

= True at First Light =

True at First Light is a book by American novelist Ernest Hemingway about his 1953 ? 54 East African safari with his fourth wife Mary , released posthumously in his centennial year in 1999 . The book received mostly negative or lukewarm reviews from the popular press and sparked a literary controversy regarding how , and whether , an author 's work should be reworked and published after his death . Unlike critics in the popular press , Hemingway scholars generally consider True at First Light to be complex and a worthy addition to his canon of later fiction .

In a two @-@ day period in January 1954 , Hemingway and Mary were in two plane crashes in the African bush . He was reported dead by the international press , arriving in Entebbe to face questions from reporters . The severity of his injuries was not completely known until he returned to Europe months later . Hemingway spent much of the next two years in Havana , recuperating and writing the manuscript of what he called ' the Africa book ' , which remained unfinished at the time of his suicide in July , 1961 . In the 1970s , Mary donated it along with his other manuscripts to the John F. Kennedy Library . The manuscript was released to Hemingway 's son Patrick in the mid @-@ 1990s . Patrick edited the work to half its original length to strengthen the underlying storyline and emphasize the fictional aspects . The result is a blend of memoir and fiction .

In the book , Hemingway explores conflict within a marriage , the conflict between the European and native cultures in Africa , and the fear a writer feels when his work becomes impossible . The book includes descriptions of his earlier friendships with other writers and digressive ruminations on the nature of writing .

= = Background = =

Hemingway went on safari to Africa in 1933 with his second wife Pauline and always intended to return . That visit inspired Hemingway 's " Snows of Kilimanjaro " published in The Green Hills of Africa , well @-@ known parts of the Hemingway canon . Two decades later in 1953 , having finished writing The Old Man and the Sea , he planned a trip to Africa to visit his son Patrick who lived in Tanganyika . When Look magazine offered to send him to Africa , paying \$ 15 @,@ 000 for expenses , \$ 10 @,@ 000 for rights to a 3500 word piece about the trip , and Earl Theisen as official photographer to go with him , he quickly accepted . Hemingway and Mary left Cuba in June , traveling first to Europe to make arrangements and leaving from Venice to Tanganyika a few months later . They arrived in August , and Hemingway was thrilled to be deputized as an honorary ranger , writing in a letter , " due to emergency (Mau Mau rebellion) been acting game ranger " . Philip Percival , Hemingway 's safari guide in 1933 , joined the couple for the four @-@ month expedition ; they traveled from the banks of the Salengai , where Earl Theisen photographed Hemingway with a herd of elephants , to the Kimana Swamp , the Rift Valley and then on to visit Patrick in central Tanganyika . After visiting Patrick at his farm , they settled for two months on the north slopes of Mt . Kilimanjaro . During this period Percival left their camp to return to his farm , leaving Hemingway as game warden with local scouts reporting to him . Hemingway was proud to be a game warden and believed a book would come of the experience .

On January 21 Hemingway chartered a sightseeing flight of the Congo Basin as a late Christmas present to Mary ; two days later , on their way to photograph Murchison Falls from the air , the plane hit an abandoned utility pole and crashed , with the passengers sustaining minor injuries . That night they camped in the bush waiting for a response to their distress call . The crash site was seen by a passing airliner that reported no survivors , and the news of Hemingway 's death was telegraphed around the world . The next day they were found and picked up by a bush pilot , but his de Havilland caught fire during take @-@ off , crashed and exploded , which left Hemingway with a concussion , scalp wound , double @-@ vision , intermittent hearing in his left ear , a crushed vertebra , ruptured liver , spleen and kidney , and burns . The explosion burned their passports , " thirty rolls of exposed film , three pairs of Ernest 's bifocals , all of their money , and their \$ 15 @,@ 000 letter of credit . " The group traveled to Entebbe by road , where journalists from around the world had gathered to report his death . On January 26 Hemingway briefed and joked with the reporters , and spent the

next few weeks in Nairobi recuperating and reading his obituaries . During his recuperation Hemingway immediately prepared the piece for Look . The magazine paid him an additional \$ 20 @, @ 000 for an exclusive about the plane crashes . Biographer Michael Reynolds writes that the piece , " ran for twenty magazine pages spread out over two issues " , with the first issue bearing a publication date of 26 January .

