Hemingway and the Black Renaissance

Holcomb, Gary Edward, Scruggs, Charles

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Art critic Patrick Heron is . . . enchanted by “the white areas which lie scattered thick as archipelagoes” across Cézanne’s water colors: “I would almost say that in them expression is at its most intense; that it is precisely the white patches that are the most potent in form. . . . White is where he dared not tread: the vital node of every form, where false statements would destroy the whole. White is the unstateable core of each coloured snowstorm of definitions; and its potency derives from the fact that every slanting stroke at the perimeter throws definition inwards, adds meaning to the white!” Hemingway’s theory of “omission” has seldom been better stated.

—Kenneth G. Johnson

Johnson’s essay, “Hemingway and Cézanne: Doing the Country,” from which the above is taken, follows closely the link between Paul Cézanne’s artistic craft in painting and Ernest Hemingway’s artistic craft in writing. He argues convincingly that Hemingway was so influenced by Cézanne’s artwork, specifically L’Estaque, Farmyard at Auvers-sur-Oise, and The Poplars, which were all on display at the Luxembourg while Hemingway was in Paris, that his writing took on a qualitative change after he studied them (Johnson 1984, 30). Johnson notes that Hemingway wanted to do with writing what Cézanne did with painting. Both Johnson and I agree that he achieved considerable success. In this success Johnson implies a certain appeal to whiteness. For Johnson this appeal has to do with Hemingway’s artistic rendering of the landscape and his minimalist style where the white space—the absence—is invested with powerful meaning. This minimalism to which Johnson refers appears to be dependent upon Hemingway’s ability to mirror in writing Cézanne’s
“coloured snowstorm of definitions . . . its potency deriv[ed] from the fact that every slanting stroke at the perimeter throws definition inwards, adds meaning to the white!” Johnson’s observation is important for my purposes here not only because it points to the power of contrast and omission as central components of Hemingway’s writing style—a significant element of the theory of “literary whiteness” I articulate—but also that contrast and omission are intrinsically connected to a meditation on the “white space” that is not defined directly, but is rather revealed through a circumscription and manipulation of what it is not. This, as Heron says, adds meaning to the white. This white space, connected as it is to landscape, place, lifestyle, even life itself for Hemingway, may also be seen as a meditation on the whiteness of Hemingway’s own upper-middle-class American identity.

This essay examines the presence of white characters and their subsequent dependence upon the absence of black characters as fully human in Hemingway’s early short fiction. I am therefore interested in the absences and marginalization that expose a studied literary whiteness, which in Hemingway’s work is both a function of race and social class.

LIKE MANY white American writers, Ernest Hemingway was in search of the Other, the contrast, against which to posit his idyllic white American identity. This contrast is created through idealized characters such as Andreson in the short story “The Killers” and Wilson in “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” whom Hemingway uses to posit a meaningful self. These characters are contrasted with characters rejected as unsuitable Others through whom Hemingway posits an identity to give the lives of his protagonists meaning. Characters such as Sam in “The Killers” and Molo in “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” who are in the service of the protagonist to highlight these protagonists’ own identities, are illustrative. That they are black and the protagonists white is the salient point. Toni Morrison understands this when she exposes Hemingway, Henry James, Gertrude Stein, Willa Cather, and others whose works reveal a dependence upon a racialized Other (Morrison 1993, 13–14). Morrison’s discussion of Cather, in which she points out that “Nancy [who is the slave girl in Sapphira and the Slave Girl by Cather] is not the only victim of Sapphira’s evil, whimsical scheming” (24), is indicative of the argument. Morrison continues:

She [Nancy] becomes the unconsulted, appropriated ground of Cather’s inquiry into what is of paramount importance to the author: the reckless, unabated power of a white woman gathering identity unto herself
from the wholly available and serviceable lives of the Africanist others. This seems to provide the coordinates of an immensely important moral debate. (25)

Morrison’s literary claim here is consistent with the historical claim she makes later in her text about white freedom being predicated upon black unfreedom (38). That is, black unfreedom circumscribes, defines, and gives meaning to white freedom. She also suggests the dependence that whiteness has on blackness in social, political, and economic contexts, though her text never explores the depth to which this is true in American life.

Hemingway’s idealized characters are foreign nonwhites, Spanish subalterns, or white romance heroes. They are not blacks and they are not whites of the working class. These are omitted, giving way to—and exposing—the white space. The de facto definition of the “idealized” as both foreign white and nonwhite, as both esoteric and not American, becomes influential in both shaping Hemingway’s notion of the authentic “American” and in excluding blacks and working-class whites.

The circumscription of working-class whites—but especially blacks—in his early fiction suggests to us the difficulty Hemingway had managing the ongoing discussion of maleness, Americanness, and whiteness that permeates his fiction. In this essay I will examine a collection of his short stories that explore this difficulty and demonstrate the function of danger and its connection to industrial labor and race in his texts. As I will show, danger is the context for the exercise of will, the central element of grace under pressure, and it is this will that the industrial worker and its most potent symbol, the black American, is incapable of expressing. Without the capacity for will, hence grace, these two American identities can find no place in Hemingway’s texts of American male self-realization. Hemingway elides this contradiction in his writing by focusing on the internal workings of his protagonists’ minds and positing a version of the self that has no connection to the realities of the outside world. Indeed, the rugged individual in the natural landscapes of the Midwest provides the ideal setting for the idealized isolated self unencumbered by an increasingly industrialized America.

The first group of stories I discuss are those set in Africa or various parts of Europe, such as “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” “The Undefeated,” “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” “The Capital of the World,” and, while not set in Africa or Europe, “The Killers.” In these stories, physical danger is the context within which American male identity emerges. While the majority of American males in the first three decades of the twentieth century led lives forcibly defined by alienated and exploited
labor, Hemingway’s white heroes in these texts sought self-definition in natural arenas far removed from the factories of Detroit, Chicago, and Gary. Danger in these texts also exposes the racialized coding employed by the writer which invests the protagonists with a force of human will that dominates the text and which no black character possesses.

The other stories I examine are set mostly in the great American outdoors of the Midwest, stories such as “The Battler,” “Big Two-Hearted River Part I,” “Big Two-Hearted River Part II,” and “The End of Something.” The glimpses of labor we see in all of these stories suggest rather than explicitly center on the external reality of the world the characters themselves occupy.

These nine works taken from Hemingway’s first forty-nine short stories, then, will serve to define the role of literary whiteness on the one hand, and its connection to industrialized labor exploitation in Hemingway’s short fiction generally on the other. Read together these texts suggest not only a studied categorization and deployment of racialized difference based on the degree to which characters express human will, but also presume a white male audience with whom, along with the always white, always male protagonist of the text, the narrator shapes and constructs meaning.

The division I create in the Hemingway stories between those set in the great American outdoors and those exhibiting physical danger usually set in Africa or Europe, constitute the two predominant settings for all of Hemingway’s short fiction, and much of his longer work as well. The correlation between the landscape of the American outdoors and the inner workings of the protagonist’s mind in the one set, and physical danger and the plight of black Americans and industrialized labor in the other provides tacit support for a reading of Hemingway’s texts that demonstrates not only a complex relationship between his notion of acceptable white identity and the rejected Otherness of white industrialized workers and blacks, but also a rationale for their rhetorical placement or omission from his texts. This suggests that whiteness is central to Hemingway’s fiction.

**Whiteness and Physical Danger**

“The Killers”

In the Hemingway stories presenting physical danger, whites are always risk takers and possess agency. Agency in Hemingway comes into being
through the subjective consciousness of the always white, always male protagonist. The domination of the text by the will of the character, and the centering of the narrative on the consciousness of the protagonist, is crucial to literary whiteness since this trait is denied racialized others in modern American literature. That is to say, racialized others are differentiated from white characters in American literature and in American attitudes toward race in general by their inability to express human will. In this way, Hemingway creates a landscape against which he can only grant white characters agency. Hemingway’s construction of masculinity, for instance, is always realized in white protagonists because in American mythologies of race whites and whites alone are capable of taking risks. The danger in the stories themselves is the context for the exercise of willful action. Unless one confronts the possibility of the total loss of life, which in Hemingway stands in for the myth of freedom as expressed in the idea of the American Dream, one is not a man or a white American. In American literature, as in American society, no black male character faces that risk—the loss is simply, and preemptively, assigned to him. Blacks cannot be seen as masculine risk-takers because they lack the will and the capacity for choice that must precede risk.

Similarly, the presence of will and the capacity for willful action predetermines the absence of industrial labor in the texts. Modern industrial life reduces the necessity of will and reduces the worker to machine. Prior to industrialization, the only workers without will were slaves who, according to case law such as Forsyth v. Nash and Adelle v. Beauregard (Suggs 2000, 124–25), carried the status of slave in their very person. This is so, as Jon-Christian Suggs points out in his book Whispered Consolations: Law and Narrative in African American Life, because “for most whites, blacks were recognized as beings without agency and without desire—only appetite” (77). The absence of blacks and workers proceeds from the same basic condition, the romantic definition of the American subject as the white male in possession of pure will.

This is observable in “The Killers” where Sam, the black cook, is objectified as fearful, a person who lacks will and grace under pressure. These character traits highlight their mirror opposites in the protagonist, Nick Adams, who is the embodiment of fearlessness, will, and grace under pressure.

