun-bearers and native boys clearly exist in a state of abject servitude. Wilson uses everything he has at his disposal — economic coercion, political power, physical intimidation, and cruelty — to uphold his dominance over the African men.

Wilson is also full of hatred for the American women because they have started seeking equality with their white male counterparts. Margot observes his brutal behavior and she has the license to challenge him without fear of receiving fifteen lashes. She stared at Wilson for a long time and initiated a conversation about his physical features:
“You know you have a very red face, Mr. Wilson,” she told him and smiled again.

“Drink,” said Wilson.

“I don’t think so,” she said. “Francis drinks a great deal, but his face is never red.”

“It is red today,” Macomber tried a joke.

“No,” said Margaret. “It is mine that’s red today. But Mr. Wilson’s is always red.”

“Must be racial,” said Wilson. “I say you would not lie to drop my beauty as a topic, would you?” (5)

Margot observes that “the baked red of his face stopped in a white line that marked the circle left by his Stetson hat.” An early manuscript goes even further, saying he “got himself covered in a perfect disguise made out of his own body” (John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library 689). The tough clothing and leathery skin project a powerful identity, but the white line at the top of his forehead hints at the performative aspects of this social self. He is the “white hunter” who is also referred to as a “red faced swine” and “the beautiful red-faced Mr. Robert Wilson,” revealing an unstable identity that must continuously reinvent itself. Moreover, she comes to see that Robert Wilson does not live by the modern codes of civilization whereby a man and a woman or an American and an African, can have access to various forms of power. He has created a lawless and hierarchical society where white men hold power, African men are whipped, animals are slaughtered and women are a nuisance except when they make themselves sexually available for one of his “wind-falls.”
Similar racial issue is discussed in “The Snows of Kilimanjaro.” Both Macomber and Snows represent wealthy white American men whose privileged status in terms of race and class becomes the source of their destruction. When Harry arrives in Africa he does not need someone like Wilson to teach him the ins and outs of the imperialist mindset. He has already learnt a lot from his wife and her “glamorous race” to understand the ruinous nature of excessive wealth and privilege. Harry comes to Africa to escape all of that, and at first his desires sound rather noble. But any hopes that Harry has about burning the “fat” out of his body are lost because he brings all of his racist, colonialist tendencies with him to Africa. He is not in any way able to detach from his identity as a wealthy white American and live in harmony with the African countryside or commune with the African men who surround and inhabit his camp. On the contrary, we witness acts of hubris, dominance, and imperiousness. It shows how thoroughly corrupted he has become by his culture.

In his last days on earth, he looks all around and finds one thing to condemn: his wife’s money and the ruinous effects it had on his life and work. But it is, in fact, Harry’s hubris and racist attitudes that have caused his own destruction. He has built up a mythology about himself and he is unwilling to accept anything that might alter this self-image. He is used to being shielded from harsh realities while visiting Africa – as he said himself, “there was no hardship” on this safari – and he does not anticipate the realness or potential danger in the African landscape and Mount Kilimanjaro. Helen says, “I don’t mean that,” and Harry offers a second explanation: “If we would have hired a good mechanic instead of a half-backed kikuyu driver, he would have checked the oil and never burned out that bearing in the truck” (The First Forty-Nine Stories 55). Harry accuses the easiest mark of all for a white man: the African hired to drive him around. In the same way, that the country is not real to him,
the people who live in the country are not either; they exist to serve his needs and, beyond the role, they are invisible or useless.

Later when he is alone, he thinks that the real answer to Helen’s question has nothing to do with the unmedicated scratch, the kikuyu driver or the corrosive effect of Helen’s wealth. The reason why they are in Africa is because “he had destroyed his talent by not using it, by betrayal of himself and what he believed in, by drinking so much that he blunted the edge of his perception by laziness, by sloth and by snobbery, by pride and by prejudice” (60). Here we finally have an honest assessment. Harry is a failure because he betrays his own values and beliefs, grows lazy, embraces snobbery, wealth, pride, and prejudice; not coincidentally, all these qualities constitute the racist, colonialist mind.