In spite of his injuries , Hemingway joined Patrick and his wife on a planned fishing trip in February , but he was irascible and difficult to get along with . When a bushfire broke out , Hemingway fell into the fire while helping extinguish the flames , burning himself on his legs , front torso , lips , left hand and right forearm . Months later in Venice , Hemingway was diagnosed with two cracked discs , a kidney and liver rupture , a dislocated shoulder and a broken skull .

As soon as Hemingway returned to Finca Vigía in Cuba , he began work on a book about the safari , wanting to write while it was still vivid in his memory . He quickly wrote 10 @, @ 000 words , despite his pain (eventually the manuscript grew to about 800 pages) . In September 1954 , Hemingway wrote in a letter , " At present I work at about 1 / 2 the capacity I should but everything is better all the time . " However , three months later in late December he wrote in a letter : " This has been sort of a rough year We call this ' black @-@ ass ' and one should never have it . But I get tired of pain sometimes , even if that is an ignoble feeling . "

Almost a year later in October 1955 , he declared : " Am passed 650 pages in the book . Am trying to write now like a good sorcerer 's (sic) apprentice ... always start to write as an apprentice . By the end of the book you are a master but if you commence as master in writing anyway , you end as a bloody bore . " Two months later , Hemingway was bedridden with kidney disease . By January 1956 , he acknowledged , in a letter written on the second anniversary of the accidents , he was having trouble remembering the trip . In 1956 , Hemingway agreed to work on the filming of *The Old Man and the Sea* and abandoned work on the Africa book . He wrote to his editor , " I found it impossible to resume writing on the Africa book . " Hemingway put the manuscript in a safe @-@ deposit box in Havana , although after the 1959 Cuban revolution he feared the manuscript lost .

= = Synopsis = =

The book is set in mid @-@ 20th century Kenya Colony during the Mau @-@ Mau rebellion . In his introduction to *True at First Light* , Patrick Hemingway describes the Kikuyu and Kamba tribes at the time of the Mau @-@ Mau rebellion . He explains that if the Kamba had joined the rebellion , Ernest and Mary Hemingway " would have then stood a good chance of being hacked to death in their beds as they slept by the very servants they so trusted and thought they understood . " The book takes place in December while the narrator , Ernest , and his wife , Mary , are in a safari camp in the Kenyan highlands on the flank of Mt . Kilimanjaro , where they find themselves temporarily at risk when a group of Mau @-@ Mau rebels escape from jail .

The blend of travel memoir and fiction opens with the white hunter Philip Percival leaving the safari group to visit his farm , handing control of the camp to Ernest , who is worried about being attacked and robbed , because there are guns , alcohol , and food in the camp . Deputized as an assistant game warden , he makes daily rounds in the game reserve , and maintains communication with the local tribes . He is accompanied by two African game scouts , Chungo and Arap Meina and , for a period , the district game warden G.C (Gin Crazy) . Other camp members include Keiti , who runs the camp , the safari cook , Mbebia , and two stewards , Nguili and Msembi .

For six months Mary has been tracking a large black @-@ maned lion , determined to finish the hunt by Christmas . In subsequent chapters , Ernest worries that Mary is unable to kill the lion for various reasons : she is too short to see the prey in the tall grass ; she misses her shots with other game ; and he thinks she is too soft @-@ hearted to kill the animal . During this period , Ernest becomes entranced with Debba , a woman from a local village , whom the others jokingly refer to as his second wife . From her and the villagers he wants to learn tribal practices and customs .

When Mary 's lion is finally killed at the book 's halfway mark , the local shamba (village) gathers for a ngoma (dance) . Because she has dysentery , Mary leaves for Nairobi to see a doctor ; while she is gone Ernest kills a leopard , after which the men have a protracted ngoma . When Mary

returns from Nairobi , she asks Ernest for an airborne sightseeing tour of the Congo Basin as a Christmas present .