The story begins with two men walking into a lunchroom that they know is frequented by Andreson, the man they intend to kill. The men are presented in Hemingway’s crisp, clear, minimalist style as gangsters typical of the 1920s and 30s:
The man called Al] wore a derby hat and a black overcoat buttoned across the chest. His face was small and white and he had tight lips. He wore a silk muffler and gloves. [Max] was about the same size as Al. Their faces were different, but they were dressed like twins. Both wore overcoats too tight for them. They sat leaning forward, their elbows on the counter. (Hemingway 1997, 215–16)

Hemingway’s vivid portrayal of these characters and the movie-like quality he gives to them as well as the dialogue throughout the text are no doubt reasons for the story’s enduring popularity. Hemingway renders the whiteness of Al’s face imagistically, contrasting it with his black coat. The deployment of this kind of imagery is consistent throughout the story, and rhetorically underscores the ways in which Nick Adams and Sam, the black cook, are juxtaposed. The two men soon have George (the manager of the lunchroom), Nick, and Sam hostage as they wait for Andreson to enter. Nick is tied up with Sam in the kitchen while the details of the plot are revealed through the terse dialogue between George and Max. Andreson doesn’t show at his usual time, and the gangsters leave. George unties Sam and Nick and points out that Andreson should be warned that killers are looking for him. What is significant here for our purposes is who that person turns out to be, as it is Nick who willingly does what Sam will not: face danger by going out to warn Andreson that killers are looking to kill him, as the following excerpt illustrates:

The cook felt the corners of his mouth with his thumbs.

“They all gone?” he asked.

“Yeah,” said George. “They’re gone now.”

“I don’t like it,” said the cook. “I don’t like any of it at all.”

“Listen,” George said to Nick. “You better go see Ole Andreson.”

“All right.”

“You better not have anything to do with it at all,” Sam, the cook, said.

“You better stay out of it.”

“I’ll go see him,” Nick said to George. “Where does he live?”

The cook turned away.

“Little boys always know what they want to do,” he said. (220)

Notice that it is Nick alone that George speaks to when contemplating the idea of warning Andreson. Notice also that while Sam expresses fear that he directs toward Nick, Nick ignores him and speaks directly to George.
No one speaks to Sam. It is as though he were not present, and therefore functions as the embodiment of the unwilling. When Nick ignores him he simultaneously and conversely endorses Sam’s opposite: willfulness. The last words Sam say, “Little boys always know what they want to do,” are of course highly ironic since Nick’s actions are not those of a boy, but instead are intended to demonstrate his developing manhood, which Sam cannot do. Indeed, Sam in this scene is the child, seen but not heard, and he knows what he wants to do: keep himself safe and away from danger.

Sam seems to serve two functions in the text. On the one hand he is merely the cook. His function as worker puts him in the lunchroom in the first place. Next, he is used as a rhetorical device to highlight what Hemingway appears to be most concerned with, Nick Adam’s development into a man. Sam’s positioning as without will, and fearful, makes it possible for the reader to understand all the more readily what Nick’s positioning as willful and fearless is. Sam, to recall Johnson’s critique of Cézanne’s influence on Hemingway’s craft, is the brushstroke that is at the perimeter and throws definition inward, in this case onto Nick Adams, and in so doing adds meaning to the white.

It is through Sam, then, as the symbol of labor in “The Killers,” that Hemingway elides modern America and industrialized labor, underpinning a particularized and idealized white masculinity. Nick’s own white masculinity, then, is discovered through its absence in Sam. In rejecting Sam, Hemingway not only rejects the African American as a suitable identity against which to posit an idealized self, but he also rejects the laborer as “self” as well, since Sam is its signifier. Ironically, in Robert Siodmak’s 1946 film adaptation of the story, Nick and Anderson work together at a gas station and mechanic shop where Anderson is a mechanic and Nick pumps gas. This modification to the original Hemingway story not only adds elements of industrialized America into the story that my reading of Hemingway would find problematic since Hemingway shies away from representations of industry in his short stories, but also suggests that Siodmak had to do so because of the inherent differences between film and text that required these changes to make the film reflect a readily identifiable world for its audience. This change further emphasizes Hemingway’s interest in focusing the reader’s attention on the development of the protagonist’s masculinity, as opposed to the reality that the outside world represents.

After Nick asserts that he will go to warn Anderson in Hemingway’s text, he leaves Henry’s lunchroom: “Outside the arc-light shone through the bare branches of a tree. Nick walked up the street beside the car-tracks
and turned at the next arc light down a street” (220). The imagery created in this scene, and the rhetorical use of the arc lighting as both navigational points for Nick in the story and mechanisms that force the reader to see the whiteness of his face without the benefit of specific details, is significant as arc lighting was an important feature of the film industry during the 1920s and 1930s, just as “The Killers” was being written by Hemingway (Dyer 1997, 92). As Richard Dyer illustrates in his book *White*, the decision-making process by which arc lighting is today preferred to tungsten lighting signaled the imbrication of whiteness into the film industry. The industry was materially altered to accommodate the white image despite the fact that arc lighting was uncomfortable, hot, and more expensive than tungsten lighting to use.

This decision appears to defy the logic of economics. However, arc lighting’s ability to render white skin in a particularly favorably way for film signals an example of what George Lipsitz calls the “possessive investment in whiteness.” In his book by the same name he articulates how this investment *forces* white people to make decisions daily, based on their investment in white privilege (Lipsitz 1998, 7). Hemingway focuses the attention of the reader on this contrast between Nick’s white face brightened by the arc lighting and the contrasting dark night, further emphasizing Nick’s particular masculine whiteness relative to the character of Sam, who never leaves the safety of Henry’s eatery. While Hemingway gives us no indication of the lighting in the lunchroom, the cinematic qualities of the text, indicated by the tone, imagery, and action, suggests brightness not unlike that created by the narration of Nick walking to Andreson’s house. Indeed, Siodmak’s film supports this. In the movie, all the lights in Henry’s lunchroom appear to be on, creating a brilliant daylight scene even though it is after dark. This brilliance, of course, highlights Sam’s blackness, and, in so doing,Nick’s whiteness. This contrast is dramatically illustrated when, in the movie, key changes are made to the Hemingway text, including having Nick tied up seated on a chair above Sam instead of tied to Sam seated on the floor. Sam is made childish, inferior, and Nick’s rhetorical accomplice in his quest toward masculinity.

In both the Hemingway text and the movie, when Nick sees Ole Andreson he discovers that Andreson already knows that killers are after him and he has accepted his fate. In accepting his fate Andreson follows one of the characteristics of a Hemingway code hero in that he displays grace under pressure in the presence of danger. He exhibits no overt emotion, and after Nick explains what he has experienced and the gravity of the situation to Andreson, he asks if there is anything he can do to help.
Andreson says, “No. I’m through with all that running around. . . . There ain’t anything to do now” (Hemingway 1997, 221).

While Nick declares he will leave the town because he “can’t stand to think about him waiting in the room and knowing he’s going to get it” (221), he nevertheless learns elements of the Hemingway heroic code from Andreson. It is not incidental, either, that Andreson is identifiable as a European immigrant by his name, and is indeed called “the Swede.” This further underscores Hemingway’s inability to posit willfulness in blacks or the white American working class. It is in Andreson, then, that Nick finds a suitable identity against which to posit his white male identity. He is separated from Sam now not only in the exercise of his will demonstrated by going to warn Andreson, but also because through this exercise he learns things about ideal white masculinity that Sam could never understand. This is underscored by the last line attributed to Sam, as Nick walks back into Henry’s lunchroom and Sam overhears his voice. “I don’t even want to listen to it,’ [Sam] said and shut the door” (222). Here Hemingway indicates that such forms of masculinity, will, and action are completely alien to Sam, and are in the domain of a white identity that does not have to be articulated, only demonstrated in contrast to Sam.

Morrison’s logic of invisibility is useful for a further articulation of literary whiteness in “The Killers” because it provides a way of understanding the construction of white agency and its dependence upon the circumscription of blackness represented by Sam. Whiteness—literary and otherwise—requires an agent that is dependent upon a form of the Africanist presence (a black character, for instance) invisible as fully human or capable of risk taking. Whiteness, as illustrated in “The Killers,” is enabled or visible because of the presence and circumscription of Sam as racialized Other and symbol of labor in the text. It is Sam’s humanity and manhood that is invisible in Hemingway, and his cowardice and role as discourager that is rejected by Nick. Put another way, blackness is an indispensable and contrasting element of white identity. Had Nick not been bound to Sam by the would-be killers earlier in the Hemingway version of the story, and had Sam not demonstrably refused to have anything at all to do with helping Andreson, Nick’s actions would not—indeed could not—have had the same dramatic and artistic effect in the text. The film version of the story supports quite nicely, rather than challenges, this interpretation of the text since Sam’s seated position at Nick’s feet dramatizes the interdependency that exists between the server, Sam, and the served, Nick. Nick’s position of privilege is reinforced by his seated position, with Sam at his feet in a childlike position. The dramatic elements of this scene are repeated in the
film shortly after Andreson is killed. Both Sam and Nick are in a police station looking at mug shots. Nick is seated with the book of mug shots held in his hands, while the significantly older Sam gazes at the book from over Nick’s shoulder, cap in hand, with bent back, again reinforcing his childlikeness and servitude. Sam is soon asked to leave since he is of no help identifying the killers, while Nick is asked to stay and is questioned in more depth.

