



(John F. Kennedy Library)

THE FACE IN
THE MIRROR
Hemingway's Writers

Robert E. Fleming

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*To Kathleen Fleming, who has taught me about being
a parent while being a writer.*

*And to the memory of Edward S. Bogusch, who was
much on my mind as I worked on this book.*

longer the hungry young writer who lived simply in a Left Bank apartment, forsaking creature comforts for single-minded artistic commitment.

Even though the manuscript that Hemingway sent to Arnold Gingrich for publication in *Esquire* shows signs of hasty, last-minute corrections, with pencil additions to the typescript and a cut-and-paste interpolation made near the end of the story,⁷¹ "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" was the result of considerable reworking before it got to the stage represented by that typescript. Item 702 in Kennedy Library, for example, is an earlier version of the story entitled "The Happy Ending." Although it follows the general outline of the finished story, this version is less sophisticated, beginning with the heavy irony of its title, in obvious contrast with the subtlety of Hemingway's final title.

Hemingway's concern with the epigraphs he chose for the story is also a sign of his determination to make "Snows" one of his major works. Even in the manuscript he sent to Gingrich, he included not only the epigraph that appears in the story as printed in *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* but a second epigraph that pointedly suggests the main theme of the story. A quotation from Vivienne de Watteville, this second epigraph obviously applies to literary fame as well as to its ostensible subject, the climbing of Kilimanjaro: "The difficulties, he said, were not in the actual climbing. It was a long grind, and success depended not on skill, but on one's ability to withstand the high altitude. His parting words were that I must make the attempt soon, before there was any risk of the rains setting in. V. De Watteville [sic]."⁷² Hemingway must have been pleased with the passage as a powerful found symbol for the writer's career. Not only does it parallel the writer's climb to literary acclaim—through the ability to withstand the "long grind" rather than through mere innate skill—and suggest the burdens of fame (the "ability to withstand . . . the altitude") but it contains two symbols that were personally important to Hemingway, the mountain, representing purity and detachment, and the rain, suggesting death and defeat.

Nevertheless, Hemingway had reservations about the use of the second epigraph. The margin of the *Esquire* manuscript contains a holograph note that reads, "Maybe better out. EH."⁷³ One can only speculate about why the second epigraph was better left out. Did Hemingway think that it rendered his message too explicit and removed the mystery inherent in the epigraph he did use? Did he think that it overlapped or clashed with the epigraph about the desiccated carcass of the leopard lying forever at the top of the mountain—the House of God? Whatever his reason, Hemingway chose to omit the second epigraph and let the first stand alone to prepare readers for the story.

Although none of the works of the 1930s definitively settles all of the questions Hemingway had raised about the problems of the writer, *To Have and Have Not* comes to a specific conclusion about writing in order to conform to social trends. The example of Richard Gordon shows that the writer must be true to himself, not to the critics, if he is to maintain his integrity. The more important question that Hemingway had to settle in his own mind before he could progress in his career was whether he had been right in baring his soul to his reading public. As his second marriage deteriorated, it must have seemed impossible for a writer to have both a distinguished career and a happy personal life.

"The Snows of Kilimanjaro"

Perhaps Hemingway's most ambitious single work published during the 1930s, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" grew out of a serious illness that marred the author's African safari with Pauline in 1933–1934. Reminiscent of François Villon's "Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?" "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," as has been widely recognized, strongly appeals to the nostalgic feelings most readers share, feelings of regret for lost opportunities and of nostalgia for what was best in the past. More importantly, however, it grew out of Hemingway's increasing awareness of the perils writers face. "Snows" is Hemingway's successful attempt to convey this awareness almost "as though it telescoped so that you might put it all into one paragraph if you could get it right" (*Short Stories* 68) or, if not into a paragraph, at least into one powerfully compressed short story that examines the nature of literary fame and the possible heresies of which a writer may be guilty.

