# 10: Barking at Death: Hemingway, Africa, and the Stages of Dying

*James Plath*

> *Since in our unconscious mind we are all immortal, it is almost inconceivable for us to acknowledge that we too have to face death.*
>
> — Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*
>
> *Suddenly, he was afraid of dying.*
>
> — Ernest Hemingway, *The Nick Adams Stories*

In *Green Hills of Africa*, the first-person narrator says that Crane "was dying from the start" (23). In a way, so was Ernest Hemingway, whose fiction betrays what Frank Scafella described, without exaggeration, as an "extreme anxiety of death" (5). Not surprisingly, there has been a great deal written on the subject, much of it having to do with Hemingway's love of the *corrida* and most of it harking back to Phillip Young's interpretation of a famous Hemingway phrase: "grace under pressure"[1] (*Ernest Hemingway*, 7–9, 14). Young saw the emergence of a "code hero" very early in Hemingway's fiction, a hero whose message "is life: you lose, of course; what counts is how you conduct yourself while you are being destroyed" (8). For decades, critics subscribed to Young's argument that Hemingway's famous World War I wounding was the source of his alleged ambivalence toward death and the irresistible urge to confront it.

It's worth remembering, however, that Hemingway was traumatized by death even before, as a nineteen year old, he was felled by a trench mortar and machine-gun fire in Italy. As biographer Kenneth Lynn observes, Hemingway's early boyhood was haunted by death "for reasons that he could not bring himself to discuss with anyone" (22). This avoidance persisted throughout his life. Valerie (Danby-Smith) Hemingway, who became his friend and secretary in 1959, writes that Hemingway often voiced his fears to her but never talked about death (132).[2] According to Idaho hunting companion Forrest MacMullen, Hemingway broached the subject only obliquely, in a manner that could be construed as colorful behavior or jesting: he used to *bark* at the mention of death.

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"He'd say, 'Woof woof,'" MacMullen recalled, "more or less acknowledging that he heard it. The first time that I was around him and death was mentioned and he said 'Woof woof,' I asked him about it. And he said, 'It's an unpleasant thing'" (Plath and Simons, 129).

Unable to talk about death to his friends, Hemingway filled his writing with it. Many scholars have noticed this, but John Killinger summarizes it best: "The most obviously recurrent motif in all of Hemingway's work has been the subject of death, or of violence, which, as Frederick Hoffman has observed, is only another form of death in which the victim survives" (17). From the accidental death and suicide in "Judgment of Manitou," Hemingway's first published high school story, to the last novel published during his lifetime, *The Old Man and the Sea* — which ends with Santiago not just dreaming of lions but also carrying his death inside him[3]— more than a few of his fictions deal with death.

In "Death and Dying: Hemingway's Predominant Theme," Mark Scheel notes that "most frequently, theories concerning the origin of Hemingway's preoccupation with death and dying take into consideration the psychology of the author" (5). So, when a young Nick Adams suddenly "realized that some day he must die. It made him feel quite sick" (*The Nick Adams Stories*, 14), critics often think of Hemingway as well — especially when this excised passage is so different from the ending Hemingway gave the published version of "Indian Camp," in which the narrator tells us that Nick was "quite sure that he would never die" (21). The statement cannot be easily dismissed as a young boy's naiveté: the author's careful revision and the fact that he has just witnessed pain, blood, and death make the line resonate. It's also a classic case of denial that typically follows the shock that accompanies the recognition of one's own mortality.

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's seminal work, *On Death and Dying*, published eight years after Hemingway killed himself, remains the model for understanding the emotional stages that people experience when facing catastrophic loss in general and death in particular. Studying the terminally ill, the Swiss psychiatrist affirmed that fear of death was universal and that, after the initial shock, people confronting death traverse five distinct stages: denial (as young Nick appears to experience in "Indian Camp"), anger, bargaining, depression, and, finally, acceptance. What was published as a theory in 1969 was confirmed by a Yale University study in 2007: that except for acceptance — which researchers found occurring at any point in the self-grieving process, if at all — the other stages "peaked and faded in exactly the sequence of the stage theory" (Bass, 31). The implicit universality suggests, of course, that the Kübler-Ross model could be applied to Hemingway as well — especially when, as one biographer observes, "Hemingway's own death had become so real an event in his mind that he could even imagine what it might be like for his wife to find his body, and he testified to this in 'Kilimanjaro'" (Lynn, 431).

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While death may be frequent in Hemingway's fiction, it is by no means a given: not all his protagonists die, and indeed, in some stories no one at all dies. But a progression takes us closer to death — a progression that points in the direction of Africa, a land that not only gave Hemingway extreme pleasure and inspiration but also helped him confront the prospect of his own mortality through his writing.

Hemingway's first trip to Africa amplified a sense of his fragility and mortality in ways that not even the famous wounding in Italy had done. That wound cannot be dismissed, but while Hemingway returned with a trunk full of souvenirs and a duffle bag full of rhetoric about how the war had changed him, and while brother Leicester later wrote that Ernest "had received some psychic shock" (56), the young man did not act the part of a traumatized veteran. He showed his scars at parties, wore his Italian officer's cape and boots around town, and shot flare pistols in his backyard for the neighborhood children (Nagel and Villard, 258). An article in the *Oak Parker* noted that Hemingway's "only voluntary comment on the war is that it was great sport and he is ready to go on the job if it happens again" (Leicester Hemingway, 53). Even before he returned to the United States, Hemingway had written his parents, with equal measures of humor and conviction, that "it has been fairly conclusively proved that I can't be bumped off," and that what makes him hate the war isn't death, but missing out on "those wonderful catches of Rainbow at the [Horton] Bay" (*Selected Letters*, 18, 16).