When the couple is in Africa, both Harry and Helen have their own personal boys, and one has to wonder whether the term denotes the servants; age or their perceived status. These servants fulfill all of the white tourists’ needs, including cooking, serving food, bringing water, burning fires, and changing the dressing on Harry’s leg, and making whisky sodas on demand. They are so obedient and keen observers that without waiting for orders they can anticipate the white couple’s every need. While Harry and Helen sit together at camp, the Africans stay out of sight but within earshot, in case another command is shouted out. When Helen goes off to shoot, Harry’s “personal boy” sits by the bed and says: ““Memsahib has gone to shoot,” the boy said. “Does Bwana want?” “Nothing”” (61).

There is no mention of the boy walking away, or staying by his bed after this brief exchange. He is a disembodied voice, that’s all and Harry return to his own thoughts. The only other line uttered by an African is: “Yes Bwana,” repeated twice.
What is important about these tiny, apparently insignificant exchanges, however, is the African’s use of words “Memsahib” and “Bwana.” These names were used to convey respect and deference towards whites in Africa, and it seems almost unimaginable within the context of this story that the Africa would use the white tourists’ proper names. Later in life Hemingway scorned the use of these words – boy and Bwana.

Hemingway may try to excuse himself and Harry for calling the Africans boys but Harry senses his own culpability in “Snows.” As he recounts the steps that led him to marry the wealthy, superficial Helen, he thinks to himself: “He had traded away what remained of his old life. He had traded it for security, for comfort too, there was no denying that, and for what else? He did not know” (62). Harry may not know, but the reader can detect it in nearly every scene; Harry has traded his old life to embrace white privilege and power at the expense of nonwhites.

Hemingway originally titled his story “The Happy Ending,” a cynical title if there ever was one. He creates a provisional happy ending, in a way, through the dream sequence with Campton and the rescue plane. Compton shows up with his tweed jacket brown felt hat, and cheerful, bustling chatter about a lorry on its way and his desire for a cup of tea. But who is this man, old Compie? All signs indicate that he is a British fellow: he wears traditional British tweed, expresses interest in a cup of tea, flies the Puss Moth (a British plane), and calls Harry’s wife Memsahib. So in a surprising parallel with “Macomber,” it seems Harry has his own version of Robert Wilson after all: a guide who will navigate him through the rough waters of race and class in Africa. As Harry and Compton fly over the African landscape, Harry sees the disappearing camp, dry waterholes and new water that he had never known of, and white in such a square top of Kilimanjaro. But then the readers come to know about
the fact that it was a dream. It is a good thing because if this happy ending were left to stand, it would undermine and subvert much of the attention to the issues of race, class and colonialism. The story’s focus would begin and end with Harry, the American who uses Africa successfully as a place to reclaim his identity and invigorate his career. Africa, Mount Kilimanjaro, the “boys,” the animals all would be reduced to nothingness.

If we look back and observe his final moments before death, the last words he hears while alive are: “Bwana is asleep now. Take the cot up very gently and carry it into the tent” (74). These words perfectly show Harry’s moral failure in Africa. Even at the moment of death, he inhabits an identity wrapped around racial superiority (“Bwana”) and his dying moments are attended by servants. Only in his dreams can he achieve the splendor and glory of the “unbelievably white” summit of Mount Kilimanjaro. In reality, he dies at the hands of strangers and scavengers, the proof of instability of identity and superiority based on race.

