

“YOU MUST BE MASAI WHEREVER IT IS YOU COME FROM” — CULTURAL (IN)CURIOSITY IN HEMINGWAY’S AFRICAN WRITINGS

Hemingway as a journalist, Hemingway as a writer, Hemingway as an artist. But what about Hemingway as an amateur anthropologist? According to Wyatt (2015, 159) there is “one truth that has dominated Hemingway’s fiction”, namely “how all men end”, which is frequently “absorbed into a multiplicity of truths”. However diversified these polarized truths may be, they usually oscillate around a common core — the author’s attempt to discover the genuine nature of man. Testing his characters against various circumstances in culturally diversified space-times, varying from Italian battlefield in “A Farewell to Arms” through the coast of Cuba in “To Have and Have Not” to Spanish Pamplona in “The Sun Also Rises” Hemingway appears as a modernist naturalist trying to unveil the primeval truth lying at the core of being. In one of his letters to his father Hemingway writes:

You see, I am trying in all my stories to get the feeling of the 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. You can’t do this without putting in the bad and the ugly as well as what is beautiful. Because if it is all beautiful you can’t believe in it. Things aren’t that way. It is only by showing both sides — 3 dimensions and if possible 4 that you can write the way I want to (Baker, 1980, 153).

With his journalist “camera eye” and “the hunter’s cold acuity” Hemingway acts not only as an attentive observer but also as a conscious craftsman, who carefully extracts only the most meaningful content and the most vivid elements from what he rigorously examines, presenting the chosen fragments of reality in their purest form. However, as Hemingway observes, restructuring the observed world out of the self-contained elements reduced to their simplest, rough shapes instead of reflecting the reality in a mirror-like manner, requires developing the form of accuracy which aims at the coexistence of “the ugly” “the bad” and “the beautiful”.

The unique blend of the repelling and the enchanting is perhaps most visible in the themes of hunting, fishing and bullfighting which appear to dominate both Hemingway’s fiction and non-fiction writing becoming the most frequently reoccurring motifs. Being an aficionado but at the same time a non-native observer of Spanish corrida Hemingway acts as a mediator between two different cultures making an attempt to explain “a pre-modern society and its rituals to his

American audience operating "as much as an anthropologist as anything else" (Messent, 2004, 124). Using his broad knowledge on both the cultural and technical aspects of bullfighting, at the same time reducing the observed reality to the most vivid elements, Hemingway takes up a risky process of translating complex phenomena into a rough and raw structure characterized by clarity, minimalism, and directness of representation. This in turn, results in extracting only the most relevant and meaningful elements of the foreign culture, which, reduced to their simplest forms and rearranged into a vivid and highly visual structure, serve as an indicator of the common primitive element unifying all the cultures.

As Messent (2004, 124) further notices, Hemingway's increased interest in bullfighting can be perceived as a response to what Diamond calls "the sickness of civilization" which stems from "its failure to incorporate (and only then to move beyond the limits of) the primitive". Although much of Hemingway's search for primitivism as a source of the real experience which awakes the primeval and the subconscious oscillates around bullfighting, making Spain become "the centre of his foreign world" (Messent, 2004, 124), the outlook on Hemingway as an anthropologist looking for the primeval and the primitive as a source of rejuvenation and truth would be incomplete without discussing his African writings. And, if Paris can be recognized as "a moveable feast", then the centre of Hemingway's foreign world can be also perceived in terms of constant transfiguration and movement, rather than stability and permanency, varying from Spanish Pamplona through Italian Trieste and Venice to the pristine, nameless plains of Africa.

In addition to the above-mentioned it should be underlined that the fluidity and changeability of Hemingway's concept of the foreign and the primordial is followed by significant modifications in the representation of spatio-temporal relations within the represented world. Whereas all the displays and aspects of the "pre-modern society" observed by the writer within the borders of Europe are carefully explained and clearly stated as if they were purely journalistic accounts, translated for the audience from the outside of the "pre-modern society", Hemingway's approach towards "translating" African culture is completely different. What can be expressed explicitly in the text on European "pre-modernity and primitivism" is never stated explicitly or in a descriptive way in Hemingway's African writings.