Hemingway had had occasion to reflect on his own mortality in late 1933 and early 1934 when he contracted amoebic dysentery while hunting in Africa. Although he attempted to endure the disease and continue his safari, he eventually gave in to Phillip Percival's insistence that he be hospitalized after his lower intestine prolapsed. He was flown out of the hunting camp on the Serengeti Plain and received treatment in Nairobi.⁶⁹ While he was probably not in danger of death, the experience was severe enough to cause Hemingway to imagine a writer who was about to die and to examine through his character some of the failings to which writers are subject. Another powerful stimulus was Hemingway's growing awareness that as his fame increased and he associated with new friends from his second wife's social class, he was moving away from the identity that had defined his early success.⁷⁰ Like Harry Walden, Hemingway was no

Hemingway worked hard on the first epigraph, revising it until it delivered its oracular message in just the right wording, as Item 704 attests. He moved the reference to the Masai term for the summit (*Ngaitje Ngait*) from the end of the passage to its current position in the second sentence, and he pruned a first prosaic attempt to describe the carcass of the leopard.⁷⁴ Representing the dying writer who had dared to make the Pro-methcan gesture of climbing into the realm of the gods, the leopard is present, but the wording in the original passage lacks the crispness Hemingway's editing achieved in the final version.

The story introduced by this guidebooklike description of Kilimanjaro depicts the heightened awareness of a writer, Harry Walden in the manuscript, as he nears death and suddenly faces the reality of what his artistic life has become, as if the approach of death were a "wind that makes a candle flicker and the flame go tall" (*Short Stories* 67). As his writer's conscience flares up into a last bright flame before his death, Harry sees illuminated all the mistakes he has made and the sins he has committed against his literary talent. The corruption of the progressive disease from which Harry is dying symbolizes the progressive moral decay resulting from his series of transgressions. The "painless" nature of the comfortable life of sloth into which he has allowed himself to sink, like the painless gangrene from which Harry suffers, can mean the end of hope for the literary distinction that he has sought. On its most important level, the story is about the achievement of literary immortality and the nature of that honor.

Harry's regret about the work he has left undone is first introduced on the third page of the story. "Now it was all over," Harry reflects. "So now he would never have a chance to finish it." He has saved up certain experiences, not writing about them "until he knew enough to write them well" (54). But now as he nears death, he begins to realize that this notion might have been merely a fiction to excuse his fear that he might attempt the stories and fail: "[H]e would not have to fail at trying to write them either. Maybe you could never write them, and that was why you put them off and delayed the starting" (54). It is a realization that Harry, anesthetized by alcohol and by the comforting remarks of the wealthy people with whom he has been associating, has fended off for many years.

The lost opportunities appear in the italicized passages throughout the story and span twenty years of an eventful life. Even more powerfully compressed than the "miniatures" that made up *in our time* (1924), these passages contain what Hemingway claimed was the raw material for four novels, a statement that is not as great an exaggeration as a skeptic might

assume.⁷⁵ The fact that he was willing to squander so much of his artistic capital—for these vignettes represent Hemingway's capital as surely as they do Harry's—strongly underscores the importance of his conscious decision that a writer should not hold back his stories for any reason. He must not allow his own privacy or that of loved ones to keep him from using the truth, nor should he fall victim to Harry's greatest artistic sin and allow himself to put off their use until he believes his skill is great enough to create masterpieces of his material. Hemingway had commented on this masterpiece complex in *Green Hills of Africa*, published the previous year, that he knew two "good writers who cannot write because they have lost confidence through reading critics" (23). One of these two was certainly Fitzgerald, then struggling to finish *Tender Is the Night*, who had been hurt not by negative reviews but by too much praise. Now the two writers feel that to live up to their reviews, "they must write masterpieces. . . . The critics have made them impotent" (24). He adds that if these writers had simply written, some of their work would have been good and some bad, but the important thing was that the good work would have been published.⁷⁶ The way to the summit depends more on a determined application to the "long grind" and a disdain for distractions along the way than it does on skill.

As Harry mentally "writes" the stories that he had saved, each segment suggests a substantial, fully realized story lying beneath it—the best exemplification extant of Hemingway's principle of the iceberg. And if Harry could have completed the stories, his canon would have had an impressive historical, geographical, and thematic range, from tragedies witnessed in World War I and the Greco-Turkish war that followed to the pleasures of postwar skiing in the Austrian Alps and hunting in the American West. The exactness with which Hemingway evokes the rich texture of Harry's experience gives credibility to Harry's internal lament that he has forsaken a great career.

Many of the experiences are so obviously significant that nonwriters would naturally remember them, but as an artist Harry differs from ordinary people. He recalls the many loves he has had and the quarrels that could themselves have furnished the subject matter for stories—just as Hemingway had written "Hills Like White Elephants," "Out of Season," and "A Canary for One" out of his own remembered domestic unhappiness. Harry realizes that he had not only a great ability but a duty to employ that ability: "He had never written any of that because, at first, he never wanted to hurt any one and then it seemed as though there was enough to write without it. But he had always thought that he would

write it finally. There was so much to write. He had seen the world change . . . and it was his duty to write of it; but now he never would" (66; italics omitted).

