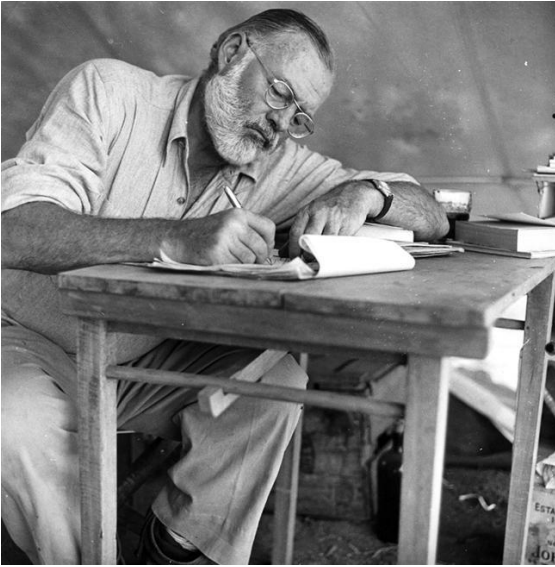


A taxidermy specimen of a snow leopard is shown lying in a layer of snow. The leopard's fur is a mix of tan and brown with dark, irregular spots. It is looking down and to the right. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

The Snows of Kilimanjaro

Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961)



*If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing.— Ernest Hemingway in *Death in the Afternoon**

Genre: Novel, short story, newspaper articles

Movement: Lost Generation

Awards:

1. Pulitzer Prize for Literature (1953)
2. Nobel Prize for Literature (1954)

Major Works:

1. *The Old Man and the Sea*
2. *The Sun Also Rises*
3. *A Farewell to Arms*
4. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*
5. *In Our Time*

Influenced: His work gave rise to the minimalist movement in American fiction

Lost Generation: Literary Context

The term "Lost Generation" is used to describe the generation of writers active immediately after World War I. Gertrude Stein used the phrase in conversation with Ernest Hemingway, supposedly quoting a garage mechanic saying to her, "You are all a lost generation." The phrase signifies a disillusioned postwar generation characterized by lost values, lost belief in the idea of human progress, and a mood of futility and despair leading to hedonism. The mood is described by F. Scott Fitzgerald in *This Side of Paradise* when he writes of a generation that found "all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken."

"Lost generation" usually refers specifically to the American expatriate writers associated with 1920s Paris, especially Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and to a lesser extent T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Hemingway used the phrase "You are all a lost generation" as the epigraph to his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, and the influential critic Malcolm Cowley used "lost generation" in various studies of expatriate writers.

Last Generation: Historical Context

World War I

The first World War was a traumatic experience for Europe and America, for although it was fought largely in Europe, it involved almost every European nation and, at the time, the European nations controlled vast areas of Africa and Asia. The war was remarkable for the sheer mass of killing it entailed. New technologies of war, including motorized vehicles, airplanes, and poison gas, were used for the first time. Probably most traumatic and senseless was the strategy of trench warfare, utilized largely in France and Belgium, in which each army dug a trench in the ground and attempted to advance to overtake the opposing army's trench by waves of soldiers going "over the top." Hundreds of thousands of soldiers died in these waves, but trench warfare only brought the war to a bloody standstill.

Hemingway saw action in World War I as an ambulance driver and was wounded.

Last Generation: Historical Context (cont.)

Africa

Kenya, where Mount Kilimanjaro is located, was a popular destination for adventurous American and European tourists during the time between the two world wars.

Europe

During the 1920s, Hemingway and the rest of the Lost Generation wandered around Europe, drank, spent time together, and produced some of the greatest art and literature of the 20th century. Many of this group were aimless, dissatisfied with their home countries, and refused to assimilate into the European culture.