However, as Messent (2004, 127) argues, "translating one culture for the understanding of another can never be a neutral process". Thus, regardless of the mode of "cultural translation" that Hemingway chooses to follow, in both his Spanish and African writings certain elements can be tracked which underline the strong presence of the author and his subjective perception of the subject matter. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Hemingway's narratives on both African safari trips and Spanish corrida may be categorized as belonging to the writer's accounts

of the foreign explored in the search for the genuine and the primeval, there are significant differences in the representation of both people and events embedded in an unfamiliar culture.

These discrepancies in turn, influence the critical reception of the texts, putting Hemingway either in the role of a knowledgeable mediator between cultures with a broad knowledge and deep interest in what he tries to present the reader, or an ignorant intruder communicating his racial bias and sexist attitudes through violent content and rough language. Although, indeed, the outlook on some of Hemingway's works as an expression of harmful preconceptions about both race and gender, based on what Morrison (1992, 62) calls "the economy of stereotype", may seem plausible, it is crucial to analyze what leads to considerably diverse modes of representation of the foreign. And, thus, exploring the theme of Hemingway's cultural (in)curiosity in his writings on African safari requires referring to his works on Spanish corrida, as both kinds of texts may be perceived as belonging the same category of aesthetics based on the representation of the unfamiliar and the pre-modern as a source of the primordial.

In case of "Death in the Afternoon", which is meant by the author to be "an introduction to the modern Spanish bullfight", of which the major objective is "to explain that spectacle both emotionally and practically" as "there was no book which did this in Spanish or in English" (Hemingway, 2002, 399), Hemingway appears to be fully aware of the fact that both controversialism and emotional load of the topic raised in the book has made it impossible to present the audience with a fully objective account of the represented phenomena. Thus, as Hemingway (2002, 399) notices himself in the bibliographical note that closes the book "when a volume of controversy may be written on the execution of a single *suerte* one man's arbitrary explanation is certain to be unacceptable to many".

The final, yet not conclusive remark the writer makes at the end of the book seems to be the essence of what Hemingway tries to persuade his American audience. The closing sentence emphasizes the impossibility to provide a clear and internally coherent description of bullfighting, since the performance itself appears as a complex, dynamic and, thus, multifaceted phenomenon, which, instead of being described from a single viewpoint of a passive observer needs to be approached simultaneously from multiple different perspectives. Approaching the bullfight only from one point of view would result in the most objective account, yet, paradoxically such a representation would appear as flat and one-dimensional, lacking the multidimensionality and dynamism which contribute to its complexity. This, in turn allows for the rise of the multiplicity of coexistent, but frequently mutually exclusive truths, which remain in a constant dialogue between the original phenomenon and its literary representation.

Taking into consideration the above-stated, it is crucial to notice that Hemingway's understanding of what is true and real differs significantly from the conventional approach, since, according to the writer "there is no one thing that is true. It's all true" (Hemingway, as quoted in Wyatt 2015, 159). Rejecting the absolute and exclusive character of truth, traditionally perceived as a universal idea, independent of external circumstances and of an individual's perception of reality, Hemingway deprives truth of its internal coherence, making it appear in a number of guises. Being a war correspondent the writer quickly discovered that "the truth of objective reality, if it exists, is not what gets directly reported, in either the media or everyday conversation", since people's observations of the external world are highly distorted by their "internal, subjective realities" which consist of their past experience, political beliefs, expectations and hopes for the future (Donaldson, 1996, 25).

However, Hemingway's search for primitivism does not only allow for the departure from the original idea of the writer's objectivity, introducing the polyphony of truths and perspectives from which to observe the reality, but also requires the use of atrocity, violence and blunt language. This, as the author expected, gives rise to controversy and unacceptability of both the represented content as well as the mode of representation itself. The opening pages of "Death in the Afternoon" gradually introduce the reader into the brutality of Spanish corrida, preparing the non-native audience for the unacceptable, which appears to be an integral part of the foreign. Perhaps one of the most striking examples of Hemingway's uncompromising attitude towards presenting the genuine in the search for the primitive and the primeval is the description of what happens to horses during the bullfight:

There is certainly nothing comic by our standards in seeing an animal emptied of its visceral content, but if this animal instead of doing something tragic, that is, dignified, gallops in a stiff old-maidish fashion around a ring trailing the opposite of clouds of glory it is as comic when what it is trailing is real as when the Fratellinis give a burlesque of it in which the viscera are represented by rolls of bandages, sausages and other things. If one is comic the other is; the humor comes from the same principle. I have seen it, people running, horse emptying, one dignity after another being destroyed in the spattering, and trailing of its innermost values, in a complete burlesque of tragedy (Hemingway, 2002, 15).