“The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”

Another example of literary whiteness expressed through physical danger and the eliding of labor is presented in “The Short Happy life of Francis Macomber.” However, Macomber is noteworthy not so much for his growth and development toward white masculinity as for the display of cowardice which disqualifies him from attaining it. His inadequacy is contrasted and heightened by the white, masculine figure of Robert Wilson who embodies it.

The story begins in Africa where Macomber is on a safari with his wife, Margaret, and Wilson, their white hunter and guide. Also with them are several black men who are hired laborers brought along to carry their gear and supplies. The story opens after Macomber has “just shown himself, very publicly, to be a coward” (Hemingway 1997, 6). This is so because he not only broke one of the tenets of the Hemingway code hero in displaying emotional weakness; in the face of danger, he ran. The text also opens shortly before Macomber is “carried to his tent from the edge of the camp in triumph on the arms and shoulders of the cook, the personal boys, the Skinner and the porters” (5). This is significant since the ostensible reason for Macomber being commended by them is the slaughter of the lion from whom he ran; he did not kill the lion, Wilson did.

In breaking the Hemingway heroic code and allowing himself to be praised for an act he did not perform—by people who know better—Macomber becomes one with those who carry him. He becomes “black.” The act of carrying Macomber can be seen not as triumph over the defeated lion, but rather as an ironic welcome into the ranks of the willless blacks who carry him. The blacks here are without will because they are laborers and not guides. They follow instructions and directions, not give them. Macomber’s embarrassing act of cowardice as he bolted away from the injured lion not only signals his exclusion from whiteness but also genders him feminine. This is underscored by Wilson’s statement that com-
ments on the ironic ending of the story as well, “no woman ever misses her lion and no white man ever bolts” (8). Wilson’s statement here feminizes Macomber and makes him womanly. This is so because Macomber does miss his lion, as Wilson indicates a woman may do; Wilson makes the kill for him as he would do if he were hunting with a woman. The statement also gives tacit support to the idea that whites alone are capable of possessing a willed masculinity since the will and courage necessary to face the danger represented by the lion are inside the essential nature of masculine whiteness, hence no white man ever bolts, the implication being, of course, that blacks do.

Macomber’s feminization is also underscored by Margaret’s actions as she refuses to take Macomber’s hand during the trip back to camp, and also in her slipping out of their tent to sleep with Wilson on the night following the embarrassing event. It is Wilson who is what Macomber is not, demonstrating, as he does, white masculinity by confronting danger and killing the lion, and it is Wilson whom Margaret rewards with a kiss on the mouth as they travel back to camp after the event, in full view of her husband (17). Macomber’s act of cowardice and the subsequent response to it by Wilson and Margaret have the effect of isolating Macomber in the text. Margaret and Wilson now comprise a white universe of values that Macomber can be no part of.

Macomber does not confront the possibility of the total loss of life, which in Hemingway stands in for democratic notions of freedom. Macomber, then, cannot be seen as a man who has achieved freedom through his own actions, and therefore he must be rejected as a desirable white male American.

Indeed, the same rhetorical relationship that exists between Macomber and Robert Wilson exists between Sam and Nick in “The Killers” since it is Macomber’s lack of will that highlights Wilson’s masculinity for Margaret and for the reader. The blacks in “Macomber,” like Sam in “The Killers,” are not seen as men or masculine risk takers. They are preemptively assigned a position similar to that which Macomber has taken by his choice to run—since white men possess the capacity for choice—and his lack of will. This is illustrated by the interchange that takes place between Macomber and Wilson after the lion has been wounded. Macomber, frightened by the prospect of going into the tall grass to finish off the lion, asks if they can send in beaters to flush out the lion. Wilson responds:

“Of course we can . . . but it’s a touch murderous . . . somebody bound to get mauled.”
“What about gun bearers?” [Macomber asks]

“Oh, they’ll go with us. It’s their Shauri. You see, they signed up for it. They don’t look too happy though, do they?” (15)

This interchange is significant because the beaters, facing the prospect of death, would go into the tall grass to flush out the lion. However, the decision to go in does not rest with them. It is not their will or choice; it rests with the white hunter, Wilson, whose force of will and implicit power is stronger even than their fear of death.

Similarly, the gun bearers’ nonverbal cues indicate their unwillingness to confront the lion on Wilson’s orders: “the gun bearers looked very grave. They were silent now” (14). However, they are powerlessness to confront Wilson. Both the beaters and the gun bearers have no voice of their own, but rather are presented to us through the consciousness of Wilson and Macomber. Indeed, Wilson’s character is partially defined by the beaters and the gun carriers in ways not unlike Sam, who helps to define the character of Nick in “The Killers.” Macomber, however, demonstrates a form of Otherness within whiteness that Hemingway rejects, and is placed outside of the white American masculinity Hemingway champions.

Macomber is white and therefore possesses something in appearance at least that the blacks do not. We may then read “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” as a story about the discovery and acquisition of Macomber’s white masculine identity. Although his eventual “successful” encounter with a water buffalo buoys Macomber’s spirits and provides the basis for Hemingway’s ironic title, that masculinity is nevertheless rejected by Margaret, Wilson, and Hemingway himself. Indeed, this provides one plausible interpretation of the very last scene of the story when Margaret shoots Macomber. As Wilson tells us early in the story, “a woman never misses her lion.” While this may be interpreted, as illustrated above, to mean that even though a woman may miss her lion, the white masculine hunter is always there to make the kill for her, Margaret’s shooting of Macomber may also be seen as a white woman always knowing where white masculinity is located, and eliminating as choices those who do not possess it or those who possess it in ways that threaten their status.

While it can be argued that Margaret intended to kill the water buffalo that she presumed threatened her husband—the text reads, “Mrs. Macomber had shot at the buffalo with the 6.5 Mannlicher as it seemed about to gore Macomber” (28)—Hemingway’s irony here can not be overstated. The development of the plot suggests just as easily that she
intended to kill Macomber as a result of recognizing his femininity, then newfound masculinity. While in his own mind Macomber is redeemed due to the fact that he kills the first water buffalo they encounter, and fearlessly pursues its mate, and even felt a new man after the kill (as indicated in the text, he “felt a wild and unreasonable happiness that he had never known before . . . ‘something did happen to me,’ he said. ‘I felt absolutely different’”) (25), in the eyes of Margaret and Wilson, Macomber can never be a white man in their universe of ideas after having bolted. He forfeits all authentic masculinity. What Macomber fails to understand is that masculinity is constructed out of both another’s and the Other’s response to one’s actions. Margaret’s fear that the water buffalo would kill Macomber is consistent with her understanding of Macomber as feminized. Indeed, Macomber’s actions provide motivation for Margaret to see him dead since life with the feminized Macomber would be unbearable for her flirtatious and willful character. Her husband’s newfound identity constitutes a self not dependent upon her good looks, the thing that kept Macomber wedded to her both legally and physically, but rather upon his own sense of masculinity which is incongruous with Margaret and Wilson’s white world, a world that he can never occupy. Macomber’s character now constitutes the apex of a triangulation with Wilson and the blacks who carried him at the beginning of the story. Margaret recognizes Macomber’s isolation and the end of their marriage which this isolation signals. Indeed, Wilson also realizes it and says, “[h]e would have left you too” (28). The shooting, then, signals Margaret and Hemingway’s total rejection of Macomber’s particular form of masculinized whiteness.

“The Undefeated”

“The Undefeated” presents us with a different kind of Hemingway protagonist. Manuel Garcia is an old bullfighter who is the image of the Hemingway code hero. His life is marked by the idea of grace under pressure, not just in terms of personal loss, but also in confronting danger in the bullring under less than ideal circumstances. In so doing, he confirms his masculinity and manhood.

In Hemingway, the idea of grace under pressure emerges as a function of will. However, in Christian theology, “grace” cannot be willed. It is a gift from God. The opening chapter of Norman Mailer’s *An American Dream* illustrates a good rendering of “unwilled grace” quite succinctly. Here, Steven Rojack, our first-person narrator, describes a battle scene
during World War II where his company is pinned down on either side by German machine gunners protected by knolls. Recognizing they are in a hopeless crossfire, Rojack is inspired to attack both German machine-gun posts simultaneously. Just before he leaves his position he says: “I could nonetheless feel danger withdraw from me like an angel, withdraw like a retreating wave over a quiet sea, sinking quietly into the sand, and I stood and then I ran, I ran up the hill into the isle of safety I felt opening for me” (3). Later, after he has thrown grenades into each machine-gun post and shot three of the four German soldiers he will come to kill, he describes his encounter with the last of them:

I started to rise. I wanted to charge as if that were our contract and held, for I could not face his eyes . . . eyes that go all the way back to God is the way I think I heard it said once in the South, and I faltered before that stare . . . and suddenly it was all gone, the clean presence of it, the grace, it had deserted me in the instant I hesitated, and now I had no stomach to go, I could charge his bayonet no more. (5)

This scene is ironic since it suggests a specific relationship with God where “Amazing Grace” is responsible for willed action. The human being is a vessel for the exercise of will, which suggests that divinity resides inside of the human agent. This clearly invokes the opening chapter of Richard Dyer’s *White* where he argues that white people and white people alone are invested with this *something else* that is realized in, and yet is not reducible to, the corporeal (14–15). According to Dyer, this something else constitutes a kind of “will” or enterprise, which blacks simply lack due to their carnal nature. Whites, Dyer suggests, maintain a certain spiritual connection to God through this will and are in a sense his chosen people, those for whom Eden was created (Dyer 15).

