CHAPTER FIVE
GREEN HILLS OF AFRICA

Trial by nature, not society was indicative of Hemingway’s basic cultural values. Hemingway has been identified more of an expatriate. Carlos Baker has called him, “Citizen of the world”. So much so that Hemingway’s essential identity as American, with American dreams and assumptions, has been ignored to the point of denial.\footnote{1} He faced this issue in Cuba in his 1956 Article “A situation Report” and emerged with a clear identification.

This is the matter of being expatriates. It is very difficult to be an expatriot at 35 minutes by air from Key West and less than an hour, by faster plane from Miami. I never hired to be a patriot but regularly attend the wars in which my country participates and pay my Federal taxes. An expatriate is, consequently, a word I never cared for.\footnote{2}

He voluntarily lived outside his native land about ten years of his adult life. The view of America as the world’s second chance had its specific meaning for Hemingway when he saw the frontier as the essential American experience. To him cities were European and often in the worst sense of machines and swarms of people. The frontier meant nature and a man testing himself against nature. To use Frederick Jackson Turner’s scheme, Hemingway’s frontier was the hunter’s and explorer’s frontier. It was in search of this frontier of an hunter that he hired a safari in 1933 to visit Africa. He believed that unspoiled nature was the only way to develop on unspoiled man.

Green Hills of Africa is the most literary hunting trip on record. In Green Hills of Africa Hemingway juxtaposes American culture
with African culture. He lamented the changes that had come in American landscape. Edwin Fussell has maintained that the west ceased to exert an influence on the imagination of Americans well before Hemingway’s time because the idea survived only while there was an actual frontier. But Hemingway experienced the frontier values in both Michigan and Illinois during his childhood. He considered himself one who had seen the transition from frontier to a world of cities. It was a loss to which he was never able to reconcile. It still haunted him when he reported to Philip Percival during the thirties that frontier values had been abandoned in urbanized America.

People were living on borrowings, not savings, were giving up work in natural settings to build more cities, were denying the values of work to go on relief.4

It was actually as an escape from this declined scene in American cultural values, that he sought refuge in an environment of primitive culture in Africa.

*Green Hills of Africa* (1935), an account of a safari, rehearses the tragedy of a man and a beast but celebrates – almost desperately the triumphant dignity of human courage. The *Green Hills of Africa* was an experiment ‘The Writer’, says the foreword, “has attempted to write an absolutely true book to see whether the shape of a country and the pattern of a month's action can, when truly presented, compete with a work of the imagination.” Reproducing the truth was nothing new with Hemingway, though he had normally woven truth together with carefully controlled invention.

Two major aspects of the experiment are the attempt at verisimilitude (“The shape of a country) and architectonics (“the pattern of a month in action”). Here it meant specifically the attempt to transfer to the unsafaried reader a sense of the way to move cross-
country through the hills and plains of Tanganyika. He wished to project accurately his own apprehensions of the life of the land and the habits of animals, the living personalities of the natives he met, the state of the weather, the quality of the food, the methods of the camp, the procedures of the hunt, and running through it – the emotional tensions and relaxations which gave the events of each day their tone and meaning. It is, as such, a picture as much topographical as psychological in content and expression.

The necessity of achieving verisimilitude is common to both fiction and non-fiction. So is the challenge of working out a reasonably tight architectural structure. In these two respects, The Green Hills of Africa rises above the status of a “noble experiment” and becomes, in its own right, a work of art. The communication of the sense of place, the sense of the immediacy and palpability of the experience in that place, is what gives The Green Hills of Africa its special distinction: “I loved this country”, says Hemingway “and I felt at home, and where a man feels at home, outside of where he is born, is where he’s meant to go.”(PP 283-284). The task which Hemingway undertook in writing The Green Hills of Africa was a difficult one. He had not only assumed the obligation of verisimilitude, both to the country and to the residents of that country whether human or animal. What he had to work with, as the foreword indicates was a “month’s action”. The period to be covered was that which extended between the author’s return from medical treatment at Nairobi and the party’s final retreat to the coast in the face of seasonal rains – roughly January 21 to February 20, 1934. He inserted certain incidents from the Serengeti period of December and early January – notably the shooting of the first lion, and M’Cola’s amusement over the self-eating hyena as flash backs for the purpose of the dramatic contrast, in the main course of action.
As this was a hunting expedition its fundamental form was obviously pursuit. The book is accordingly divided into four parts: “Pursuit and Conversation” (two chapters); “Pursuit Remembered” (chapters iii-ix inclusive); “Pursuit and Failure” (two chapters; and, with a serious pun on the Declaration of Independence), “Pursuit as Happiness” (the closing chapters xii-xiii). The form of the book is so devised as to point out to the climactic account of the Kudu-hunt in the twelfth chapter. To achieve this point, the opening chapters deal with the early phases of the Kudu sequence. They have been after Kudu, for ten days and the oncoming rains will allow them only three days more. The seven intervening chapters – “Pursuit Remembered” – double back in time to the relatively unsatisfactory rhinoceros and buffalo hunting before the party went after the Kudu. From this beginning the reader is gradually brought back to the then present until in the 10th chapter, the splice work is completed and one finds himself back in the time of the book’s opening.