Ernest describes his close relationships with the local men ; indulges in memories of previous relationships with writers such as George Orwell , and D.H. Lawrence ; and satirizes the role of organized religion . Subjects as diverse as the smell of the pine woods in Michigan , the nature of Parisian cafés , and the quality of Simenon 's writing are treated with stream of consciousness digressions .

The back of the book includes a section titled " Cast of Characters " , a Swahili glossary , and the editor 's acknowledgments .

= = Publication history = =

The ownership of Hemingway 's manuscripts is complicated . Two books have been published from the African book manuscript : *True at First Light* , edited by Patrick Hemingway , and *Under Kilimanjaro* , edited by scholars Robert Lewis and Robert Fleming . In 1965 Mary Hemingway established the Hemingway Foundation , and in the 1970s she donated her husband 's papers to the John F. Kennedy Library . A group of Hemingway scholars met in 1980 to assess the donated papers when they formed the Hemingway Society , " committed to supporting and fostering Hemingway scholarship " . After Mary Hemingway 's 1986 death , Hemingway 's sons John and Patrick asked the Hemingway Society to take on the duties of the Hemingway Foundation ; in 1997 the Hemingway Estate and the Hemingway Society / Foundation agreed to a two @-@ part publishing plan for the African book . An abridged trade publication of *True at First Light* was to be published in 1999 , to be edited by Patrick Hemingway ; the Hemingway Foundation would then oversee the reworking of the entire text , to be published as *Under Kilimanjaro* . Of *Under Kilimanjaro* , the editors claim " this book deserves as complete and faithful a publication as possible without editorial distortion , speculation , or textually unsupported attempts at improvement " .

In the early 1970s , portions of the manuscript had been serialized in *Sports Illustrated* and anthologized . Mary Hemingway approved the segments published by *Sports Illustrated* : segments described by Patrick Hemingway as a " straight account of a shooting safari " . In a 1999 talk presented at the annual Oak Park Hemingway Society dinner , Patrick Hemingway admitted ownership of Ernest Hemingway 's manuscripts had " a rather tortuous history " . Access to the Africa manuscript ? and to other Hemingway material ? required a lawsuit and an eventual agreement with the Hemingway Society .

Scribner 's requested a book of fewer than 100 @,@ 000 words . Patrick Hemingway worked for two years with the 200 @,@ 000 @-@ word manuscript ? initially converting to an electronic format , and then editing out superfluous material . He strengthened the storyline , and eliminated long descriptive passages with disparaging remarks about family members and living persons . He explains the manuscript was a draft lacking " ordinary housekeeping chores " such as character names . The cuts made , he said , maintained the integrity of the story and " the reader is not deprived of the essential quality of the book " .

True at First Light was published on July 7 , 1999 with a print run of 200 @,@ 000 . For the publicity campaign , Patrick Hemingway appeared on the *Today Show* on the day of publication . The book became the main selection for the Book of the Month Club (BOMC) , was serialized in the *New Yorker* , and rights were sold for translations to Danish , French , German , Icelandic , Italian , Norwegian , Polish , Spanish , and Swedish . A sound recording was released in 2007 .

= = Genre = =

In *The New York Times* James Woods described *True at First Light* as a travel journal that became a " fanciful memoir " and then a novel of sorts . Patrick Hemingway believed adamantly the manuscript was more than a journal . He emphasized the storyline because , as he explains , " the essential quality of the book is an action with a love interest " . He tightened the hunting scenes , and to honor his father 's statement to the reader that " where I go , you go " he emphasized the mid

@-@ 20th century Africa scenes and " the real relation between people ... on that continent " . Although he fictionalized the storyline , Patrick Hemingway said of the characters , " I knew every single one ... very well indeed " . Hemingway scholar Robert Fleming (who reworked the manuscript as *Under Kilimanjaro*) considers Patrick Hemingway 's editing essentially to be correct because he believes the work shows evidence of an author unable to " turn off the mechanism that produces fiction " . The marital conflict is where Fleming believes the book took " a metafictional turn " . The published book is marketed as fiction .