In short, Harry has lost what Robert W. Lewis, Jr., and Max Westbrook call "his sense of selfless dedication" to his art, the dedication that would have allowed him to write, even about the most painful subjects, with the necessary objectivity of the artist.⁷⁷ Harry's greatest sin against his talent, then, has been sloth, while a lesser sin has been the opposite of that committed by Phil in "The Sea Change." While Phil will violate the privacy of a former lover to use her story in his writing, Harry has gone to the other extreme—neglecting certain important areas of his experience from a sense of delicacy. Hemingway's treatment of both courses as dangerous failings suggests the ambivalence he felt about the use of his private life and the lives of those closest to him. He recognized both sides of the question, but "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" suggests that he had personally arrived at the conclusion to which Harry comes too late—that using private materials is not only justifiable but absolutely necessary if the artist is to live up to his potential.

Harry recognizes that his art—and all art—is a form of exhibitionism. At its worst, art is the "crowing" of the artist. Harry tells Helen, "Love is a dunghill. . . . And I'm the cock that gets on it to crow" (57). In *To Have and Have Not* Helen Gordon accuses her husband of using his writing to "crow" about extramarital sexual exploits; in "Snows" Harry suggests that his own writing has been partly a chronicle of his personal sexual experience. However, since his marriage to Helen, he has employed his sexual powers directly—by pleasing his wealthy wife—rather than sublimating them in literature, as he acknowledges with his overtly Freudian reflection that he has "chosen to make his living with something else instead of a pen or a pencil" (60). But Harry's attraction for Helen is more than sexual: she soaks up the writer's vitality as a feeding vampire might.

Similarly, the rich people who surround Harry and Helen are pleased to associate with a well-known writer, partaking of his strength and vitality even though they "were all much more comfortable when he did not work" (59). Being outsiders, they cannot know that a writer is a writer only when he is actively writing, and they assume that the empty shell of a writer reflects fame on those who surround it. Harry salves his conscience by pretending that he is "a spy in their country," studying the rich in order to write about them someday. Ironically he falls into the same trap as his friend Julian, whose "romantic awe" in the presence of the wealthy has "wrecked him just as much as any other thing that wrecked him" (72). Instead of heeding the warning posed by Julian's experience,

Harry allows himself to be seduced by the same comforts—physical and psychological—that have "wrecked" Julian. Unlike Julian, Harry attempts to protect his self-esteem with harsh ironic judgments of the rich.

Harry's most profound analysis of his ruin is a single passage in the first third of the story, a passage that contains echoes of the seven deadly sins as well as the biblical parable of the talents entrusted to the three servants:⁷⁸ "He had destroyed his talent by not using it, by betrayals of himself and what he believed in, by drinking so much that he blunted the edge of his perceptions, by laziness, by sloth, and by snobbery, by pride and by prejudice. . . . What was his talent anyway? It was a talent all right but instead of using it, he had traded on it. It was never what he had done, but always what he could do" (60). The rest of Harry's regrets play variations on this summary of his faults as an author. Perhaps Hemingway had Fitzgerald partially in mind when he created Harry (although it is Julian who is most closely identified with Fitzgerald), for he felt that Fitzgerald had betrayed his talent by using his manuscript of *The Last Tycoon* the way "a mincing [*sic*] prospector" uses "a salted mine," never intending to complete the book but continuing to draw advances from Scribner's.⁷⁹ But Hemingway also had to be aware that his own career had taken a wrong turn since those days in Paris when he was considered the most promising writer of his generation. "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" should be read not as an indictment of a specific writer, however, but as an examination of what can go wrong with the creative life of *any* writer. As Hemingway had noted in *Green Hills of Africa*, something does go wrong with most American writers, and often, like Harry, and perhaps like Hemingway himself (as he might have feared), they fail to fulfill their early promise.