But fifteen years later, in Africa, there was nothing sporting or heroic about the debilitating amoebic dysentery Hemingway developed — an illness so severe that he had to be airlifted to Nairobi for eight days of hospital treatment, interrupting his much-anticipated first safari with his wife, Pauline, and their Key West friend, Charles Thompson. He did not play it down (as he had the war wound). "That's a hell of a lousy disease," he wrote his editor Max Perkins. "Your whole damn intestine tries to come out. Feels as though you were giving birth to a child" (*The Only Thing That Counts*, 206). In "A Tanganyika Letter," which was published in *Esquire*, Hemingway sounded martyred as he tried to be more poetic: "I became convinced that though an unbeliever I had been chosen as the one to bear our Lord Buddha when he should be born again on earth" (*By-Line*, 159). With factors like war, duty, patriotism, and heroism removed from the equation, a potentially life-threatening moment such as this seems to have had a serious impact on Hemingway. And there were other close calls on safari, including Hemingway's rifle falling and firing a shot past his head, as well as the realization that when Pauline tried to shoot a lion, Hemingway had remained in the car and would have been "unable to save her if the lion charged" (Reynolds, *The 1930s*, 159, 162). The entire first safari carried a subtext of accidental and nonheroic death.

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By all accounts, that safari was less than a triumph. Biographers report that Hemingway's shots were so off-target it was sometimes humiliating, while their guide became sick and depressed and "the safari degenerated badly," turning into an alpha-male contest of measurements between Hemingway and Thompson in which Hemingway came up short every time (Reynolds, *The 1930s,* 162–65). Yet, none of it could dampen his enthusiasm for the long-awaited safari. Africa had such a powerful effect on Hemingway that even the memory of the dysentery that made him stagger and caused him a "fortnight of torture" (Baker, *Life*, 251) wasn't enough to keep him from gushing rhapsodically in *Green Hills of Africa*, "I loved the country so that I was happy as you are after you have been with a woman that you really love, when . . . you can never have it all and yet what there is, now, you can have, and you want more and more, to have, and be, and live in, to possess now again for always, that long, sudden-ended always" (72). As Baker writes, "Ernest's appetite and his admiration for the land were both enormous" (*Life*, 249), and that was reflected in his writing about it. Leicester Hemingway reports that his brother "had been doing twenty to twenty-two pages a day toward the end [of *Green Hills*], though his usual production was about five pages daily" (178).

The second safari in 1953–1954 also had several close calls. Michael Reynolds informs us that friends found Hemingway "incredibly changed by the two African plane crashes, his beard whiter, his eyes frequently vacant, his moods mercurial." Yet once again, working on his African book he found the words flowing at an above-average rate, producing 4,587 words the first week of February 1955 "when previously a good week would have been half that many" (Reynolds, *The Final Years,* 286). Africa was so captivating and the amount of game so unbelievably bountiful that the second trip made Hemingway "ready to give up his no longer defensible Cuban hilltop in favor of Africa" (286), despite the two crashes that almost killed him. "I never knew of a morning in Africa when I woke that I was not happy" (16), he writes in *Under Kilimanjaro*, a book composed between October 1954 and spring 1956 — that is, immediately after his experiences of observing death, inflicting death, and coming very close to his own death. In that manuscript, it's clear that Africa helped him process his thoughts on such a difficult and complex subject. Time and again an observation of an animal's death leads to a meditation on death, which in turn leads to an appreciation of life. In one such instance, Hemingway considers what would have happened had one of them been killed by a lion, wondering optimistically, "would our souls have flown off somewhere?" (220). Observing death in another quarter, he notes that "a lion after he has died and stiffened has little dignity" (224), and this leads him, on the very next page, to a happy appreciation of all the species he's ignored: "For a long time I realized I had only paid attention to the predators, the scavengers, and the birds that were good to eat and the

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birds that had to do with hunting," but he resolves to pay more attention to kingbirds and mockingbirds and migratory birds (225). Both safaris then, gave him direct exposure to death, heightened his feeling for life, and were followed by periods of fluent writing.

Still, it was the first safari that made the deeper impression. It was an important, emotional, and long-awaited event for Hemingway. Reynolds tells us that Ernest, at age six, "stood in awe beside two gigantic stuffed elephants in the Field Museum; at sixteen, he promised himself to do 'exploring work' in Africa; at twenty-six, he gave his character Jake Barnes the dream of hunting in British East Africa. Now, at thirty-four, Ernest was there on Roosevelt's ground" with the very guide who had led Hemingway's earliest childhood hero on his epic 1909 safari (*The 1930s*, 156). He was living out a childhood fantasy by following in Teddy Roosevelt's footsteps. To have that trip marred by pain, severe bleeding, and such a depletion of energy that "he could hardly write a letter" (Leicester Hemingway, 141) made it not just a life-threatening moment, but a life-defining one as well.