The formal advantages of such a procedure are clear. The author carefully prepares the reader for an appreciation of the natural beauties of the ultimate Kudu bull. He leads up the reader very deftly to the high-tension and emotional excitements which surround that event. The whole “Pursuit Remembered” section is geared into the marked contrast which is to come. As part of the total plan of attack, Hemingway places various disappointments, dissatisfactions, and emotional confusions in the “build-up” sections of the book. The plot is cyclic and but for this gradual building up and end start unification, it would have been a mere travelogue.

When he talked with Kandinsky at the East African camp and defended hunting as a function of the artist, he also refrained, he said, from disillusioning the Austrian about all those brilliant literary people he believed in back in the metropolises of Paris and Berlin.
For Hemingway reading was like hunting and fishing. A way of finding that time beyond time by finding the secret current of nature. Hemingway sometimes speaks optimistically of nature's immutable survival in the face of human abuse. The long description of the Gulf-Stream in the Caribbean is notably so. At the back of Hemingway's cultural thought was that long-used stream flowing into the sea a metaphor for time and timelessness. But the difference was that the stream -the Gulf stream- was already in the sea, and sea was not a static realm but the vital place where all the streams converged and flowed together.

Hemingway compares the hunting slopes of Africa with the deer slopes in Wyoming. As he reported his hunting in *The Green Hills of Africa*, the slope on which he hunted Kudu appeared to him like the deer slopes of Timber Creek in Wyoming. The discovery of the back country where both Kudu and sable were hiding was, he said, like finding the river he had been told about as a child – “a river no one had ever fished out on the huckleberry plains beyond the sturgeon and the pigeon.” (PP. 192-210)

The bagging of the first lion took place back on the edge of the Serengeti Plain. Hemingway carefully reduces it to an emotionally unsatisfactory event. The party had been “prepared for a charged, for heroics, and for drama.” (41) But the lion succumbed with disappointing ease. Even while the natives shouted their victory song, with its imitation of the deep, asthmatic cough of the lion as an iterative chorus, Hemingway was feeling “more let down than pleased” (41) This was not what they had paid to see. Of course, it was what they had paid for, like everything else recorded in the book. But Hemingway is writing that way as a part of his plan of attack. In the same strain he tells us that he admired and respected the heavily powered buffalo. Yet he felt that this truck-like, scale-headed creature
was slow and ponderous. “All the while we shot I felt it was fixed and that we had him. The buffalo had neither the speed, the grace, nor the elusiveness of the Kudu”\(^5\) records Carlos Baker.

The Kudu is clean and beautiful. Through the early parts of the book, Hemingway introduces various images of physical disgust and loathing to point up later contrast. The hyenas skulking along the plain are seen as foul, hermaphroditical, belly-dragging beasts. Philip Young says “the wounded hyena in *The Green Hills of Africa* which eats its own intestine, is a cannibalism which Hemingway did not approve: the swamp is a “bad place again”.\(^6\) The rhinoceros described in a detailed set-piece still pointing toward the kudu-bull, is “the hall of an animal” – hulking, malformed, anachronistic, and tick-ridden. One allusion to the ever-possible snakes in the underbrush has the force of a minor horror. More loathsome is the incident of the baboons. While the party was in search of buffalo, they came to a part of the forest which has just been traversed by a tribe of baboons. Hemingway uses an effective concentration of disgust words he says that the whole area was filled with “a nasty stink like the mess cats make.” (P.112) Hemingway describes the Masai people of Southern Kenya in romantic terms: The whole description is detailed and beautifully worded. But he contrasts them with the northern Masai who he finds "sullen" and "contemptuous" (219). It seems never to have occurred to him that perhaps they and many people throughout Africa at that time lived under the control of white settlers and the arbitrary rule of colonial authorities, and had little reason to appear "light hearted". The point is not so much that he was unaware of this possibility, but that he did not care enough about the indigenous people in his host country to get to know them better. Africa’s further meaning was the meaning Hemingway had seen in America when he interviewed Lloyd George on the “Mauretania”. To him Africa had
been physically among the oldest of the worlds, but he found it culturally, the new world of the twentieth century. And this new world was the world that the disillusioned American in him had come in search of. It was not so much the culture for the outer physical self as for the inner emotional self.

