

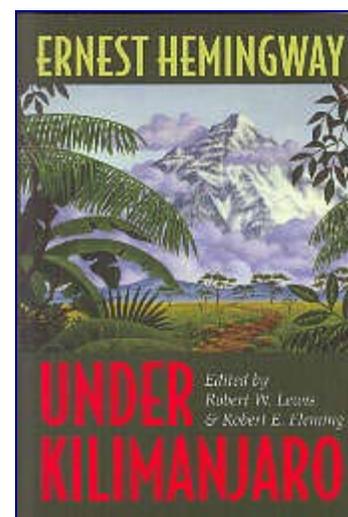
A READER'S JOURNAL

Under Kilimanjaro

by
Ernest Hemingway

ARJ2 Chapter: Reading for Enjoyment
Published by Kent State University Press/OH in
2005

A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2012



This is the most complete edition of
Hemingway's "The African Book" edited with a

fine hand by Robert W. Lewis and Robert E. Fleming. He finished this book in 1956 and stored the 843 page manuscript in a trunk where it remained until some excerpts were edited and run in *Sports Illustrated* in 1972, 73. Then an abridged version was published by Patrick Hemingway as *True at First Light* in 1999. What attracted me to this book was that Ernest himself was the character in the book who was living with his wife Mary under the shadow of Kilimanjaro in a permanent camp at the time. If you're ready for Hemingway writing about Hemingway, open the back flap of the tent allowing the snowy breezes flowing down the great mountain to cool you as you crack open this book, entering the world of everyday African life, sipping a Tusker beer newly pulled from the cooling canvas bag. Stretch your legs, for you'll soon be crouching and stalking a fat oryx or prized elan for the evening's dinner table, and after the long day's hunting you'll be lying in the cot in your tent listening to the night sounds of the raucous hyena or the cough of the female lion in the brush, deciphering from the sounds where they are and what they are about.

This book cannot be read without referring to the glossary of characters' names (each person has many names) and the Swahili and other foreign words which are sprinkled throughout the text liberally, often without being translated more than once. It is a small price to pay to enjoy the flavor of Hemingway's life in East Africa.

Hemingway was assigned the title of Honorary Game Warden by the Kenya Game Department, which required him or allowed him to dispose of various otherwise protected species (Royal Game) which were causing problems. He also provided medications and applied first aid to natives who were sick or injured. His camp was run by Keiti with the help of several other natives such as Charo, Mary's gunbearer, and Ngui, his gunbearer. Mary was known as Miss Mary, Memsahib, or Kittner, and Ernest as Pop, Papa, Big Kitten, and General. Some natives called him Bwana, but he discouraged that usage.

As the story opens, his white hunter friend is telling Papa how to run the camp he would be in complete control over, and Papa had said that he was afraid he'd "make a fool of himself with elephants".

[page 4] "Know everybody knows more than you do but you have to make the decisions and make them stick. Leave the camp and all that to Keiti. Be as good as you can."

There are people who love command and in their eagerness to assume it they are impatient at the formalities of taking over from someone else. I love command since it is

the ideal welding of freedom and slavery. You can be happy with your freedom and when it becomes too dangerous you take refuge in your duty. For several years I had exercised no command except over myself and I was bored with this since I knew myself and my defects and strengths too well and they permitted me little freedom and much duty.

Papa's tug of war between freedom and duty plays out through the pages of this book, as he is free to hunt most any animal he decides is a problem or whose meat is needed for the survival of his camp and his duty is a melding of Kenyan game rules and the mores of the natives who live in his area. Whenever he goes on a hunt, he ensures whenever possible that someone is along who can halal the kill according to Moslem law so the Muhammadans will be able to eat the meat. If possible he would hold off butchering until arriving back at camp so the locals could enjoy the delicacies of tripe which would else have to be discarded during butchering at the hunt site.

Another joy of this book is his writing about the people whom he knew, such Marlene Dietrich, F. Scott Fitzgerald, etal. Here's an example where he gives his opinion of writers who wrote about him.

