

HUNTING, FISHING,
AND THE CRAMP OF ETHICS IN
ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S
THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA,
GREEN HILLS OF AFRICA, AND
UNDER KILIMANJARO

RYAN HEDIGER
University of Colorado at Boulder

TOWARD THE END OF HEMINGWAY'S second African safari (1953–54), he took up his own version of a traditional Masai practice: hunting alone at night, barefoot, head shaved, and carrying only a spear. These walks are described in *Under Kilimanjaro* (2005) (and in the abridged *True at First Light*, 1999). Both versions reveal, with some self-deprecating humor, that Hemingway was “properly scared” and wished for any kind of companion, dog or human. Yet, he calls that fear “a luxury that you have to pay for and like the best luxuries it is worth it most of the time” (*TAFL* 271; *UK* 361). As the description proceeds, we understand that the reward is a complex experience of the African night, including the sounds of “night birds,” “small animals,” and a lion; the sight of foxes, hares, a wildebeest, and more; and a clearer sense of himself as another animal, exposed to that sweating fear. It is tempting to call this reward aesthetic, at least in part.

Many readers note that such practices also have an ethical valence, especially in comparison to Hemingway's first safari (1933–34), depicted in

Green Hills of Africa. Introducing *Under Kilimanjaro*, for instance, editors Robert W. Lewis and Robert E. Fleming mention Hemingway's changed attitude toward hunting, saying he "takes greater pleasure in merely watching the wildlife" than in killing (xiv). In a recent article, "He Only Looked Sad the Same Way I Felt: The Textual Confessions of Hemingway's Hunters," Carey Voeller also demonstrates that Hemingway showed more and more sympathy toward animals on later trips, replacing his trophy-hunting mentality with a more complex view. For Voeller, these changes are part of a general shift in Hemingway's later life. Voeller's argument follows from Charlene Murphy's work, which he cites, and resembles a number of other studies that draw similar conclusions on this point.¹

Not mentioned in Voeller's study but also relevant to this issue is Glen Love's 1987 essay "Hemingway's Indian Virtues." Love condemns excessive killing in Hemingway's personal hunting practices (e.g. 203) and finds Hemingway's Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* also too willing to kill the sharks and other animals of the sea that oppose his interests. However, Love notes signs of Hemingway's shift toward greater ecological benevolence "at about the time of the writing" of *The Old Man and the Sea* (209). As he reminds us, by this time Hemingway had published his belief that "it is a sin to kill any non-dangerous game animal except for meat" (qtd. in Love 209) and had spoken against other wanton killing. Love seems to deduce this as a kind of moral code for Hemingway's later hunting practices.

Love's analysis contrasts this growing sympathy with animals with Hemingway's status "as a modern and as an artist," a maker "proclaiming of his own uniqueness, [which] also necessitated a destruction or diminishment of the natural world which he loved [. . .]" (205). For Love, artistic style conflicts with ethics. On this point, Love's approach resembles critical arguments heard not long after release of *The Old Man and the Sea*. Although the novel was greeted with high praise at first, a second wave of responses was more skeptical. Philip Rahv, for example, calls the story "supple" and "exact" but also finds it limited because of Hemingway's "chosen theme" (360). Rahv suggests that "its quality of emotion [is] genuine but so elemental in its totality as to exact nothing from us beyond instant assent" (360). Philip Young praised the book highly in his first edition of *Ernest Hemingway* (1952), but in the 1966 edition notes his desire to "greatly tone down the praise for *The Old Man and the Sea*." He proclaims that "although the tale is here and there exciting it is itself drawn out a lit-

tle far. Even the title seems an affectation of simplicity, and the realization that Hemingway was now trading on and no longer inventing the style that made him famous came just too late” to Young, hence his initially high praise (274). Young heartily agrees with Dwight Macdonald, who wrote, “Nothing is at stake [in *The Old Man and the Sea*] except for the professional obligation to sound as much like Hemingway as possible” (qtd. in Young 271–72). Indeed, Young uses this discussion to reflect his belief in “the declination of Hemingway’s powers—physical, mental, hence literary” (264). Such views all turn on the idea that the story’s theme is insignificant and that Hemingway’s use of his characteristic style is a form of “fakery,” to borrow Robert Weeks’s term. Style is at odds with serious, sincere writing in this critical framework.

This notion of internal conflict recalls other, more recent critical accounts insofar as they understand Hemingway to embody, in Voeller’s concluding words, “contradictory and very human ideas” (75). Murphy argues that Hemingway could both love and kill animals, recasting this apparent contradiction as a “duality.” Similarly, as Lewis and Fleming mark Hemingway’s decreased interest in killing animals late in life, as mentioned above, they suggest he took “pleasure” in watching animals instead. This word choice begs the question of what motivates this change (although clearly, unlike earlier critics, these readers find the theme of such works valuable). Has Hemingway merely substituted the pleasure of watching for the pleasure of killing, without significantly considering the interests of other forms of life? How are we to understand “pleasure” here? Or to frame the question more broadly, what relationship does aesthetic engagement, including experiential pleasure, have to ethics? Should we content ourselves with the familiar but unsatisfying notion that Hemingway’s work and conduct regarding animals is complex because it is contradictory?

This essay approaches this problem by revising what we mean by “ethics,” permitting us to find an important and principled consistency—one that develops more fully as time passes—in Hemingway’s conduct toward and writing about animals. While many critics of Hemingway’s treatment of animals—Love, for example—suppose some clearcut ethical principle against which that treatment can be measured, I rely on recent theory presenting ethics as centered on openness to experience and to aesthetics. In this approach, ethical principles are subject to change based on

local conditions of time and place; ethical principles and human actors are thus more fully in dialogue. Hemingway's rigorous attention to particulars and his lifelong stance against abstraction are therefore fundamental to his sense of ethics.

