Navigating Abundance and Scarcity in *True at First Light* by Ernest Hemingway

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Throughout his literary career, Ernest Hemingway searched for "the happiness of the Garden that a man must lose" (Baker 460). Despite the inevitability of the fall, some of the author's characters attempt to recover a natural and unspoilt land. In his fiction, several landscapes come close to embodying this ideal, such as the Irati river in *The Sun Also Rises*, or the Swiss mountains in *A Farewell to Arms*. In Hemingway's non-fiction, the reader sometimes encounters places of prosperity and peace, *loci amoeni,* that seem particularly favoured by some divine power. Such settings appear in *Green Hills of Africa*, an account of a safari in East Africa, undertaken in 1933 by the author and his second wife, Pauline. A group of lucky hunters is faced with a bounteous nature: "We all had the nervous exhilaration, like a laughing drunk, that a sudden over-abundance, idiotic abundance of game makes. It is a feeling that can come from any sort of game or fish that is ordinarily rare and that, suddenly, you find in a ridiculously unbelievable abundance" (69). The absurd reversal from "rare[ness]" to "abundance"—repeated three times with different qualifiers—prompts a feeling of elation close to dizziness. These hunting grounds are depicted as a mythical land of plenty, generous enough to feed the multitude.

Similar imagery is used in Hemingway's fictionalised memoir *True at First Light*, posthumously published in 1999, in a first version edited by his son, Patrick Hemingway.[1] What the author called "the African Book" is a genre-bending text based on a journey to Kenya with his fourth wife, Mary, in 1953-4, twenty years after the first. In the preface, Patrick Hemingway insists on the undetermined generic nature of the text, described as an "ambiguous counterpoint between fiction and truth" (ix).[2] Although Kenya offers difficult living conditions

[1] The manuscript was revised in a second version, *Under Kilimanjaro*, edited by Robert W. Lewis and Robert E. Fleming in 2005.

[2] This article will refer to the narrative instance of *True at First Light* as the author's avatar or persona, to maintain a distinction between the author and his self-created image. See Michael D. DuBose's recent article, "*True at First Light* and *Under Kilimanjaro*: The African Book in Two Parts": "Hemingway was likely conscious of the genre-bending nature of his manuscript and might have been experimenting with the line between truth and fiction—but not with regard to events, places, and chronology. Hemingway reserved his creative license for the development of character, especially his own. The African Book *is* nonfiction, but the author's crafting of his own self- image—his "Africanizing" of himself—is where the line between truth and fiction comes closest to blurring" (55).

(the author plagued by rain, heat, and mosquitoes), it is nonetheless a place of great wealth. Wildlife diversity is described at length with an almost scientific precision: the reader encounters a whole bestiary of lions, leopards, kudus, and elephants. Hemingway is appointed Game Warden of a game reserve, and his mission is to control the animal population. He is in charge of regulating rich ecosystems, in which men and animals both have their role to play. Much like the natural Kenyan space, the narrative space of this text is also characterised by excess, as the simple storyline about the everyday life at the camp and the political Kenyan context is constantly disrupted by the thoughts of the author's persona, notably about the art of writing.

The natural African wealth contrasts with the industrial affluence of the American society of the 1950s. While Americans massively invested in items based around home and family, such as televisions, cars, or washing machines, Hemingway was attempting to reach for a more authentic way of living, far from the comfort of the United States. In *True at First Light*, the authorial persona tries to become a local Kamba—an ethnic group who lives in Kenya—in order to get rid of his white, American identity. He does so notably by having an intimate relationship with Debba, a young African woman, in what is usually considered to be a fictional addition to his memoir.

After the publication of Hemingway's posthumous manuscripts, many critics have noted the author's change of attitude towards the environment in his later life. Carey Voeller, for instance, analyses how the author's hunters display a growing ethical concern for animals. Other critics such as Rose Marie Burwell and Christopher Ondaatje show similar conclusions, underlining the author's change of mentality in his second safari. Similarly, Ryan Hediger, in his article "Hunting, Fishing, and the Cramp of Ethics in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Green Hills of Africa*, and *Under Kilimanjaro*," suggests that Hemingway does not suddenly become an environmentalist at the end of his life, but does achieve a more ethical posture.