[page 4] Lately I had read with distaste various books written about myself by people who knew all about my inner life, aims, and motives. Reading them was like reading an account of a battle where you had fought written by someone who had not only not been present but, in some cases, had not even been born when the battle had taken place. All these people who wrote of my life both inner and outer wrote with an absolute assurance that I had never felt.

To be childish is to do things badly the way a child would, but to be childlike is to do things well the way a child would. This was a distinction which I learned from my studies of Gestalt therapy as its master exponent, Fritz Perls, was always childlike but seldom childish. People in Gestalt groups were already too grown up and needed to be grown down, to regain the childlike attitude of wonder and excitement which has long been drained from them by the blood-suckers of the workaday world. Africa provided a chance for those who survived its rigors to live as children again, with no one admonishing them to "grow up". He shares a sample conversation with Mary about the subject, then reflects on how Africa admires people who remain childlike. It is still one of the things which so-called developed countries and peoples could learn from Africa.

[page 23, 24] "Don't be childish, darling."

"I hope the Christ I am. Don't be childish yourself." It is possible to be grateful that no one that you would willingly associate with would say, "Be mature. Be well balanced, be well adjusted."

Africa, being as old as it is, makes all people except the professional invaders and spoilers into children. No one says to anyone in Africa, "Why don't you grow up?" All men and animals acquire a year more of age each year and some acquire a year more of knowledge. The animals that die the soonest learn the fastest. A young gazelle is mature, well balanced, and well adjusted at the age of two years. He is well balanced and well adjusted at the age of four weeks. Men know that they are children in relation to the country and as in armies seniority and senility ride close together. But to have the heart of a child is not a disgrace. It is an honor. A man must comport himself as a man. He must fight always preferably and soundly with the odds in his favor but on necessity against any sort of odds and with no thought of the outcome. He should follow his tribal laws and customs insofar as he can and accept the tribal discipline when he cannot. But it is never a reproach that he has kept a child's heart, a child's honesty, and a child's freshness and nobility. The elders, who govern, are presumably those that govern in cold blood and legal procedure because they no longer have the hot blood that would sway a warrior's thinking. They are respected, but not loved, unless they can also think as a child, in his nobility, or as a young warrior would think in his quick hate, his pride, and

his blindness.

This childlike nature is shown in Hemingway's conversation with his native fiancée, Debba, having as one of the freedoms of his command the acquisition of more than one wife, a process made easier because the natives think his first wife Pauline is still alive since he can't bear to tell them she died and they think that Marlene who owns a big farm called Las Vegas is also his wife. He keeps telling Debba that he will come to her soon, and she replies finally, "I hate soon. You and soon are lying brothers."

If it seems strange to Western ears that Debba would personify "soon," listen how Ngui personified Hemingway's pistol (1) and get a flavor of how Swahili mixed into the daily conversations between the men. Hemingway saw himself as a brother of his men, not a gentlemen or sir, so he didn't like them to call him Bwana, but it slipped through at times.

[page 51] Everyone loved the pistol because it could hit guinea fowl, lesser bustard, jackals, which carried rabies, and it could kill hyenas. Ngui and Mthuka loved it because it would make little sharp barks like a dog yapping and puffs of dust would appear ahead of the squat-running hyena then there would be the plunk, plunk, plunk, and the hyena would slow his gallop and start to circle. Ngui would hand me a full clip he had taken from my pocket and I would shove it in and then there would be another dust puff, then a plunk, plunk, and the hyena would roll over with his legs in the air.

"Do you want to go over and halal?" I would ask Charo.

"Hapana, Bwana." He would grin his old man's grin and Ngui would smile his love smile for pistol. It was never "the pistol." It was "pistol" as though pistol were a man or an animal or death or beer or supper. Pistol was our prodigy and our unbelievable champion. But what they loved best was to see pistol shoot fast.

"Shoot him fast," Ngui urged. "We have mingi, many, mingi cartridges."

"You shoot him fast."

"No, you. Shoot him fast for practice."

Then I would shoot him so fast at the dead hyena that the little barks chopped up almost into a blur.

"Seven," Ngui would say. "Three misses. Two chini, one juu."

"Pistol mzuri," Mthuka would say.

"Mzuri sana, Bwana," Charo said. "Mzuri sana."