Preserving the blatant, tragicomic mode of representation Hemingway (2002, 15) continues the description of "disembowellings" and "visceral accidents" only to arrive at the conclusion that "the aficionado, or lover of the bullfight, may be said, broadly, then, to be one who has this sense of the tragedy and ritual of the fight so that the minor aspects are not important except as they relate to the whole." The emphasis on the wholeness, completeness and integrity of repre-

sensation as the major aim of the book is also underlined in the very beginning of the novel, where Hemingway (2002, 15) admits that:

This is not being written as an apology for bullfights, but to try to present the bullfight integrally, and to do this a number of things must be admitted which an apologist, making a case, would slide over or avoid.

Paradoxically, taking a role of an observer, a participant, and a mediator between cultures Hemingway seems to be aware that the wholeness and totality of representation is only to be achieved by the meticulous focus on the particular. Only by representing carefully selected details about the bullfight in all its brutality and barbarism, the overall outlook on Spanish corrida, will become comprehensible for the non-Spanish audience, and the truth, in its multifaceted nature, will be conveyed. However, aware of the controversy such representation of the topic may cause, Hemingway (2002: 11) finds it important to refer to the aspects of morality, explaining the choice of content and his uncompromising realism:

The killing of the horses in the ring was considered indefensible. I suppose, from a modern moral point of view, that is, a Christian point of view, the whole bullfight is indefensible; there is certainly much cruelty, there is always danger, either sought or unlooked for, and there is always death, and I should not try to defend it now, only to tell honestly the things I have found true about it.

Correspondingly, in *Death in the Afternoon* and, similarly, in other texts on bullfighting Hemingway appears as both an attentive spectator and a involved aficionado analyzing what he observes from the inside, but in the process of culture translation oriented towards the audience remaining outside of the time-space that he is trying to convert into words and literary images. Therefore, as Messent (2004, 124) notices, “despite a degree of controversy Spanish critics have generally agreed that, with his book, Hemingway proved his status as »the greatest of foreign aficionados of the Spanish bullfight«” who “got to know Pamplona as native would know it”.

However, it is worth to emphasize that both the abovementioned explicit explanations and the author’s justifications for the choice of literary content as well as writerly technique and style characterized mostly by a skillful use of specific terminology connected with bullfighting, that become the most recognizable elements of Hemingway’s texts on Spanish corrida, are rarely to be found in the author’s African writings. Furthermore, much of the controversy around Hemingway’s representation of Spanish corrida, arising on the ground of a rough, almost barbarian representation of the events, has been overshadowed by the writer’s excellent knowledge of the technical aspects of bullfighting, whereas the marginalization of the natives representing

African culture, followed by the lack of explicit description of their habits and customs leads to poor critical reception of some of Hemingway's African writings.

Referring to the inner story about elephant hunting set in Africa and inserted in Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden*, a posthumously published novel on a young American couple undergoing "psychosexual transformation" during their honeymoon, Tanimoto (2011, 203) suggests after Morrison, that

The inner story has an African setting and American values, the outer story of the physical and spiritual Africanization of the white couple on the French Riviera suggests what from certain American perspective of time may be experienced as a troubling deviation from a sense of cultural order.

Furthermore, as Tanimoto (2011, 203) notices, not only does Hemingway overshadow the complexity of African culture with purely American elements, but also reduces them to an obscure and imprecise idea of "the tribal things", which in the novel appear to encompass the main characters attempts to "inscribe primitivism on their own bodies" by tanning, demonstration of scars and hair highlighting, which altogether, connected with the motif of transsexuality and blurring the boundaries between genders make the outer story focus more on fetishism and primitivism severed from any particular culture, than on a well-planned cultural exploration (Tanimoto, 2011, 204).

This issue of cultural incuriosity in Hemingway's writings has been also emphasized by Mehring (2011, 214), who claims that Hemingway's protagonists are "not only incurious or inattentive (...) but they also tend to be oblivious towards cultural encounters in Austria, France, Italy, Spain, or various regions in Africa". This, in turn, leads to the rise of "a hidden discourse on cultural indifference ingrained in Hemingway's African short stories", as the author seems to neglect not only the elements of cultural landscape against which he sets the plot, but also lacks creativity in creating his literary depiction of the foreign, constructing his representation of African wilderness on the basis of "journalism, guidebook information, and poetic reduction" (Mehring, 2011, 218). Furthermore, using the example of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" Mehring (2011, 218) underlines that Hemingway's characters have limited knowledge of native African languages, which makes them remain outsiders within a foreign culture.