Adrenalin and youth got Hemingway through the shock of his World War I wounding, and his main concern while in the hospital in 1918 was whether he would lose his leg or if his exaggerations about his bravery would be uncovered (Reynolds, *The Young Hemingway*, 21). But in Africa, suffering far from a hospital, he feared something much worse: he knew he could die. The prospect was not leavened by any sort of spiritual or political ideology or idealism. As Hemingway the "naturalist" had written in *Death in the Afternoon*, "most men die like animals, not men." He describes "death from Spanish influenza. In this you drown in mucus, choking, and how you know the patient's dead is; at the end he shits the bed full" (139). Clearly, a slow, natural death was even more odious to Hemingway than being killed suddenly, quickly, and for an ideal, as in war.

Hemingway's treatment of death in his postsafari fiction confirms that Africa had a most profound effect on him. Before the first safari, Hemingway had only dabbled in death, keeping it at a distance. His high school fiction was as derivative of Jack London as his journalism was of Ring Lardner, and the deaths that Hemingway included in two of three stories published in his high school's literary magazine were as far removed from Hemingway's life and experiences as London's Klondike. In "Judgment of Manitou," a presumably French-Canadian trapper named Pierre plays a trick on his partner that results in poor Dick being attacked by a wolf pack. Ironically, as Pierre tries to help his friend, he gets caught in one of the traps they had set earlier, and is forced to kill himself to avoid the more unpleasant death his friend faced. Aside from the word *Manitou*, which is Ojibway for "Great Spirit" (and something Hemingway would surely have known from his summers in Michigan), nothing in the story is remotely connected to his own life. Hemingway was not a trapper, Michigan

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was not Canada, and the deaths in the story involved two people who were completely formed in Hemingway's (or London's) imagination. "Sepi Jingan," the other story involving death, is also a highly imaginative tale in which a dog kills an Indian. Again, while Hemingway spent time with the Ojibway in Michigan, none of the biographies or letters mentions any such incidents as the stories describe.

Likewise, of the stories Hemingway wrote in Paris following his World War I service, those that feature dying characters are far removed from the people and events in his personal life. "My Old Man" (1923), for example, tells of a jockey who dies; the story reminded critics of Sherwood Anderson, it seemed so derivative. "Indian Camp" (1925) includes the well-known suicide of the Indian husband who could not bear to hear his wife screaming during her caesarian without anesthesia — an event that Hemingway's siblings report was completely made up. "The Undefeated," "Banal Story," and Interchapter XIV from *In Our Time* (1925) feature bullfighters killed or dying, all of whose fates were totally imagined. As Reynolds reveals, while Hemingway saw Maera at the first bullfights he attended in 1923, "no matter what Hemingway saw in Pamplona and no matter what he said in letters about hanging out with bullfighters, he spoke little Spanish that summer" and did not know Maera — whom he "killed" in the bullring vignette, rather than reporting the less romantic death Maera suffered in real life from tuberculosis (*The Paris Years*, 139).

No major characters die in *The Torrents of Spring* (1926) or *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), but by this time, as Jackson Benson notes, Hemingway "began to identify very closely with his protagonists as he wrote about them, thinking of them as himself. Evidence may be found in the early manuscript of *The Sun Also Rises* wherein 'Hem' is used rather than 'Jake,' and in stories like 'Three-Day Blow' and 'Summer People' wherein Hemingway's own nickname 'Wemedge' is used as a nickname for Nick" (290). At this point, for a Hemingway haunted by death and beginning to exploit his own life in fiction, a novel that brings death closer to home is a significant step. Such a novel is *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).

Like Hemingway, Frederic Henry is a young American who is wounded below the waist while serving in the Italian ambulance corps, and, like Hemingway, young Henry has a romance with his nurse. With Catherine, Henry enjoys an Alpine idyll of love and skiing, much as Hemingway did with his first wife, Hadley. Then Catherine, like Hemingway's second wife, Pauline, has a terrible labor and a caesarian birth. Catherine dies. But while it is a major change for Hemingway to imagine the death of a character based on a composite of two real women he loved (instead of the wholly invented deaths of his previous fictions), the male protagonist still only faces the death of someone close to him, rather than his own.

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Like the hyena from "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," Hemingway was gradually drawing closer to death in his fiction. Even so, although he writes about death in very graphic and grisly terms in his next book, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), death is still kept at a safe distance because it is imagined, constructed out of knowledge acquired in observation, reading, and conversation, and not from the experience of his own flesh. The distance is reflected in the style, which assumes, as Scott Donaldson notes, the "objective tone" of a journalist or naturalist (*By Force of Will*, 283).

Then comes that first, all-important African safari that began in November 1933. The main male characters of the two famous short stories that emerged from it are clearly identifiable with Hemingway: they are on safari in Africa, they are married to rich women, and Harry is a writer. For the first time in Hemingway's writing life, his male protagonists die — Macomber an "animal" death via a hunting gun, a 6.5 Mannlicher; and Harry a "natural" death that is considerably more painful and protracted. This was a major turning point for Hemingway, for while before that safari no male protagonist had died, after Africa every main male character in every novel published during Hemingway's lifetime will die. Harry Morgan dies (1937), Robert Jordan dies (1940), Richard Cantwell dies (1950), and Santiago, if he is not dead at the end of *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), will die soon after, having told Manolín that "in the night I spat something strange and felt something in my chest was broken" (125). According to Reynolds, "Only Mary [Hemingway]'s pleading kept Santiago alive after returning with the shark-stripped skeleton of his marlin" (*The Final Years*, 297).