This was a wide open country as this next passage about spotting poachers reveals.

[page 76] I remembered about the arrow shafts and about how one of G.C.'s jobs as Game Ranger was to catch the Wakamba that poached south of the railway into the Game Reserve. I remembered I how he said you spotted them. You glassed the country from the top of a high hill and you knew a poaching band from the dark shine of the red dried meat in the sun.

Willie was a pilot who made deliveries, took Mary to Nairobi, etc. and was always a welcome sight to Papa and Miss Mary. Here is a boxing metaphor Hemingway uses to great effect in describing Willie's voice.

[page 86] He spoke in a sort of swinging lilting voice that moved with the rhythm that a great boxer has when he is floating in and out with perfect, soft, unwasting movements. His voice had the sweetness that was true but I knew it could say the most deadly things without a changing of tone.

Often as my wife is asleep, I lie in bed and listen to the sounds of the house, thinking is that the sound of the air conditioning unit for the living room, is that the sound of a water hose left on watering the flower bed, is that the sound of her breathing peacefully, and I won't go to sleep until all the sounds are normal. For Papa in Africa, he read the sounds of the night, is that the lion Mary wants to kill over by the grassy

landing strip, are the birds quiet or making noises showing that there are no humans about in the night, and so on.

[page 97] Then she was really asleep and breathing softly and I bent my pillow over to make it hard and double so I could have a better view out of the open door of the tent. The night noises all were normal and I knew there were no people about. After a while Mary would need more room to sleep truly comfortably and would get up without waking and go over to her own cot where the bed was turned down and ready under the mosquito netting and when I knew that she was sleeping well I would go out with a sweater and mosquito boots and a heavy dressing gown and build up the fire and sit by fire and stay awake.

One might wonder if Hemingway was still shooting animals for sport and trophies, but he clearly had outgrown that phase of his hunting life. As Game Warden he was expected to eliminate any predatory animals and he took this assignment seriously. Even the large male lion which Miss Mary was to seek to kill over several months was a known predator. As to the question if it was sporting to kill a lion with a huge rifle, you need only know that a lion can cover a football field in under 3 seconds and be in the air lunging towards you — if the first shot doesn't kill or seriously wound the lion, you may not get another shot before he is on top of you. Solitary lion hunters have no margin for error. Lion tenderloins may be delicious, but you shop for them at a Supermarket where it is eat or be eaten.

[page 116, 117] The time of shooting beasts for trophies was long past with me. I still loved to shoot and to kill cleanly. But I was shooting for the meat we needed to eat and to back up Miss Mary and against Beasts that had been outlawed for cause and for what is known as control of marauding animals, predators, and vermin. I had shot one impala for a trophy and an oryx for meat at Magadi which turned out to have fine enough horns to make it a trophy and a single buffalo in an emergency which served for meat at Magadi when we were very short and which had a pair of horns worth keeping to recall the manner of the small emergency Mary and I had shared. I remembered it now with happiness and I knew I would always remember it with happiness. It was one of those small things that you can go to sleep with, that you can wake with happy in the night and that you could recall if necessary if you were ever tortured.

What is Miss Mary like? This excerpt from a conversation with her husband is enlightening, revealing her determination, her possessiveness, and her pride in her hunting skill. It begins with her asking him, "Should I make the speech about when I kill the woman who steals your affections?" and Ernest says, "Okay, start it."

[page 126, 127] "Aha," Miss Mary said. "So you think you can make my husband a better wife than I can. Aha. So you think you are ideally and perfectly suited to one another and that you will be better for him than I am. Aha. So you think that you and he would lead a perfect existence together and at last he would have the love of a woman who understands communism, psychoanalysis, and the true meaning of the word love? What do you know about love, you bedraggled hag? What do you know about my husband and the things we have shared and have in common?"

"Hear. Hear."

"Let me go on. Listen, you bedraggled specimen, thin where you should be robust, bursting with fat where you should show some signs of race and breeding. Listen, you woman. I have killed an innocent buck deer at a distance of 340 estimated yards and have eaten him with no remorse. I have shot the kongoni and the wildebeest which you resemble. I have shot and killed a great and beautiful oryx and that is more beautiful than any woman and has horns more decorative than any man. I have killed more things than you have made passes at and I tell you you will cease and desist in your mealy-mouthed mouthings to my husband and leave this country or I will kill you dead."