Hemingway’s treatment of will, then, connected as it is to notions of manhood and masculinity, can be seen as an ironic complication of Dyer and Mailer’s treatment of will. For Hemingway, God is “Nada,” a kind of nothingness; instead, we have an idealized masculinity and manhood which produces will. Grace, then, is not a gift, but is rather a product of one’s own making. Not residing in white masculinity, but an intrinsic element of it.

In “Dramatizations of Manhood in Hemingway’s *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises*,” Thomas Srychacz argues that men are made or emasculated in the bullring:
The physical characteristics of the ring shape the rituals enacted there, providing necessary boundaries within which potentially chaotic action may reveal a comprehensible structure. The presence of the audience, in particular, is crucial for the transformation of space into arena. Acting as an agent of legitimation for ritual gestures made in the ring, the audience assimilates all action to the performance and invests performance with value. Part of the audience’s function is to appraise rituals of manhood and bestow praise or condemnation on the protagonist. But such moments of evaluatory watching are not confined to the bullrings: they pervade *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises*. An audience may comprise only one other person or even the protagonist watching himself. Many symbolic spaces in this early work [*In Our Time*]—houses and hotels, bedrooms, camps and clearings—take on the characteristics of a ceremonial arena (246).

Srychacz’s reading of the bullring, and other settings in Hemingway’s short stories, suggests that audience is key, even if that audience is only the writer himself. Ralph Ellison, in his essay “Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity,” draws similar conclusions, asserting that the act of writing itself was ritualistic for Hemingway, an act that absolves the author of the moral contradictions inherent in his treatment (or absenting) of the Negro (27). It is also a psychological drama of guilt where the author “seeks protection through the compulsive minor rituals of his prose” (40). This understanding of audience is illustrated in “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” in that Macomber does not understand the relationship between audience—his wife and Wilson on the one hand, and the Africans on the other—and his own white masculinity. Manuel Garcia, the protagonist in “The Undefeated,” goes some distance in demonstrating the psychological drama Ellison speaks of. It is illustrated, for instance, in the very first scene of the text when he enters the office of Don Miguel Retana, a bullfighting promoter, and is confronted with skepticism as evidenced by the look on Retana’s face, and, just above Retana on the wall behind him, the face and head of the stuffed bull that had killed Manuel Garcia’s brother, “the promising one, about nine years ago” (Hemingway 1997, 183–84). Manuel Garcia’s brother, in terms of Srychacz’s reading of the bullring, would not have been unmanned, though he was killed, since his death had come about as a result of confronting physical danger. It is the manner of death, the grace under pressure exhibited for the audience, which becomes significant. The danger associated
with the bullring is implied in almost every element of the opening scene of
the story, especially in the stuffed bull, in which, we are told, Manuel Gar-
cia felt “a certain family interest” (183). It is this information, as well as
Retana’s skepticism, that creates the context for the exercise of human will
Manuel Garcia demonstrates at the ending and climax of the story.

Indeed, it is upon Manuel Garcia’s will that the entire text is hinged,
as well as the relative weakness of his picadors; no one else, no picador
with any skill, would agree to work with this matador who is past his
prime. Much of the story revolves around Manuel Garcia negotiating the
terms of his bullfight with Retana, including the picadors and the cuadril-
las. What we learn through the text that is important for our purposes is
that Manuel Garcia is not motivated to fight by money as he has to pay
for the cuadrillas out of his own small pay to be given an opportunity to
fight. Here we see that Manuel Garcia literally exchanges his labor, in the
form of his pay, for the opportunity to fight in the ring—to perform for an
audience who can evaluate his worthiness and his honor. This is significant
since money is a sign for labor in most Marxian frames of reference. Man-
uel Garcia is posited on the side of capital in the capital–labor dichotomy,
but it is not capital used for material profit. Rather, it—and the labor it
purchases—is used for the singular opportunity to exercise his will. One
could reasonably argue that the bullfight is a capitalist relationship being
acted out in the symbolic space of the bullring. In this relationship, wealth
is counted in terms of honor, grace, masculinity, and the exercise of will,
not in money.

For Manuel Garcia bullfighting is not only a matter of honor and
respect, it is also a matter of guilt, life, and death. It is a matter of honor
and respect because it is through his skill as a bullfighter that Garcia and
his family name are distinguished in the text. It is a matter of guilt because,
as indicated above, his brother, “the promising one,” was killed in the
ring. He can only restore honor to the family by confronting death, risk-
ing his life, and claiming victory by his sheer will. It is also a matter of life
and death because it is the bullfight, his actions inside of the ring and the
audience’s appraisal of that action, as we discover in the text, that gives
meaning to his life. Hence, the last words he utters in the story, after he is
gored by the bull, are a plea for assurance from Zurito, his trusted friend
and picador, that he acted honorably, “‘Wasn’t I good, Manos?’ he asked
for confirmation. ‘Sure.’ Said Zurito. ‘You were going great’” (205).

Manuel Garcia represents one aspect, then, of Hemingway’s approach
to race and masculinity. The masculinized Other from which the reader/
author learns may not even be “black” except, as with Sam and the Afri-
can porters, as examples to react against. Nevertheless, as we will see in *The Sun Also Rises*, many whites are not acceptable either. But the brown races, the swarthy Spaniards, the Indians, the Italians, all people of some color can be—and in most cases are—sites of honor and “grace.”

“The Capital of the World”

Paco, the young and inexperienced protagonist in “The Capital of the World,” is, like Manuel Garcia’s brother, killed through his confrontation with physical danger. Paco nevertheless retains his honor. “The Capital of the World” has not enjoyed great critical attention, perhaps because of the apparent futility of the ending. The young Paco, after just arriving from the Castilian country to the big city of Madrid, is eager to join the ranks of the matadors for whom he has a boyish admiration and childish delusions of grandeur. Paco dies in the dining room of the hotel where he works, after playacting at a bullfight with his coworker, Enrique. While Paco does die in this show of naiveté, his death as a playacting matador is best seen in light of the three actual matadors we see in the short story who bear the description “matador” but lack the requisite characteristics of a matador and, subsequently, the Hemingway code. The first matador is past his prime and does not draw the people’s attention, the second one is chronically ill and incapable of fighting, and the third is a coward.

While Emily Hoffman in her essay “Tradition and the Individual Bullfighter: The Lost Legacy of the matador in Hemingway’s ‘The Capital of the World’” argues convincingly that Paco’s death is in part due to a “generational rift, one that threatens to do irreparable harm to Spanish culture . . . because he has no one with experience to dispel his illusions about the bullfight and teach him a more adequate approach to craft” (91), and while David Sanders argues that the characters we see in “The Capital of the World” are emblematic of the state of Spanish politics vis-à-vis the fight against fascism, a struggle that Hemingway vigorously supported (Sanders 1960, 138), it is just as likely—and indeed consistent with both critics—to suggest that Paco dies attempting to exercise his will, and confronting danger. That is to say, Paco is best seen as a Hemingway code hero in that he willingly confronts danger. In this sense, he is similar to Nick Adams in “The Killers” as Nick in that story is also young, willing to confront danger, and has the rhetorical equivalence of the three ineffective matadors in the figure of Sam, the cook. The difference, of course, is that in “The Killers,” Nick’s masculinity is juxtaposed and indeed shaped
by Ole Andreson, who serendipitously teaches him and in whom he finds a suitable identity against which to posit a meaningful self, and also in the sense that Sam is without the capacity for the exercise of will, unlike the matadors, due to their profession.

“The Snows of Kilimanjaro”

Unlike Paco, Harry Wilson, the protagonist in “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” has both the experiences of the Hemingway code hero and knows intimately people who exhibit the traits of the hero. However, Wilson emerges as an unaccomplished hero because he is seduced by the trappings of his wealthy wife’s lifestyle and material goods. He is forced to lament his unfulfilled ambitions as a writer through the narrator of the story who, in a deft rhetorical maneuver by Hemingway, becomes the vehicle by which Wilson’s heroic stories are related. In “Reading and Writing as a Woman: The Retold Tales of Marguerite Duras,” Marilyn R. Schuster correctly points this out, showing that the author/narrator in “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” has privileged access to Wilson that his wife does not. However, Schuster fails to accurately account for the role that race plays in Hemingway’s text and therefore does not see that it is not Helen, Wilson’s wife, as gendered female that is the principal reason she is not considered by Wilson to be a worthy listener to his stories, but rather Helen as *white* that she is even considered as a potential listener in the first place, even though she is ultimately dismissed. Schuster convincingly argues:

In “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” the passing on of Harry’s legacy is possible only through the lucid, presumably masculine bond between the omniscient narrator, the central character, whom he knows like a second self, and the reader. The gender of both the narrator and the reader are assumed because “the woman” has been dismissed as an unworthy listener. (51)

Here Schuster refers to an elaborate paralipsis composed of stories that Harry tells himself throughout the main story set in Africa at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro and related through the narrator. These stories are not part of the “here and now” story in Africa which ostensibly centers on the impending death of Harry and his wife’s vain hope of rescue. Rather, they are drawn from Harry’s experiences—experiences the reader knows only because the narrator relates Harry’s innermost thoughts. This element of
“The Snows of Kilimanjaro” would be justification for including it in the second set of stories centering on the inner workings of the protagonist’s mind. However, the stories Harry tells himself are focused primarily on the exercise of his will, and the ways in which he confronts his environment in these stories which are replete with danger. The tension in “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” is created in part by the differences we find in the willful Harry presented in these stories, and the will-less Harry who is now dying of gangrene. Indeed, much of the narrator’s attention—and subsequently the reader’s—is spent watching Harry lament that these stories will now never become the subject of his writing that would give his life meaning since he knows he faces imminent death. The paralipptic element, of course, is that the stories are told, as Schuster points out, precisely because of the relationship that exists between the character Harry, the narrator, and the reader.