After exploring these points about ethics with reference to the safari books *Green Hills of Africa* and *Under Kilimanjaro*, this essay will examine *The Old Man and the Sea* to show its presentation of ethics as a rigorous, ongoing process. Santiago does not decide upon his ethical stance towards the marlin until he has undergone the encounter. But more crucially for my argument, the novel's rigorous attention to style, to aesthetics, highlights the importance of something like deep inhabitation. The style of *The Old Man and the Sea* conveys Santiago's keen, embodied awareness of the Cuban marine environment and its life, and that awareness is not only valuable in itself, but fundamentally informs his ethical considerations. Crucially, this form of ethics is not some rote application of a rule about never killing animals. Hemingway is fully aware of the fact that eating requires killing. Rather, this paper argues that in Hemingway's later texts, dead animals—the number of trophies, the size of their horns, or the weight of their flesh—become less necessary as a measure or memento of his hunting or fishing experience, and ethical experience itself takes greater emphasis.

SPORT AND ETHICS

The safari presented in *Green Hills of Africa* can seem merely a masculine contest in killing power, measured in simple terms such as the sheer numbers of animals killed or the size of their horns. The book's ethics would therefore involve not shooting animals from moving vehicles, obeying license requirements, and doing one's best to be civilized in the midst of the struggle to best one's hunting companions. The primary plot line of *Green Hills of Africa* consists of a competition between Karl and the Hemingway-figure narrator for size and quality of trophies, while the book's subplot is a literary competition between forms of writing. Hemingway announces this literary competition in the Foreword: "The writer has attempted to write an absolutely true book to see whether the shape of a country and the pattern of a month's action can, if truly presented, com-

pete with a work of the imagination” (my emphasis). In the literary asides that recur through the book, Hemingway develops this element into a justification for the nonfiction form he is practicing.

But winning such competitions is not the book’s highest value. Hemingway, although he presents himself as more skilled than Karl, loses the battle of the trophies consistently and finally (e.g. *GHOA* 63, 83, 86, 153, 291, and *passim*). He also admits to himself and to readers that M’Cola, one of the African hunters, “was immeasurably the better man and the better tracker” (269). The literary competition also proves difficult to resolve as victory or defeat; the distinction between a work of the imagination and an “absolutely true book” erodes when Hemingway expresses his aspiration not only as wanting “to try to write something about the country and the animals and what it’s like to someone who knows nothing about it,” but also to evoke how he and his companions “feel about the country,” to indicate “the way we feel about it” (194). This kind of talk about “feel” pushes the nonfiction form back toward fiction or narrative, and without an absolute distinction between forms, how can we say one form has bested the other?

In all of these cases throughout *Green Hills of Africa*, the framework of competition modulates into something more complex, focused always on experiences of the country and their value. Acknowledging this point permits us to revisit Hemingway’s conflict with himself about the animals he shoots and his desire to beat Karl. For instance, near the end of the book when he is pursuing sable, Hemingway explains, “I did not mind killing anything, any animal, if I killed it cleanly,” because he “ate the meat and kept the hides and horns” (*GHOA* 272) and therefore did not waste the animal’s life. But, Hemingway continues, he “felt rotten sick over this sable bull” because “I wanted him damned badly, I wanted him more than I would admit” (272). Read strictly in terms of the plot about competition, Hemingway feels sick about the intensity of his desire because it is ungentlemanly.

But this internal conflict must also be read in terms of what the animals signify outside of human-to-human competition. Again and again, members of the safari note the beauty of the animals they kill. Poor Old Momma, to cite one example, says of a rhino Hemingway shoots, “Didn’t he look wonderful going along there?” (*GHOA* 77). Cognizance of the paradox of killing to preserve should be read back into Hemingway’s reluc-

tance to admit how much he wants, for example, to find and kill the sable. The nature of this paradox becomes clearer by the end of the book, when Hemingway expresses his wish to return to Africa with more time to “get to know it as I knew the country around the lake where we were brought up” (GHOA 282). On this return trip he would “see the buffalo feeding where they lived, and when elephants came through the hills we would see them and watch them breaking branches and not have to shoot [. . .].” He would be able to “see them long enough so they belonged to me forever,” without always having to kill them (GHOA 282). The animal trophies are only imperfect mementos, standing against the flight of time and the necessity of leaving the place; they are imperfect replacements, like narratives or other such texts, for experience itself, which is the real value.

When Hemingway falters on the thin satisfaction of the trophy as a supplement for ongoing experience, what arises is an interrogation of the larger life conditions that make trophies seem desirable in the first place. That is why his critique of the trophy mentality, already developing in *Green Hills of Africa*, amounts not to some simple rule about killing animals, but to a whole system of regard for place, inhabitation, and animals. At stake is the way he lives in the world. Suzanne del Gizzo, working with *True at First Light* before the release of *Under Kilimanjaro*, makes a similar point about Hemingway’s second safari. She suggests that this text shows how, in Africa, he “may have been seeking to become a member of a culture without writers—a place where he would have the opportunity to explore himself and re-define his identity on other terms” (518). In other words, Hemingway wanted to inhabit the place seriously more than he wanted to produce artifacts (like texts, or trophies) about brief visits.

