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***NARCISSISTIC SUICIDE: ERNEST HEMINGWAY  
BETWEEN EXISTENTIAL NARRATIVE AND THE  
(META)FEMININE PARADOX***

**Keywords:** *birth(days); death; dying; (re)birth; nada; leopard*

**Abstract:** *An emblematic prose master of The Lost Generation, Ernest Hemingway owes quite a lot to his classic 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors: to Mark Twain as well as to Walt Whitman; to Stephen Crane the first American naturalist fiction writer, but likewise to Stephen Crane the fine poet, so accurately anticipating modern metaphor. Yet my concern here focuses on the particular lyrical influence upon Hemingway's style and vision of the least expected poet, herself a champion of minimalism.*

*For some years now Hemingway's works and personality have been privileged objects of a certain interest revival, on the part of filmmakers, literary critics, scholars and students alike, who have once again fallen under his spell. Here I have preferred a return to Hemingway's African safari setting and also some hints at his Spanish setting – in a couple of short stories which I hope to defamiliarize.*

*Although (the title of) my paper here may echo the Canadian literary theorist Linda Hutcheon's now canonic book about "narcissistic narrative" and "the metafictional paradox" (as postmodern rather than modern prose characteristics) – this essay actually represents a re-reading in a refreshing poetic key of Hemingway's best-known (and most obviously self-reflexive) short-stories. Moreover, by the '(meta)feminine paradox' I mean literature/poetry of women about/beyond femininity – and particularly Emily Dickinson's verse.*

*Because, despite his self-(un)masking cynicism, Hemingway's writings do evince deep poetic qualities, just waiting to be re(dis)covered.*

Motto:

Every year without knowing it I have passed the day  
When the last fires will wave to me  
And the silence will set out  
Tireless traveller  
Like the beam of a lightless star . . .

W. S. Merwin, "For the Anniversary of My Death"

If the poet is right, the cyclic mystery of one's (natural) death-day, opposing the certainty of one's birthday, would continue to tease one, year after year.

Yet among the best representative writers of the past 20<sup>th</sup> century there seems to be a grand poets' souls' 'select society' – consisting of those who deliberately turned their last day of life into the symmetrical certainty to their (natural) birthday. And in this exquisite group of 20<sup>th</sup> century canonical writers,

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Ernest Hemingway appears as an exception confirming a rather feminine propensity. In 1941 it was Virginia Woolf. In 1963 it was Sylvia Plath. But between the two formidable ladies, in 1961 it was Ernest Hemingway.

In a cynical 20<sup>th</sup> century, ready (at least theoretically) to accept euthanasia as “a valediction forbidding mourning” – suicide was still ill-reputed. Despite the honestly assumed (and predominantly French) cast of mind, so typical for the writings of Albert Camus or Emil Cioran, demonstrating the pointlessness of all human existence – *la joie du vivre* still represented a moral duty in point of (American) self-reliance. The “literary *histrion*” (as championed in Poe’s romantic “Philosophy of Composition”) still had to beware the fluid frontier between fact and fiction – all the more so since both fact and fiction were matters of life and death.

Returning every academic year to Hemingway’s most frequently anthologized short-stories: “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” and “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” – I have detected in them certain poetic echoes upon which I should like to focus here and now. Surprisingly enough, at least one of Hemingway’s major metaphorical sources of inspiration lies in the verse of a woman: Emily Dickinson.

Looking for a motto anticipating Hemingway’s entire work in tune with his own pessimistic paradox *Winner Take Nothing*, I can find no better anticipation than Dickinson’s poem 67 – “Success is counted sweetest.”<sup>1</sup>

Success is counted sweetest  
By those who ne’er succeed.  
To comprehend a nectar  
Requires sorest need. (Dickinson 35)

Dickinson’s poem 690 – “Victory comes late” would do, likewise, foreshadowing Hemingway’s prevailing nihilistic view:

Victory comes late –  
And is held low to freezing lips –  
Too rapt with frost  
To take it –  
How sweet it would have tasted –  
Just a Drop –  
Was God so economical? (340)

Poem 754 – “My Life Had Stood – A Loaded Gun” and poem 492 – “Civilization – spurns – the Leopard!” reverberate in the cryptic sense and structure of the two short stories mentioned above. Even stylistically, by his choice of extreme conciseness and shocking understatement, Ernest Hemingway, the indefatigable (compulsive?) traveler across Africa and Europe, in times of war and peace, proves himself to be a virtuoso disciple of Emily Dickinson, “the recluse of Amherst.”