In keeping with this critical tendency to re-evaluate Hemingway's relationship with the environment, this article analyses his ambivalence through the prism of the dichotomy between abundance and scarcity. The rejection of abundance seems to be the cornerstone of his ethical posture. In an article about Hemingway's ethics of travel, Kevin Maier suggests that "the ethic informing [Hemingway's] approach to Africa forces us to consider difficult questions about what we now call ecotourism" (719). In a similar perspective, mass tourism is denounced

specifically for its spectacular quality. Jean Baudrillard's reflections on the concept of simulacra as well as Guy Debord's analysis of the society of the spectacle are useful tools to understand how mass tourism creates a superficial and inauthentic experience of foreign countries. As opposed to Western abundance, the authorial persona in *True at First Light* seems to favour scarcity: he strives to respect the environment, without spoiling natural resources. This code of conduct even extends to his writing style. Though he constantly betrays his posture of political and economic domination over the locals,[3] the author's avatar thinks of himself as a Kamba, and abides by the Kamba rules, particularly while courting Debba. However, the celebration of scarcity is contradicted by his enduring fascination for abundance. Sacrificing animals and eating them collectively appear as ways to strengthen the community through the consumption of waste. By giving a social function to waste, the authorial avatar seems to abandon the paradigm of scarcity. His oscillation between the values of abundance and frugality is key to understand his ambivalent position , in terms of politics, ecology, and aesthetics.

Tourism, exploitation, and the spectacle of abundance

In *True at First Light*, Hemingway's avatar groups together all "white men" who live by a consumerist system of values, whether they be American or European. They keep their luxurious habits when travelling abroad, and seek to accumulate both experiences and commodities. The author's persona imagines how an American girl he is intimate with would travel to Africa with her husband:

> She could go with the husband and they could be nervous together. He would always have the long-distance telephone which was as necessary to him as seeing the sunrise was to me or seeing the stars at night was to Mary. She would be able to spend money and buy things and accumulate possessions and eat in very expensive restaurants [...] When she woke in the night she could [...] practice counting her money to put herself to sleep. (221)

Instead of confronting themselves with the environment, tourists remain attached to their comfort, which has almost become a new natural need. The hypotactic style used in the third sentence imitates their compulsion to collect. Tourists thus experience a fake authenticity, they

[3] After recounting how Hemingway treats his African servants severely in this text, Kevin Maier summarises his ambiguous posture as follows: "What makes Hemingway's representation of himself on safari more interesting than the hunting of the rich tourists he hates is his ability to be aware of the problems even while he perpetuates them" (728).

satisfy themselves with a superficial rendition of wildlife, a mere replica of nature and culture. Money alienates them from the real, as well as from local people, whom they never get to truly encounter. Westerners seem to remain entrapped in a world of representations, produced by the media and the entertainment industry.

The author highlights the discrepancy between these counterfeit images and the dangers of the real world: "You cannot describe a wild lion's roar [...] 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" (106). To use Jean Baudrillard's terminology, representations of wildlife have become simulacra which threaten to replace the authority of the real. Baudrillard defines the "era of simulation" as follows: "the era of simulation is inaugurated by the liquidation of all references [...] It is no longer about imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is about substituting signs of the real for the real" (my trans., *Simulacres* 11). Baudrillard helps us to understand the discrepancy between authentic experience and fake simulacra at play in *True at First Light*. If simulacra have replaced reality for Western tourists, African characters are in their turn influenced by the Western system of images and representations.