Fleming considers *True at First Light* similar to Hemingway 's *Green Hills of Africa* and *A Moveable Feast* ? a book that presents a primary topic as a backdrop interspersed with internal dialogue . Unlike the other two books , *True at First Light* is without a preface " indicating the intentions of the author or dictating how he intended to have the book read " . Fleming thinks Hemingway regarded *Green Hills of Africa* as experimental and *A Moveable Feast* as fiction . Rose Marie Burwell , author of *Hemingway : The Postwar Years and the Posthumous Novels* , believes Hemingway enjoyed writing the " strange combination of memoir and fiction " . She thinks in the fictional aspects of *True at First Light* he is free to imagine a second wife and to jettison his Protestant background .

= = Themes = =

Hemingway is " most definitely on vacation " in *True at First Light* writes Fleming ; and Burwell sees an author who is willingly and happily enjoying a vacation , behaving childishly , blissfully unaware of the effect his behavior has on the members of camp . The impression is of a man seeking to delve into cultural conflicts in Africa , which takes a fictional turn in the Debba storyline . Mary is characterized as a nag whereas the character of the writer is presented as " placid , mature , and loving " , immersing himself in native culture .

Burwell and Fleming says the book 's subtext is about aging , as symbolized by the writer 's attraction to the younger fertile woman , and Hemingway used fertility imagery to symbolize " the aging writer 's anxiety about his ability to write " . The images of the old elephant symbolize the aging and unproductive writer , and Burwell approves Patrick Hemingway 's decision to retain those pieces of the manuscript . Hemingway scholar Hilary Justice writes the work shows an emphasis on " the writer not writing " , which for Hemingway would have been a fate worse than aging . Thus , she says , *True at First Light* invokes a paradox with " an aging writer for whom writing is becoming increasingly difficult in the moment of writing about the not @-@ writing author " . Writing , for Hemingway , had always been difficult . He revised his work endlessly and stuck to the practice of writing " one true sentence " and stopping each writing session when he still had more to write . Tom Jenks , editor of an earlier posthumously published book *The Garden of Eden* , says Hemingway shows the worst of his writing in *True at First Light* : presenting himself as a " self @-@ pitying , self @-@ indulgent , self @-@ aggrandizing " persona in a book that is no more than a mass of fragmentary material . Jenks thinks Hemingway is simply aimlessly writing and the plot lacks the tension notable in his earliest works such as *The Sun Also Rises* . However , he thinks Hemingway had good material to work with and some skeletal thematic structures show promise .

True at First Light shows the nature of mid @-@ 20th century conflict in Africa . Colonialism and imperialism pressured African tribes and wildlife . Hemingway shows an awareness of the political future and turmoil in Africa according to Patrick Heminway who , although he lived in Tanzania (formerly Tanganyika) for decades , was surprised at the degree of perception apparent in his father 's mid @-@ century writing about Africa . Hemingway scholar Anders Hallengren notes the thematic similarities in Hemingway 's posthumous fiction , particularly in the final books . The genesis of *True at First Light* was an African insurrection , also symbolically depicted in *The Garden of Eden* : " The conviction and purposefulness of the Maji @-@ Maji in *The Garden of Eden* , corresponds to the Kenyan Mau @-@ Mau context of the novel *True at First Light* " . Writing for *The Hemingway Review* , Robert Gadjusek says the clash of cultures is " massively active " in the book with Hemingway exploring tribal practices ; Christianity and Islam are juxtaposed against native religions ; and the Mary / Debba triangle is symbolic of the white " Memsahib and the native girl " .

Similar to his first African book , *Green Hills of Africa* , Hemingway embeds in *True at First Light*

digressions and ruminations about the nature of writing , with particular attention to James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence . Patrick Hemingway explains his father was interested in D.H. Lawrence 's belief that each region of the world " should have its own religion " ? apparent when the male character invents his own religion . Mary 's intent to decorate a tree for Christmas mystified the native camp members , and Hemingway seemed to realize that Africa was a place without an influential and established religion ? a place where religion could be redefined .