Setting

Time – Afternoon until night that same day; between WW1 and WW2

Place – Safari camp on the plains of Tanganyika (Tanzania)

Mood – Attempted detachment

Tone – Reminiscent; futility; regretful

Conflict

- **External Conflict**

Man vs. Man (Woman) – Harry believes that the women in his life have kept him from achieving artistic success as a writer.

- **Internal Conflict**

Man vs. Himself – Harry struggles to come to terms with his own death.

Characters

- **Compton**

Compton flies the plane that is meant to take Harry back to the city to save his life. He is confident and tries to make Harry feel better about his predicament. However, he exists only in Harry's dream.

- **Harry**

Harry is the protagonist of the story. He is a writer and has had many experiences in Europe. He also very much enjoys big-game hunting. When the story begins, Harry is suffering from gangrene in his leg and he is dying in the African backcountry while waiting for a plane to take him to the city.

- **Helen**

Helen, a major character, is Harry's wife. Also known as The Wife, she remains unnamed until the end of the story when a delirious Harry refers to her by her name as he dies. He does not seem to love her, but he does respect her to a certain degree for her skill with a gun. She comes from

Characters (cont.)

- **Helen (cont.)**
a wealthy family, and Harry has contempt for that. However, Helen cares for him greatly and tries to ease his suffering.
- **Molo**
Molo, a minor character, is the African servant who serves Harry and Helen. He does little more in the story than bring Harry whiskey and sodas.

Style: Flashbacks

The story is divided between six present-time sections (set in regular type) and flashbacks (set in italics). In the present-time sections, the protagonist is facing his death stoically, quietly, and with a great deal of machismo. All he needs is whiskey and soda to accept his imminent death. However, in the flashback sections, Harry faces his life. His flashbacks show the reader that he has had an exciting and well-travelled life but that he is also haunted by his memories of World War I. He served in the U.S. Army in that war and saw combat on the Eastern front, in the Balkans, and Austria. The violence and death that he saw there come back to him as his rotting leg tells him that he is about to die. Harry's past is not all negative, however. He is a writer, and in his flashbacks he thinks about his vocation and about all of the stories he wanted to write that he never took the time to begin. He has spent time in Paris with the artists and writers who lived there in the 1920s (one name he mentions, Tristan Tzara, is a real poet of the time and another, "Julian," is a thinly-disguised portrait of the

Style: Flashbacks (cont.)

American novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald) and is familiar with the Place de la Contrescarpe, a popular bohemian locale of the time. His flashbacks also show that he is an experienced outdoorsman – necessary background to this character so that readers do not think of him as a greenhorn who is dying out of pure inexperience.

The flashbacks center around concerns about the erosion of values: lost love, loose sex, drinking, revenge, and war. They are a mix of hedonism, sentimentality toward the human condition, and leaving unfinished business.

Style: Point of View

In “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” the matters that trouble Harry are made clear to the reader; the narrator, who is inside Harry’s head, speaks of them explicitly. However, Hemingway sets these instances of introspection apart, dividing them into sections printed in italics. In all but one of the sections that are in regular type, the narration is typical Hemingway: blunt, unadorned, almost devoid of adjectives, and quite uninformative as to what Harry is feeling. The sentences are short and declarative. Nevertheless, when the narration drifts into the italic sections, the tone changes. The sentences grow longer and almost stream-of-consciousness, with one clause tacked on after another recording the protagonist’s impression of a scene. The narrator describes scenes fondly and vividly, and uses metaphors and figurative language: “the snow as smooth to see as cake frosting,” for instance.

Style: Point of View (cont.)

As the story proceeds and Harry's condition worsens, the switching between unadorned narration and impressionistic, memory-laden narration becomes quicker and more frequent, until the penultimate section. In this section – the section in which Compton arrives and takes Harry away – the reader thinks they are in the “real world” until the end, when they realize that Harry is having another dream sequence. This time, however, the dream—usually delineated by italics—has bled through to the “real world,” and the only clue, before the end of the dream, that it is a dream is the sentence structure. In this section, the sentences are longer, more impressionistic, more descriptive, just as the sentences in the earlier italic dream segments were. The contrast between the “real world,” in which Harry's gangrene has killed him, and the dream world, in which he is flying toward the “unbelievably white” peak of Mount Kilimanjaro, is accentuated in the final section, in which the narrator returns to his short, declarative sentences.