This satire of Western values exposes the inner workings of consumerism. The authorial persona attacks the generalised transformation of people and experiences into commodities, notably in the passage which describes how Debba keeps pictures of animal trophies, famous celebrities, and advertisements for food above her bed, in an intimate and potentially erotic space:

> she was always afraid of Miss Marlene [Dietrich] although she had a large picture of her wearing what looked to me like nothing on the wall above her bed along with advertisements for the washing machine and garbage disposal units and the two-inch steaks and cuts of ham and the paintings of the mammoth, the little four-toed horse and the saber-toothed tiger that she had cut from *Life* magazine. These were the great wonders of her new world and the only one she feared was Miss Marlene. (271)

Magazine pictures have a levelling effect: they transform their objects into commercial goods. The entertainment industry commodifies celebrities—whether they be female actresses or famous authors such as Hemingway himself—and turns them into trophies, just like wild animals. Famous people are no longer autonomous individuals, they have become simulacra as well. As idealised symbols of prosperity and power, celebrities have turned into godlike figures to be revered and feared. Debba feels all the more inferior to Marlene Dietrich as the actress is thought to be romantically involved with Hemingway.

Debba is presented as the naïve victim of advertisement and entertainment. She goes as far as washing her dress every day, to be as efficient as a washing machine. Someone tells Hemingway's avatar: "she washes her dress so much. She is trying to be like the washing machine to please you. She is afraid that you will become lonely for the washing machine and go away" (25). Debba is indirectly turned into an object, as she tries to compete with machines. This betrays her fearful devotion: she does not want this type of machine for her own enjoyment and emancipation, but because she imagines how her partner *might* miss it. Her commodification mirrors her sexual objectification: she is a highly erotic character who strives to fulfil her lover's desires. Her obsession with cleanliness might be read as the translation of an unconscious desire to remain pure for her partner, according to a patriarchal view of sexuality. She is thus both sexualised and simultaneously afraid of her sexualisation.

The author's persona criticises the manipulative power of magazines, more than Debba's ingenuity—even though her fascination for Euro-American culture can be read as a stereotypical primitivist trope.[4] Hemingway seems to anticipate Guy Debord, who wrote about the replacement of authentic life by its representation and the advent of commodity fetishism (a concept borrowed from Marxist theory) in *La Société du Spectacle*: "it is the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by 'intangible yet tangible things,' which reaches its ultimate fulfilment in the spectacle, where the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exists above it, yet which at the same time is regarded as the tangible par excellence" (my trans., 35-6).[5] Debord claims that imperialist countries influence others not only through the abundance of their consumer goods, but also through the social spectacle that they produce: "the society that bears the spectacle does not dominate underdeveloped regions only by its economic hegemony. It dominates them *as a society of the spectacle*. Where the material basis is still absent, modern society has already spectacularly invaded the social surface of every continent" (my trans., 53).[6] Even if some goods are not available to less

[4] Hemingway uses some primitivist tropes about Africans, such as the infantilisation and sexualisation of African female characters. Primitivism can be defined as a body of ideas, images, and representations that inform the way the West has looked at countries deemed more exotic, ever since the eighteenth century. The enthusiasm for "primitive" art from Africa and the Pacific islands gained new momentum at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Western artists, particularly from the avant-garde, wanted to escape from the urban, modern civilisation. They were in search of a supposedly freer "primitive" existence, that they associated primarily with Africa.

[5] "C'est le principe du fétichisme de la marchandise, la domination de la société par 'des choses suprasensibles bien que sensibles', qui s'accomplit absolument dans le spectacle, où le monde sensible se trouve remplacé par une sélection d'images qui existe au-dessus de lui, et qui en même temps s'est fait reconnaître comme le sensible par excellence".

[6] "La société porteuse du spectacle ne domine pas seulement par son hégémonie économique les régions sous-développées. Elle les domine *en tant que société du spectacle*. Là où la base matérielle est encore absente, la société moderne a déjà envahi spectaculairement la surface sociale de chaque continent."

industrialised countries (which is the case with the washing machine in Kenya, for instance), they are spectacular enough to reshape social links.