In the matter of Hemingway and death, then, the fulcrum is clearly Africa, and at the apex of that fulcrum are the African stories, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" spawned much criticism based on the psychological necessity of facing one's fears, in this case, the fear of unmanly or unmasculine behavior. Macomber peforms poorly on safari, is consequently emasculated and cuckolded, but has his manhood (and his power over his wife) restored when he conducts himself with courage. One can point to the cuckolding as the turning point, as it leaves Macomber "grim and furious" while it strengthens the woman's power: the next morning, "Margot . . . looked younger . . . more innocent and fresher" (27). Then, when Macomber shoots well, he "felt a drunken elation," while his wife's power was reduced: she "sat very white faced" (29). Even when he discovers that one bull hadn't been killed and he has to go back in to finish the job, Macomber discovers that "for the first time in his life he really felt wholly without fear. Instead of fear he had a feeling of definite elation" (31). Later, he tells Wilson he'd like to try for another lion and adds, "I'm really not afraid of them now. After

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all, what can they do to you?" Macomber had learned the lesson that Africa has to teach — kill or be killed, and when you're killing you're not being killed . . . or cuckolded, which is a type of symbolic killing. "That's it," said Wilson. "Worst one can do is kill you" (32). The power in the Macombers' relationship shifts, based on who is doing the "killing." And Macomber's reward for facing death is a quick "clean kill," during which he sensed "a sudden white-hot, blinding flash explode inside his head and that was all he ever felt" (36).

It was a remarkable step for Hemingway to take, if in fact he was facing his own fears through fiction. Indeed, a good argument might be made for that position. He had long resented what he saw as his mother's emasculation of his father (explored fictionally in "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife" and "Now I Lay Me"), which he considered a main reason for his father's suicide (revisited fictionally in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*). Closer to home, there is Hemingway's relationship with the Cuban-based Jane Mason, the beautiful young wife of Grant Mason, on whom (many critics argue) Margot and Francis Macomber are based. Biographers are divided as to whether Hemingway had an affair with Jane. Cuban writer and Hemingway scholar Enrique Cirules bases his strong case on the testimony of locals and concludes "there was an intense and scandalous love affair" (23). But even if the affair didn't happen (as Reynolds seems to feel), the couple spent an inordinate amount of time together from their first meeting in 1931 until the Hemingways' departure for Europe and Africa in late 1933. Given Hemingway's own history of adultery, and factoring in his current guilty adulterous (and therefore suspicious) thoughts, he may have, as Robert W. Lewis convincingly argues, "turned Poor Old Mama's deep affection for Pop into the adultery of 'The Short Happy Life'" (Smith, 332). Lewis "was the first and most thorough in exploring the relationship between the triangles implicit in *Green Hills* and explicit in the story" (Smith, 332). In killing Macomber, then, Hemingway had basically killed an alter ego. He had done so mercifully, in the way that seemed least offensive to him, with a bullet that comes from the outside and that kills him quickly, painlessly, and at a moment when he feels good about himself (as opposed to the more shameful self-inflicted death of his father, or the messily degrading death caused by disease). Facing his own death, and finally able to translate that into the death of a main character with whom he could identify, Hemingway gave Macomber a "good" death, not the death of a defeated man or a coward.

An even more personal, more direct and painful confrontation with death appears in Hemingway's second African story. In "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," he no longer dabbles in death, reserving the ultimate fate for characters strictly devolved from his imagination (as in the early fiction) or for secondary ones based on friends or wives (as in *A Farewell to Arms*), nor does a character psychologically close to him die a clean,

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quick and relatively painless death (as with Macomber). In "Snows," about which Hemingway once admitted he "never wrote so directly about myself as in that story" (Hotchner, 176), Hemingway takes an even bolder step and doesn't just try to capture the essence of a dying man; he apparently records his own progression of feelings as recalled from that grave bout with dysentery — feelings that so closely parallel the stages of the Kübler-Ross model that Harry's confronting of his own mortality must have also been Ernest's.

Always recognized as a major story, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" has elicited much criticism, almost all of it centering on the story's symbols: the frozen carcass of the leopard in the epigraph, the vultures and hyena that close in on the dying Harry, and the great mountain itself that looms as an ethereal postscript. As Gloria Dussinger explains,

> When passing an aesthetic judgment on the symbols in 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro,' students of Hemingway follow one of three courses. The first is to grant the leopard and the mountain their full idealistic value, but to deny Harry a place among them. . . . A second critical group, accepting the metaphysical meaning of the symbols and also accepting the apotheosis of Harry, cannot reconcile the two. . . . The third approach to 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro' subscribes unreservedly to both the transcendental import of the symbols and the transfiguration of the protagonist." (55)

Other critics have found it difficult to integrate the symbols into the story. Marion Montgomery complains that "the headnote and the final two sections protrude from the story, making it an awkward iceberg" (149), while Robert O. Stephens writes, "The connection between Hemingway's riddle at the opening of 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro' and the story itself is tenuous at best" (93). Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate are even more blunt, insisting that "the symbolism seems something the writer has tacked on, rather than an integral part of the story" (144). They meant it as a complaint, but perhaps they are correct: it *is* tacked on. After all, this was a writer who once famously remarked that "all symbolism that people say is shit" (*Selected Letters*, 780), and later poked fun at critics' responses to "Snows" in a letter in which he wrote that he did not "want to be breathing down your neck like a hyena (just got these new symbols by reading reviews of The Snows of Kilimanjaro)" (782).