In *Green Hills of Africa* Hemingway had suggested that the ruin of American writers was caused by economic problems: after the financial success of their early works, they developed expensive tastes and were forced "to write to keep up their establishments, their wives, and so on, and they write slop" (23). Harry's predicament, however, shows another aspect of the successful writer's financial dilemma. The money that Helen has brought to their marriage has made Harry so comfortable that he no longer exerts himself. Although other sins are mentioned—drinking excessively and prostituting his sexual and creative vitality—Harry's primary sin against his talent is the same one attacked in the biblical parable. Like the unwise servant who fails to increase the yield of his talent, Harry has "destroyed his talent by not using it" (60). Once he had traveled around the world seeking material for his fiction; now, like Helen's rich friends, whom he despises, he seeks sensations for their own sake.

But traces of Harry's former virtues and his identity as a writer persist in spite of neglect. A writer is an illusionist, creating images for his audience. Lying on his deathbed, Harry incorporates both artist and audience in his own person: he creates the illusion that recalling the stories he has never told is, in fact, the act of writing them. After his internal monologues, he tells Helen that he has been writing, and he seems to believe that he has been. Lacking a stenographer to transcribe his last attempts at fiction, Harry internalizes them, and the effort of recalling them and structuring them—in his mind if not on paper—leaves him exhausted. He is in this state, emptied as if from a prolific writing session, on the last night that he lives.

Harry's vision at the hour of his death is the last creation of his artistic consciousness. With no time left to tell the stories and explore the themes that his reverie has engendered, Harry's mind focuses on the problem that most concerns the artist—his own chances for literary immortality. During his last moments, his artistic consciousness creates an elaborate metaphor for the career of the artist.

With his conductor Compton, a surrealistic figure comparable not only to Charon⁸⁰ but to Vergil, Harry leaves behind his earthbound camp and, to a large extent, the reminders of mortality represented by the decaying leg, the vultures, and the hyena. Moving away from earth, he views it with the detachment of the artist—the hills flattening, the plain spreading, the animal life diminishing in size and importance as his removal from the day-to-day events intensifies. He makes discoveries—"new water that he had never known of" during his life on earth—and flies through an airborne storm high above the earth. As Compton smiles and beckons, Harry sees ahead the "unbelievably white" top of Kilimanjaro and realizes that it is his destination (76). Removed from earth and its constraints, Harry's soul is preserved, like the work from his early productive period, in the snows of the mountaintop, far above the mundane concerns of nonartistic men and women.

But the story does not end at the top of Kilimanjaro. Instead, the third-person narrator returns to the camp and Helen's discovery of Harry's dead body, its gangrenous leg divested of its dressings, displaying its gruesome testimony to Harry's mortal corruption. This ending serves as a reminder that the writer is two beings. While the artistic self soars, like Daedalus, the mortal self may fall back to earth like Icarus. The earth-bound part of the artist may fester on earth, causing misery and pain to those closest to him. Thus the final depiction of Harry is not as a triumphant Faustian figure, suggested by Wirt Williams,⁸¹ but as both artist

and frail mortal, a bittersweet duality encompassing both triumph and tragedy, depending on whether the perspective is short term or long term.

In works published during Hemingway's lifetime, Harry is the most successful characterization of a writer, a multifaceted portrait that reveals different aspects of the artist's problems, and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" is the most penetrating exploration. Although its open-ended conclusion suggests that the conflicts within the artist would continue to trouble him, Hemingway, like his character Nick Adams, had temporarily purged a serious problem by writing about it, incorporating many of his own doubts in Harry. The catharsis would clear the air sufficiently so that, after a brief interlude during which he considered various aspects of the writer's role in time of war, he could progress to the writing of his best book of the decade, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, which is relatively free of artistic questions. But *The Fifth Column* and the civil war stories suggest that his artistic preoccupations remained to be dealt with, and Hemingway would also return to them in his two posthumous novels, in which writers are important figures.