Debba is not the only African character to be influenced and corrupted by the Western spectacle of abundance in *True at First Light*. Masai men, for instance, do not know how to hunt anymore. The authorial persona reproaches them with their lack of masculinity: "I had sent word to the chief that if his young men were not women who spent all their time in [the town of] Laitokitok drinking Golden Jeep sherry he would have no need to ask for me to kill his lion" (33). A reversal has occurred: by being able to kill lions, Hemingway and his wife have become more local than the Masai, who spend their days drinking sherry, imported from South-Africa. Behind the provoking address to the Masai chief lies the fear that Africans should become too Westernised. This anxiety had been shared by many travellers, as Helen Carr writes: "creeping into the travel writing of the late nineteenth century and beyond is the fear that 'the rest of the world' is losing its distinctive otherness, and the perturbing recognition that the lines of demarcation between Europe and the other are becoming disturbingly blurred" (81). The author, himself an American, paradoxically wishes to preserve Africans' "distinctive otherness" from Westerners.

He also wishes to preserve the demarcation between supposedly masculine and feminine norms. The feminisation of Masai echoes a common association in American discourse between femininity and consumerism. Sally Robinson identifies a "long-running narrative about how consumer culture endangers authenticity, destroys individuality, and subjects the individual to forces that sap his creativity and commodify his personality" (1). She argues that this narrative relies on a gendered distinction "that places masculinity on the side of the individual who is both subjected to consumer forces and authorized to complain about them, and femininity on the side of the social mechanisms, systems, and conventions that aim to curtail masculine agency and authenticity" (Robinson 1). Therefore, Debba's fascination with the washing machine, as well as the Masai's drinking, both appear as the symptoms of a generalised feminisation of African people caused by, among other Western influences, consumerism.

In the text, Westerners are responsible for the systemic corruption of the African abundance of natural resources. Africa is described as an "unspoiled, never shot-over, primitive" (200) land. The fantasy of being the first men to penetrate an Edenic nature is visible here: "we got so close to everything in the big green woods and it was like we were the first people that were ever there" (211). Even if the author's avatar is aware of the made-up nature of this type of representation and confesses to romanticising "the old Africa that we had dreamed and

invented" (287), he is unable to completely dismiss this idealised version of Africa. He exposes how white people have continually exploited African countries, whether it be economically or politically. Western tourists have transformed the environment, exploited the plentiful resources, and put an end to the abundance of wild game. The authorial persona goes as far as comparing African reserves (as well as American reservations for Native Americans) to concentration camps: "I did know that the white people always took the other people's lands away from them and put them on a reservation where they could go to hell and be destroyed as though they were in a concentration camp" (199). Africans and Native Americans are physically and morally corrupted by Western values, and their identities are utterly disturbed.

This feeling of corruption pervades Hemingway's work. His nostalgia for the "old days" is repeatedly asserted, as modern living conditions seem to have perverted the meaning of many activities such as hunting or bullfighting.[7] In *True at First Light*, Philip Percival, a white hunter, laments a time before the advent of modern technologies: "Pop, on his last lion hunt and taking out his last safari, wanted things to be as they were in the old days before the hunting of dangerous game had been corrupted and made easy by what he always called 'these bloody cars'" (36). The author draws the picture of a world in which the Western abundance of wealth and technologies has degraded the "primitive" African lifestyle and the plentiful African nature.

In order to counter the movement of corruption, the author's avatar wants to reconnect with the so-called "primitive" otherness of Africa. His aim is to transcend his whiteness and to adopt an African identity. This appropriation of another ethnicity is, of course, highly problematic, as he never suffers the same conditions of exploitation as the locals, yet still benefits from an extremely privileged position. However, despite this politically condemnable enterprise, it is to be noted that Hemingway's avatar does try to live in a sustainable and ethical manner, as opposed to the Westerners he describes. He constantly justifies himself and his presence in Africa: he is not here as a tourist, but as a game warden, preserving the abundance of the environment. This book describes a shift from trophy hunting to animal control: the author admits to having hunted for trophies in the past, but now only kills for food, or to eliminate dangerous animals. His work is useful for the community and he is not hunting only to entertain himself. Consequently, he develops an ethical relationship with animals, who are seen as intelligent individuals and not as prestigious commodities: "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

[7] One thinks of *Death in the Afternoon,* in which the author discusses the decay and decadence of bullfighting.