While Schuster points out that Helen is dismissed as an unworthy listener on the basis of her gender, my reading of the text both extends and complicates her analysis. Gender contributes to the rhetoric and narrative structure of the text as Schuster suggests, but Helen’s gender is subordinate in the text to her wealth, and, just as critically, her whiteness. Indeed, both are responsible for the setting, climax, and tension of the text since it is because of her wealth that they are in Africa in the first place while their whiteness is what guarantees the particular social status they enjoy while there.

How both race and class are implicated in Hemingway’s assessment of the elite is consistent and pervasive throughout his work and is clearly illustrated in his treatment of whiteness in *The Sun Also Rises*. Daniel S. Traber argues in his essay “Whiteness and the Rejected Other in *The Sun Also Rises*” that several characters, ultimately including Robert Cohn, represent for Hemingway a rejected white identity (235).

Traber’s thesis raises interesting and probative questions about Hemingway’s racial coding, his rhetorical style, and their connection to social class similar to those questions Kenneth Johnson raises in his study of Hemingway and Cézanne. Hemingway’s notion of the authentic American identity as expressed in his literature is in the first place upper middle class, mirroring closely his own social class in Oak Park, Illinois. According to Traber, Hemingway—whose values he sees expressed through the narrator, Jake Barnes—searches for an “Other” against which to posit this white American self. However, he rejects most of them, specifically those he considers white and “unauthentic.” Traber argues that Hemingway/Barnes rejects the homosexuals he meets at the bal musette night club in
Paris. He also rejects Bill, his traveling companion from Paris to Pamplona, not for sexual inversion but for his poseur’s stance on life. For Hemingway, this stance captures the spirit of the Lost Generation, and his treatment of Bill in the novel is an overt comment on that group. That generation, including the bal musette homosexuals, according to Traber’s reading of Hemingway, are inauthentically white, because they are not true to themselves, and, more importantly, because they break the rules of the Hemingway heroic code.

Also significant for my purposes here is where the most likely source for the bal musette—or workmen’s dance hall—in The Sun Also Rises comes from. Hemingway’s first lodging in Paris, with his new wife, Hadley, whom he married the year before, was at 74, rue du Cardinal Lemoine, a plebeian street that wound up from the Seine near Pont Sully (Baker 84). This location was beside a bal musette that the Hemingways often visited during their residence in Paris. This is significant as Hemingway clearly had available a working-class culture from which to fashion the reality he lived in Paris. However, he rejects it. When the Hemingways moved in on January 9, 1922, he would write to his friends that he lived in “the best part of the Latin Quarter” (Baker 1969, 84). Apparently Hemingway not only had little interest in accepting working-class people into the reality he lived as he reported it, but also little interest in presenting or representing working-class people in his fiction, as his texts show.

The bal musette homosexuals, because of their homosexuality, and Bill, because of his stance on life, are disqualified as viable identities against which Hemingway/Barnes can posit a desirable, authentic, white Americanness. Traber suggests that Hemingway organizes and evaluates these forms of Otherness “according to a rejected notion of centered whiteness” (235) represented most forcefully in the text by Lady Brett Ashley not only because she shares Bill’s outlook on life, but also because she is Hemingway/Barnes’s unconsummated (and unconsummable) love interest. Jake Barnes is distinguished from Lady Brett, Bill, and “the lost generation” they represent primarily because of his war wound and the implicit lived experiences that accompany it. This wound identifies Barnes as one who has faced danger by going to war, and signals the exercise of human will that neither Bill nor the bal musette denizens express since they did not go to war as Barnes/Hemingway did. Hemingway also rejects the Otherness represented by Robert Cohn because Cohn isn’t true to himself. As a Jew he tries to mimic and “pass” as one of the leisured and elite of Europe and America, represented most vividly for Cohn (and for the reader) by Lady Brett Ashley.
We might then argue that Hemingway sought a nonthreatening example of the Other, one not so close to home, against which to posit his “self” or identity in order to give his world meaning. In *The Sun Also Rises*, he ultimately finds that figure in the “romanticized Spanish subaltern” situated sufficiently outside and within the center (Traber 2000, 249). By “center” Traber appears to mean Europe. By being a marginalized group in Europe, the Basque peasants are neither the decadent Lost Generation of the elite that Hemingway and Barnes ultimately reject in the novel, nor are they blacks whom Hemingway cannot even draw as three-dimensional human characters due to his inability to see them as participants in American democracy and citizenship. The Basques, sharing no linguistic ties to either French or Spanish, and having preserved a certain purity of culture as well as being fiercely independent, present an ideal identity against which Hemingway may posit a meaningful self since he actively seeks the very qualities they possess, having left the United States largely because of its development toward careering industrial modernity. Hemingway, then, appropriates the Basque peasantry not so much because of who they are as because of who they are not. Put another way, the task of the Hemingway white male figure is to adapt “colored” masculinity. Hemingway posits such masculinity in Latin figures but not, crucially, in blacks or working-class whites—the dark sources or models are never “Negro.” While Traber correctly points out that there are problems associated with Hemingway’s appropriation of the Basque peasants in this way (249), he does not articulate what they might be. For my purposes here it is enough to illustrate that the Basque function in ways blacks cannot in the universe of Hemingway’s fiction. The black presence in Hemingway is best understood as, following Ralph Ellison’s lead:

> a projection of processes lying at the very root of American culture and certainly at the central core of its twentieth century literary forms . . . [having to do] with processes molding the attitudes . . . that condition men dedicated to democracy to practice, accept and, most crucially of all, often blind themselves to the essentially undemocratic treatment of their fellow citizens. (26–27)

What Ellison refers to here is Hemingway’s use of fiction to elide commentary on the most pressing issue of the twentieth century, the denial of full citizenship to African Americans. This, according to Ellison, marked a shift in the role the artist played in American culture and separated Hemingway from his self-acknowledged forebear, Mark Twain. Ellison continues:
Hemingway was alert only to Twain’s technical discoveries—the flexible colloquial language, the sharp naturalism, the thematic potentialities of adolescence. Thus what for Twain was a means to a moral end became for Hemingway an end in itself. And just as the trend toward technique for the sake of technique and production for the sake of the market lead to the neglect of the human need out of which they spring, so do they lead in literature to a marvelous technical virtuosity won at the expense of a gross insensitivity to fraternal values. (35)

African Americans, then, represented a source of guilt for Hemingway, which seems to account for their absence as fully human in his prose, and were connected to his ambivalence toward modernity, the iconic symbol of which was the industrialized worker.

The Basque add definition to Hemingway’s literary craft in Cézanne-like ways while blacks do not appear to get onto his canvas. Different figures emerge as examples of the Other against which Hemingway can, and does, posit a self. The hunter in Africa and the bullfighter in Europe are only two character types who, while confronting physical danger, were less threatening for Hemingway than other available types. Indeed, it is through danger and the spectacle danger creates that Hemingway confronts the guilt associated with the contradictions of his democratic ideals and his practices both as a writer and as an American.

From an authorial point of view, Jake Barnes’s relationship with Lady Brett in *The Sun Also Rises* is a variation of Helen’s relationship with Wilson in “The Snows of Kilimanjaro.” The major difference arises from the fact that Barnes continues to live by the Hemingway code signaled by grace under pressure and, most significantly, the exercise of his capacity for human will—though forced to do so because of his wound. He also bears the scars of his confrontation with danger which serve as his legacy, and institutes a crucial element of the novel since it is because of these scars that he is unable to consummate his love for Lady Brett in the story.

Wilson, however, has no war wound as a testament to his confrontation with danger, and has been seduced by the wealth of the elite which he has always despised but could never resist. He has demonstrated a complete inability to exercise his human will. Indeed, had it not been for Jake Barnes’s confrontation with danger—the symbol of his white identity celebrated by Hemingway—his fate may well have been similar to Wilson’s. This is because Barnes would have similarly been seduced by Brett Ashley as the text intimates in several places, particularly in the closing lines where his sexual impotence is heightened by the image of a police officer
seated on his horse raising his baton as Lady Brett is pressed against Barnes by the slowing motion of the car. Lady Brett utters the words “Oh Jake . . . we could have had such a damned good time together,” to which Barnes replies, “Yes . . . isn’t it pretty to think so” (Hemingway 1987, 247). Barnes may also have become like his travel companions, Bill, Cohn, and Mike, Lady Brett’s fiancé, and been indistinguishable from Harry Wilson in that he would have epitomized the Lost Generation Hemingway so insistently critiques. Wilson, then, is tempted by Helen in ways Jake Barnes cannot be tempted by Brett Ashley because Wilson does not carry with him the physical affliction which marks his body as well as his experiences in the form of a wound. While Jake cannot will his body to perform with Brett Ashley because of his physical wounds, he does exercise human will in facing danger in the first place and it is the physical scars that are the most compelling evidence of the experiences. Wilson, however, has no such scars and no such lived experiences.