This anti-product orientation is already visible in *Green Hills of Africa*, visible even in the often-discussed rebuke of the “foreigner,” who “destroys, cuts down the trees, drains the water [. . .]” and so on (GHOA 284). This famous critique opens with the observation that “A continent ages quickly once we come,” its first person plural (“we come”) self-consciously positioning Hemingway squarely and self-consciously within the colonialist behavior he challenges and justifying his unease about participating in the trophy-hunting safari (284). Within this critique of colonialism are further signs of this book’s often conflicted discourse. Immediately following this searing comment is Hemingway’s insistence that he “would come back to Africa” and that “we always had the right to go somewhere

else” (285, my emphasis). Such points are more than contradictory. They foreground the fact that we always inherit subject positions that are, to some extent, beyond our control, that we are often complicit in realities we did not choose, and that we must work to recognize who and what we are if we are to make ethical choices. The narrative in *Green Hills of Africa* presents Hemingway at least partly coming to terms with the system he inhabits, experiencing an uneasiness, a kind of cramp of ethical feeling.

In the second safari, Hemingway extends and solidifies many of the lessons he learned on the first safari, constantly underscoring the value of deep inhabitation. In a key passage, he does so explicitly, and as is often the case in his work, he writes about his awareness of place in terms of the animals who live there:

I thought how lucky we were this time in Africa to be living long enough in one place so that we knew the individual animals and knew the snake holes and the snakes that lived in them. When I had first been to Africa we were always in a hurry to move from one place to another to hunt beasts for trophies. If you saw a cobra it was an accident as it would be to find a rattler on the road in Wyoming. Now we knew many places where cobras lived. (UK 116; TAFL 97–98)

This more local and particular awareness seems tied to the claim he makes in the next paragraph: “The time of shooting beasts for trophies was long past with me.” Instead, he “was shooting for the meat we needed to eat and to back up Miss Mary and against beasts that had been outlawed for cause [. . .]” (TAFL 98; UK 117). Although the paragraph goes on to mention an impala that he did in fact shoot “for trophy,” Hemingway clearly marks out a critique of wasteful killing here, as critics have suggested. In place of the recreational pursuit of animals that is trophy hunting, Hemingway emphasizes his engaged knowledge of place and his experiences. These experiences, like the strange pleasures of walking at night, are more aesthetic and qualitative than the more easily calculated, quantitative successes in killing.

These two systems of evaluating safari trips provide useful examples for thinking about ethics more generally. In the trophy-hunting system, ethics

are essentially rules that permit the game of competition among humans to proceed. There are rules about how to kill animals and about how many animals can be killed, and more subtle expectations about decency toward one's fellow competitors. The rules are more or less fixed, and the hunters simply follow them. The system ostensibly values animals insofar as they cannot be heedlessly slaughtered, but not much beyond that, and views the environment as a backdrop for a human endeavor. Hemingway inhabited this approach to animals and to hunting uneasily even on his first safari. On the second safari, advances in his thinking about inhabiting place register in a relatively minor shift regarding the ethics of killing animals—he will do so only for meat. But this specific principle is only the tip of his ethical iceberg. The less visible portions of this structure involve a thorough awareness of what it means to be one among many mortal animals in a larger ecology, one consequence of his deep inhabitation. Indeed, it is partly the mortality we share with animals that renders our encounters with them meaningful.

Although there is not space to explore this notion fully here, our ever-present need to eat is a sign of our corporeality and mortality, a sign of human limitation that heightens Hemingway's desire to attend to experience carefully. He constantly feels time passing. With such cognizance, Hemingway treats animals neither as pawns in a human competition, nor as beings so entirely foreign that he believes himself outside of the natural economy in which life depends upon other forms of life. Thus, he continues to hunt and kill animals for food.

This account of ethics, which distinguishes following a rule from having a sensibility open to experience, may sound somewhat strained given that Hemingway can simply be understood to follow a rule—only kill animals for meat. But such a view of ethics mistakes the role of the ethical agent, who, for Hemingway and for theorists like Jacques Derrida, must take greater responsibility for being ethical than simply following rules. Moreover, this paper's approach to ethics permits people in a different context than Hemingway's to reach different conclusions about hunting. For example, knowing how overfished today's oceans are, an individual might decide to avoid killing fish even to eat them, at least until populations recover.

This second system of ethical regard refuses to separate the agent from the ethical system, so that Hemingway must constantly revisit the principles with which he confronts animals and places.

The first system, one in which a set of ideas or rules is generally stable, is

a more familiar notion of ethics to many of us. The agent's task is simply to obey (or disobey) that system. Hemingway was famously suspicious of such abstract systems of understanding.² His work on this point resembles later critiques of ethical systems in law, religion, and other fundamental doctrines. Geoffrey Galt Harpham explains that such critiques, which gathered force in the 1960s, understood conventional ethical systems as merely "rendering mystical and grand their [creators'] own private interests or desires" (387). For instance, in the case of trophy hunting, the animal head or carcass would function as a sign of human prowess and mastery over nature in general. On safaris, trophies would reiterate the international hegemonic system, as the white European demonstrated his (or, less often, her) mastery over the nature of Africa, including both humans and animals. Implicit in this colonialist and imperialist view was, now quite infamously, a set of "ethical" implications, perhaps most egregiously expressed in the idea of the "white man's burden" to "civilize" non-Europeans.