All this paves the way for considering the symbols as a subterfuge, as details that Hemingway inserted to draw critics' attention away from his real purpose, which would appear to be a highly personal "test run" of facing death. Such a reading would certainly help to explain why he said that of the African stories, this was the only one that was "difficult" for him (*The Only Thing That Counts*, 239), or why he was so proud of

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it, considering it "about as good as any of my stories" (*Conversations*, 46). "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" goes beyond what Carlos Baker called "an experiment in the psychology of a dying man." Baker writes: "Like Hemingway, the writer Harry in the story has been 'obsessed' for years with curiosity about the idea of death" ("Two Hemingway Stories," 122), but for Hemingway to write this story as accurately as he did, he had to be experiencing psychologically the very same stages as the dying Harry. As Lynn observed, the plane that was to airlift an extremely sick and suffering Hemingway that first safari "did not arrive in the morning, and the agonized waiting then began that Hemingway would recreate so brilliantly in 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro'" (414) — which may be Hemingway's first direct attempt to deal with his own physical mortality through fiction. And Harry/Hemingway's psychological journey follows the same stages in the process of facing one's own death that Kübler-Ross identified, initial shock giving way to the coping stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally (if it occurs at all), acceptance.

As Kübler-Ross writes,

> the patient's first reaction may be a temporary state of shock from which he recuperates gradually. When his initial feeling of numbness begins to disappear and he can collect himself again, man's usual response is, "No, it cannot be me."
>
> . . . Depending very much on how a patient is told, how much time he has to gradually acknowledge the inevitable happening, and how he has been prepared throughout life to cope with stressful situations, he will gradually drop his denial and use less radical defense mechanisms. (37)

When readers first meet Harry at the start of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," he is already past the shock of realizing he is dying. Just as the narrative begins in medias res, so does Harry's reaction to his African death sentence. The very first line of "Snows" is an expression of denial (Kübler-Ross's second stage); Harry says, "The marvelous thing is that it's painless" (52). That sounds very much like one of Kübler-Ross's own subjects who, in the stage of denial and isolation, referred to death as a "nuisance" and wished it would come "during sleep" or "without pain" (36). "Denial functions as a buffer after unexpected shocking news, allows the patient to collect himself and, with time, mobilize other, less radical defenses," writes Kübler-Ross. She explains that denial can range from an insistent "I feel fine" or "It's not so bad" to a complete unwillingness to accept even the idea of impending death ("It can't be" or "Why me?"). "This does not mean, however, that the same patient later on will not be willing or even happy and relieved if he can sit and talk with someone about his impending death. Such a dialogue will and must take place at the convenience of the patient, when he (not the listener!) is ready to face

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it. The dialogue also has to be terminated when the patient can no longer face the facts and resumes his previous denial" (35).

Harry has already passed the initial and peak phases of denial and has begun to incorporate the partial acceptance that Kübler-Ross saw in patients who "may briefly talk about the reality of their situation, and suddenly indicate their inability to look at it realistically any longer" (36–37). This explains why Harry wants to talk, but only on his own terms, and as a diversion. When his wife suggests that she read to him, he quickly rules it out, saying, "I can't listen to it," and reaffirms that "talking is the easiest" (53). Harry must talk about the things that he is able to face at this stage, the odor of the wound and the three vultures "squatting obscenely" nearby, and a dozen more sailing overhead. "I'm only talking," he reiterates. "It's much easier if I talk" (52). At this stage, Harry's flippancy, humor, and mercurial changing of subjects fit the pattern of behavior Kübler-Ross discovered in dying patients:

> How do we know, then, when a patient does not wish to face it anymore? He may talk about relevant issues as far as his life is concerned, he may share some important fantasies about death itself or life after death (a denial in itself), only to change the topic after a few minutes, almost contradicting what he said earlier. Listening to him at this point may seem like listening to a patient with a minor ailment. (37)

When someone rationalizes as Harry does and considers the "bright side" of his situation, he is not only denying his impending death, he is also denying himself an emotional response to it. At this point, the closest Harry comes to acceptance of death is when he thinks about his writing: "Now he would never write the things that he had saved to write until he knew enough to write them well." But Harry quickly replaces regret with another rationalization: "Well, he would not have to fail at trying to write them either" (54).

According to Kübler-Ross, "When the first stage of denial cannot be maintained any longer, it is replaced by feelings of anger, rage, envy, and resentment. The logical next question becomes, 'Why Me?'" This can be a difficult stage for loved ones to cope with, writes Kübler-Ross, because "this anger is displaced in all directions and projected onto the environment at times almost at random," often directed at the loved ones who are not dying, who get to live (44). Harry lashes out at his wife repeatedly, rejecting her offers of help and blaming her for his failings: "If you hadn't left your own people, your goddamned Old Westbury, Saratoga, Palm Beach people to take me on —," he blusters. His comments are cruel. When she asks him, "Don't you love me?" his terse response isn't just a "no." He expands on it: "I don't think so. I never have" (55). He rejects love altogether: "'Love is a dunghill,' said Harry. 'And I'm

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the cock that gets on it to crow'" (57). Harry is so unrelenting that he makes her cry. "You bitch," he says to her. "You rich bitch," to which she responds, "Stop it. Harry, why do you have to turn into a devil now?" (58). Hemingway makes a point of letting readers know that the bickering was not normal for Harry and his wife: "He had never quarreled much with this woman" (64). According to Kübler-Ross, terminally ill patients often become impossible during the second stage, but "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" offers an interesting take on the lashing out. "It's trying to kill to keep yourself alive, I imagine" (58), Harry explains, which was one of the lessons that Africa had taught him. Kill, or be killed — options that, as we have seen, Hemingway explored in "Macomber."

