

MIRIAM B. MANDEL, ed., *Hemingway and Africa* (Rochester: Camden House, 2011), 426 pp.

Despite Ernest Hemingway's discovery of Africa as an adult, he connected the continent to the importance of childhood in the writer's imagination. For example, his protagonist of the posthumously published *The Garden of Eden* (1986), David Bourne, writes a short story based on a boyhood event that took place on the continent of Africa. Part of honing his craft is David's ability to remember exactly how he felt during this trial that "had brought an understanding of age" (551).<sup>1</sup> The transition from innocence to maturity characterizes "An African Story." In it, young David learns, through the hunt for the elephant, the significance and the price of empathy. What he subsequently takes away from the ordeal is the "beginning of the knowledge of loneliness" (553).<sup>2</sup> Africa was not part of Hemingway's childhood, but, as he wrote in *Under Kilimanjaro*, the continent, "being as old as it is, makes all people [...] into children."<sup>3</sup> Africa provided a conduit through which he could explore fundamental shifts in understanding such as David Bourne's experiences—shifts that, in his work, are typically contingent on the power of place.

Consistently grounded within strong geographical contexts, Hemingway's fiction repeatedly celebrates the numinous qualities of place and the far-reaching effects it can have on an individual. Moreover, his love of traveling has captured the attention of critics for decades, but some destinations have been more successful than others in securing firm roots in the public perception of Hemingway's pantheon of place. Until now, not as much consideration has been given to Africa as it has to other countries such as France, Spain, and Italy. Miriam Mandel's new edited collection of essays, *Hemingway and Africa*, shifts the current conversation connecting Hemingway and topography in a new direction, one that has been lacking in the standard scholarship.

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Hemingway, "An African Story," *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, Finca Vigía Edition (New York: Scribner's, 1987): 545-54.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Hemingway, "An African Story": 545-54.

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Under Kilimanjaro*, eds. Robert W. Lewis and Robert E. Fleming (Kent: Kent State UP, 2005): 23.

Mandel's book is a must for anyone who wishes to begin understanding this segment of the writer's oeuvre and the two periods of his life spent on the 'Dark Continent.' Placing a list of Hemingway's African narratives and the chronology of his two safaris at the very beginning of the collection provides a visual impression of the volume of creative energy and time Hemingway spent on and in Africa. Prefacing Mandel's compelling introduction, these two components provide a different qualification for the present study. Though he ventured there only twice, the existence of two distinct and protracted periods devoted to Africa fits into a pattern of repetition that, so Mandel argues, defined most of his professional life.

Mandel's introduction looks at the peculiar geographical arrangement of Hemingway's career. Her observations, though not surprising to anyone familiar with the writer's peripatetic lifestyle, are arresting for the way she organizes them into what she calls "Patterns of Travel" (7). Each country that captured his attention seems to have done so in a similar manner and produced a relative quantity and genre of work. After identifying Oak Park as the anomaly, owing to the fact that Hemingway never wrote about it but, instead, sought to escape it altogether in his fiction, she articulates his dual visits to Italy, France, and Spain. What Mandel strives to make evident is that, for Hemingway, the proverbial joy really was in the journey, not the destination. She suggests that the liminal space occupied in the 'act' of traveling stimulated the writer so that throughout his middle age, protracted stays in his destinations become less and less frequent. This leads to the implicit claim that coheres the book: Hemingway's relationship with traveling and place was analogous to the notion of 'safari,' a "Swahili word that means journey" and refers to an act that, by definition, is "composed of movement, travel, and impermanence" (19). In many ways, this metaphor helps the very different, sometimes conflicting, readings of Hemingway's African texts in this book to coalesce.