Critiques of such misguided ethics have led to revised notions of what ethics might mean more generally, revisions often referred to as the "ethical turn" in contemporary examples. Philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas and later Jacques Derrida, who was influenced by Levinas, worked to revive or reform ethical discourses by shifting notions of ethics away from merely obeying pre-established codes. In their analyses, ethics must factor the complexities of experience into inherited codes and understandings. The defamiliarizing, often profoundly upsetting character of experience is discussed in Levinas's work, especially *Otherwise Than Being*, as exposure to the radical difference between self and other. Levinas's conception of these matters embodies the experience of ethics in the very viscera at times. Near the conclusion of *Otherwise Than Being*, for example, he writes that "the subject gives himself and exposes himself in his lungs, without intentions and aims, [. . .] the subject could be a lung at the bottom of its substance" (180). In such accounts, we are exposed to the other in all of our dealings. The involuntary character of breathing thus serves as a figure for and example of ethical selfhood that we enter into without ever having decided to do so. We are immersed in a world that continually makes ethical demands upon us. For Levinas, only in such a conception can we practice the doubting of self and law that sincere ethical practice requires, sometimes going so far as to do the opposite of what cultural codes such as laws would command. Derrida has recently summarized this approach to ethics by saying that "casting doubt on responsibility, on decision, on one's own being-ethical" is at the center

of ethics (128).³

Hemingway undertakes this type of endeavor in his barefoot night walks in Africa, becoming “properly scared” in order to experience the complexities of the place under Kilimanjaro. This embodied exposure to the radical otherness of night and of dangerous animals such as cobras and lions enriches his sensibility and his writing. Night walking therefore connects to a profoundly humbled sense of self at the level of the body. Hemingway deliberately immerses himself in a large and potentially dangerous world that dwarfs the meaning of the individual and presents new insights about how such a life might be lived. This ethical sensibility renders *Under Kilimanjaro* a book that Lewis and Fleming call “most lighthearted yet unconventionally serious” (UK viii), an apt description for much of Hemingway’s work. The book reiterates the often intimate connection between art and life for Hemingway; writing was a way for him to draw new conclusions about how to live, or about ethics in general terms. As with *Green Hills of Africa*, the (mostly) nonfiction genre of *Under Kilimanjaro* marks Hemingway’s seriousness in considering Africa, as the book works with actual events. But in *Under Kilimanjaro*, the encounter between Hemingway and Africa requires a new openness and receptivity on Hemingway’s part, a kind of negative capability that is distinctly ethical in the sense described by Derrida and Levinas.

Yet Hemingway’s idiosyncratic adoption of Masai practices can also be seen as a suspicious form of “going native,” one for which he has been sharply criticized, especially in ethical terms. Toni Morrison, for instance, understands Hemingway’s primitivism in books like *The Garden of Eden* to depend on a notion of Africa as a “blank, empty space into which he asserts himself” (88–89). I believe Morrison is at least partly right, as Hemingway himself was aware, and as I have argued, in the case of *Green Hills of Africa*. But I am also suggesting that to a significant extent, the opposite is true; Hemingway regarded himself as a partly blank page onto which Africa and African cultures could write themselves. In saying so, I do not mean to excuse each of Hemingway’s actions so much as to indicate how his notion of ethics allows for cross-cultural and even human/nonhuman exchanges. Throughout his life, defamiliarization in foreign cultures and places seems to have helped him consider the rationales for ethical systems and work to formulate an ethical system of his own that was more than the mere abstractions he so disliked. Some of the nuances of his ethical sensibility appear in the carefully crafted presenta-

THE CRAMP OF ETHICS IN *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

The Old Man and the Sea is a critique of triumphalist hunting. It unravels Santiago’s apparently great victory at sea, delivering a mere skeleton for a trophy. Indeed, the marlin’s skeleton signifies the impossibility of a trophy sufficient to represent either the living fish or Santiago’s experience of the hunt and his knowledge of the sea. The skeleton trophy also suggests the error implicit in commodifying the sea and attempting to turn its life into product. Santiago, thoroughly knowledgeable about the local environment, understands and admits his error, and is ultimately forced to revise his ethical code: “I shouldn’t have gone out so far, fish,’ he said. ‘Neither for you nor for me. I’m sorry, fish” (OMATS 110). By story’s end, Santiago’s own survival is in doubt as he is revealed to be on the edge of death.

Deliberately putting his person into a position of doubt, defamiliarizing himself in an environment he generally knows well, is a premise of Santiago’s trip and of his fishing practice more broadly. As Susan Beegel has recently shown in “A Guide to the Marine Life in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*,” Santiago is well-attuned to the otherness of the ocean and its animals. With rigorous detail, Beegel maps the ways in which Hemingway has, in minimalist fashion, rendered Santiago’s knowledge of the sea. Beegel summarizes her findings by saying, “A few strokes of his [Hemingway’s] pen sufficed to limn a lifetime of intimacy with the sea and its creatures [. . .]” (309). On the trip depicted in the book, Santiago has gone further out to sea than is common. The distance and his primitive gear expose him quite fully to the whims of the ocean, to his prey, and to the sharks. Beegel’s essay clarifies the gravity of this danger, for example, in Santiago’s encounter with the mako shark, which “could easily result in the destruction of Santiago’s skiff and his death from injury or drowning” (265). In this respect, his trip resembles Hemingway’s late-night walks in Africa. Both Santiago and Hemingway limit their abilities to exert agency, trading control for raw, direct, informative experience, registered on their bodies.