From the ninth chapter onwards, through the frustrations of “Pursuit and Failure,” the reader is led towards the quarry of the twelfth, the crown of the expedition and the artfully-prepared crown of the book. For “Pursuit as Happiness” is beautifully presented in the opposite of all preceding disgusts and disappointments: “the huge beautiful Kudu bull,” sweet-smelling, wholesome, perfectly formed and marked, with the walnut-meat-colored horns sweeping back from the proud head. The thirteenth chapter, closing the book, is by intent a structural anti-climax – the uncrowned (or cow crowned) pursuit of the wounded bullsakle – bringing the reader back to solid ground after the glories he has known. The form of the book has in fact been conditioned throughout by Hemingway’s “emotionated” recollection of the best and worst parts of the safari. But it is planned and worked out as an entity. This book is a very thoughtful attention to the aesthetic principles of big-game hunting in Africa.

In the introduction to Francois Sommer’s ‘Man and Beast in Africa, he saw the hunter’s instinct as a complement to man’s love for the animals worthy of being hunt. It is no hypocrisy to hunt animals and love them, he insisted. To hunt is an instinct in the same way as the instinct to worship.

It would be a strange thing if people with hunting in their blood for many hundreds of years would suddenly be without that taste. But it is taste and a hunger too, that can be satisfied or partially satisfied ………… In each person
changes come in a different way. There is no sudden thing such as happened to Saint Paul or Saint Ignatius Loyola for anyone who tries to kill cleanly and never to excess. (P.6.)

Rather the hunter follows a course of emotion through his hunting life, at seventeen wanting to kill the grizzly bear but feeling happier about killing a boar at forty-five or shooting high-flying pheasants at a more advanced age. He had imagined the basis for such an identification of hunter and hunted, however, during the thirties.

Other formal and semi-formal aspects of the book show the same kind of careful planning, designed to enable “the truth” to compete with fiction. “Love-interest” enters in a subdued form, the foreword directs the reader “to insert whatever love interest he or she may have at the time.” Suspense is always present in the formula of pursuit as well as the sense of urgency at the approach of the seasonal rains. Hemingway, indeed, once comments on “that most exciting perversion of life: the necessity of accomplishing something in less than should truly be allowed for its doing.” Conflict is established in the undeclared war between the author and colleague Karl. And for a idyllic interlude we have the wing-shooting on the flats of Lake Manyara, with teal, block duck, and snipe enough to satisfy the greediest consumer.

If the hunter-writer was to be the culture hero of Hemingway’s saving frontier, he sought to provide a rationale for that hero. He cited his own feelings as the basis for that rationale. His Esquire article “Remembering Shooting Flying” explains it the best. The instinct to hunt, he believed was a continuing, if repressed, drive in men. In some it had been completely sublimated; in others it was still very much alive. To him, they were the vital ones for the culture.
I think they were all made to shoot because if they were not why did they give them that whirr of wings that moves you suddenly more than any love of country? .......... I think they were made to shoot and some of us were made to shoot them........

Not only the sound of wings but the taste of meat, he maintained evoked the hunter’s instinct. In his 1987 essay, “Hemingway's Indian Virtues: An Ecological Reconsideration,” Glen Love offers a devastating catalog of animals killed by Hemingway – “Hemingway's body-count against the earth” (203) – to suggest that despite his gestures toward something we might recognize as stewardship, Hemingway tends to “adopt an aggressive and isolated individualism which wars against those natural manifestations he claims to love” (203).

Louise H. Westling is similarly critical of Hemingway's hunting exploits, amplifying Love's argument to suggest that field sports allow Hemingway and his characters to exert a masculine dominance of a feminized natural world.

Rose Marie Burwell comments in her review of the 1999 text that she's "grateful" for Patrick Hemingway's editing, noting that he "has eluded to two aspects that become depressing and tiresome in the African book: the endless killing of animals (many conveniently classified as ‘Virmin’by the game regulations code) and the jejeune banter of Hemingway and G.C.” (22)

In Green Hills of Africa, the protagonist is a carefully constructed persona of Hemingway. After his first trip to Africa in 1933-34, Hemingway gave his audience what they might expect from a big game hunter: fearlessness, hardness, skill, and domination. As Thomas Strychocz puts it, “his overbearingly charismatic personality
begins to take center stage” (23). At the same time, guilt, sadness and disgust with hunting and killing complicate Hemingway's persona in *Green Hills of Africa*. As Voeller Carey writes “In *Green Hills of Africa*, Hemingway waivers as much as he will in the short stories. He questions and critiques the role of the rugged – unfeeling hunter even as he constructs it”(65). Putnam's assertion holds weight in this moment as Ann Putnam argues, “The heart in Hemingway's fiction is always divided against itself. The pastoral impulse to merge with nature is always working against the ‘tragic’ impulse to master it” (169).