Marilyn Schuster’s privileging of gender in “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” is further complicated by Molo, one of Harry and Helen’s black companions who is not female, and therefore (given Schuster’s reading of the text) should be a worthy listener and transcriber of Wilson’s stories. However, he is not. That he is excluded causes us to seek a reason. One plausible, indeed almost inescapable one is his Africanness—his race, his color. While Helen is excluded on the basis of her gender, Molo’s exclusion suggests she is considered a worthy listener in the first place only because she is white. Molo is not even considered for the task while Helen is, though she is ultimately rejected. This reading of the text suggests that gender difference alone is not sufficient to argue Helen’s dismissal as a worthy listener of Harry’s stories. Indeed, this reading of Shuster’s analysis suggests that Harry and Helen together form a white universe of ideas and beliefs that exclude blacks in ways similar to that exhibited in “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber.”

While Schuster carefully articulates the rhetorical strategy used by Hemingway in the narrative to exclude Helen, she never articulates the essential difference between the Harry that we meet dying of an infected leg in Africa and the Harry presented in the stories he tells himself (and the narrator) as centering on the respective differences in willfulness and the ability to face danger through this willfulness. Indeed, this difference explains why Helen and Molo are excluded as worthy listeners of Harry’s stories. The Harry presented in the main story set in Africa resents and regrets a life wasted because he did not exercise the full capacity of his will as a white man as demonstrated by his self-representation in the stories he
tells himself: “She shot very well, this good rich bitch, this kindly caretaker and destroyer of his talent. Nonsense. He had destroyed his talent himself. Why should he blame this woman because she kept him well? He had destroyed his talent by not using it, by betrayals of himself and what he believed in” (45).

Here we see that it is precisely because Wilson has made the choice not to use his will that he does not fulfill his potential. Even in his failure as an apparently ideal heroic figure, Wilson nevertheless acknowledges his capacity to be one. In this way he confirms his whiteness.

Consciousness, Landscape, and the Eliding of Labor

My analysis of the second set of Hemingway’s short stories is dependent in part upon my reading of the first. I depend, for instance, upon the idea that only white characters are granted the capacity for the exercise of will. I also depend upon Hemingway’s codification of whiteness and social class in such a way that his protagonists are able to posit an identity to give their lives meaning in only specific cases closely related to his own white upper-middle-class identity. Further, I depend upon the idea that the racialized Other and the white working class are preemptively assigned social and rhetorical positions that fall outside of the universe of whiteness—and subsequently humanity—that Hemingway and his protagonists embrace.

This last point is implicitly connected to the issue of labor that the stories in this second set elide. Indeed, these stories present an evacuated and diminished sense of labor that simultaneously creates an imagined idyllic reality that has little bearing on the reality of the outside world. They center instead on the inner workings of the protagonist’s mind. This is achieved with the tacit compliance of the reader who becomes most concerned with the action and the development of the protagonist’s character.

I begin my discussion of the second set of stories with “The Battler” because in many respects it captures characteristics of both sets of stories while adding its own complexities to the themes I explore in both.

“The Battler”

To begin with, “The Battler” is a story about Nick Adams confronting physical danger in various ways similar to what we find in the first set of stories. In particular he confronts danger in the form of a brakeman who
throws him off a train. He next confronts danger in the form of Ad Francis, a white ex-prizefighter turned drifter, and his black companion, Bugs.

Thrown from the train, he is bruised and scraped (like Ad Francis, as we discover later). Nick gets to his feet, washes his scraped hands clean in a stream and, as the narrator declares, is concerned about the fact that he “must get somewhere” (Hemingway 1997, 97). He follows the tracks heading toward the next town, Mancelona, a northern Michigan town east of Lake Michigan’s Grand Traverse Bay. The story, from beginning to end, is hardly without a scene where Nick’s disorientation is not made prominent or where the specter of physical danger or violence doesn’t seem imminent. It is because of the specter of danger and violence that the story may be placed in the first set of stories discussed above. However, it is Nick’s response to the various kinds of danger we see in this story that is significant and which lends itself to the second set of stories where landscape and social class are central. For instance, Nick’s encounter with the brakeman leaves him intent on getting back at him (98). The brakeman, who had feigned friendship with Nick to get close enough to him to throw him off the train because Nick had jumped on without paying, had taken advantage of Nick’s youthful eagerness to make friends. In this bout with physical danger, our narrator chalks Nick’s injuries up to worldly inexperience, telling us, “What a lousy kid thing to do have done. They would never sucker him that way again” (97). This encounter with danger and violence is similar to those we have discussed above in that Nick learns something about how to be a man.

However, this story also fits the second set of stories because the landscape mirrors closely the protagonist’s innermost feelings and his own tentative and disoriented consciousness. The following passage is illustrative:

Now he must be nearly to Mancelona. Three or four miles of swamp. He stepped along the track, walking so he kept the ballast between the ties, the swamp ghostly in the rising mist. His eyes ached and he was hungry. He kept on hiking, putting the miles of track back of him. The swamp was all the same on both sides of the track. . . . He came up on the track toward the fire carefully. . . . Nick waited behind the tree and watched. (98)

Notice that the descriptions of the landscape put Nick in swampland, and with only the railroad tracks as a guide to get him to Mancelona. Notice also how the imagery and the tone of the text is eerie, mysterious, and enigmatic. This is achieved with the use of words like “ghostly” and “rising
…also notice the tentative way Nick approaches the campfire he comes to discover belongs to Ad Francis and Bugs. While we might be tempted to argue that Nick here is showing prudence, especially since he has just encountered physical danger in his encounter with the brakeman, it is nevertheless difficult to shake the sense that Nick appears fearful. This fear marks a shift in Nick’s character from the one we meet in a story like “The Killers” or in a story like “The Undefeated” where the protagonist distinguishes himself precisely because he confronts danger in a manner becoming a man.

Indeed, the most significant aspect of the story for the purposes of the themes I trace in the second set of stories is how this unfamiliarity with the landscape is coupled with Nick’s uneasiness with Ad Francis and Bugs. In these two characters, Nick faces a white man and his black companion, two men who are outside the bounds of class society, and who occupy a terrain wholly unfamiliar to Nick.

Ad and Bugs’s social position is a point discussed by William Bache in his essay “Hemingway’s ‘The Battler.’” Here Bache argues that “Bugs and Ad are outcasts who, by sloughing off the falsity and inhibitions of society, have become ‘crazy.’” Thus, according to Bache, “it is useless to say that they are good or bad; they are motivated in terms of their figurative selves” (13). By “figurative” Bache seems to imply, but does not fully articulate, the roles the characters play in developing the main narrative, which is specifically focused on Nick and his response to the unfamiliar environment he finds himself in and the unfamiliar characters, Ad and Bugs, he encounters.

Nick’s uncertainty about Ad and Bugs is reinforced by his uncertainty about the terrain. His encounter with both men—and Hemingway’s narration of it—is marked by skepticism and fear, and decided instability rather than grace under pressure. Nick is not controlled or in the process of developing a steady masculinity as we observe in the Nick from “The Killers,” for instance, who coolly takes up the challenge of finding Ole Andreson to warn him that gunmen are after him. Nor is the Nick we see here able to take positive lessons from his experience with Ad and Bugs as he did with the brakeman. Instead we find a confused and cautious Nick unable to deal with the masculinity these two characters together present.

Both Ad Francis and Bugs add to Nick’s sense of confusion and disorientation. Bugs is black, and our narrator has considerable trouble describing him, using words like “long nigger legs” (100) and “smooth polite nigger voice” (103). These descriptions create a distancing and amorphous effect such that both the reader and Nick are never close enough to—
or comfortable with—Bugs to see him as a three-dimensional character. Indeed, Bugs is barely presented as a human being.

Bugs would fall neatly into Toni Morrison’s notion of a “disturbing nurse.” These characters, Morrison argues, have enabling properties, which take the place of female nurses in the masculine world Hemingway usually prefers to occupy (Morrison 1993, 82). These characters, Morrison further suggests, “are Tontos all, whose role is to do everything possible to serve the Lone Ranger without disturbing his indulgent delusion that he is indeed alone” (82). She goes on to note, with specific reference to “The Battler,” that the nurse men often have disabling qualities too, pointing out that when Ad gets unmanageable, Bugs has leave to smash him over the head with his blackjack.\(^1\) Morrison also reminds us of the similarity between this scene and the one in Poe’s “Gold Bug” with the slave Juniper who has similar leave to whip his master (83). George Monteiro, in his essay “‘This is My Pal Bugs’: Ernest Hemingway’s ‘The Battler,’” suggests another interpretation of Bugs’s character—not altogether inconsistent with Morrison’s—drawing on the fact that he was in prison, where he met Ad Francis, for “cutting a man,” and comparing Bugs with Herman Melville’s Babo where he shaves his master, Benito Cereno, in short story “Benito Cereno.” In this interpretation, Nick would be roughly equivalent to the naïve Captain Delano and Ad would be Cereno. This reading also lends itself to my reading of “The Battler” as I wish to show that Nick and Ad belong to a white community, and they occupy a space that Bugs can be no part of. I also wish to show that Bugs represents an enigmatic figure that Nick has trouble confronting and which our narrator can only point to, invoking our reading of Ellison, with descriptions illustrated above (“long nigger legs” and “smooth polite nigger voice”).