Similar view has been presented by Armengol-Carrera (2011, 46) who, referring to some of the previous critical commentary on Hemingway's literary approaches towards African cultures in both the author's fiction and non-fiction writings, explores the idea of masculinity and whiteness focusing mainly on the examples of *The Green Hills of Africa* and *Under Kilimanjaro*. According to Armengol-Carrera (2011, 46) "the celebration of white manhood in Ernest Heming-

way's *Green Hills of Africa* depends on the parallel subordination of both women and non-whites". Placing the major emphasis on the theme of hunting as a male-dominated activity, Armengol-Carrera (2011, 46) extends his observations to "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro", two of Hemingway's most well-known African short stories, in which Hemingway appears to be "primarily concerned with celebrating himself as a white male hunter, with women and black men acting as foils to his self-image". Frequently referred to as "the boys", "they" or "the natives", the portrayals of Hemingway's both African characters and safari fellow-hunters should be perceived as too general and imprecise, depriving them of both their personal and cultural identity.

Moreover, focusing on Hemingway's descriptions of Masai nakedness as well as purely physical aspects of their appearance Armengol-Carrera (2011, 48) suggests that "Hemingway establishes a direct association between nakedness and savagery", which leads to treating obvious cultural differences as an indication of "cultural inferiority". The whole discussion on Hemingway's underrepresentation of his African characters in both his fiction and non-fiction writings is concluded with a remark on imperialism, which created a breeding ground for the perception of the foreign and the uncivilized "as a private testing grounds for manly courage and imperialism" (Armengol-Carrera, 2011, 50).

However, although these views appear to be plausible, and dismissing the accusation that Hemingway displayed characteristics of an "ethnocentric, white racist and male chauvinist" as Mehring (2011, 229) put it would be difficult, it is worth to analyze Hemingway's perception of the foreign and the primitive from an entirely different perspective. Examined from the viewpoint of Hemingway's style and writerly technique the question of cultural incuriosity becomes more vague, revealing a completely different attitude of the writer towards African culture and the people representing it.

The writer's literary technique, also known as the theory of omission, based on minimalist language use and skilful implementation of dynamic dialogues, makes his texts acquire a peculiar "grace under pressure" (Baker, 1980, 200). However, Hemingway's experience in journalism and the roughness of his literary creations' linguistic structure, stemming from the disposition of unnecessary elements, followed by the overall minimalism of the writer's compositions, do not impoverish the text's semantic structure. "I always try to write on the principle of the Iceberg. There is seven eighth of it for every part that shows" — revealed the writer, pointing to the vast body of meaning hidden beyond the text's surface structure (Plimpton, 1958, 84). All the aforementioned elements contributing to the uniqueness of Hemingway's writing craft, have provided the foundation for a new literary style known as *The Iceberg Theory*.

Taking into consideration Hemingway's perception of truth, and the implementation of *The Theory* understood as the writer's pursuit for the simplest and the purest form, capable of embracing a complex and rich content, it can be argued that what the critics perceive as a manifestation of the writer's cultural incuriosity may be recognized as Hemingway's reduction of the observable reality to its most refined form. Therefore, although Hemingway's representation of both African people and their culture is, indeed, not always stereotype-free, from a purely technical and literary point of view it can be treated as an attempt to grasp life in its rough shape, the moment it emerges before the very eyes of the observer.

Perhaps one of the best examples of "Hemingway's camera eye" (Trodd, 2009, 209) capturing the life and its dynamics, as well as representing it from the point of view which shows its linearity, the upmost beauty hidden in simplicity, is the fragment in which the writer describes the best of the Masai:

'Good Masai,' M'Cola repeated, nodding his head emphatically. 'Good, good Masai'. Only Garrick seemed impressed in a different way. For all his khaki clothes and his letter from B'wana Simba, I believe these Masai frightened him in a very old place. They were our friends, not his. They certainly were our friends though. They had that attitude that makes brothers, that unexpressed but instant and complete acceptance that you must be Masai wherever it is you come from. That attitude you only get from the best of the English, the best of the Hungarians and the very best Spaniards; the thing that used to be the most clear distinction of nobility when there was nobility. It is an ignorant attitude and the people who have it do not survive, but very few pleasanter things ever happen to you than the encountering of it (Hemingway, 2015, 153).