As Kevin Maier says: “they reveal Hemingway as an ethical sportsman in the Roosevelt tradition of sportsmen-conservationists, rather than the “game hog” some critics make him out to be”(121).

With Hemingway, form is inseparable from content. In the book humankind is not neglected: the ebullient Kandinsky, the brave and laconic white hunter Pop; the tensely generous Karl the least obtrusive of shooting companions. Among the most substantial parts of the book are the portrayals of the natives. In portraying the natives, Hemingway enlists and describes the cultural rituals they observe as they are people belonging to different religions. These rituals are their mark of identity and individuality as a group.

It is undeniable that many of Hemingway's interactions with and observations of the African people are marked by condescension, contempt, and sometimes by affection and desire. But most of the time Hemingway is disinterested and happily oblivious. Edmund Wilson, in his review for the *New Republic*, wrote that the reader does not “learn much about the natives. There is one fine description of a tribe of marvellous runner but the principal impression we carry is that the natives were simple people who enormously admired Hemingway”. It is important to note that Hemingway's perspective is
that of the American frontiersman rather than a European colonialist. The key to the book is the conception of Africa as a frontier. Rampaging through the jungle and shooting up the wildlife stirs Hemingway's spirit because it allows him to emulate his frontiersman ideal. Meanwhile he realises the environmental precariousness of this part of Africa. So he is motivated to put it down on paper as “an absolutely true book”.

If Hemingway’s mystique of the hunter bordered on some kind of primitive religious feeling, that tendency was hardly denied by his imagined identification with other primitive hunters. His irregular welts and scars, trophies from wars and hunts, were, he felt, somehow indication of essential kinship with his bearer and tracker Droopy, whose more formal tattoos and tribal scars put him in the tradition of great hunters. And during the late running of the Kudu and sable, he felt the unanimity of impulse and instinct that made the hunters do the right things without his calling signals. “I was thinking all the country in the world is the same country and all hunters are the same people” (PP. 53, 249).

Margot Macomber leapt into bed with the white hunter after her husband's courage failed during a lion hunt. In Hemingway's work, the hunt is often presented as a testing ground of masculinity. In Green Hills of Africa, Hemingway is bitterly jealous of fellow hunter Karl's repeated success. ‘Pop’ Philip Percival is a model of masculinity for Hemingway. English, but not “bloody English”, Pop is a contrast to the despised intellectual figure of Kandinsky, who neither drinks nor hunts. P.O.M. thinks Pop “her ideal of how a man should be, brave, gentle, comic, never losing his temper, never bragging, never complaining except in a joke, tolerant, understanding, intelligent, drinking a little too much as a good man should, and, to
her eyes, very handsome.” (P.64) Hemingway is compelled to write that he thinks Pop is “lovely looking” (P.65).

Hemingway’s old gun-bearer, M’Cola, plays a very winning Niger Jim to the author’s over-explosive Huckleberry Finn. The association between them develops into mutual respect and genuine friendship. Hemingway inspite of being a white American, does not suffer from prejudices. He mixes freely with the black natives of Africa. He shares many private jokes with M’Cola, like true comrades. One only partly shared is M’Cola’s amusement over religious belief. Charo, the other gun-bearer, is a highly devout Mohammedan. “All Ramadan he never swallowed his saliva until sunset.”(38) When the sun is nearly down one evening, Hemingway sees him watching it nervously.

Charo was deadly thirsty and truly devout and the sun set very slowly. I looked at it red over the trees, nudged him and he grinned. M’Cola offered me the water bottle solemnly. I shook my head and Charo grinned again. M’Cola looked blank. Then the sun was down and Charo had the bottle tilted up, his Adam’s apple rising and falling greedily and M’Cola looking at him and then looking away. (PP. 38-39)

The relationship with M’Cola produces several other degrees of the comic. Often the joke is on Hemingway. Besides these he has drawn the portraits of a variety of people. Droopy is the matchless tracker, wearing a red fez. He is very courageous and enthusiastic. Droopy’s antithesis, is the evil-smelling Wanderobo, solemn a stork, “useless as a bluejoy. Another is Kamau, the Kikuyu driver, who “with an old brown tweed coat some shooter had discarded, trousers heavily patched on the knees and then ripped open again, and a very
ragged shirt, managed always to give an impression of great elegance. (P.177) But it was an elegance backed up with a modesty, a skill and a pleasantness of demeanor which Hemingway very much admired. One of the happiest section of the book is the group portrait of the merry Masais, joyously racing the car, delighting in the noise of the klaxon, and eating with relish the cold tinned mincemeat and plum pudding which the visitors hand out as largesse to good humour.