Hemingway’s presentation of Santiago emphasizes the shock of difference with rigorously crafted writing in which elements of style evoke what cannot be properly described in direct language: Hemingway’s iceberg principle. We might call this style “skeletal” in the context of *The Old Man and the Sea*. Such writing, using understatement, repetition, and the like, often conveys embodied experiences, so that a stylistically complex description

testifies to the dissonance between actual, full-bodied experience and the craft or technology of representing it with language. This stylistic approach, exemplified below, often amounts to a claim of humility and is frequently described as a kind of ethic (e.g. Bickford Sylvester “Hemingway’s Extended Vision”). But more than this, such style aligns with what Zoe Trodd has recently called a “politics of form” that reaches beyond what can easily be shown, acknowledging the difficulties of representation (Trodd 8). In Hemingway’s carefully constructed contexts, the word, the trophy, and other such signs carry marks of their insufficiency to reproduce complex reality.⁴

The limitations of representation appear as part of a more general approach to subjectivity in *The Old Man and the Sea*, in which even inhabitation of the body is a sign of limited agency. The signature moment of weakness, doubt, and ethical consideration for the present discussion occurs as Santiago begins to tire in his fishing travail, his left hand cramping closed:

He rubbed the cramped hand against his trousers and tried to gentle the fingers. But it would not open. Maybe it will open with the sun, he thought. Maybe it will open when the strong tuna is digested. If I have to have it, I will open it, cost whatever it costs. But I do not want to open it now by force. Let it open by itself and come back of its own accord. After all I abused it much in the night when it was necessary to free and untie the various lines.
(OMATS 60)

Santiago is neither completely at home in his body nor able to inhabit some disembodied self. His ethical position with regard to his left hand—”let it open by itself”—is driven by the implicit understanding that the hand will function best when its needs are acknowledged, whatever the desires of the organizing subject who would have it do as he pleases. Hand is to body here as self is to environment more generally in the story.

Hemingway’s style reveals dissonance between systems of understanding, such as language or ethics, and local realities of place, including the individuals who live in those places and the systems they use. The appearance of Spanish phrases in *The Old Man and the Sea*, for example, recalls

the particular, local conditions of his Cuban setting, marking the difference between actuality and Hemingway's textuality, meant to address a broader audience. Early on, for instance, we read that Manolin asks Santiago to "Tell me about the great John J. McGraw. He said Jota for J" (*OMATS* 22). This technique is used with even more significance in the key passage later in the text where Santiago ponders the significance of his left hand cramping: "I hate a cramp, he thought. It is a treachery of one's own body. It is humiliating before others to have a diarrhoea from ptomine poisoning or to vomit from it. But a cramp, he thought of it as a *calambre*, humiliates oneself especially when one is alone" (61–62).

The otherness of the Spanish word *calambre* helps us notice how language is functioning more generally in the text. Santiago has already decided to let the hand open by itself, and this is what he ultimately does (*OMATS* 60). Thus, despite his avowed hatred of a cramp, Santiago *practices* a careful inhabitation of his body that recognizes the difference between his desire for its absolute strength and the reality of his human weakness and mortality. The claim to hate his cramp, then, appears as a kind of overstatement to vent spleen. While sometimes read as simple, macho posturing, Santiago's language acts in an almost opposite way, as a comfort. The function of such language within the dramatic space of the story, where Santiago speaks to no one but himself, is not to convey meaning but to help him cope with his bodily limitations. The passage about the cramped hand embodies a kind of cramp in meaning. Just as the strange word *calambre* shows the heterogeneity of Hemingway's language, mixing the local Spanish with English, the frustrations expressed in this passage show the space between Santiago the desiring person and Santiago the body. Ultimately, it is Santiago's ethical response to the otherness of his own body that enables his hand to function again.

Hemingway uses the key word "treachery" both to describe the cramp ("a treachery of one's own body") and to describe how the old man had hooked the fish ("through treachery," *OMATS* 50), likening the catching of the fish to the cramping of his own body. Neither form of exalting the self in this text—whether physical achievements like successful fishing or effective use of language—provides a way for the self to feel completely triumphant. Instead, craft, teaching, and ultimately love (relationships, in other words) fill the place of self-gratification.

The story reveals craft in a doubled fashion, where Hemingway's descriptions evoke both his own writing abilities and Santiago's knowl-

edge of the sea, as many readers have observed. But it is essential to the story that craft does not show mastery so much as humble, serious engagement in long-term relationships. The following passage demonstrates the careful expression of discipline at a key moment, as Santiago surveys his surroundings just prior to hooking the marlin:

He could not see the green of the shore now but only the tops of the blue hills that showed white as though they were snow-capped and the clouds that looked like high snow mountains above them. The sea was very dark and the light made prisms in the water. The myriad flecks of the plankton were annulled now by the high sun and it was only the great deep prisms in the blue water that the old man saw now with his lines going straight down into the water that was a mile deep. (*OMATS* 40)

He is too far out to see the shore and in blue water, both of which suggest his entrance into the ocean wilderness. The tremendous otherness of the ocean is further signaled by the repetitions of “deep” and “water” in a sentence crossed through with marks of sharp visual observation and practiced physical craft. Santiago is simultaneously shown both as knowledgeable and as relatively insignificant, with a sense of insignificance actually heightened by his knowledge. The paratactical style, clauses linked by “ands” and therefore not sorted hierarchically, conjures these things together. Thus qualifiers like “myriad” and “great” align with “straight” to encourage us to see how Santiago’s accurate fishing derives from and grammatically parallels his awareness of the unfathomable otherness of the ocean. Appreciating the greatness of the sea is keeping straight lines.⁵

What I see here as admiring understatement may appear to other readers as fulsome description. Harold Bloom calls the book “overwritten” in a brief, dismissive introduction to a recollection of critical essays on the story. Put into the context of Hemingway’s oeuvre, though, we can see understatement in *The Old Man and the Sea* partly by recognizing the effects of its style, which is perhaps *more* technically achieved than, for example, this passage from *The Sun Also Rises* celebrated by Larzer Ziff in “The Social Basis of Hemingway’s Style”:

In the morning it was bright, and they were sprinkling the streets of the town, and we all had breakfast in a café. Bayonne is a nice town. It is like a very clean Spanish town and it is on a river. Already, so early in the morning, it was very hot on the bridge across the river. We walked out on the bridge and then took a walk through the town. (SAR 90, quoted in Ziff 147).