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper Emily Dickinson’s poems will be referred to according to Thomas H. Johnson’s numeration in the first edition of *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1955), which he edited.

His reputation though has recently suffered from the harsh (feminine) criticism involved in such portraits of him as ‘Hemingway the racist’ in Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993), and as ‘Hemingway the sexist’ in Therese Anne Fowler’s *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013). I hope to highlight here the paradox of Hemingway’s survival as an essential 20<sup>th</sup> century writer of world literature – despite (or perhaps in virtue of) all these fascinating experiments in creative misprision of his dazzling yet complex personality.

Writing a message – and especially the writing of a literary message – has remained the classic gesture of defying death itself. There is hope and despair in it. Hope is the illusion that the message may eventually find a responsive reader. Despair is the lucidity that eventually one dies. Therefore, a poet’s suicide remains the most paradoxical, self-contradictory, narcissistic gesture. Yet perhaps also the most emphatic confirmation of the written message.

The affinity between Emily Dickinson and Ernest Hemingway goes much deeper than the smooth stylistic surface. Death is much more than a recurrent theme with both: poet and narrator share a fascination with death, an obsession with dying, a certain blend of New England ‘Liebestod.’ Moreover, death/dying would frequently appear in shocking/aggressive images, whether in Dickinson’s verse or in Hemingway’s tense narrative. Addicted readers of American literature were ready for Hemingway’s death imagery ever since they had first met Dickinson. The same poetic thrill comes out of such laconic renderings of dying, whether in her bold short poems or in his daring short stories. A keen sense of mortality enhances the zest of living – the poet’s epiphany, the story-teller’s (cinematic and cynical) illustration of the fundamental revelation.

And such revelations, coinciding with (or rather culminating in) the suicidal gesture, also appear in the striking prose of another American lady writer: in Kate Chopin’s (outrageous) novel *The Awakening* (1899), Edna Pontellier goes drowning as she realizes she cannot give up her *self* – not even for the sake of her children. Anything else that she can give up for them is “unessential:” her money, her life. So she is fair to her profoundly personal criteria and renounces her life. Yet never that typically American narcissistic entity: *the sense of a selfhood*.

The ‘short happy life of Edna Pontellier’ ended up in this supreme gesture of self-assertion as *a woman* – just as (not so very much) later “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” in Hemingway’s (outrageous) short-story culminated in Francis Macomber’s ultimate self-assertion as *a man*. Even though Macomber’s death is no suicide, it is his own revelation of *his own deeper self* that triggers it.

Returning to Miss Emily of Amherst, Massachusetts – her own literary destiny may not be linked to suicide – apparently. Yet the heritage history of her poetry is one of *rebirth*, of revival, of (outrageous, since related to the sexual scandal in her brother’s life) renaissance. Her verse did suffer a strange sort of ‘clinical death’ until Thomas H. Johnson recovered it completely, with the devotion of a noble academic (and the obstinacy of a magician or an outrageous physician, resuscitating the mind of a poet too powerful to die).

This happened in 1955: the very year of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* – the postmodern writer’s homage to E. A. Poe, the original “literary *histrion*,” that

shameless “founding father” of an American poetic and narrative tradition, which we call ‘Gothic’ lacking a better term for this limbo (metaphorical rather than metaphysical) mood.

Another funny detail of literary history is the busy year 1899, when *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin’s novel about suicidal Edna Pontellier, was first published; this happened on April 22<sup>nd</sup> that year, when Vladimir Nabokov was born in St. Petersburg, Russia. The birthday of the postmodern Russian writer who would make such an outstanding American career coincides with the launching of an audacious American woman’s novel, originally rejected with the same hypocritical narrow-minded vehemence which Nabokov’s *Lolita* would stir up around mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Hart Crane (the promising poet who would too soon put an end to his life), was born then in Garrettsville, Ohio. On the same day with Hart Crane, on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois, Ernest Miller Hemingway was born; he would shoot himself dead on July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1961.<sup>2</sup>

Hemingway’s short-story “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” was first published in the volume *Winner Take Nothing* (1933). It is one of his finest achievements, a genuine poem in prose about utter solitude and ultimate existential meaninglessness. The nameless old customer who had “tried to commit suicide” – although his despair was about “nothing,” since he had “plenty of money,” according to the younger waiter – finds a silenced sympathy in the older waiter. In the latter’s stream-of-consciousness, the insight of the other’s tragedy turns into a grotesque version of the Lord’s Prayer:

What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. *It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too.* It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but *he knew it all was nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada. Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name, thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee. . . .* After all, he said to himself, *it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it.* (Hemingway 357-358; my emphasis)

Hemingway’s literary debut was rather as a poet than as the singular prose writer he would later become; this (anti)lyrical debut was marked by a volume entitled *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923). The mature author, the winner of the 1954 Nobel Prize for Literature would keep his poetic vein alive in all his celebrated novels and stories, whether longer or shorter. Remaining true to himself, refusing self-delusion, Hemingway the writing ‘winner’ ‘took nothing’ without a grain of salt. He knew “it”/life was “probably only insomnia. Many must have it.” For a while.

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<sup>2</sup> 1899 was indeed a ‘busy’ year, when other prominent cultural personalities were also born, such as: Allan Tate, the distinguished American poet and critic, whose name remains related to Old Southern lyrical heritage and to the New Criticism school of thinking; Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, the devoted admirer of 19th century American masters of literature; last but not least, Duke Ellington, the classic jazz musician.

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In “Hills Like White Elephants” – another miniature narrative – a couple are talking abortion. The nameless partners of a sad love story – the “girl” and the “man” – are two Americans in Spain. Their precarious dialogue occurs in a railway station, where they are waiting for the “express from Barcelona” to take them to Madrid. The awkward replies they exchange are hinting at their sorrowful moment of crisis: the “man” is doing his best to persuade the “girl” that the murderous operation can only be “perfectly simple.” She retorts: “I don’t care about me” – and focuses on the “hills like white elephants.” This is her only way of expressing/repressing her grief.

The word itself – ‘abortion’ – never passes their lips; no rigor mortis mask breaks the sordid serenity of the provincial railway station in Spain. And yet death is promiscuously present, even before the birth itself, between the lines, within what is left unsaid.

My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –  
 In Corners – till a Day  
 The Owner passed – identified –  
 And carried Me away – (Dickinson 369)

Emily Dickinson’s 754 remains one of her most remarkable, though also one of her most puzzling poems. No doubt, the formidable image of a (human) “Life” as “a Loaded Gun” should express paroxysm of carnal desire, i.e. triumphant *libido*.

On the other hand, this “Gun” remains profoundly *inhuman*, i.e. non-erotic. “The Gun” of Miss Emily stands for the professional (*mortido*) symbol: the impersonal instrument of work, of a faithful assassin serving “The Owner.” Whereas “The Owner” is (any)one who possesses this instrument – for a certain price. Together – Owner and Gun – they do their job of (allegorical) hunting. The Gun also protects The Owner – hence the paradox:

Though I than He – may longer live  
 He longer must – than I –  
 For I have but the power to kill,  
 Without – the power to die – (369 – 370)

Dickinson’s sphinx-riddle-like poem ends up in this dilemmatic image blending a mortal (The Owner) and an inanimate instrument of killing. As for the ‘dying’ – Miss Emily was a passionate reader of the Metaphysical Poets, therefore her suggestion is far from ‘innocent’ here. It is only here, when the poem ends up (inconclusively), that the (im)possibility (she ‘dwells in’) becomes evident. Desire remains a dream never to be fulfilled. A Gun’s Life – loaded and unloaded – is itself denied the relief of death. Death is just the gun’s job in its killing profession – never a vision of rest.

Robert Wilson, the professional hunter in Hemingway’s “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” is not the only professional in this story. Margot Macomber is also a sort of professional:

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She was an extremely handsome and well-kept woman of the beauty and social position which had, five years before, commanded five thousand dollars as the price of endorsing, with photographs, a beauty product which she had never used. She had been married to Francis Macomber for eleven years. (Hemingway 4)

The only amateur in this strange safari is Francis Macomber: the only Owner of the three, the one with also “the power to die,” beside “the power to kill” – which now they all share. Since he is the only one human of the party, the only dilettante among professionals, Francis Macomber has to die, in order to confirm his exceptional status. He is the one to pay for the entire entertainment: pay his wife Margot, who kills him; pay the Englishman, the hired hunter Wilson, who has eventually taught him the job/art of killing; pay the hired African boys, who actually are rather used to beating/whipping, preferring it even to (legal) fines. Downright hard *emolument* is in the air – rather than any dubious nonsensical *eroticism*:

He, Robert Wilson, carried a double size cot on safari to accommodate any windfalls he might receive. He had hunted for a certain clientele, the international fast, sporting set, where *the women did not feel they were getting their money's worth unless they had shared the cot with the white hunter*. He despised them when he was away from them although he liked some of them well enough at the time, but he made his living by them; *and their standards were his standards as long as they were hiring him*. (24; my emphasis)

“The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” is a perfect ‘professional romance’ – which has secured its place in the American literary canon. Professionalism first comes into question in this story as soon as Macomber “begs” Wilson to keep the secret of his shame:

‘I’m awfully sorry about that lion business. It doesn’t have to go any further, does it? I mean no one will hear about it, will they?’

‘*You mean, will I tell it at the Mathaiga Club?*’ Wilson looked at him now coldly. He had not expected this. So he’s a bloody four-letter man as well as a bloody coward, he thought. I rather liked him too until today. But how is one to know about an American?’

‘No,’ said Wilson. ‘I’m a professional hunter. We never talk about our clients. You can be quite easy on that. It’s supposed to be bad form to ask us not to talk though.’ (6; my emphasis)

This is the first one of the three distinct instances all along the carefully calculated dramatic plot of this short piece of narrative, in which the issue of *indiscretion* is being raised. Indiscretion represents a major menace to professionalism. As long as one is “*still drinking their whiskey*” (7), a professional should control personal reactions – disdain for one’s employers included.

The second such instance when indiscretion is mentioned (and blackmail insinuated) occurs after the buffalo hunting trip, which actually brought Macomber’s redemption from cowardice. This time – perhaps just to belittle her husband’s own triumph upon himself – it is Margot who threatens to disclose a (presupposed) secret the three of them share – thus hurting Wilson again:



'It was frightfully exciting,' she said. 'It's given me a dreadful headache. *I didn't know you were allowed to shoot them from cars though.*'  
'No one shot from cars,' said Wilson coldly.  
'I mean chase them from cars.'  
'... Buffalo could have charged us each time we shot if he liked.  
Wouldn't mention it to anyone though. It's illegal if that's what you mean.'  
'*It seemed very unfair to me,*' Margot said, 'chasing those big helpless things in a motor car.'  
'Did it?' said Wilson.  
'What would happen if they heard about it in Nairobi?'  
'I'd lose my license for one thing. Other unpleasantnesses,' Wilson said, taking a drink from the flask. 'I'd be out of business.'  
'Really?'  
'Yes, really.'  
'Well, said Macomber, and he smiled for the first time all day. '*Now she has something on you.*' (27; my emphasis)

It is remarkable how the story shifts from one mind to another of the members of this triangle – which is rather professional than amorous, anyway. Telling on the other (i.e. betraying them) remains the favorite (and the most feared) threat of the two American customers of the British professional hunter on their would-be pleasure safari in Africa.

The third time this threat of 'telling on the other' comes into question, the boomerang-like psychological reversal is decisive. As if by accident, Francis is shot dead by Margot, who realizes her precarious marriage situation, now that her husband does not depend on her own 'discretion' anymore. In a classic symmetry, proving the high modernist standards of Hemingway's poetic craftsmanship, Wilson is now 'begged' by the wife of his formerly coward client to keep her murderous secret undisclosed:

'That was a pretty thing to do,' he said in a toneless voice. 'He would have left you too.'  
'Stop it,' she said.  
'Of course it's an accident,' he said. 'I know that.'  
'Stop it,' she said.  
'Don't worry,' he said. 'There will be a certain amount of *unpleasantness*, but I will have some photographs taken that will be very useful at the inquest. There's the testimony of the gun-bearers and the driver too. *You're perfectly all right.*'  
'Stop it,' she said.  
'There's a hell of a lot to be done,' he said. 'And I'll have to send a truck off to the lake to wireless for a plane to take the three of us into Nairobi. *Why didn't you poison him? That's what they do in England.*'  
'Stop it. Stop it. Stop it,' the woman cried. Wilson looked at her with his flat blue eyes.  
'I'm through now,' he said. 'I was a little angry. *I'd begun to like your husband.*'  
'Oh, please stop it,' she said. 'Please, please stop it.'  
'That's better,' Wilson said. '*Please is much better. Now I'll stop.*' (33; my emphasis)

Wilson's sarcasm is refreshing both morally and aesthetically – if readers were to be honest to themselves. The professional's main source of "unpleasantness" – as Wilson puts it, deliberately understating it – is getting emotionally involved with his client. Detachment is so hard to observe as a rule for survival, especially when it comes to killing (other) animals.