The racial elements have always existed in Hemingway’s short stories and critics have acknowledged the presence of Indians in the early works and the rather exotic interest in Africa. However, after the publication of *The Garden of Eden* (1986) and *True at First Light* (1999) his readers cannot help noticing how race manifests itself in Hemingway’s works. For example, in the former David, through his African story, has explained the Maji-Maji rebellion of 1905-07 in Tanzania the significance of which has been explained as follow:

The people fought because they did not believe in the white man’s right to govern and civilize the blacks. They rose in a great rebellion not through fear of a terrorist movement or a superstitious oath, but in response to a natural
call, a call of the spirit, ringing in the hearts of all men, and of all times, educated or uneducated, to rebel against foreign domination. (*The Garden of Eden* 40-41)

We can make out from this story that Hemingway has emphasized the cause of blacks and has revealed the devastating effect of white imperialism on the Africans. The primary focus of the story comes from David’s identification with the oppressed and his growing disdain for the modes of white domination as practiced by his father and the African tracker, Juma. He comes to know gradually that his father’s hunt for the elephant represents a form of economic and colonial hubris that ruins the beauty and nobility of Africa. He says, “My father doesn’t need to kill elephants to live” (181). But the problem is how he can challenge the ideology of his father. Ultimately he challenges the very foundation of his father’s dominance with abrupt denunciation, “Fuck elephant hunting” (182).

In the main story also Hemingway has dealt with the racial elements. For example, Catherine experiments racial transformations by performing various activities. It indicates her desire to switch from white to black. Each time David comments on her darkness, she answers: “I want to be your African girl . . . I’m lion colour . . . I wish I had some Indian blood” (30-31). She is quite pleased by Colonel Boyle’s description of her as “the darkest white girl” he has ever seen. In other words, by performing various ethnicities, she wants to defy their vulnerability to stereotyping. She lightened her hair with the pearls’ colour and tries to get mixed up with other categories to show how easily they are breakable.

To look like an African girl, Marita even cuts her hair short and Catherine also introduces her as a “dark girl.” When Catherine asks, “where she had her hair cut,”
Marita blushes. Due to her continuous blushing, Marita’s face gets masked by different colours: white, red, and brown. This indicates the subversion of racial dichotomy based on different colours like categorizing the people as blacks and whites. Her sexual orientation, her nationality, and her racial markers all lack specificity and defy categorization. After her haircut she asks David how he really felt when he saw her. He says “very excited” and she responds “me too.” Her statement that “Isn’t it nice our dark things are so simple and so complicated too” (Chapter 45, pp. 1-38, 4) reveals the changing attitude of Hemingway toward the end of his life regarding the whites-nonwhites.

Whereas *The Garden of Eden* is full of his obsession with tanning and skin colour, the focus gets exclusively centered on Hemingway’s fascination with Africa and a desire to merge his identity with the members of an African tribe with the publication of *True at First Light*. This novel is full of Hemingway’s attempts to be one with the African people. He has tried his best to mitigate the boundaries between the blacks and the whites as he says, “I knew I was in the best place I had ever been, having a fine, if complicated life and learning something every day and to go flying all over our own country was the last thing I wished to do” (*True at First Light* 426). This book is full of exceptional characterization of the Africans and the intense African politics where Hemingway lived with Wakamba tribe while on safari. A detailed interpretation of this novel from the perspective of racial difference will be taken up in the next chapter.

To conclude, in each of the short-stories and novels discussed so far, Hemingway has elaborately addressed the penetrating issues of race like miscegenation, white imperialism, the conquest of America, white – Indian conflict and white – black antagonism. These issues don’t represent a new trend in Hemingway studies; in fact
they always exist alongside the so-called classic Hemingway themes – love, loss of innocence, lost wilderness, violence and death. What needs to be taken note of is that Hemingway consistently pushed his naïve white American males into a racially charged environment and allowed the inevitable antagonisms to drive the narrative tension thereby bringing the racial element on the surface and yet not verbally stated.
Works Cited

*Australian Star Newspaper, Papa Jack*, 96.

*Chicago Defender Newspaper, Papa Jack*, 96.


The Ernest Hemingway Collection at the John F. Kennedy Library, Boston.