Then she adds that the speech is only for a white woman who would marry him, not his native fiancée who only wants to be a supplementary wife. "That is an honorable position," she says. By Hemingway's identification with the local Wakamba, he was entitled to have more than one wife, but any other wives according to Mary would have been natives. He was careful not to get into trouble with anyone, especially Mary.

[page 130] I had been told by G.C. to use my common sense, if any, and that only shits got in trouble. Since I knew that I could qualify for that class at times I tried to use my common sense as carefully as possible and avoid shit-hood so far as I could. For a long time I had identified myself with the Wakamba and now had passed over the last important barrier so that the identification was complete. There is no other way of making this identification. Any alliance between tribes is only made valid in one way.

No one would ever claim that listening to Frank Sinatra or Tony Bennett singing on the radio or through an earphone was as good as hearing them live and in person, a few steps away. The same is true for a lion's roar, as Hemingway attests below. I have heard from friends who grew up near Audubon Zoo in New Orleans that one of the treats at night as they were in bed going to sleep was hearing the lions roaring from the zoo, safely behind their enclosures, but imagine the feeling when the lion is out roaming nearby and only a canvas tent cover stands between you and the lion. Hemingway could lie in bed and follow the progress of the lion through its prowling and hunting in the night. Truly the lion was the King of the Night — when he spoke, everyone listened.

[page 134] That night when we had gone to our own beds but were not yet asleep we heard the lion roar. He was north of the camp and the roar came low and mounting in heaviness and then ended in a sigh.

"I'm coming in with you," Mary said.

We lay close together in the dark under the mosquito bar, my arm around her, and listened to him roar again.

"There's no mistaking when it's him," Mary said. "I'm glad we're in bed together when we hear him."

He was moving to the north and west, grunting deeply and then roaring.

"Is he calling up the lionesses or is he angry? What is he really doing?"

"I don't know, honey. I think he's angry because it's wet."

"But he roared too when it was dry and we tracked him in the dust."

"I was just joking, honey. I only hear him roar. I can see him when he sets himself and tomorrow you'll see where he tears the ground up."

"He's too great to joke about."

"I have to joke about him if I'm going to back you up. You wouldn't want me to start worrying about him, would you?"

"Listen to him," Mary said.

We lay together and listened to him. You cannot describe a wild lion's roar. You can only say that you listened and the lion roared. It is not at all like the noise the lion makes at the start of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer pictures. When you hear it you first feel it in your scrotum and it runs all the way up through your body.

"He makes me feel hollow inside," Mary said. "He really is the king of the night."

We listened and he roared again still moving to the northwest. This time the roar ended with a cough.

"Just hope he kills," I said to Mary. "Don't think about him too much and sleep well."

One day a Wakamba man had cooked for the Governor General who wanted his usual British fare, which cook provided, but which the cook regarded "amiably as an eccentric way of spoiling good food." The cook also had "learned Mohammedanism just as he would learn a new dish." He also enjoyed producing Government House dishes on safari, he loved jokes and secrets and new dishes. Here was a cook after my

own heart. (Page 168)

The Game Warden of the district in which the Hemingway camp was located was called G. C., a shorthand name for Gin Crazy. In this next passage we learn about the problems in commanding irregular troops if you are British. I make that qualification because Americans in their history have won major battles with irregular troops, from the Minutemen of 1776 to Jean Lafitte's men in the Battle of New Orleans, both of which did quite well against the British's very proper "regulars".

[page 169] By the time I met him he had a long and very difficult and unrewarding war behind him plus the abandonment of a British Protectorate where he had made the start of a fine career. He had commanded irregular troops which is, if you are honest, the least rewarding way there is to make a war. If an action is fought perfectly so that you have almost no casualties and inflict large losses on the enemy it is regarded at headquarters as an unjustified and reprehensible massacre. If you are forced to fight under unfavorable conditions and at too great odds and win but have a large butcher bill the comment is, "He gets too many men killed." There is no way for an honest man commanding irregulars to get into anything but trouble. There is some doubt as to whether any truly honest and talented soldier can ever hope for anything except to be destroyed.