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" (88).

The author's ethical turn also translates into the adoption of local customs and traditions. In the community he lives in, social relationships are based on the reciprocity of gifts and ritualised exchanges. Hemingway's persona follows this model with Debba, bringing her meat, chocolate, sugar, medicine, soap, and dresses. When Mary asks him what Debba gives him for presents, he replies: "Ceremonial beer. You know everything is based on exchanges of beer" (20). Adopting this gift economy becomes yet another way to distance himself from Western capitalism. Hemingway's avatar often displays his knowledge and appreciation of ceremonial beer, brewed locally according to ancestral traditions. In addition to traditional beer, the characters also drink industrial Tusker beer, produced in Kenya. However, as mentioned earlier, the author dislikes the South African sherry, drunk by Masai men. The production of wine in South Africa is directly linked to its colonisation by European countries. Dismissing a wine of Spanish origin, produced in South Africa, is thus an indirect way of rejecting European imperialism.

Moreover, the author's persona spends several pages describing a hunting experience he had in America, after which he traded two eagle feathers with a Cheyenne. These kinds of exchanges seem to allow for a deeper human connection than those that are monetised, for they offer alternative ways to think about money and goods. Even though there are monetary exchanges in the book, the author chooses not to focus on them. Torgovnick insists on the idea that definitions of the primitive Other varied throughout time, so as to fit the opposite of what the current Western characteristics were. When the present is deemed "too materialistic", then "primitive life is not—it is a precapitalist utopia in which only use value, never exchange value, prevails" (8). The insistence on ritualised exchanges falls within the broader criticism of consumerism, and the ensuing quest for economic alternatives.

The authorial avatar is thus supposed to be an exception among foreigners. He is looking for an authentic and ethical relationship with nature, animals, and local people. With his acute ecological and political awareness, he understands the importance of not wasting resources. He therefore tries to live according to a principle of frugality, which finds an aesthetic translation in his literary style.

The quest for a frugal (life)style

As stated, Hemingway's avatar tries to exploit natural resources in a reasoned and moderate way: "I wish the meat wrapped in cheesecloth so that the flies will not spoil it. We are guests here and I am responsible. We must waste nothing" (41). His responsibility is political, he must pay particular attention not to destroy the natural environment, as white men have a history of spoiling land. This self-imposed command not to waste goes further: it becomes an ethical code of conduct, extended beyond the idea of protecting the environment. Both terms, "to waste" and "to spoil," are used with a variety of objects: it becomes inherently immoral to spoil or waste anything, whether it applies to a physical thing or to an intangible notion. For instance, Mary declares: "I don't care what you do as long as you don't hurt other people or spoil their lives" (63), but also, "Isn't it lovely to be here alone with our own Mountain and our lovely country and nothing to spoil it?" (283). This last quotation is ambiguous in so far is it betrays both Mary's sense of entitlement ("our own Mountain") and what could be called her environmental awareness. For her and her husband, any type of waste, literal or figurative, is to be regretted: "Reading the bird book I felt how stupid I had been and how much time I had wasted" (165).

Every movement that is not strictly necessary must not be carried out. In *True at First Light,* the author repeatedly praises people who behave in a measured way, without wasting superfluous energy, as in this meliorative comparison: "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, *unwasting* movements" (my emphasis, 66). Similarly, in *The Sun Also Rises,* Pedro Romero is praised for "never wasting the bull" (145). What is true of boxing or bullfighting is also valid for the art of writing: Hemingway's style is characterised by the same quest for control. Right from the very first sentence of *True at First Light,* the euphemistic prose suggests more than it explains: "Things were not too simple in this safari because things had changed very much in East Africa" (1). The indeterminacy of the term "things," as well as the lack of details about time and place, intrigue the reader and engage their interpretative efforts. About Hemingway's discipline as a short story writer, Carlos Baker wrote these following words: "He learned how to get the most from the least, how to prune language and *avoid waste motion*, how to multiply intensities" (my emphasis, 117).

