

# The snows of kilimanjaro



This paper analyzes three short stories of Hemingway- The Snows of Kilimanjaro, Hills Like White Elephants, and Indian Camp by reading them against the grain. The aim of this paper is to study the stories by re-reading them and using approaches that will give greater insights and reveal new meanings.

### **The Snows of Kilimanjaro (Marxism)**

Marxism believes " the real forces that create human experience [are] the economic systems that structure human societies" (Tyson 53). Marxist criticism chooses to focus more broadly on the cultures " economics [as] the base on which the superstructure of social/political/ideological realities is built" (Tyson 54).

When we speak of ideology from a Marxist perspective we mean a belief system created by cultural conditioning (Tyson 56). It is these underlying, pervasive, and sometimes disguised economic ideologies that shape our culture which in turn shapes each of us as individuals through cultural conditioning.

Thus, it is the " differences in socioeconomic class [which] divide people in ways that are much more significant than differences in religion, race, ethnicity, or gender" (Tyson 54). When we speak of socioeconomic class we mean differences in economic, social, and political power between people. Marxism gives us the terms bourgeoisie and proletariat, which in simple terms refer to the rich and the poor, respectively.

But Tyson says there are essentially five different socioeconomic classes in America: the underclass, lower class, middle class, upper class, and "

aristocracy" (55). And people are always fighting and struggling to climb the socioeconomic ladder as part of their cultural conditioning. " For Marxism, getting and keeping economic power is the motive behind all social and political activities, including education, philosophy, religion, government, the arts, science, technology, the media, and so on" (Tyson 53).

When looking at " The Snows of Kilimanjaro" from a Marxist perspective, it is important to note the time period in which the story was written and published. Even though the story takes place in Africa it is predominantly influenced by the characters' experiences in American (and European) culture. Harry and Helen are (presumably) American citizens and therefore their behaviour has been shaped by the predominant American ideologies of the mid 1930s, which include: classism, consumerism, rugged individualism, and the American dream.

In " The Snows of Kilimanjaro" Harry can be seen as a patriot, he fought in the war; as a rugged individualist, Helen " thought he did exactly what he wanted to" (Hemingway 46); as a man living the American dream, climbing the social ladder, always improving his social standing in life by moving on to women with more money than the last, and enjoying the " acquiescence in this life of pleasant surrender" (47) and comfort; and as classist, although Harry shares his wife's money he still felt like " a spy in [the] country...[of] the very rich" (44). Harry embodies all of these American ideologies and they shape his identity as an individual, even though at their root the ideologies are a result of the underlying capitalist American economic system.

We can also learn a lot about the prevailing ideologies from the narrative itself. Throughout the story Harry and Helen both shout orders to their camp and hunting support staff. Although the support staff is presumably being paid but it is worth pointing out that there is a class division between the privileged couple and the workers whose job is to make their experience enjoyable. Also there are numerous references to money throughout the text.

Harry says to Helen it's "[y]our bloody money" (Hemingway 41), and "[y]our damned money was my armour," and "[y]ou rich bitch" (43). Harry also thinks about how he " had his life and it was over and then he went on living it again with different people and more money, with the best of the same places, and some new ones," and of the " very rich...which he despised" (Hemingway 44); and " this rich bitch," and "[Helen] who had the most money of all, who had all the money there was" (45); and " because she was richer" (46); and "[t]he rich were dull and they drank too much, or they played too much backgammon.

They were dull and they were repetitious" (53). Harry also recalls a story in which a guy named Julian says " The very rich are different from you and me" and someone responds to Julian by saying " Yes, they have more money," but this crushed him because Julian " thought they were a special glamorous race" (Hemingway 53).

These textual references deal with the subject of money, of economics, of ideology, and classism. But there is still more textual evidence of the capitalist American ideologies present in the story. Another example of

classist ideology includes Harry's statement to Helen " your own people, your goddamned Old Westbury, Saratoga, Palm Beach people" (Hemingway 41). And examples of consumerist ideology can be seen as Helen " had to make another life" so " she acquired him (Harry)" and " built herself a new life" (Hemingway 46).

All of the above textual references are proof of the underlying economic ideologies that shape the characters in " The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and illustrate the ways in which Harry and Helen value their commodities for their exchange value and sign-exchange value. " For Marxism, a commodity's value lies not in what it can do (use value) but in the money or other commodities for which it can be traded (exchange value) or in the social status it confers on its owner (sign-exchange value)" (Tyson 62).

Viewed from this perspective Harry and Helen are using each other's sign-exchange value in their relationship, in other words, they are showing off their possession of one another to society in a process called commodification. Commodification, or the use of sign-exchange value, is exactly what it means when Harry describes himself " as a companion and as a proud possession [of Helen's]" (Hemingway 45).

As we have seen there are many references in the narrative of " The Snows of Kilimanjaro" that shed light on the relevant ideologies as applicable to Marxist criticism. The ideologies of classism, patriotism, rugged individualism, consumerism, and the American dream are as predominant today as they were in the 1930's.