Style: Allusion

“The Snows of Kilimanjaro” alludes subtly to two well-known short stories: one by its structure and technique, the other by its subject matter. The first story is “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” (1891) by the American writer Ambrose Bierce. In this story, set during the Civil War, an Alabama man is being hanged on Owl Creek Bridge for espionage. As the story opens, readers see him on the bridge, having the noose put over his head. When the boards under his feet are snatched away, the rope breaks. He is able to use his bound hands to take the rope off his neck and swim away down the river as the Union soldiers’ bullets hit the water by him. After swimming down the river a long way, he gets out and finds his way back home. As he arrives at his house and as his wife stretches her arms to greet him, the noose jerks at his neck and he dies instantly. The whole story has been an imaginary scene that the protagonist has lived through from the time he begins falling to the time that the rope’s slack runs out. Just like in “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” the seeming salvation for the hero existed only in the hero’s mind.

Style: Allusion (cont.)

Hemingway's story also alludes to another well-known story, Henry James' "The Middle Years" (1893). Like Hemingway, James presents a self-portrait of a writer near the end of his life. James' Dencombe, like Hemingway's Harry, has an admirer. However, in the case of Dencombe, the admirer is male, not a wife as in the case of Henry. This admirer gives up something important and valuable to be with the writer. Finally, like Harry, Dencombe dies somewhat unexpectedly and ironically at the end of the story.

Style: Foreshadowing

- **The hyena** – It foreshadows the death of the protagonist.
- **Vultures** - They foreshadow the death of the protagonist.
- **The leopard's skeleton** - It foreshadows the death of the protagonist.

Symbolism

- **The leopard** – It is a symbol of immortality, a reward for taking the difficult road. Harry himself was a "leopard" at certain times in his life. Specifically, Harry can be seen as a leopard during:
 1. His youth, when he lived in a poor neighborhood of Paris as a writer
 2. In the war, when he gave his last morphine pills for himself to the horribly suffering Williamson
 3. On his deathbed, when he mentally composes flashbacks and uses his intention to write
 4. When he stays loyal to his wife and does not confess to her that he never really loved her
- **The hyena** – It is a symbol of the rotting death that Harry fears.
 1. Approaching death
 2. The emptiness with which Harry associates the sign of death
 3. On his deathbed, when he mentally composes flashbacks and uses his intention to write
 4. Death is about to reach Harry

Symbolism (cont.)

- **Mount Kilimanjaro** – It is a triple symbol.
 1. Immortality – In most civilizations, God's promise of immortality resides on the highest mountain top: Mount Olympus for the Greeks and Mount Fuji for the Japanese.
 2. Truth, idealism, purity
- **The plains** – They symbolize evil and confusion.
- **The poetry Harry never wrote** – This symbolizes Harry's belief that he has not accomplished what he set out to do as a young man. ("I'm full of poetry now. Rot and poetry. Rotten poetry.")
- **Alcohol** – It symbolizes two things.
 1. Goodwill, friendship, accomplishment (flashbacks)
 2. Self-destruction for Harry

Themes

- **Death** – Man’s spirit can triumph despite death. (Three deeds during Harry’s life make this possible:
 1. Giving away his last morphine pills that he saved for himself to his friend Williamson, who is in horrendous pain
 2. Harry's intention to write (the mental writing of the flashbacks) in his painful stupor
 3. Sacrificing himself to his wife as opposed to absolving himself)
- **Artistic creation** – Harry’s failure to achieve the artistic success as a writer that he sought in life is one of the major themes. He became what he despised. (Harry comes close to representing Hemingway himself.)