The selectively omniscient narrator has an obvious propensity for Wilson's stream-of-consciousness. In his virtuoso ambition to attain some sort of 'objectivity' in his unmistakable "art of fiction," 'Hemingway the bastard' – the racist, the misogynist, etc. – chose Wilson as a self-reflexive embodiment of the professional, hence the hired hunter had to be from England and not from back home in the US. Thus British-minded Robert Wilson could afford to contemplate his poor/rich American client, Francis Macomber, from the mutually neutral distance of an exotically African setting:

Look at the beggar now, Wilson thought. It's that some of them stay little boys so long, Wilson thought. Sometimes all their lives. Their figures stay boyish when they're fifty. The great American boy-men. Damned strange people. But he liked this Macomber now. Damned strange fellow. Probably meant the end of cuckoldry too. Well, that would be a damned good thing. Beggar had probably been afraid all his life. [ . . . ] He'd seen it in the war work the same way. More of a change than any loss of virginity. Fear gone like an operation. Something else grew in its place. Main thing a man had. Made him into a man. Women knew it, too. No bloody fear. (30; my emphasis)

Sharp sense of humor is the best (and the most human) quality of Wilson's mind; his insight must speak for not just the narrator, but likewise for the author of this classic American short-story. This is why I have always rediscovered it with the delight reconfirming of the old truth that in matters of art, literature included, the much too often claimed war between sexes remains just a (pre)text for a deeper message. Birth, death and rebirth – as hallmarks of all mortals' condition – can be regarded as the authentically dilemmatic themes of the actually significant writers of world literature. This is why for some poetic minds, like those of Emily Dickinson and/or Ernest Hemingway, the issue of gender –although apparently crucial with each one of them – only comes second to the metaphysical question. Otherwise perhaps they would not challenge it so often in their works, which were never meant for naïve readers.

Civilization – spurns – the Leopard!  
Was the Leopard – bold?  
Deserts – never rebuked her Satin –  
Ethiop – her Gold –  
Tawny – her Customs –  
She was Conscious –  
Spotted – her Dun Gown –  
This was the Leopard's nature – Signor –  
Need – a keeper – frown?



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Pity – the Pard – that left her Asia –  
Memories – of Palm –  
Cannot be stifled – with Narcotic –  
Nor suppressed – with Balm – (Dickinson 236)

Dickinson's poem 492 must have been at the back of Hemingway's mind when he wrote "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" – his most often anthologized short story. This is also Hemingway's most self-reflexive story, "dwelling in [the] possibility" – as it were – of a fictive frontier between modernism and postmodernism. Miss Emily's rebellious "Pard" must be mysteriously related to the leopard whose "frozen carcass" lay by "the House of God," and for which, in his ultimate agony, Harry the failed writer, hunting for fun in Africa, dreamt he was heading:

Kilimanjaro is a snow covered mountain 19,710 feet high, and is said to be the highest mountain in Africa. Its western summit is called 'Ngaje Ngai', the House of God. Close to the western summit is the dried and frozen carcass of a leopard. No one has explained what the leopard was seeking at that altitude. (Hemingway 47; original italics)

May the inspiration of Isak Dinesen (alias Karen Blixen), the brave modern Danish lady writer, have also borrowed something from (or even lent something to) this enigmatic (African) leopard of American writers Ernest Hemingway and Emily Dickinson?<sup>3</sup> Should the Danish writer's volume *Out of Africa* – half memoirs, half fiction – have at least some affinity with this American allegory of the formidable feline? Do they all not also owe something to William Blake's

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright,  
In the forests of the night:  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry? (Blake 1)

Blake's "Tyger," Dickinson's "Pard," Hemingway's (frozen ghost of a) lost leopard, Dinesen's lions in love – all take us back to *romanticism*. Ominous and omnipresent death can only be reflected by traces of a glorious (and self-destructive) creation, which is itself mirrored in the poets' works. Moreover, the leopard's frozen fossil in Hemingway's short story found an echo in the marlin's skeleton, allegorically rounding up his Nobel novella, "The Old Man and the Sea" (1952). Fossil imagery stands for the same *nada/nothingness* notion, by which Ernest

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3 A contemporary of Ernest Hemingway, and even outspokenly admired by him as a professional, Karen Blixen (1865-1962) did have her own live African experience. See also the eponymous film made by Sydney Polack in 1985, after her 1937 book, *Out of Africa*, with Meryl Streep and Robert Redford, universally acclaimed for their performance. Much more recently, Philip Kaufman's film *Hemingway and Gellhorn* (HBO, 2012) stars Nicole Kidman and Clive Owen in a professional romance taking its biographical inspiration from Hemingway's third marriage and the couple's Spanish Civil War experience.