"I did not mind killing anything, any animal, if I killed it cleanly," Hemingway writes in *Green Hills of Africa*: "they all had to die and my interference with the nightly and the seasonal killing that went on all the time was very minute and I had no guilty feeling at all" (192–93). In Africa, a not-so-peaceable kingdom full of predators and prey, the killing is constant. While stalking a bull buffalo, Hemingway thinks, "I felt the elation, the best elation of all, of certain action to come, action in which you had something to do, in which you can kill and come out of it" (80). Later he muses, "I did nothing that had not been done to me. I had been crippled and gotten away. I expected, always, to be killed by one thing or another and I, truly, did not mind that any more" (107). But he did mind. As he wrote in *Death in the Afternoon*, "when a man is still in rebellion against death he has pleasure in taking to himself one of the Godlike attributes; that of giving it" (233) — which helps to explain the "Godlike" capriciousness in Hemingway's sport killing of birds and hyena described in great detail in *Green Hills of Africa*. Africa was Hemingway's bull ring, a natural, powerful validation of a symbolic construct in which Hemingway, who was indeed "in rebellion against death" throughout most of his life, found himself joyously in his element. There was something exhilarating about being in a natural environment where death could come at any moment and one could still somehow survive, which Hemingway apparently emphasized in an interview. As a reporter for the New York *Herald Tribune* observed, "The pursuit of game having renewed his enthusiasm for life, he returned home 'to work like hell and make enough money so that I can go back to Africa and really learn something about lions'" (*Conversations*, 4). The lessons that Hemingway — and Harry — learned about kill-or-be-killed are in evidence here as Harry pounces on his wife while in the second stage of anger identified by Kübler-Ross.

But as Harry lies dying in camp, it becomes clear that all he wants is to be able to write — to write the things, finally, that he had postponed. That was the reason for this safari, in fact; Harry returns to Africa "where he had been happiest in the good time of his life" and hopes that there "in some way he could work the fat off his soul the way a fighter went into

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the mountains to work and train in order to burn it out of his body" (60). This is Harry entering the stage that Kübler-Ross identified as bargaining. "If we have been unable to face the sad facts in the first period and have been angry at people and God in the second phase," Kübler-Ross writes, "maybe we can succeed in entering into some sort of agreement which may postpone the inevitable" (72). In most cases, this involves bargains with God, the wish for "most always an extension of life, followed by the wish for a few days without pain or physical discomfort" (72–73). It's ironic that Harry, who had come to Africa hoping for revitalization, instead finds himself on his deathbed. But it's equally ironic that in this state Harry is finally able to accomplish something he was now bargaining for — to "write" in his head those things that he could not get down on paper before.

Critics have pronounced the italicized sections "memories" of the writer's past and the final section a "dream" or "dreamlike sequence." But these sections are much more than that. They provide evidence of a writer who has recovered his gift. Memory and detail are the writer's tools, and Harry now successfully recalls events that he could write about. These italicized, well-"written" mental compositions represent a renewed defiance of death, a relapse into Kübler-Ross's second stage. "Now in his mind he saw a railway station at Karagatch," the first italicized section begins, "and he was standing with his pack and that was the headlight of the Simplon-Orient cutting the dark now and he was leaving Thrace then after the retreat." The immersion into memory is stopped by reality — "That was one of the things he had saved to write" (55) — but immediately he returns to memory/writing, until reality interferes again: "But he had never written a line of that" (56). Yet, Harry is already composing again, with another recollection-story about Christmas in the mountains and a wartime episode with the Austrians, interrupted again by the same reality-check refrain: "he had never written a word of that" (57). That Harry is actively engaged in trying to remember, to recollect details that form the basis of his fictions, is proven by the fact that the italicized memory/writing breaks off only to enable Harry to ask his wife for more detail: "Where did we stay in Paris?" (57), a city he will "write" about later in the story. Although reality intrudes again, as he realizes not only that he hasn't written it, but also that he never will — "He had been in it and he had watched it and it was his duty to write of it; but now he never would" (66) — he is still determined to write. "You can't take dictation, can you?" he asks his wife hopefully, which reinforces even more that he's indeed engaged in the process of writing (67). No, she tells him, after which he says, "That's all right." Then the acceptance continues, as he thinks, "There wasn't time, of course," only to be followed by a return to denial: "although it seemed as though it telescoped so that you might put it all into one paragraph if you could get it right" (68). Almost instantly Harry tries to "get right" his descriptions of the Black Forest and Paris.

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Another exchange, about eating, also makes clear that denial is becoming more difficult to sustain:

> "Could you eat now?" [his wife asks.] . . .
> "I want to write," he said.
> "You ought to take some broth to keep your strength up."
> "I'm going to die tonight," he said. "I don't need my strength up!" (67)

Here a glimmer of acceptance clearly shines through, as does the brief, single episode of depression that Harry goes through: "I'm getting as bored with dying as with everything else, he thought." Then, "'It's a bore,' he said out loud" (73).

Hemingway wrote his attorney, Alfred Rice, that "if I had not been using an airplane and very near dead there would not have been any The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (*Selected Letters*, 832). The stages of dying that Harry experiences conform so closely to those that Kübler-Ross noticed in dying patients that one has to believe they were real feelings for Hemingway — stages of dying that he felt perhaps at various points in his life, but never more vividly than when he was lying weak, inwardly frightened, and in pain on a cot in Africa.