Ziff points out how Jake Barnes is able to celebrate the café in Bayonne in *The Sun Also Rises* with doubled intensity because he so underwrites the praise. Jake is an exile looking for a culture and a life that seems truer to him. But the passage from *The Old Man and the Sea* quoted earlier is more subtle and has larger implications. It answers to Jake's old problem with a similar technique, showing Santiago's cultured life-practice as an ethical and loving inhabitation of place, but then it goes beyond simply investing that place with mere familiarity. The stylized description in *The Old Man and the Sea*, furthermore, with its rhythmic repetition of simple words like "deep" and "water," makes familiar language strange as well. Hemingway inhabits language as Santiago inhabits the sea.

Recognizing the importance of Santiago's place-awareness is crucial to understanding the function of style in this book more generally. Place-awareness bears, for instance, on another surprising innovation in Hemingway's work at the level of the word in this text. When introducing Manolin, he permits a key abstract term to enter the story directly, in a way he often avoided and or criticized in earlier books: "The old man had taught the boy to fish and the boy loved him" (10). This plain statement, early in the book, might seem simply to state what would be shown by superior art, making it perhaps less surprising that Bloom and others see the book as "sentimental," as relying on "emotion in excess of its object" (Bloom 3).

But I do not think Hemingway has simply lost control of his language here, or, to quote another critic, "gone soft."⁶ Rather, this phrase functions as understatement because its brief revelation of Santiago and Manolin's relationship is balanced against the long, fatally trying fishing trip in solitude. The phrase depends greatly on the full context of the book. The brief exchanges with Manolin locate Santiago in a human culture, but the fishing trip locates culture in a broader world of other species and of the ocean. The extent and importance of the nonhuman in this novel is sig-

naled both by the length of the fishing account and by Santiago's persistent longing for Manolin's help. In this context, the sentiment of love, stated with ironic simplicity, signifies a human lineage that continues despite the mortal limitations of the individual. Again, "The old man had taught the boy to fish and the boy loved him" (10).

Moreover, the importance of ethical human relationships with the non-human seems entirely ignored in arguments like Bloom's, which do not acknowledge the value of this theme (instead, we saw Bloom claiming that the book shows "emotion in excess of its object," in keeping with other critics mentioned above). Beegel's guide to the marine life in this book sharpens our awareness of these different interpretive frameworks. She explains that although recent criticism by Glen Love, Gerry Brenner, Lisa Tyler, and Beegel herself responds to "the biocentrism of *The Old Man and the Sea*," this critical work nonetheless "has been largely humanistic, proceeding from the political ideologies of environmentalism and ecofeminism" and the like (236). Her guide, however, is meant to investigate the marine science in Hemingway's book much more closely, more independently of political or philosophical ideologies. And in this sense, Beegel explains, she follows more carefully what Hemingway had in mind when writing the book. She quotes Hemingway arguing against excessively symbolic readings of the text, for instance, claiming, "The sea is the sea. The old man is an old man. The boy is a boy and the fish is a fish. The sharks are all sharks, no better and no worse" (Beegel 239–240). Hemingway, like many ecocritics who read him, including Beegel, Love, and myself, believed there was enough value in narrating the interactions between humanity and marine life to make such a story important, without the need for every natural fact to appear as a humanistic symbol of some other reality. This approach humbles the position of humanity while elevating the value of nonhuman nature.

Hemingway's anti-symbolic stance, if perhaps slightly overstated, highlights his sense of the intrinsic value of the sea and the marlin. Nonetheless, although Santiago respects the fish immensely, he also must eat. This places him in an ethical conundrum that, under the pressure of trauma and exhaustion as the story proceeds, leads to an essential inversion. After the cramps in his hand have been bothering him, and after the fish has shown itself by jumping, Santiago thinks, "I wish I could show him what sort of man I am. But then he would see the cramped hand. Let him think

I am more man than I am and I will be so. I wish I was the fish, he thought [. . .]” (*OMATS* 64). Identity in this sequence of sentences moves from an expression of desire to a fiction. The desire—“I wish I could show him what sort of man I am”—is undercut by a realistic awareness of his cramped old body, and that awareness inspires a fiction told to the fish by the well-handled line—“Let him think I am more man than I am and I will be so.” Like speaking aloud to himself, this fiction organizes and drives Santiago’s activity. Santiago does not believe it to be true so much as potentially true from a certain perspective. But significantly, this acknowledgment of the fiction or performativity of the self, not only confirms that self, but also drives Santiago’s desire to travel further outside of it. He wants to become the fish. This desire is crucial to a new awareness of his limits, to his sense that he should not have gone out so far.

This pattern is replayed and its significance extended over the next several pages, as Santiago’s exhaustion grows. After contemplating the size and strength of the fish, he insists,

“I’ll kill him though,” he said. “In all his greatness and his glory.” Although it is unjust, he thought. But I will show him what a man can do and what a man endures.

“I told the boy I was a strange old man,” he said. “Now is when I must prove it.”

The thousand times that he had proved it meant nothing. Now he was proving it again. Each time was a new time and he never thought about the past when he was doing it.

I wish he’d sleep and I could sleep and dream about the lions, he thought. Why are the lions the main thing that is left? (*OMATS* 66)

This dialogue swings wildly from position to position, even alternating between words spoken aloud to the self and internal dialogue. The first spoken words make a brave claim that Santiago hopes to live up to—“I’ll kill him”—but the thoughts, like an internalized Greek chorus, immediately undercut the spoken words.⁷ The “thousand times” paragraph reasserts his purpose, but more quietly than the first claim. By the time we reach the “I wish” response, the fiction of the self has again modulated

into a surrender to the animal other and a desire for dreaming that is a key to the story.