Not sure I could recommend the following practice suggested by Hemingway for general use in America today, but in certain recalcitrant cases, it might prove useful.

[page 169] Over the spaghetti and the wine he told us of how he had been reproved by some newly arrived, bespectacled young bureau master for, having come in from a patrol involving shooting with human beings, using a bad word which might be overheard by this young man's wife. I had seen the wife and felt that a few sound words of the type G.C. had uttered, if put in practice by her husband, might have done the marriage no end of good.

No better place to sample the droll humor which passed for conversation between Papa and G. C. than this short snippet which they vamped as they tried to figure out how they might raise Miss Mary above the height of the grass during her upcoming lion hunt along the base of the bluish Chyulus hills.

[page185] "We could hunt Miss Mary on stilts," I said. "Then she could see him in the tall grass."

"There's nothing in the Game Laws against it."

"Or Charo could carry a stepladder such as they have in libraries for the higher stacks."

"That's brilliant," G.C. said. "We'd pad the rungs and she could take a rest with the rifle on the rung above where she stood."

"You don't think it would be too immobile?"

"It'd be up to Charo to make it mobile."

"It would be a beautiful sight," I said. "We could mount an electric fan on it."

"We could build it in the form of an electric fan," G.C. said happily. "But that would probably be considered a vehicle and illegal."

"If we rolled it forward and had Miss Mary keep climbing in it like a squirrel would it be illegal?"

"Anything that rolls is a vehicle," G.C. said judicially.

"I roll slightly when I walk."

"Then you're a vehicle. I'll run you and you'll get six months and be shipped out of the Colony."

"We have to be careful, G.C."

"Care and moderation have been our watchwords, haven't they?"

"Any more in that bottle?"

"We can share the dregs."

"A pair of dreg sharers out in the blue."

"The Chulis are blue."

They were very blue and very beautiful.

"Chyulus," G.C. corrected. "Tell me what is The Wild Blue Yonder that your air force has a song about?"

"It is a Challenge To Man."

"I know a beautiful airline stewardess that is a Challenge To Man."

"She's probably the one they're talking about in the song."

If I could start a sentence in Africa, it would not be any good by the rule laid down by Hemingway himself. Someday. If I go to Africa someday, I will certainly try starting a sentence with "if" and see if it turns out good. Papa was after a leopard and had moved his camp before he got the leopard, all of which led him to write this "if" sentence: "If I could have stayed there one more day I am quite sure I would have killed him. But no sentence that starts with *if* is any good in Africa and most sentences start that way." (Pages 206, 207) My wife and I are currently on a cruise ship in a trans-Atlantic crossing. Each day the view is magnificently identical to the previous one: deep blue water, sunshine and a few clouds. Except for a slight coolness as we head north toward Gilbralta, the days run into each other, just as they apparently do in Africa.

[page 238] "The days run into each other and into each other and into each other," Miss Mary said. "That's in my poem about Africa."

Hemingway never studied Swahili, but picked up enough words to construct phrases like "wmanake piga simba mzuri sana" which according to the Swahili dictionary in the back of the book means, "young men shoot lion very good." Miss Mary berates her husband at times for not formally studying Swahili, but instead talking in some mishmash of Swahili, Spanish, Italian, and English that she calls "Unknown Tongue".

[page 240] "You never make a mistake," Miss Mary said. "We all know that. And you'd be much better off if you studied your Swahili instead of trying to speak all the time in Unknown Tongue and reading nothing but French books. We all know you read French. Was it necessary to come all the way to Africa to read French?"

The above two passages inspired me to write this poem:

Unknown Tongue

One day on an Unknown Street
I began babbling in an Unknown Tongue,
Meaning everything to me,
Rolling off inexplicable & inexplicably
from my fully Known Tongue.