In talking with Malcolm Cowley, one of the first scholars to convince Hemingway to open up, Denis Brian says, "Part of Hemingway's do-it-yourself psychotherapy in controlling his fears of death and his nightmares of going insane, was to put them down on paper, to write about them obliquely in his fiction," to which Cowley responds, "It's his short stories in particular that seem to give a clue to his inner life" (200), adding that Hemingway "sometimes seems to regard writing as an exhausting ceremony of exorcism" (43). Donaldson saw the same thing; Hemingway used writing as therapy (to purge himself of the von Kurowsky rejection; "Therapy," 100).

In "Snows" Hemingway shows us, long before Kübler-Ross codified them, the stages a patient traverses as he or she faces death. But Hemingway adds an artist's twist, arguing that art survives death — that creation trumps the destruction of body and spirit. In *Green Hills of Africa* Hemingway writes, "A country, finally, erodes and the dust blows away, the people all die and none of them were of any importance permanently, except those who practiced the arts" (80). Art prevails. When we are first introduced to the dying Harry, we read that what takes his mind off his situation is the scene before him: "He lay then and was quiet for a while and looked across the heat shimmer of the plain to the edge of the bush. There were a few Tommies that showed minute and white against the yellow and, far off, he saw a herd of zebra, white against the green of the bush. This was a pleasant camp under big trees against a hill" (151). It's not just Africa that diverts a dying Harry; it's his writer's eye, his appreciation of detail that is the beginning of his

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salvation. It's the same method of overcoming so-called writer's block that Hemingway described in *A Moveable Feast*:

> I would sit in front of the fire and squeeze the peel of the little oranges into the edge of the flame and watch the sputter of blue that they made. I would stand and look out over the roofs of Paris and think, "Do not worry. You have always written before and you will write now. All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know." So finally I would write one true sentence, and then go on from there. It was easy then. . . . (12)

Though it's more difficult for Harry, details and memory gradually help him recover and rediscover his ability to write, each italicized foray into narration becoming more detailed and expansive. Inexplicably, critics have been almost unanimous in pronouncing Harry a failed writer and interpreting the section in which Harry is loaded onto the plane and taken to Kilimanjaro as a "dream" or some symbol of shortcoming. Edmund Wilson wrote in an early review, "The reader is made gradually to realize that what seems to be an escape by plane with the sick man looking down on Africa is only the dream of a dying man" (630). Meanwhile, Oliver Evans — and there have been none since to refute him — complains of trickery, that "on his deathbed, [Harry] realizes that he has traded for security his integrity as a writer," and that "Hemingway has so contrived the ending that the reader is unaware, until Helen makes her discovery, that the plane trip never took place except in the mind of the dying man: the details of it are rendered with the utmost realism" (602). But that's exactly the point.

The so-called dream section features a telling typographical change: the italics disappear. This is deliberate, of course, and while readers who have come to rely on italics to denote Harry's interior monologue are led to believe that the cot-ridden writer is actually being rescued, then feel tricked when they find out that he in fact died, it's quite possible that Hemingway was trying to indicate typographically that Harry finally moves beyond interior monologue to finished-quality writing. Harry finally managed to "get it right" — so much so that the writing moves beyond description to the kind of powerful prose that Hemingway himself had been trying to perfect.

In an often-quoted letter to his father, Ernest explained, "You see I'm trying in all my stories to get the feeling of actual life across — not to just depict life — or criticize it — but to actually make it alive. So that when you have read something by me you actually experience the thing" (*Selected Letters*, 153). Harry's "writing," which he would have dictated to his wife, were she capable, is so powerful in this final scene that it literally moves him. In the final description Harry would ever write, it becomes so real for him that as he's being loaded onto the little plane it "was difficult getting him in, but once in he lay back in the leather seat,

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and the leg was stuck straight out to one side of the seat where Compton [the pilot] sat" (75). The power of Harry's imagination — of his writing — is that it becomes real for Harry — so real that Helen discovers her dead husband and notices his "bulk under the mosquito bar but somehow he had gotten his leg out and it hung down alongside the cot" (77). Thus, while Wilson wrote in an early review that Harry "failed to get what he had hoped," that would seem most emphatically not the case. Harry wanted rejuvenation for his dwindling powers of writing, and he found it in Africa, just as Hemingway discovered in Africa an inspiration for writing and a way to confront his own impending mortality.

The original title of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" was "The Happy Ending" (Smith, 349), language that surfaces in Hemingway's letter to Lillian Ross of 20 February 1953: "I have no message to give Mr. Faulkner except to tell him I wish him the grace of a happy death. And I hope he will not continue to write after he has lost his talent. Don't give him that message either, but that is what I would really tell him" (807). Faulkner was also on Hemingway's mind as he first composed this story; Peter Hays points out that an odd reference in "Snows" about death coming "on bicycles" (71) is an allusion to deputy Percy Grimm's bicycle pursuit of Joe Christmas, whom he shot and brutally castrated in Faulkner's *Light in August* (434–36).[4] Harry's last act as a writer — to imagine a happy death, a scripted and painless death that's far removed from such a Grimm demise or the throes of Spanish influenza — may well be Hemingway's way of barking once more at the hyena that seemed, to him, to be coming closer year after year. Though one might argue that Harry never makes it past the bargaining stage that Kübler-Ross identified — *Please, let me write* — the writing is so vivid that it sustains Harry to the very end, as that protruding leg attests.