The dream motif evokes the individual's unconscious and so marks the limits of will and control. The motif also softens or "gentles" the depiction of the self's limits (to echo Hemingway's terms from the book). Thus, although the central action of *The Old Man and the Sea* can appear to be a trauma, the story's recourse to the involuntary appeal of animal dreams, like the pleasures of Hemingway's style, shows ethical intersubjectivity differently. The limits of the individual are not a violent but a liminal space, a rich and curious dream world full of new possibilities, including perhaps the watching of animals instead of killing them. The end of the story, with the old man "dreaming about the lions," figures death not violently, as a trauma, but quietly, as a dream.

The lions certainly suggest the ferocity of appetite and of nature, but Santiago's dream lions "played like young cats in the dusk and he loved them as he loved the boy" (25). Perhaps some readers see this too as sentimental. But nature is more than merely "red in tooth and claw." In fact, lions do play as well as hunt, although our accounts of nature often override such ordinary realities to focus on dramas of life and death. This playful "dream" of nature haunts the story, quietly encouraging Santiago to move beyond the exigencies of hunger towards love for his ostensible adversary, the marlin. Santiago, like the later Hemingway, is a hunter who recognizes his place in his world, who knows that eating requires killing, but recognizes how much more there is to nature than killing.⁸ In *The Old Man and the Sea*, this something more appears in all the textual details that reveal how much living contains the actual acts of killing and eating. The necessity of detail, the necessity of narrative itself, is evidence that the meaning of life cannot be reduced to simple death.

Santiago's utter exhaustion, caused by his protracted struggle with the fish and thus a physical acknowledgment of the fish, pushes his thinking another step: "There is no one worthy of eating him from the manner of his behavior and his great dignity." Nonetheless, Hemingway's narrative tells us that Santiago's "determination to kill [the fish] never relaxed in his sorrow for him" (*OMATS* 75). Across the fishing line, the marlin has interrupted Santiago's selfhood and exposed another fiction as fiction—that of commodity value. That is, commodity value is only one of many possible stories that we tell about something like a great fish. This point is reiterated both comically and

dramatically once Santiago has killed the fish. Thinking that the marlin is “over fifteen hundred pounds” and wondering how much he is worth, Santiago says aloud, “I need a pencil for that” (97). And when the sharks hit, the gradual stripping of the marlin is recognized piece by piece; the mako shark, for example, takes “about forty pounds” (103).

This reckoning reduces the magnificent fish to pounds of meat, yet the whole story hinges on the unavoidable reality of animal appetite that drives Santiago, the marlin, and the sharks, a reality that prevents Santiago or Hemingway from freeing himself of such calculations. In other words, this story aims to show not only the majesty of the marlin, which makes its being eaten by sharks seem wasteful, but also the ordinary and universal fact of appetite. Death, at the center of this story and crucial to all appetite, can flatten hierarchies. A great fish, privileged in the story, becomes mere pounds of meat for sharks, and finally just one more piece of “garbage waiting to go out with the tide” (126). These losses of the marlin are practical, registered financially and in terms of the people the fish could feed, so that the irreducible beauty of this fish—the big one that could not be brought in—is coupled tightly to all ordinary animal needs. Such complexities prevent a simple ethical understanding and justify Santiago’s nuanced sense that although killing some fish may be acceptable, killing this marlin was wrong: “I shouldn’t have gone out so far, fish,’ he said. ‘Neither for you nor for me. I’m sorry, fish’” (110).

With this full reading of *The Old Man and the Sea*, we can compare Hemingway’s night walks in Africa to Santiago’s self-condemnation. In a sense, when Toni Morrison accuses Hemingway of treating Africa as a “blank, empty space into which he asserts himself” (88–89), she is suggesting that Hemingway has, like Santiago, gone out too far. He has forced his way into another’s identity. But Santiago’s error can be more precisely located. It is not going too far out to sea or learning about the complexities of the wild ocean; it is trying to bring too much of that otherness back with him. The older Hemingway of *Under Kilimanjaro* shows greater restraint on this point, a restraint which appears in his hunting practices. During the spear-equipped night walk mentioned in opening this essay, for instance, Hemingway notices a wildebeest that he steers around. As he does so, he thinks, “I could always have killed the wildebeest, maybe [. . .].” He decides not to try because of the trouble of dealing with the animal responsibly after doing so; he would have to dress the body and then guard it against hyenas or “rouse

the camp” like a “show-off” (*UK* 361). Additionally, few in the camp care for wildebeest meat. Hemingway’s heedful decision conveys complex ethics that go beyond the simple application of an ethical rule.

The differences between going out and going out too far are important because they permit cross-cultural and inter-species exchange without necessarily rendering all such exchanges into imperialism or colonialism. They also demonstrate how simple ethical strictures can be misleading. Not only may what is right in one era prove wrong in another, and vice versa, but circumstances within an era may contradict its standard codes of ethical behavior. An ethical person must not only obey what seems to be a correct law, then; she or he must have a sensibility open to experiences which may themselves shift ethical thinking. Such a sensibility characterizes much of Hemingway’s work, as it characterizes a book he greatly admired—Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In one of the great ethical moments in American literature, Huck decides not to send the letter that would turn in the runaway slave Jim. Instead, Huck says, “All right, then, I’ll go to hell” and tears the letter up (272; Ch. 31, original emphasis). In this case, as in much of Hemingway, Huck’s own experience, his pleasant memories of Jim’s goodness, lead him to contradict what the laws of the time and place dictate.