Ad Francis is an ex-prizefighter we have a much more lucid view of, and who we are clearly meant to see as physically and psychologically damaged as his physical description suggests: “The man [Ad Francis] looked at Nick and smiled. In the firelight Nick saw that his face was misshapen. His nose was sunken, his eyes were slits, he had queer-shaped lips. Nick did not perceive all this at once, he only saw the man’s face was queerly formed and mutilated. It was like putty in color. Dead looking in the firelight” (99).

Ad Francis’s physical features clearly evoke Nick’s own scars and confrontation with danger. This evocation suggests that Nick and Ad Francis occupy a white space—that of confronting danger—that Bugs does not, and reinforces the notion that this capacity exists in whites but is absent in blacks. Nick’s disoriented state of mind and his finding Ad Francis in a wholly unfamiliar terrain is also significant. Ad Francis represents a white-
ness Nick rejects, but it is not a rejection Nick fully understands since Ad
does not occupy a readily identifiable social class position in the text. This
also accounts for and underscores Nick’s bewilderment.

The climax of “The Battler” occurs when the crazed Ad takes offense
because Nick listened to the black man, Bugs, and didn’t hand Ad his
knife. Ad accosts Nick and we see a Nick who is ill-prepared to defend
himself. Indeed, as the narrator tells us, Nick “felt nervous” and “stepped
back.” The danger is alleviated only when Bugs taps Ad across the base
of the skull with a blackjack wrapped in a handkerchief (102). It is at this
point that Nick engages in a conversation with Bugs, where Bugs relates
the story of Ad Francis’s life and his ill-fated relationship with his wife
who, because of her likeness to Ad, many thought was his sister. While
it is made clear in the text that Ad’s estranged wife, who doubled as his
manager, still provides him with money, Ad squanders it, suggesting that
neither he nor his nurse man Bugs, understands its value or expresses any
great will to use it to join society. In the conversation with Bugs, Nick
says very little, and on instruction from Bugs “walked away from the fire
across the clearing to the railway tracks” (103). Nick’s disorientation and
confusion by his interactions with Ad and Bugs is further illustrated in the
last paragraph of the story where the narrator tells us, “He found he had
a ham sandwich in his hand and put it in his pocket” (104). He registers
neither recollection of Bugs putting the sandwich in his hand, as the nar-
reator tells us, nor any desire at all for their company. Nick seems to have
learned from his interaction with Ad that confronting danger can make
you go crazy. It can leave physical as well as psychological scars. If you
do not control pressure gracefully—however it presents itself to you—you
become a social outcast (similar to Macomber who loses his whiteness),
as illustrated symbolically by Ad’s deformed flesh and misshapen face. Ad
Francis is an example of someone who faced danger but went mad doing
so. His is a masculinity and whiteness Nick rejects.

Hemingway’s inability to draw black characters as fully human,
ilustrated by his depiction of Bugs, appears to be related to his inabil-
ity to present in these early short stories a landscape reflecting the real-
ity of America’s industrialized working class, and—as we have seen with
the character of Ad Francis—America’s migrants. This inability signals a
rejection of racialized identities, as well as certain kinds of white identi-
ties against which he is unable to posit a meaningful self. The resulting
evacuated and diminished landscape, as well as the flattened presentation
of black characters, signals the production of literary whiteness in these
stories.
Frederic J. Svoboda discusses Hemingway’s use of landscape to create an imagined reality in his essay “Landscapes Real and Imagined: ‘Big Two-Hearted River’”:

In “Big Two-Hearted River” we live with Nick in a world that becomes more real to us as readers as it involves questions of life and death. We live in a Michigan selected by Hemingway to parallel Nick’s states of mind as he looks for control. The story stays rooted in the historical and legendary Seney even as Nick hikes from Seney, moving into a timeless Michigan, a Michigan of the writer’s and the reader’s imaginations in which much more seems implicated than only the lives and deaths of insects—[“hoppers”]—and trout. (41)

As I suggest earlier in this essay—and as Svoboda confirms—the treatment of landscape is crucial to the relationship Hemingway wishes to establish between himself and his audience. Svoboda’s essay focuses on the historical Seney and the ways in which Hemingway’s story “Big Two-Hearted River” uses the historical facts of the logging town asynchronously. The essay also demonstrates how these asynchronous deviations from the historical facts of the town and its surrounding flora are not incidental in Hemingway, but actually serve his narrative purposes. For example, Svoboda points out that in part 1 of the story Nick camps in an area populated by fern and jack pines, two species of plant that thrive upon fire for pollination (40). As I will show, the evidence of fire in “Big Two-Hearted River” is symbolic of the industrial landscape and the plight of the racialized and white worker elided in Hemingway, but crucially important to the historical town of Seney and to the events of the summer of 1919 when Hemingway would have first visited it with his high school friends Al Walker and Jack Pentecost (Svoboda 38). Svoboda’s essay ends with the passage that I cite above. This passage suggests that the Michigan presented in “Big Two-Hearted River” is a deliberate misrecreation on the part of Hemingway. That is to say, key elements of the actual Michigan and its landscape are ignored while other elements are inserted—such as the hike north that takes place midway through part 1 of the story through a grove of old-growth pines that could not have existed. The area would have been barren, made so by logging activity that would have occurred several decades before Hemingway would have had an opportunity to see it (Svoboda 1996, 39). Also significant is Svoboda’s observation that the
Michigan we see is “parallel [to] Nick’s states of mind as he looks for control.” We are inside the psyche of both the protagonist and, by implication, Hemingway, the author. Certainly, as the excerpt suggests, more seems at stake than the deaths of insects, “hoppers,” and trout. However, Svoboda never ventures to articulate what that might be. One plausible answer lies in what Hemingway wishes to convey with his use of landscape and subsequently how he wishes to establish the relationship between himself and his audience.

As discussed above, Srychacz and Ellison argue that the audience for Hemingway fulfills the role of appraiser and judge. What the audience is judging is the state of the protagonist’s mind, his will as revealed through his actions. What these actions come to symbolize, as Ellison points out, is a ritual for the absolution of his guilt. This guilt is related to Hemingway’s inability to find a suitable identity amongst America’s racialized and industrialized others against which to posit a meaningful self. It is recognition, as Ellison says, that the democratic ideals for which he fights during World War I, are incapable of accommodating the humanity of America’s blacks or, it is safe to say, its growing industrial working class. This incapacity is extended into literary landscapes that only present an evacuated and diminished sense of labor and industry. The following excerpt from “Big Two-Hearted River Part I” is illustrative of Hemingway’s narrative focus that evinces this kind of evacuated and diminished industrial landscape: “The train went up the track out of sight, around one of the hills of burnt timber. . . . There was no town, nothing but the rails and the burned-over country” (163). In “Big Two-Hearted River Part I” Hemingway is most interested in “doing the country like Cézanne.” In terms of the theory of literary whiteness I articulate here, the burned-over country we see in this excerpt—and at various places later in the text—functions almost precisely the same way that the racialized characters Sam, Molo, and others function in the texts I discuss above. They create a dramatic contrast to what Hemingway wants to show the reader, a pristine idyllic Michigan landscape only fully realized in part 2 of the story, the country as Cézanne would have painted it, even if it is more than half created from his imagination. Indeed, the most dramatic difference between part 1 and part 2 of “Big Two-Hearted River” is the absence of the burned-over country in the latter and any evidence of the civilization or industry that pervade part 1 of the story.

The parallel between Nick’s states of mind and the landscape that Svoboda sees is created in part by the rhetorical positioning and treatment of the audience. The role of the audience and the creation of familiarity with
it in Hemingway is a point raised by Walter Ong in his essay “The Writer’s Audience Is Always a Fiction.” Ong, like Svoboda and Strychacz, highlights several important features of Hemingway’s writing in relation to his audience. Ong says:

The writer [Hemingway] needs only to point, for what he wants to tell you about is not the scene at all but his feelings. These, too, he treats as something you really had somehow shared, though you might not have been quite aware of it at the time. He can tell you what was going on inside him and count on your sympathy, for you were there. You know. The reader here has a well-marked role assigned him. He is a companion-in-arms, somewhat later become confidant. It is a flattering role. Hemingway readers are encouraged to cultivate high self-esteem. (13)

Here Ong has identified several important features of Hemingway’s rhetorical style, including the intimacy with which he treats his audience, the implicit familiarity and trust conveyed. An example of this can be illustrated in the passage cited above from “Big Two-Hearted River Part I.” As we read the opening line, “The train went up the track out of sight,” we are tempted to ask, what train? Indeed, what tracks? As we read on, we find more information, but no explanation: “There was no town, nothing but the rails and the burned-over country” (163). While we may understand that the rails must be “the tracks,” there is no indication what these tracks signify, and how they are related to the town, which we similarly have little information about. This is a rhetorical strategy Ong associates with Hemingway and that he finds pervasive in A Farewell to Arms. As my example illustrates, no explanation is given concerning the significance of the burned-over country or the tracks, or why the town—that we later learn is Seney—should be deserted. All we learn is that as Nick moves away from Seney and the evacuated industrialized civilization it represents he becomes more contented and progressively happier. As the text explicitly says, “Nick felt happy. He felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs. It was all back of him” (Hemingway 1997, 164).