The first section, "Knowing what Hemingway Knew," begins with a short essay and thorough bibliography detailing Hemingway's reading in Natural History. Following, it is Silvio Calabi's very practical contribution, "Ernest Hemingway on Safari: The Game and the Guns," which provides invaluable historical information on Hemingway's chosen arsenal that indicates he was not a "collector of fine

guns and rifles” but, rather, of “function” and “familiarity” when it came to weapons (100). Offering a perspective on a different kind of genuine knowledge, Jeremiah M. Kitunda’s piece addressing “Ernest Hemingway’s Farcical Adoration of Africa” examines the author’s use of language, local custom, and folklore as a means to evaluate his fiction. As contradictory as he claims Hemingway’s “treatment of African reality and people” is (141), Kitunda’s essay suggests the “farce” in the “African writings is intentional” and not the result of the writer’s ignorance of East Africa or his “disregard for its languages” and “ways” (135).

The middle section of the book, “Approaches to Reading,” is the longest. Beatriz Penas Ibáñez and Suzanne del Gizzo offer compelling readings of Hemingway’s source texts. Ibáñez addresses the Baudelairian “ethic/aesthetic critical concerns” (153) as one way to understand the shift in Hemingway’s oeuvre away from the iceberg principle and toward postmodernism, signified by the African writings. Del Gizzo distinguishes herself from the mass of criticism on *The Garden of Eden* by focusing not on gender but on “the importance of childhood and empathy” in “An African Story” and the novel as a whole (177). Her essay is particularly striking for the way it opens up a text that has been exegetically saturated by gender and sexuality theory since its publication in 1986. Different from del Gizzo’s work, Chikako Tanimoto’s contribution, “An Elephant in the Garden,” aligns with extant readings of *Garden* in that it addresses “Hemingway’s need to explore unconventional behaviors, transgressive identities *outside* his own America” (200; emphasis in orig.). Finally, Frank Mehring applies a Rortian perspective to his exegesis of “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” which allows him to highlight the “moral and ecocritical potential” of the story (228).

The penultimate section of the book addresses a topic familiar to Hemingway scholars though a thorny one nonetheless, “Religion and Death.” Despite prevailing critical readings of religiosity in Hemingway’s fiction, such as those offered by H.R. Stoneback, Larry Grimes, and recently Matthew Nickel, among others, such scholarship has not looked

extensively at the African writings in this context. Moreover, the contributors to Mandel’s collection expand the definition of ‘religion’ past denominational boundaries. Fascinating for the ways it connects Hemingway’s childhood in northern Michigan with his adult time in Africa, Philip H. Melling’s essay, “Memorial Landscapes,” examines Hemingway’s interest in “primitive modernism” through the lens of his African writings that, he claims, provided a catalyst for the ways in which the writer was seeking to comprehend his own “Indian blood” (239). Melling’s work adds to a rich conversation about Hemingway and place with a type of synthesis and contextual understanding rare in that discourse. Similar to Melling’s essay in its effort to synthesize different influences on Hemingway’s religious beliefs, Erik G.R. Nakjavani’s piece, “Hemingway’s African Book of Revelations,” is a densely packed study of the different forces at work in the existential and spiritual qualities of the author’s life and fiction. James Plath’s “Barking at Death: Hemingway, Africa, and the Stages of Dying” ends the section. Using Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’s famous five-point guide to the stages of death and dying, Plath uses them to assert that the “fulcrum” in the “matter of Hemingway and death” (305) is Africa and the well-known African stories, “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” and “The Snows of Kilimanjaro.”

Finally, Kelli A. Larson dutifully notes “What Others Have Said,” and in her brief introduction to a thorough bibliography, she explains the surfeits and needs among scholarship addressing the African texts. Subsequently, she makes clear the fertile opportunity for “critical exploration” into them (325). One such work, *Under Kilimanjaro*, enjoys popular and critical acclaim and, as Larson argues, could “bolster” the success of the posthumous texts, especially in the ways it represents an evolving writer (325). In that book, Hemingway wrote that “there are always mystical countries that are a part of one’s childhood.”<sup>4</sup> The Africa of Hemingway’s childhood is an anachronism but an incredibly revealing one for those who wish to understand the unique qualities of his craft.

Georgia

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<sup>4</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Under Kilimanjaro*: 23.