ETHICS AND EATING

Huck arrives at his decision after considerable brooding. Hemingway’s work on hunting also demonstrates that what is ethical is not always obvious or simple. Attentive immersion in hunting restores the too-often-invisible complexity attending decisions about eating animals. Several critics, for instance, have helped us to see what was at issue historically in Santiago’s fishing practice, which he takes to be more ethical than the younger men’s methods. Hemingway briefly makes us aware of the other fishermen who use elaborate tools, “those who used buoys as floats for their lines and had motorboats, bought when the shark livers had brought much money [. . .]” (*OMATS* 29-30). Santiago chooses otherwise, holding to his simple implements.

Beegel argues that Santiago’s approach to technology allows him “to

uphold an ecological ethic diametrically opposed to Ahab's 'iron way'" ("Santiago and the Eternal Feminine" 143). She points out that the younger fishermen with all their gear "are the ancestors of today's long-liners" (143). Industrial fishing practices such as long-lining, with much larger catches than small-scale, traditional fishing practices such as Santiago's, are not only responsible for modern declines in marine populations, but have radically changed the culture of fishing among humans.⁹ *The Old Man and the Sea* indicates the general mid-20th century shift towards using more technology but counters it with the lineage of Santiago and Manolin, demonstrating that cultural and technological questions may be more important ethically and ecologically than the sometimes reductive question about whether humans should ever kill animals. Nonetheless, the significance of each individual animal was also becoming more clear to Hemingway late in life.

The ethics and aesthetics of hunting, a form of engaged inhabitation of the world, attuned to the depths of self and the differences of others, was a locus of meaning in Hemingway's oeuvre. His later work expands on moments that appear in some of his earlier writing, especially the fishing stories. Those moments, such as the fishing interlude in *The Sun Also Rises*, are often read as providing some redemptive serenity in the midst of meaningless violence and confusion. Miriam B. Mandel, commenting on *Under Kilimanjaro*, suggests that Hemingway's quasi-fictional author-narrator still "needs (desperately, it seems to me) to construct some universal, comprehensive ethical system" (97). It is no accident that this desire manifests in a book centered on human/animal relationships in the radically different cultures and environment of East Africa. Hunting for principles to live by, for a religion of his own, was arguably Hemingway's lifelong undertaking, signs of which appear throughout his work, like tracks of some elusive animal. Our appetite for a universal ethics, however unappeasable, is itself perhaps the essence of the search for principles of right living. Hemingway's attentive, nuanced style reminds us that this desire for the universal must always be balanced against and informed by the details of the particular if we are to be ethical.

NOTES

The author of this essay would like to thank Suzanne Clark for her incisive remarks on an earlier version.

1. Rose Marie Burwell corroborates this view, for instance. She explains that Hemingway's guide on his second African safari, Denis Zaphiro, reported Hemingway's preference for watching animals rather than killing them (137). Christopher Ondaatje also supports this characterization of Hemingway's second safari (see 179 for example), and Hemingway discusses his concerns with killing animals in his letters (e.g. SL 772).
2. The classic example is the dismissal of "abstract words" in *A Farewell to Arms* (184–185).
3. One debate between Levinas and Derrida is about whether to privilege the term "ethics." Derrida suggests not (see 121). For more on the ethical turn in theory, see James Berger's "Falling Towers and Postmodern Wild Children: Oliver Sacks, Don DeLillo, and Turns against Language"; Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack's collection, *Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory*; Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, who edited *The Turn to Ethics*; and Harpham's, "Ethics."
4. Leonard Lawlor's new book *This Is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida* presents the notion of the "insufficiency" of systems of understanding, whether ethical or epistemological, as central to Derrida's philosophy, particularly his later texts on animals.
5. Beegel, in "A Guide to the Marine Life in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*," also remarks on how this passage shows that "Santiago clearly understands how the action of light on plankton changes the color of the sea" (284).
6. Robert Weeks makes this claim because of some factual errors he finds in the text. But Beegel's essay on the marine life in the book compellingly demonstrates not only how thorough Hemingway's general knowledge of the sea was, but also that Weeks's specific critiques of Hemingway are often wrong (see Beegel 276–277, for example). Weeks goes on to claim that the story is "tricked out in an effort to extort more feeling than a reasonable person would find there" (40). This obviously gendered interpretive framework values the hard, scientific, manly writer in the science-oriented thinking of the cold war, but Hemingway was moving (even further) beyond that approach in this text. He was famously having some trouble taking this journey in the latter years, as he struggled to complete his many book projects (as Michael Reynolds's *Hemingway: The Final Years*, Carlos Baker's *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*, and other biographies report). We can imagine, however, why he may have experienced such difficulty in so polarized a critical environment. Suzanne Clark's *Cold Warriors: Manliness on Trial in the Rhetoric of the West* provides a full account of the critical climate in this period and a discussion of Hemingway's own difficulties. Another critique of *The Old Man and the Sea* can be found in James Justus, "The Later Fiction: Hemingway and the Aesthetics of Failure."
7. My reading here is indebted partly to Glen Love (207).
8. Much recent research has been conducted on the character of nature. See, for instance, Frans De Waal's *Primates and Philosophers*, where he argues that many of the elements of human morality are present in other animals, so that it is incorrect to understand nature as purely "red in tooth and claw." Other works along this line include Marc D. Hauser's *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong* and Donald R. Griffin's *Animal Minds: Beyond Cognition to Consciousness*.
9. In "The Cuban Context of The Old Man and the Sea," Bickford Sylvester also points to the sea-change in fishing practices occurring in the 1940s and 50s (e.g. 257).

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