58. Item 204-7, pp. 179-80.
59. Item 204-7, p. 183.
60. Item 204-6, p. 130.
61. Item 205, p. 449.
62. Item 205, p. 472.
63. *Ibid.*
64. Item 205, p. 474.
65. On Dos Passos as a model for Gordon, see, for example, Donald Pizer, "The Hemingway-Dos Passos Relationship," *Journal of Modern Literature* 13 (1986): 111-28; Baker, *Life Story*, 298-99; Arthur Waldhorn, *A Reader's Guide to Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1972), 247; Meyers, *Hemingway*, 294; and Townsend Ludington, *John Dos Passos: A Twentieth Century Odyssey* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1980), 333. In opposition to this point of view, see Robert E. Fleming, "The Libel of Dos Passos in *To Have and Have Not*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 15 (1989): 597-601.
66. Item 204-8, pp. 230-32.
67. Item 204-7, p. 203 and insert to 203.
68. Item 204-6, p. 148.
69. Baker, *Life Story*, 249-52.
70. *Ibid.*, 286-87.
71. See Robert W. Lewis, Jr., and Max Westbrook, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" Collated and Annotated," *Texas Quarterly* 9 (1966): 71-74.
72. *Ibid.*, 81.
73. *Ibid.*, 82.
74. Item 704, p. [2].
75. "The Art of the Short Story," 96.
76. See also Hemingway's much later memory of Fitzgerald's reaction to a piece of favorable criticism of *The Great Gatsby* by Gilbert Seldes, in *A Moveable Feast*, 154.
77. Lewis and Westbrook, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," 103.
78. *Matt*, 25: 14-30.
79. *Selected Letters*, 678-79; Bruccoli, *Scott and Ernest*, 150.
80. On Compton as Charon, see Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro": Commentary," in *The House of Fiction* (New York: Scribner's, 1950), 422.
81. Wirt Williams, *The Tragic Art of Ernest Hemingway* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 154-35.

3. The Writer at War: An Interlude

1. Ernest Hemingway, *Men at War* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1942), xv. Page numbers provided parenthetically in the text below refer to this edition.
2. Baker, *Life Story*, 321.
3. Ernest Hemingway, *The Fifth Column and Four Stories of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Scribner's, 1969), 20. Page numbers provided parenthetically in the text below refer to this edition.

4. William Braasch Watson, "Old Man at the Bridge": The Making of a Short Story," *Hemingway Review* 7:2 (Spring 1988): 155.
 5. Kenneth G. Johnston, "Hemingway's 'The Denunciation': The Aloof American," in *Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual 1979*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Richard Layman (Detroit: Gale Research, 1980), 382.
 6. Paul Smith, *A Reader's Guide*, 370.
 7. Johnston, "Hemingway's 'The Denunciation,'" 372, 374.
 8. Martin Light, "Of Wasteful Deaths: Hemingway's Stories About the Spanish Civil War," in *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: Critical Essays*, ed. Jackson J. Benson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1975), 71-72.
- ### 4. Posthumous Works: *Islands in the Stream*
1. Baker, *Life Story*, 460.
 2. On the dates of composition for *Islands*, see Baker, *Writer as Artist*, 379-81, and *Life Story*, 494, 497. On the composition of *Garden*, see *Writer as Artist*, 386n, and *Life Story*, 454-55, 460, 540. In the manuscript of *Garden*, the date 19/11/58 appears in the margin near the beginning of item 422.1, book 3, chap. 24, probably indicating that Hemingway had made revisions on the chapter that day.
 3. Ernest Hemingway, *Islands in the Stream* (New York: Scribner's, 1970), 12. Page numbers provided parenthetically in the text below refer to this edition.
 4. Item 98-1, p. 3.
 5. In spite of her own wealth, Pauline's divorce settlement with Hemingway had been vindictive in Hemingway's eyes. He had agreed to pay substantial child support—not alimony. See Meyers, *Hemingway*, 347.
 6. Item 98-1, p. 5.
 7. See Item 98-9, p. 401.
 8. On the differences between the manuscript novel and the final version, see Robert E. Fleming, "Roger Davis of *Islands*: What the Manuscript Adds," in *Hemingway: Essays of Reassessment*, ed. Frank Scafella (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 53-60, and Robert E. Fleming, "The Hills Remain: The Mountain West of Hemingway's *Islands* Manuscript," *North Dakota Quarterly* 58 (1990): 79-85.
 9. Baker, *Writer as Artist*, 386-87.
 10. See Item 648b. The Allen manuscript and its relationship to the story of Philip Haines are discussed by Donald Junkins in "Hemingway's Paris Short Story: A Study in Revising," *Hemingway Review* 9:2 (Spring 1990): 10-48, especially "Appendix A," 22-31, which transcribes the James Allen ms.
 11. Baker, *Life Story*, 273, 286. Baker reports that the black dock singers commemorated the fight in a calypso song about the "big fat slob in Bimini Harbor" who turned out to be a real fighter. For Hemingway's firsthand account, see *Selected Letters*, 414. Although Roger's fight is recounted in almost epic terms, the novel follows the facts quite closely.
 12. Item 102-3, chap. 4, pp. 19-20.
 13. Item 98-12, p. 559.
 14. Item 98-1, p. 4.