Hemingway's depiction of the natives is marked by bigotry – they are simply “niggers”, “boys”, or “savages”, who are often physically revolting to Hemingway and the object of ridicule or they are admired for their simple: “ignorant dignity, such as the Masai people who live in the unspoiled country (“the tallest, best-built, handsomest people I had ever seen and the first truly light hearted people I had seen in Africa” (P.219).

Hemingway has only a dim realisation of his superiority attitude. Thus there is a disturbing moment when Hemingway seems to realise that his driver, Kamau, is a human being with modesty, pleasantness and skill:

[I] thought how, when first we were out, he had very nearly died of fever, and that if he had died it would have meant nothing to me except that we would be short a driver; while now whenever or wherever he should die I would feel badly. (P.177)

The African nicknamed Garrick offends Hemingway the most for his flamboyant native head-dress and behaviour. Hemingway calls him “that theatrical bastard”, and mocks him without mercy. He jokes about putting Garrick in the cinema as The Moor of Venice (P.166).
Hemingway's appraisal of the natives is mostly physical and often sexual. When Hemingway encounters a Masai Man, a “boy [that] was as pretty as a girl and looked rather shy and stupid” (P.248), he rather half-heartedly inquires as to whether the man has a sister. Later, he admires a woman, “the most freshly brideful wife who stood a little in profile so that I saw her pretty, pear-shaped breasts and the long clear niggery legs. ……. had all taken [her] with our eyes” (P.249).

Hemingway feels the sense of home as the firelight gleams through the trees to guide the returning, dog tired hunters. There are the meals, happily detailed, like the midday dinner in the shade of a big tree under the green fly of the dining-tent: “Grant’s gazelle chops, mashed potatoes, green corn and then mixed fruit for dessert.”

Hemingway claims Africa away from the European colonialists for himself, the American frontiersman. He denies the Africans any particular significance. But he does not fail to observe that the natives live in harmony with the continent. It is difficult to say if Hemingway and his party exploited the natives. Certainly, they expect to be waited on hand and foot to have their luxuries like beer and whiskey which have to be carried by porters. But there is also a camaraderie between Hemingway and other African characters that remind us that, even in unequal relationships that are frowned upon nowadays, there is an emotional reality that can not be dismissed.

The grinding need for self-justification and the nervous, eloquently belligerent attitudes are even more striking in *The Green Hills of Africa*. This is an account of a big game expedition, in which the author repeats that he is doing what he likes most, is enjoying himself and is happy - nine times in the very first seventy – two pages. The natural inference is that something is most certainly wrong. To be sure, “It was my own damned life and I would lead it
where and how I pleased.”(71-72) But Hemingway liked Africa very much. As for his own country, “a country that is finished:” “Our people went to America because that was the place to go then. It had been a good country and we had made a bloody mess of it……. Now I would go somewhere else.”16 (Philip Young P. 97)

Indeed for Hemingway the difference between a few people and many was more qualitative than quantitative. Something happened to people in masses to make them unreal and unnatural. “I had loved country all my life,” he wrote in The Green Hills of Africa; “the country was always better than the people. I could only care about people a very few at a time.” (P.73) In ‘A Moveable Feast’, he writes that people, not weather, could spoil a day, and they were limiters of Happiness.17 But he indicated his feeling more fully in another passage of the African book when he explained that one could sense the reality beyond human institutions only when alone and aware of the secret flow in nature. Then one was willing to “exchange the pleasant comforting stench of comrades for something you can never feel in any other way than by yourself. (148-49) His metaphor for the secret force in the world was the Gulf Stream, and the transitory achievements of nations – “all the systems of Governments, the richness, the poverty, the martyrdom, the sacrifice and the venality and the cruelty ……….. the palm fronds of our victories, the worn light bulbs of our discoveries and the empty condoms of our great loves” – were the garbage sinking into the always flowing stream.” (148-50)

The extent to which the big game hunter had lost touch with the finished land in the year 1935 is harshly indicated by passages in which he discusses, somewhat jocosely, “What’s going on in America?” (“some sort of Y.M.C.A. show,” is an answer) But The Green Hills of Africa includes more than social criticism. This book
contains “something for everyone.” There is hunting, autobiography and some literary discussion. In this book he had an Austrian interview him on the subject so that he might deliver a small short lecture. There was not much, he considered. Poe, though skillful is “dead” Melville is marred by rhetoric. Thoreau he “can’t read.” As for a Emerson, Hawthorne, Whittier and company,” they were “English Colonials .............. Who did not know that a new classic does not bear any resemblance to the classics that have preceded it.18(PY P. 188) As Philip Young remarks:

If this last remark is not succinct version of the burden of a good deal of Emerson, and particularly of his fundamental and famous “American Scholar”, we have been misreading him. And if Hemingway really saw a connection beyond the geographical, between Emerson, Hawthorn and Whittier – and whoever goes in their company – we have for some time underestimated his powers of intellectual synthesis.19

Hemingway's aesthetic stance values writing that accurately captures the physical attributes and the writer's physical and emotional responses to the landscape. Hemingway's objection to Kandinsky is not because of Kandinsky's colonial opportunism with the African natives, but because of his intellectualism.