This stylistic principle of economy is echoed in the diegesis. Debba and the author's persona do not speak the same language, so they interact thanks to a mix of Spanish and Kamba. They only have a few words and expressions in common, but this scarcity gives rise to a multiplicity of interpretations. For instance, they both use the phrase "en la puta gloria," which the author

comments on: “It is a strange phrase and no two people would translate it alike” (238). Faced with obstacles of communication, they can pick words from different languages and give them personal meanings. In this context of heteroglossia, competing interpretations are simultaneously present, which leaves room for linguistic creativity. As is typical of Hemingway’s prose, apparent stylistic scarcity fuels semantic abundance. Another communicative hindrance is the lack of words to say “love” or “sorry” in Swahili. Strategies must be developed in order to overcome this initial gap. One of them is body language: characters often understand one another without speaking, much like the hunters, who silently communicate so as not to be noticed by their prey. As readers, we then try to decipher these strategies, hunting for meaning.

The aesthetics of scarcity reads partly as a reaction against American affluence, which weakens creative abilities. It is most striking in the short story “Snows of Kilimanjaro,” in which Harry’s wife, the “rich bitch,” is called the “destroyer of his talent” (*The First Forty-Nine* 56). On the other hand, hunger and scarcity seem to foster creativity. In *A Moveable Feast*, the author comments on this connection:

> You got very hungry when you did not eat enough in Paris because all the bakery shops had such good things in the windows and people ate outside at tables on the sidewalk so that you saw and smelled the food. When you were skipping meals at a time when you had given up journalism and were writing nothing that anyone in America would buy, explaining at home that you were lunching out with someone, the best place to do it was the Luxembourg gardens where you saw and smelled nothing to eat all the way from the Place de l’Observatoire to the rue de Vaugirard. There you could always go into the Luxembourg museum and all the paintings were heightened and clearer and more beautiful if you were belly-empty, hollow-hungry. I learned to understand Cézanne much better and to see truly how he made landscapes when I was hungry. (65)

Being hungry heightens perception and encourages a better understanding of works of art. Despite its provocative character, this Bohemian posture nonetheless expresses an artistic ideal which seems consistent with Hemingway’s valorisation of measure as opposed to excess. However, it might be too simplified to claim that, as an individual and a writer, he always remains on the side of scarcity. He betrays his fascination for waste and excess, which he tries to reconcile with his ethical, ecological, and aesthetic imperatives.

Redefining waste and abundance

As a rich white game warden, the authorial persona is bound to remain on the side of economic abundance. He cannot discard his American identity: he provides medicine for the camp,

seduces Debba with gifts, and buys excessive amounts of food and drink for his friends. There are some internal contradictions between his professed refusal of excess and his actions. In the following passage, the author's persona imagines buying goods in a store to impress other people:

> I thought about [...] how we would look at the different prints and how the Masai women with their long skirts and the flies and their insane, pretending, beauty parlor husbands would watch us in their unsatisfied boldness and syphilitic, cold-handed beauty and how we, Kamba, neither one with our ears even pierced but proud and worse than insolent because of too many things that Masai could not ever know, would feel the stuffs and look at the patterns and buy other things to give us importance in the store. (224)

His strategy here, in order to shut off moral considerations about abundance, is to present himself as a Kamba, and not as an American. The spending is described as a collective action, it is mainly a demonstration of power in front of the Masai. Unlike American tourists, his goal is neither to accumulate individual possessions, nor to spend money for his personal comfort. He is only interested in spending money for the community. The author does compare the store to "a Western general store" (248), and the town of Laitokitok to an American small town: "Today it was straight Laitokitok with overtones of Cody, Wyoming, or Sheridan, Wyoming, in the old days" (248). In so doing, he establishes a continuity between the Kenyan town and a typical Western town. He is closer to the former ruggedness of the Frontier life than to the new comfort of American cities. These comparisons also reinforce his ambivalent position: he admits to buying an abundance of goods in order to bind the members of the Kamba community together, but paradoxically, his economic wealth betrays his status as an outsider.