Hemingway remains tributary to Herman Melville, the romantic nihilist, himself a postmodern master much ahead of his time.

“The Snows of Kilimanjaro” remains a fascinating story due to many things. It is a strangely *prophetic* story: although at the time of its first publishing, Hemingway was (still) a successful, fashionable, prolific writer – within a couple of decades his fate would become a hallucinatory echo of Harry’s tale of failure and death. In 1954, Hemingway did himself suffer from two plane crashes in Africa – which, though his life was miraculously spared, actually started his decline.

Harry dies in full maturity, still having left most of his works unaccomplished, his writings yet unwritten, of an (allegorically) ignored gangrene in his right leg, breaking/spoiling all the African fun of his last safari.

A final self-scrutiny reveals his main flaws to his own conscience: addicted to alcoholism and philandering, Harry’s supreme regret and self-reproach now is *not having worked enough*. (Hemingway himself was a notorious perfectionist and a workaholic writer.)

The fragments most frequently commented on in various literary analyses are those of Harry’s flash-back episodes in italics – just like the premonitory paragraph about the frozen fossil of the leopard, anticipating the entire story. Whatever we might say, it means a lot for Hemingway’s Romanian readers that he has Harry remember Tristan Tzara and Dadaism, in his Paris recollections.

But what captures our attention now is the ritual of death courting its prey:

He had just felt death come by again.  
 ‘You know the only thing I’ve never lost is curiosity,’ he said  
 to her.  
 ‘You’ve never lost anything. You’re the most complete man  
 I’ve ever known.’  
 ‘Christ,’ he said. ‘How little a woman knows. What is that?  
 Your intuition?’  
 Because, just then, death had come and rested its head on the foot of the cot and he  
 could smell its breath.  
 ‘Never believe any of that about a scythe and a skull,’ he told her. ‘It can be two  
 bicycle policemen as easily, or be a bird. Or it can have a wide snout like a hyena.’  
 It had moved up on him now, but it had no shape anymore. It simply occupied  
 space.  
 ‘Tell it to go away.’  
 It did not go away but moved a little closer.  
 ‘You’ve got a hell of a breath,’ he told it. ‘You stinking bastard.’  
 (Hemingway 67; my emphasis)

In terms of *time*, while Francis Macomber has very little left, without knowing it – Harry is aware of every second being irreversible. If Macomber’s (mock-saintly) death is sudden, shocking, absurd – Harry’s death, though just as absurd, is (cruelly) taking its time, ‘courting’ its customer with its foul smelling breath. And since he is a (professional) poet, Harry knows only too well that death needn’t look like its conventional picture with “a scythe and a skull.” “It can be” – Harry goes on – “two bicycle policemen as easily.”

Or it can be some gentlemanly acquaintance, offering some ride, just as in Emily Dickinson's poem 712:

Because I could not stop for Death –  
He kindly stopped for me –  
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –  
And Immortality. (Dickinson 350)

In both instances, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century short story and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century poem, death deliberately performs its mesmerizing courting ritual. It will always work without fail. "A backward glance" – in the words of Walt Whitman – would reveal the bitter truth that there is no running away from one's own conscience, especially when one is a poet. Which is also the case of Ernest Hemingway and all his *fictive personae*.

If in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" the writer's fictive *alter ego* is Robert Wilson, the professional hunter – in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" it is Harry, the professional writer. They both get (also) paid for their sexual charisma, only enhanced in both cases by their professions. In other words, just fit for Emily Dickinson's poem 709, hunting for money is much like writing for books-buyers:

Publication – is the Auction  
Of the Mind of Man – (Dickinson 348)

That great writers communicate with each other should not impress us anymore, perhaps. There are labels for this situation: intertextuality is the most often employed, meaning itself a (re)generation of a poetic message.

We may likewise say that Hemingway's Africa is like Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha – a place of the poet's mind, with its hunters and their hunted, more or less homely or exotic. The very dynamics of that place in the poet's mind must rely on this continual exchange, from life to death, and rebirth.

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