He saw crowded cities as centres of sophisticated depravity, traps for his morally naïve frontiersman. Explaining to Kandinsky in Africa why American writers failed to mature their careers and present lives full of distinguished works to the world, he said that writers were destroyed when they accepted the metropolis standards of monetary and critical success as measures of their work instead of
maintaining their own uninstitutionalized visions. Instead of recognizing their primitive individual, Antaean vitality as their key strength, they accepted the mass vision, which turned out to be reformist, genteel, economic, political, or any other massive category, but not individual or natural or vital (P.19-24). Yet if one asked him to analyze what he meant by such terms, he would not, indeed could not, define them. Because he believed that the meaning could hold strong, the feelings keep their authority, only if they were not killed by analytical dissection.

As the next section of interview comes to life, revelations occur. It is here that Hemingway has claimed, what he would like to think of as his own true affiliations. He praises three Americans Henry James, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane. He liked the short stories of James. He has made special mention of ‘Madame de Mauves’, ‘The Turn of the Screw’, ‘The American’ and ‘The Portrait of a Lady’. Among Crane's he considered ‘The Red Badge of Courage’ as “one of the finest books of literature”. Of the shorter stories, Hemingway likes both ‘The Open Boat’ and ‘The Blue Hotel’. As For Twain When Kandinsky recalled him only as a “humorist”, Hemingway was unequivocal.

All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called “Huckleberry Finn”. If you read it you must stop where the Niger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating. But it’s the best book we’ve had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since.20

In Green Hills of Africa, Hemingway instructs a curious Austrian on American Literature: “All modern American literature
comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn. If you read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end” (22). While many agree that Twain's novel becomes chaotic toward the end, few would concur with Hemingway's appraisal today. Toni Morrison calls the closing chapters of Huckleberry Finn, “the hell it puts its readers through”(57). She sees Huck as personifying “a critique of slavery and the pretensions of the would-be middle-class”(55) with Jim as “enabler”. Of Huckleberry Finn and Hemingway's comments on it, Ellison writes:

So thoroughly had the Negro, both as a man and as a symbol of man, been pushed into the underground of the American conscience that Hemingway missed the structural, symbolic and moral necessity for that part of the plot in which the boys rescue Jim. Yet it is precisely this part which gives the novel its significance. Without it, except as a boy's tale, the novel is meaningless.  

Despite his debt to Hemingway, Ellison faults him for “seeking a technical perfection rather than moral insight” (38). Ellison seems to capture much of Hemingway's view of race when he writes:

It is instructive that Hemingway, born into a civilization characterised by violence, should seize upon the ritualized violence of the culturally distant Spanish bullfight as a laboratory for developing his style. For it was, for Americans, a moral violence (though not for Spaniards) which he was seeking. Otherwise he might have studied that ritual of violence closer
to home, the ritual in which the sacrifice is that of a human scape, goat, the lynching bee (37).

Ellison views Hemingway's portrayal of African Americans as stereotypes and when he remarks, “the object of the stereotype is not so much to crush the Negro as to console the Whiteman” (41). He comes close to the agreement with Morrison's statement on the “parasitical nature of white freedom” (57). Indeed, in a 1964 essay, “The World and the Jug”, Ellison anticipates Morrison's thesis in Playing in the Dark when he writes: “Southern whites cannot walk, talk, sing, conceive of laws or justice, think of sex, love, the family or freedom without responding to the presence of Negroes”

It is for reasons such as these, as well as his lack of curiosity about African Americans and his acceptance of the post-Reconstruction view of race, that Hemingway's attitude can be considered one of indifference at best.

In terms of the practical aesthétician, scanning the field for evidence of an indubitably “modern” note in American writing, the choice of ‘Huckle-berry Finn’ is hardly astonishing. Carlos Baker remarks: “Twain’s notable ability to project in Ostensible “simple” language the essence of active experience is the quality that endears Huckleberry Finn to Hemingway.”

“Simplicity” wrote Lytton Strachey, “is often the surest test of an artist’s power. A bad artist must fail when he is simple; but whoever is simple and succeeds must be great.”