If I had known my tongue
to be so talented
I would have let it solo more often on its own,
Speaking so low no one else could hear it,
As each new sound ran into each other
and into each other
and into each other
As the days do down in Africa.

~~~~~

By now you will have noticed that Hemingway writes in a lyrical fashion and therefore you would not be surprised that I found a poem hidden in one of his paragraphs. First as it appeared in the text shortly after the above passages and part of the continuing conversation between Miss Mary and Papa. and then as I poemized it:

[page 241] "No," I said. "I'm not hopeless because I still have hope. The day I haven't you'll know it bloody quick." (2)

"What do you have hope about? Mental slovenliness? Taking other people's book? Lying about a lion?"

"That's sort of alliterative. Just say lying.' Now I lie me down to sleep. Conjugate the verb lie and who with and how lovely it can be. Conjugate me every morning and every night and fire, no sleet, no candlelight and the mountain cold and close when you're asleep and the dark belts of trees are not yews but the snow's still snow. Conjugate me once the snow, and why the mountain comes closer and goes farther away. Conjugate me conjugal love. What kind of mealies did you bring?"

And below you can read the found poem which I fashioned from Hemingway's words.

### Lying About a Lion

Now I lie me down to sleep.

Conjugate the verb lie  
and who with  
and how lovely it can be.

Conjugate me every morning  
and every night

And fire, no sleet, no candlelight  
And the mountain cold and close  
when you're asleep  
And the dark belts of trees are not yews  
but the snow is still snow.

Conjugate me once the snow,  
and why the mountain comes closer  
and goes farther away.

Conjugate me  
Conjugal love.

We have watched and read as Papa conjugated himself and his conjugal love on the foothills of the snowcapped Kilimanjara. We have heard him talk about lion-hunting and line-writing and now he speaks to us about something every writer thinks about, the young writer thinks about stealing lines from a Hemingway perhaps, the older writer thinks about those who steal lines from his writing, a process easier to accomplish in this day of universal access to everyone's writing over the Internet. Here's how Hemingway writes about adulterated lion fat and line-stealing.

[page 356] I had seen the bulge of the Grand MacNish bottle containing the adulterated lion fat wrapped in the Informer's(3) paisley shawl but that meant nothing. We had better lion fat than that and would have better if we wished and there is no minor

**satisfaction comparable to have anyone, from a writer on up, and up is a long way, steal from you and think that they have not been detected. With writers you must never let them know since it might break their hearts if they had them and some have them and who should judge another man's cardiac performance unless you are in competition?**

After reading this book during three weeks of glorious Spring weather outdoors in the shade from our New Orleans pergola and the last week on a cruise to the strait between Europe and Africa, it was as though I had been in Papa's camp in Eastern Africa at the base of mighty Kibo, hearing the lions roar and cough on the hunt at night, feeling the cool breezes flowing through the tent at night, ever so gently brightening the glowing embers of the fire as they speeded up otherwise imperceptibly, crouching down as we approached the great black-maned lion who sat imperiously posed on a large rock as if daring us to shoot him, acting as wing man to head off the huge lion should he bolt for the swampy area, helping load up the lion into vehicle, buying the Tusker beer and the Coca-Colas for the huge ngoma (party) to celebrate Miss Mary's kill, basically living inside of Hemingway, not one of his fictional characters, but himself, the himself he made up every day as he learned the mores of natives and the rules of the Kenyan Game Preserve in which he lived. After finishing this last published book of Hemingway's which laid in musty storage so long before being resurrected, we can only say, The King of Africa is dead. Long live the King! And pause at the last to reflect on the Masai proverb, "It is always very quiet when a great bull dies." (4)

~^~

----- *Footnotes* -----

**Footnote 1.** Swahili translations: *mzuri* is good, *sana* is very, *chini* is down, *juu* is above, *hapana* is no, *bwana* is gentleman, *mingi* is many.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

~~~~~  
Footnote 2. Near the end of his life, Hemingway was forced by Mary to undergo a series of electroconvulsive shock treatments and after the second or third time, he did lose hope and blew his brains out, giving her exactly the sign he warned her about years earlier as he was writing this passage in Africa.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 2.](#)

~~~~~  
**Footnote 3.** Papa's nickname for the manipulative Masai police agent who brought him news almost daily, some of it true.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 3.](#)

~~~~~  
Footnote 4. Appears on page 246.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 4.](#)