The only times when abundance seems to be acceptable is when it holds a social function, notably during copious meals, parties, or drinking sessions. The Kamba community performs these rituals in order to encourage a sense of belonging. The irruption of an excess of food, drinks, or festivities is exhilarating, just as the "unbelievable abundance" of game in *Green Hills of Africa*. While Westerners spend money in an individualistic way, Hemingway's persona redefines the social functions of abundance and waste: to bring men and women together on an intimate level. The sacrifice of a lion is the strongest social rite in *True at First Light*. Even if this animal is originally the object of Mary's obsession, it becomes everyone's prey during a large feast. Mary has no valid reason to kill him, other than her desire to challenge herself and "kill cleanly" an animal that she admires and loves. This fixation betrays an impulse to destroy, and therefore clashes with the paradigm of ethical killing and scarcity exposed earlier.

Each time resources are wasted, a rupture occurs in a lifestyle of scarcity, which recalls George Bataille's theories developed in *La part maudite*. Human beings alternate between

accumulating capital and wasting energy. Excessive energy, coined the "accursed share" ("la part maudite") is wasted in unproductive activities, such as rituals, non-reproductive sex, festivals, and games. By collectively destroying the accursed share, the community is reinforced. The lion has become a scapegoat, sacrificed for the group. Baudrillard writes about the distinction between the unproductive destruction of the accursed share and the waste of resources as organised by our consumer societies:

> There is, in that sense, an absolute difference between waste in our "affluent societies," a waste which is a *nuisance integrated into the economic system*, a "functional" waste, not productive of collective value, and the destructive prodigality that all the so-called "societies of scarcity" practiced in their festivals and sacrifices, waste "by excess," in which the destruction of goods was a source of collective symbolic values [...] The economic system cannot transcend itself into festive waste, caught up as it is in its own alleged "rationality." (my trans., *La société de consummation* 47)[8]

The joyful consumption of the lion has nothing to do with the way capitalism plans to get rid of waste. The "garbage disposal units" advertised above Debba's bed are not productive of collective value. On the contrary, their unction is to integrate waste into the economic system.

During ritualised banquets, community members thus become one by incorporating the same substance, in a Eucharistic communion. Hunting or eating wild game is meant to abolish the distance between human beings and animals. The author's persona describes the killing of the leopard as follows: "He was a good leopard and we had hunted him well and cheerfully and like brothers with no White Hunters nor Game Rangers and no Game Scouts and he was a Kamba leopard condemned for useless killing" (231). The hunter and the prey are put on an equal footing, they both belong to the Kamba tribe with no distinction of species. The description of animal killing is highly ambivalent here: the hunt is presented both as a rational enforcement of the law ("condemned for useless killing") and as a spiritual sacrifice gifted to the community. A few pages earlier, the authorial persona eats a bone fragment of the leopard, in an episode reminiscent of the transubstantiation:

> It was a piece of shoulder blade and I put it in my mouth. There is no explanation of that. I did it without thinking. But it linked us closer to the leopard and I bit on it and tasted the new blood which tasted about like my own [...] The sharp end of the splintered bone had cut the inside of my cheek and I could taste the familiarity of my own blood now mixed with the blood of the leopard. (229)

[8] "Il y a, dans ce sens, une différence absolue entre le gaspillage de nos 'sociétés d'abondance', gaspillage qui est une *nuisance intégrée au système économique*, qui est un gaspillage 'fonctionnel', non producteur de valeur collective, et la prodigalité destructive qu'ont pratiquée toutes les sociétés dites de 'pénurie', dans leurs fêtes et leurs sacrifices, gaspillage 'par excès', où la destruction des biens était source de valeurs symboliques collectives . . . Le système économique [capitaliste] ne peut se dépasser dans un gaspillage festif, pris qu'il est à sa propre prétendue 'rationalité'."

This passage almost reads like an epiphany of his brotherhood with animals. Hunting and eating the "accursed share" during festive ceremonies is thus a way for men and women to come together and acknowledge their proximity with the animal realm.