It is remarkable too that Huckleberry Finn is sometimes behavioristic – a fashion that is so characteristic of Hemingway. Now and then Twain does nothing to recognize, reorder or analyze his material. He simply relates the events as they happen – outwardly or in the mind of his protagonist. A passage where Huck is escaping from a cabin where he has been imprisoned by his father (“I Fool Pap
and Get Away”) is constructing in this fashion. Twain lists each detail of Huck’s escape, of his preparation for a voyage, and of his feigning his own murder, in a strict one, two and three chronology of apparent artlessness that is a prominent, characteristic of such accounts as those of Nick’s fishing trips.

As Philip Young comments, “It is a bit too much to say that” all American writing” comes from Twain’s book, but not too much to say that Hemingway has accurately identified the progenitor of his own prose. Still there is a generation missing in this heredity; Clemens was born early enough to be Hemingway’s grand-father. And there is a quality of flat intensity in Hemingway that is usually absent in Twain.”26

The parallels which exist between Hemingway and Crane as human beings are numerous and unbelievably exact. They will explain why the two men so resemble each other as prose stylists, and even on occasion as poets. Both Hemingway and Crane began their careers as reporters when very young and quickly became foreign correspondents. They travelled widely and to the same places: Key West, the American west and Cuba; Europe, a Greco-Turkish War, and so on. Their common interest in war, the sea, the American west and the men-without women situation would sufficiently explain Hemingway’s neighbourly feeling for Crane. But there is also in Crane what Mr. John Berryman describes as “the immense power of the tacit” – a quality which “gives his work kinship …… With Chekhov and Maupassant.”27 A similar operative grasp on this power, and a similar kinship may be noted in the best of Hemingway’s short stories. Take for example, the portrait of Andre marty in ‘For whom the Bell Tolls’:

“The tall, heavy old man looked at Gomez with his outthrust head and considered him carefully with his watery eyes …… His
looked as though it were modeled from the waste material you find under the claws of a very old lion.”  

At first glance there is no apparent connection between Henry James and Hemingway. The world of James, is society-centred, ghoul-haunted, politely agonistic, externally inactive. That of Hemingway, is sharp in definition, quick in movement, and brash in manner. The difference in idiom is also striking. Hemingway like James, tended to concentrate on the individual mind as the instrument of revelation, and to project his stories as from one engaged on a journey of discovery finding out more and more about the central situation and its implications while he processed through it.

The common inference is that Hemingway’s doctrine of “imitation is of a special kind. He imitates nature, the world around him, expanded before his eyes. Dante, like his renaissance audience is dead. The modern writer writes for his own and future time. It is proper that he should know Dante, he should have a close reading acquaintance with the best that has been said, thought, and painted from Dante to Shakespeare, from Cervantes to Goya, and from Tintoretto’s Crucifixion to Picasso’s Guernica. But what he seeks to imitate is not the texture, it is the stature of the great books – he reads the great pictures and he admires them. These show what can be done with words and paint, with intellect and emotion; they also show what can be equalled if the modern writer has the time, the gifts, the devotion, and the luck: And if he chooses to derive his own work from the life of his time rather than from the art of former times.”

In The Green Hills of Africa Hemingway acted according to his concept of hunter’s frontier and explorer’s frontier. After the Austrian Kandinsky had asked him all kinds of personal questions at their first meeting, he left. Hemingway realized that he had not asked the Austrian anything: “I do not like to ask questions and where I was
brought up it was not polite” (P.9). He acted according to the primitive braggart tradition associated with frontier hunters when he boasted to his guide that he was “Bwana Fisi, the hyena slauterer” and killed with his bare hands. Later during the trip, at the fireside after killing his prize Kudus, he bragged to another guide of his hunting exploits by naming of his major kills: ‘Simba, Simba, Faro, Nyati, Tendalla, Tendall’ ……………. And I named the six cartridges again. ‘Lion, lion, rhino, buffalo, Kudu, Kudu’ (P.241).

The characteristic objection of Lehan and other critics to Hemingway's primitivism is that it is a denial of contemporary society and an avoidance of the issues faced in modern lives. But a further concern needs exploring: not that Hemingway rejects intellect and society in favour of primitive values and ‘rhythms of life and death and the land’. On the other hand, he often turns against the earth itself in his version of primitivism. Hemingway is in rebellion against death. As A.E. Hochner reports Hemingway saying, “When a man is in rebellion against death as I am in rebellion against death, he gets pleasure out of talking to himself one of the godlike attributes, that of giving it”. Hemingway does not exclude himself from the pioneering exploiters of nature in the Green Hills of Africa. He says, “We are the intruders” (284). But Hemingway also clearly considered himself a defender of and a spokesman for the natural world. We recall his claim to Maxwell Perkins that the point of The Sun Also Rises “was that the earth abideth forever – having a great deal of fondness for earth and not a hell of a lot for my generation ………. I didn't mean the book to be a hollow or a bitter satire but a damn tragedy with the earth abiding forever as the her“ (Selected Letters 229)