When Nick sees the burned-over country, he is restless—only stopping to observe the trout in the stream near the town, but not long enough to fish for them. This is significant as he is ostensibly in the country to fish for trout. His rejection of the trout near the burned-over country suggests that his fishing for trout must be done within a particular context, away from any semblance of industry. Here Hemingway’s rhetoric suggests an evacu-
ated industrial landscape to be disregarded. Indeed, Nick does not stop moving toward the pristine idyllic country presented most fully in “Big Two-Hearted River Part II,” and away from the burned-over landscape pervasive in part 1.

As he moves toward this idyllic open country, Nick encounters grasshoppers blackened by the fire that evidently destroyed the town. These blackened grasshoppers appear to be symbolic of a rejected identity. The text reads:

Nick had wondered about them [the blackened grasshoppers] as he walked, without really thinking about them. Now, as he watched the black hopper that was nibbling at the wool of his sock with his four-way lip, he realized that they had all turned black from living in the burned-over land. He realized that the fire must have come the year before, but the grasshoppers were all black now. He wondered how long they would stay that way.

Carefully he reached his hand down and took hold of the hopper by the wings. He turned him up, all his legs walking in the air, and looked at his jointed belly. Yes, it was black too, iridescent where the back and head were dusty.

“Go on, hopper,” Nick said, speaking out loud for the first time.

“Fly away somewhere.”

The blackened grasshoppers that we come to see through Nick’s eyes because of the familiarity established by Hemingway’s rhetorical style are first seen by Nick but not contemplated by him. They are blackened because of the place they occupy, the charred landscape of the Seney region. As noted earlier, Hemingway’s first trip to Seney was in the summer of 1919 with his high school friends Al Walker and Jack Pentecost. That summer marked a critical juncture in the history of labor and capital relations in the United States. It was punctuated by riots and civil unrest that affected the rapidly industrializing urban centers of the country like Chicago and its suburbs, including Oak Park where Hemingway grew up. While there is almost no mention of political activity or discussion of the social politics of the United States in the Hemingway biographies by Baker, Meyers, Reynolds, or Griffin (Cooper 1992, 1), it is unlikely that such social unrest would have escaped Hemingway’s notice. Like the blackened hopper that nibbles at Nick’s sock, the plight of blacks and the working class generally is noticed but ignored in Hemingway’s literary and creative imagination. This is consistent with our protagonist noticing
that the hopper is blackened all over and disregarding it, though he needs grasshoppers for bait. He proceeds to collect a bottle full of hoppers that are not blackened, shortly after this scene. It is in reference to the disregarded and blackened hopper that Nick speaks the first words in the short story saying, “Go on hopper . . . fly away somewhere.” Nick “tossed the grasshopper into the air and watched him sail away to a charcoal stump across the road” (165). The grasshopper, by crossing the road and landing on a charred stump which itself is blackened, is symbolically placed outside of the world that Nick is moving toward, the unspoiled, idyllic, natural world. Indeed, Nick’s objective is to leave the burned town behind him, to leave everything behind him, “the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs” (164).

“The End of Something”

Our reading of the first set of stories, particularly “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” and “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” and our brief reading of _The Sun Also Rises_, teaches us that the ideal audience for Hemingway is not female or black, but is instead like himself, white, male and upper-middle-class, someone for whom these images of “the country” would not have been alien or threatening but familiar and welcoming.

In the short story “The End of Something,” I am most interested in the opening paragraph, which, like “Big Two-Hearted River Part I,” presents an evacuated industrial landscape that is crafted by Hemingway to parallel the internal conditions of the protagonist’s—Nick’s—mind:

In the old days Hortons Bay was a lumbering town. No one who lived in it was out of sound of the big saws in the mill by the lake. Then one year there was no more logs to make lumber. The lumber schooners came into the bay and were loaded with the cut of the mill that stood stacked in the yard. All the piles of lumber were carried away. The big mill building had all its machinery that was removable taken out and hoisted on board one of the schooners by the men who had worked in the mill . . . it moved out into the open lake, carrying with it everything that had made the mill a mill and Hortons Bay a town. (79)

While critics agree that the landscape mirrors Nick’s feelings about his deteriorating relationship with Marjorie, his soon to be ex-girlfriend—whose comment on the ruins, “it look like a castle” (79), suggests she has
no idea how Nick feels about the state of their relationship—it is important to understand that he does so through appropriating the symbols and images of labor that enter the landscape, obliterating the evidence of class and turning them into instrumental elements of the narrative.

This view of the landscape is continued in the third paragraph of the opening: “Ten years later there was nothing of the mill left except the broken white limestone of its foundations showing through the swampy second growth as Nick and Marjorie rowed along the shore” (79). As well as reiterating the theme of an evacuated landscape, this paragraph introduces the reader to Nick and Marjorie. They row out to Hortons Bay and it is here that Nick ends their relationship. However, “the end of something”—their relationship—is also the end of Hortons Bay, the industrial town. This is so because the reader is encouraged to see their romantic relationship in terms of the ruins of the town. In the description above, we are left to imagine what the excitement of industry, the making and production of lumber, and the energy of humanity hustling and bustling about must have been like. We do not see the production so much as we hear and imagine it, as Hemingway says “no one lived in [Hortons Bay] was outside of the sounds of the big saws in the mill by the lake.” Through this suggestion we are left to imagine and align the fate of Hortons Bay with the fate of Nick and Marjorie’s relationship, and this is confirmed for the reader when Nick ends the relationship by saying, “It isn’t fun anymore. Not any of it.”

She didn’t say anything. He went on. “I feel as though everything was gone to hell inside of me. I don’t know, Marge. I don’t know what to say.”

He looked on at her back.

“Isn’t love any fun?” Marge said.

“No,” Nick said. Marge stood up. Nick sat there his head in his hands.

“I’m going to take the boat,” Marjorie called to him. “You can walk back around the point.” (81)

Like the contents and the machinery of the town, Marjorie departs on the lake, further suggestive of the parallel between the fate of the town and that of their romantic relationship. This rhetorical strategy is consistent with doing the country like Cézanne in that it is not so much what Hemingway says as it is what is hinted at, left at the margins of his narrative and left to the reader’s imagination, that completes the story. In this
construction the hustle and bustle of industry and production are as mysterious and complex as the interpersonal relationship that is at the center of the story.

Significantly, there is no mention whatsoever of the human beings—the workers themselves—who would have operated the machinery and run the production lines. They are invisible in that their labor is disembodied sound, and absent in that we never actually see them. This throws rhetorical and narrative definition inward onto the subjective relationship between Nick and Marjorie, adding definition and meaning to its emptiness. Through these images Hemingway creates a landscape that would be familiar to any laborer seeking work in the Midwest in the mid-1920s and early 1930s when these short stories were published. However, the plight of the laborer is subordinated to Nick’s innermost feelings about Marjorie such that the scene, rather than reflecting an objective social reality, reflects instead Nick’s personal feelings. This is underscored, as illustrated above, by Marjorie’s complete misreading of their relationship, indicated by the fact that she sees the ruins as a castle. Nick does not respond to her comment. Literary technique, industry, labor, and landscape are united in Nick’s subjective consciousness of his subjective feelings. We come to understand that all that remains of the relationship is parallel to what remains of Hortons Bay seen through our narrator’s eyes, the broken white limestone of its foundations showing through the swampy second growth.

In many ways it is appropriate that I should end this discussion of Hemingway’s short stories with “The End of Something.” Not only is the title fitting, but the text itself illustrates a fitting story to juxtapose with “The Battler” with which I began this set of stories. “The Battler” is similar to “The End of Something” and markedly different from it. The landscape in both is used by Hemingway to mirror the inner workings of the protagonist’s mind. In both, Nick is alone with a person who is either racialized differently from him, as in “The Battler,” or gendered differently, as in “The End of Something.” As such, they each are used to circumscribe and adorn the white masculine identity of the protagonist. Their characters help to provide the boundaries of whiteness upon Hemingway’s canvas.

“The Battler” and “The End of Something” are also very different. Whereas fear and disorientation seem to govern Nick’s actions in “The Battler,” when he confronts the image of misshapen whiteness in Ad Francis and the racialized Other in Bugs, precisely the opposite is true when he is confronted with white femininity in the form of Marjorie. His
diametrically opposed response to Bugs and Marjorie gives us insight into other aspects of American culture during early modernism with respect to race, gender, and sexuality, and also raises questions about other aspects of Hemingway’s fiction along these specific lines. However, that discussion—if only marginally so—falls outside the bounds of this study.

Note

1. Morrison’s use of the word “smash” is perhaps a little misleading as the text actually says “taps.” The detail is small but important since the care and attention Bugs shows Ad Francis is better conveyed with Hemingway’s word, and indeed “taps” does seem to illustrate Morrison’s point all the more convincingly.

Works Cited