This is where Hemingway touches the primitive in its form of the primeval and unadulterated, showing a common link between all people across cultures. Similarly, reporting on the celebration after hunting, Hemingway shows a strong sense of belonging to the group of fellow hunters; cultural differences are blurred and the scene is permeated with a sense of harmony. As a result it can be concluded that instead of describing the foreign from the perspective of a passive observer, Hemingway immerses himself in what Fiedler (2003, 211) calls a "pure marriage of males — sexless and holy". This unusual relationship, although rough and unrefined, is based on a deep mutual understanding built on common experience reserved only to males.

Moreover, being on a safari trip requires active involvement in the events rather than just attentive observation of action. Therefore, since one is a part of that action, they are no longer safe from danger; death is something they take part in, either when it comes to the death of a hunted animal, or their own life being jeopardized in the middle of African wilderness. As a result, the language, oftentimes rough and now perceived as a typically masculine discourse fre-

quently rude towards the natives, becomes a part of the environment with all its coarseness, hidden danger and the uncompromising nature.

Therefore, Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa*, analyzed from the perspective of *The Iceberg Theory*, indeed, differs significantly from conventional literary representations of the foreign and the cultural other, making the author appear as indifferent to the cultural background of his safari trip. However, resigning from guide-like descriptions and replacing fully controlled cultural exploration with spontaneous and unrestrained cultural immersion, Hemingway presents the reader with a series of events and experiences from the inside rather than from the outside, distorting the traditional perspective. The writer's experimental exploration of the foreign, makes Hemingway grasp life as it is, capture the truth in its purest, unrefined form, suggesting the reader, that the common root of all the cultures is to be discovered at the feet of the green hills of Africa.

Literature:

- Armengol-Carrera, Joseph; 2011, Race-ing Hemingway: Revisions of masculinity and/as whiteness in Ernest Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa* and *Under Kilimanjaro*; in: *The Hemingway Review*, vol. 31, part 1, pp. 43-61
- Baker, Carlos (ed.); 1981, Ernest Hemingway. Selected letters 1917-1961, New York: Scribner Classics
- Baker, Carlos; 1980, Hemingway, the writer as artist, Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Donaldson, Scott; 1996, *The Cambridge Companion to Hemingway*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Fiedler, Leslie A.; 2003, *Love and death in the American novel*, Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press
- Hemingway, Ernest; 1967, Notes on the next war: A serious topical letter. *Esquire*, Sept. 1935; in: William White (ed.), *By-line: Ernest Hemingway: Selected articles and dispatches of four decades*, New York: Charles Scribner's, pp. 209 – 211.
- Hemingway, Ernest; 2002, *Death in the afternoon*, New York: Scribner
- Hemingway, Ernest; 2015, *Green Hills of Africa*, New York: Scribner
- Mehring, Frank; 2011, Between Ngaje Ngai and Kilimanjaro: A Rortian reading of Hemingway's African Encounters, in: Miriam B. Mandel (ed.), *Hemingway and Africa*, Rochester: Camden House
- Messent, Peter; 2004, "The real thing"? Representing the Bullfight and Spain in "Death in the afternoon"; in: Miriam B. Mandel (ed.), *A Companion to Hemingway's Death in the Afternoon*, New York: Camden House, pp. 123-142
- Morrison, Toni; 1992, *Playing in the dark*, New York: Picador
- Plimpton, George; 1958, The art of fiction: Ernest Hemingway, in: Matthew J Bruccoli. (ed.), *Conversations with Ernest Hemingway*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Sims, Norman (ed.); 2008, *Literary journalism in the twentieth century*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press
- Tanimoto, Chikako; 2011, An elephant in the garden: Hemingway's Africa in "The garden of Eden" Manuscript, in: Miriam B. Mandel (ed.), *Hemingway and Africa*, Rochester: Camden House

- Trodd, Zoe; 2009. Hemingway's camera eye: The problem of language and an interwar politics of form, in: Harold Bloom, Ernest Hemingway's "A farewell to arms", New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism
- White, William (ed); 1967, By-line: Ernest Hemingway: Selected articles and dispatches of four decades, New York: Charles Scribner's
- Wyatt, David; 2015, Hemingway, style, and the art of emotion, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press