Because of this proximity, eating animals and eating men is not fundamentally different in the text. The existence of anthropophagy is acknowledged without being condemned. For instance, in a light and casual tone, Mary asks her husband: "You're part Kamba. Would you eat a man?" (97). Eating men is accepted without moral judgement, as when the author's persona describes the religion he has created with his friends: "in our religion [...] cannibalism was completely and absolutely abolished except for those who chose to practice it" (266). This practice takes on a particular meaning in the African context of the book. Cannibalism is indeed "one of the most frequent and telling motifs of exotic travel writing (from early Greek texts to nineteenth- and even twentieth-century ethnography)" (Baine Campbell 272). The provocative tolerance of anthropophagy in *True at First Light* is thus also to be read as a way to mock the stereotyped nature of this primitivist trope.

Incorporation is therefore a central theme in *True at First Light*. Whether they be sharing food or drinking beer, characters derive pleasure from the incorporation of several objects. The author's avatar mainly insists on describing scenes of oral pleasure, as opposed to explicit references to genital sexuality. For instance, while hinting at a sexual relationship with Debba, he dwells on the topic of the ceremonial beer he had to pay for:

> I thought of Debba and the big skin-covered, smoky, clean-smelling, hand-rubbed wood bed of the big house and the four bottles of sacramental beer I had paid for the use of it, my intentions being honorable, and the beer having its proper tribal custom name; I think it was, among the many ritual beers, known as The Beer For Sleeping In The Bed Of The Mother-in-Law. (223)

The focus of this anecdote switches from the bed and its characteristics to the beer, onto which all the sexual tension is displaced. The formal similarities between "bed" and "beer" (two monosyllables with an alliteration) make the transfer easier. Hemingway's avatar also takes pleasure in repeating the comically long name of the beer, as if the materiality of the name was more pleasurable than the sexual act itself.

Conclusion

Hemingway's relationship with Africa is riddled with contradictions and ambiguities. His persona's identity is twofold: he tries to become a local Kamba and to respect the environment, while remaining a rich white American. He wants to dissociate himself from Western tourists

by performing the role of a knowledgeable traveller, engaged in an authentic relationship with the land and the people. Scarcity is one of the primordial values required by his ecological and ethical lifestyle, along with self-reliance and discipline. However, individuals need excess and abundance in order to come together as a whole. Wasting resources in a ritualised way comes to be seen as a creative and collective experience. The author's avatar seeks to establish a complementarity, rather than an opposition, between unwasteful sustainability and exhilarating abundance. It remains that the only people who have the liberty to waste or destroy resources—whether by spending money, hunting animals, or buying alcohol in great quantities—are rich foreigners. The structure of social inequality persists, which echoes what Baudrillard writes about the false dichotomy between societies of affluence and societies of scarcity. Any society is founded on the articulation between structural excess and structural lack, and whoever gets to manipulate the structural excess is a privileged minority:

> Excess may be the share set aside for God or for sacrifice, it may be sumptuary spending, added value, economic profit or prestige budgets. At any rate, it is this luxury levy which defines the wealth of a society, as well as its social structure, for it is always the prerogative of a privileged minority and its function is precisely to reproduce class or caste privilege. (my trans., *La société de consommation* 66)[9]

Even if the author's persona wastes money and resources in a sacrificial gesture to strengthen the community, he remains at the top of the social hierarchy, above the locals he wishes to resemble. Despite Hemingway's efforts, the reader never forgets his identity as a rich, powerful white male. The complexities of this book thus reside in the existence of a political awareness—about consumerism and the environment—heavily tainted by the legacy of imperialism.

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[9] ~~My translation.~~ "L'excédent peut être la part de Dieu, la part du sacrifice, la dépense somptuaire, la plus-value, le profit économique ou les budgets de prestige. De toute façon, c'est ce prélèvement de luxe qui définit la richesse d'une société en même temps que sa structure sociale, puisqu'il est toujours l'apanage d'une minorité privilégiée et qu'il a pour fonction précisément de reproduire le privilège de caste ou de classe."

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