= = Reception = =

Although it was listed on The New York Times Best Seller list , the book received poor reviews from the popular press , although better reviews from Hemingway scholars . In a pre @-@ publication review for The New York Times , Ralph Blumenthal said that True at First Light was not as good as Hemingway 's earlier autobiographical fiction , and he questioned whether Hemingway would have wanted his " reputation and last printed words entrusted solely to any editor , even a son " . Blumenthal wondered about the autobiographical aspects of the work : the relationship between Hemingway and Debba ; the background of the Look magazine photoshoot ; the safari itself ; and the subsequent plane accidents . In the 1999 The New York Times review , James Wood claimed Hemingway knew True at First Light was not a novel though the editors billed it as one . He believes Hemingway 's later work became a parody of the earlier work . True at First Light represents the worst of Hemingway 's work according to a review in The Guardian .

Christopher Ondaatje writes in The Independent that the existence of a Hemingway industry tends to overshadow his posthumous work . He considers Hemingway 's African stories to be among his best although the posthumous work about Africa has been disregarded or overlooked . In her piece for Nation , Brenda Wineapple describes the book as " poignant but not particularly good " . However , she points out that it " reminds us of Hemingway 's writing at its most touching , acute and beautiful best " . The review in Publishers Weekly is much the same saying the " old Hemingway magic flashes sporadically , like lightning , but not often enough " .

Hemingway scholars think the work is more complicated and important than a cursory read suggests . With the publication of True at First Light critics saw a more humane and empathetic Hemingway , and began to shift their emphasis away from the image of the " white man with a gun " . Robert Fleming considers True at First Light to be part of the Hemingway canon declaring , " This is a more complicated book than it appears to be , and Hemingway deserves far more credit for it than the reviewers of the popular press have given it . Serious critics dealing with the late works would be advised not to ignore it " . Gadjusek praises the prose style , which he says is a new direction in Hemingway 's writing ; he also believes , despite the editing , the book is cohesive and whole with well @-@ ordered themes . Burwell considers the edits to the manuscript generally well @-@ done , though she laments losses that she thinks contribute to some of the subtexts in the book . Biographer Kenneth Lynn criticized Hemingway 's sons for editing the manuscript but of Hemingway he says the " memoirist is being totally , indeed helplessly honest , " and Gray concedes the publication of the book " underscores Hemingway 's courage as a writer " . Despite what he considers poor workmanship in the book , Wood considers Hemingway even at his worst a compelling writer and he says the literary estate should be left alone to save the literary influence .

= = Publication controversy = =

Many reviewers and writers were critical of the manner in which Patrick Hemingway edited the work . Paul Gray titled his review of the book " Where 's Papa ? " , answering with the opening sentence , " He 's hard to find in his fifth posthumous work " , pointing directly to Patrick Hemingway 's editing of the manuscript . Lynn thinks Hemingway would have been " outraged by his sons ' refusal to honor his judgment that the manuscript was unworthy of publication " and was outraged that " Patrick Hemingway declares that his two brothers , Jack and Gregory , share his belief that ' this job was worth doing ' " . Burwell also wonders whether Hemingway wanted the Africa book published , pointing to his statement , " I think maybe it would be better to wait until I 'm dead to publish it " ,

although she concedes that works by Chaucer , Shakespeare , and Kafka were unfinished and published posthumously . During the final two decades of his life , Hemingway had published two novels but since his death , works continue to be published . Writing in The New Yorker in 1998 , Joan Didion was extremely critical of the Hemingway family and estate for commercializing and profiting from his reputation and writing rather than protecting his legacy . " The publication of unfinished work is a denial of the idea that the role of the writer in his or her work is to make it " , she wrote , adding that True at First Light should not have been " molded " and published .

True at First Light was published in Hemingway 's centennial year , to a marketing campaign that attracted criticism . Hemingway 's sons licensed the family name and released that year items such as Thomasville furniture with labels showing the Hemingway lifestyle ? " the Pamplona Sofa and the Kilimanjaro Bed " ? and the Hemingway Ltd. brand , which Lynn describes as " tastefully chosen fishing rods , safari clothes , and (surely the ultimate triumph of greed over taste) shotguns " .