Hemingway, who lived longer than Harry, did make it past the bargaining stage to the next one — depression — for numerous sources explain that he was frequently depressed in the years following the African plane crashes on 23–24 January 1954. While he opted for the kind of death that Francis Macomber experienced rather than Harry's slow, natural one — perhaps because, unlike Harry (or a younger Ernest still at the height of his artistic powers), he had lost the ability to imagine a happy death for himself — there's a hint that Hemingway had at least one moment of acceptance, that final stage of dying that Kübler-Ross identified. Lloyd Arnold reports that shortly after they buried two hunting companions Mary insisted that Ernest talk on the phone to his good friend Gary Cooper, who they knew was dying. It would be the last conversation the men would have, albeit a brief one. In it, Arnold heard Hemingway say, "Well Coop, I'm sick too" (333). No one can say what went through Hemingway's mind after concussions suffered in the plane crashes, the shock therapy he endured at the Mayo Clinic, encroaching old age, or the

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paranoia and disease that gradually sapped his strength and powers. But in this brief, telling moment, Hemingway appears to have felt and acknowledged the weight of that hyena — death — on his own chest. And one suspects that it made him feel as uncomfortable as it did Harry.

After "Snows," the four remaining novels published during Hemingway's lifetime show a regression, but then another progression. In *To Have and Have Not* (1937) it's a step backward as death comes suddenly for the hero, as it did for Francis Macomber. And in this novel Harry Morgan never gets past the second stage of anger that Kübler-Ross identified: "No matter how a man alone ain't got no bloody fucking chance," he rails at the end (255). But the next novel finds the hero making it to the next stage. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) Robert Jordan dies a less-sudden death and, also wounded, has a longer period of time to resign himself to his fate. "Now if the attack were only a success" (469) he thinks, then his death will not have been in vain. "*And if you wait and hold them up even a little while*," he tells himself, "*or just get the officer that may make all the difference*" (470). Finally, he bargains with a force greater than his own: "Then let me last until they come" (471). Neither Harry Morgan nor Robert Jordan were as close to Hemingway as the protagonist of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," but by the time Hemingway writes *Across the River and Into the Trees* (1950) he's clearly had a chance to become more comfortable with the idea of describing the death of a character close to him again. Richard Cantwell knows his time on earth is limited and wants one last trip to Venice to engage in the things he has loved — duck hunting and women. After going through the stages of anger and bargaining, he arrives at a place of some acceptance: "I guess the cards we draw are those we get." Then, he adds, "You wouldn't like to re-deal, would you dealer?" (179), slipping back into the bargaining phase.

It took Hemingway sixteen years to get back to the point where he could apparently bear to bring a character to the brink of acceptance, as he had in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." In *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), the last novel published during Hemingway's lifetime, Santiago prays, "God help me endure. I'll say a hundred Our Fathers and a hundred Hail Marys" (87), but this little novella is otherwise full of resignation and acceptance — more so than with any other Hemingway hero since Harry lay dying on his cot in Africa. "Man is not much beside the great birds and beasts," Santiago thinks (68), the self-diminishment itself a form of acceptance, of understanding the natural order of things. "I'll stay with you until I am dead" (52), he resolves. Later comes one of the most famous lines from the book:

> "Ay," he said aloud. There is no translation for this word and perhaps it is just a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands and into the wood. (107)

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Santiago may be a classic literary Christ-figure, but first and foremost he's a man who has accepted his fate while still feeling the pain of it all. And as Kübler-Ross reminds us, "Acceptance should not be mistaken for a happy stage" (100). With enough time, a person confronting his own death will "reach a stage during which he is neither depressed nor angry about his 'fate'" and he will "be tired and, in most cases, quite weak" (99). That, of course, happens to Santiago at the end of *The Old Man and the Sea*, during which he "shouldered the mast and started to climb. It was then that he knew the depth of his tiredness." It's worth noting that during his struggles at the end, there is no interior monologue for Santiago other than this single matter-of-fact statement. This too is consistent with Kübler-Ross's observations about the final stage of acceptance, which "is almost void of feelings" (100).

Santiago dreams of Africa, even though he "no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor his wife" (26–27), because at this stage Hemingway was also clearly dreaming of the Africa of his younger days. Africa enabled Hemingway to face death through fictional characters like this old fisherman who, in the final line of the last novel published in Hemingway's lifetime, was still "dreaming about the lions" (140).

## Notes

[1] Hemingway first used the phrase in a 1926 letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald (*Selected Letters*, 200).

[2] Young Robert Cowley, son of writer-critic Malcolm Cowley, remembers drawing a Christmas card for Hemingway that included "a hillside with flowers, grass, birds, the sky, and some clouds. And just two feet stick out of the hill, as if a man were sleeping there hidden by the grass and pastoral scene. But to my mother it looked as if the man might be dead. She said, 'Oh God, you can't send that, because he's absolutely panicked by the idea of death!'" (Brian, 200).

[3] But he is only barely alive. He tells Manolín: "In the night I spat something strange and felt something in my chest was broken" (125).

[4] In a personal email, Hays writes that Faulkner and Hemingway often traded allusions. See also Hays's essay, "Exchange between Rivals: Faulkner's Influence on *The Old Man and the Sea*," in *Ernest Hemingway: The Writer in Context*, ed. James Nagel (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1984), 147–64.

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