Hemingway's stoicism, his deference to ritual and taboo – these may be primivistic, but they are accompanied by little evidence of the
autochthon's humility before the powers of the natural world and the inevitability of death. For Hemingway death was cruel and a hateful trick, malevolently claiming the best and bravest for its first victims. Hemingway's aim is to control and manage what he conceives as hostile forces. As Glen A. Love writes:

Hemingway, not as a primitivist but as literary modern, had in an important sense left the world itself the heroic, enduring earth – far behind. As a modern and as an artist, he was a *maker* of his world, and he found and refined his unique selfhood in repeated acts of will and creativity that shaped, over and over, world and event and character into the paradigm he perceived. But his *making*, his proclaiming of his own uniqueness, also necessitated a destruction or diminishment of the natural world that he loved and revered.

(11)³¹

Intimation of a threatened nature, the necessity for self-restraint, for a sense of stewardship toward the earth, do emerge in his later writings. Hemingway adopted the way of slaughtering in the primitive culture. He feels exalted by living in that culture. He wanted to become ‘blood brothers’ with the Africans.

Hemingway abandoned his experimental attempt in the other two stories which are also based on his experiences of African safari (1933-34). He made an attempt to see whether an “absolutely true book” like The *Green Hills of Africa* could compete on terms of equality with a work of imagination. In “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” and “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” he was still determined to tell “the truth”. But now he invented the characters and imagined the circumstances in which they were to be entangled. The
circumstances in these two stories are quite different. But they share certain inward thematic stresses which have been discussed at length in previous two chapters.

If anyone is interested in the method by which the patterns of experience are translated to the purposes of art, he should find abundant materials for study in the three stories – non-fiction and fiction which grew out of Hemingway’s African expedition. The foreword to The Green Hills of Africa contains an implicit question. Given a country as interesting as Africa, and given the shape of a month’s hunting-action there and given the author’s determination to tell only the truth, the question arises: Can such a book possibly compete on equal terms with a work of the imagination? The answer is that it certainly can compete provided the narrative is managed by a very skilled writer who takes both truth and beauty as his watchwords. One tends to agree with Carlos Baker: “The highest art must take liberties, not with the truth but with the modes by which the truth is projected. This was no new discovery for Hemingway. But for any serious writer it is a useful maxim”.32 To quote Robert O. Stephens: “The importance of recognizing the direction of Hemingway’s cultural thought is not in finding that such thinking existed but in recognizing that it was Hemingway’s thinking. Neither unusual nor extraordinary, it nevertheless provided him with a framework for his actions, decisions, and prejudices.”33

It can be concluded that Hemingway loved Africa more than his own country America. He liked the natives of Africa more than his own people. He liked the primitive culture of Africa for its naturalness. He had deep praise for the Africans, their way of expressing, happiness when they killed their first lion. The boys on safari picked up Mrs. Hemingway on their shoulders. Mrs. Hemingway comments, “You know people never used to carry me on
their shoulders much at home.” (PP. 42-43) They danced around the fire to celebrate this event. This is the natural way of expressing happiness of the natives which Hemingway praised too much. He develops emotional kinship with M’Cola, his gun-bearer whom he missed too much on his second safari to Africa in 1953. He respects their cultural values. He himself wanted to live by those values. He felt sorry that the foreigners destroyed the natural beauty of Africa by over-hunting the flora and fauna. Such was his love for Africa that he wrote in The *Green Hills of Africa*. “But I would come back to where it pleased me to live; to really live. Not just let my life pass.”(PP. 284-85)

It is in ‘Green Hills of Africa’ that Hemingway's search of the frontiers ideal is answered. Shooting through the jungles he also realises the environmental precariousness that this search can lead to. His mental identification with the hunters when he compares droopy with himself – his hunting injury marks with his own war injuries – marks the closeness emerging between Hemingway and the primitives. The distancing from the American way of life has picked pace. He feels that there is justification for killing and hunting in Africa by the tribals but none for the wars. The difference lies in the urge to possess, to plunder, utter lack of sharing with the real owners and complete absence of human feeling and case for those bereaved.

Hemingway's emotional bonding with the tribals and primitives is evident in *Green Hills of Africa*. Their naturalness and spontaneous expression of joy excite him and gain his appreciation. He has come to value and respect their innate qualities. On his departure, mental shutters are not downed. He looks lingeringly at the place that had made him feel – he had lived not just existed. The desire to return signals the sense of belonging – a second home – but second only in name.
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