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Tracing Cognitive Dissonance as Invisible Disability in Ernest Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro"

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Ernest Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" through the critical lens of disability studies, with a specific focus on cognitive dissonance as an invisible disability. While Hemingway's work has long been associated with themes of physical injury and hypermasculinity, this study explores how mental and psychological impairments, less visible yet equally debilitating, are embedded within the author's minimalist narrative framework. Drawing on Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance and the foundational insights of Lennard J. Davis on disability studies, the study argues that the protagoodnist Harry's internal conflict, marked by regret and self-deception, constitutes a form of psychological impairment hidden beneath the more conspicuous signs of physical decline. By juxtaposing Harry's gangrene with his deteriorating mental state, the analysis challenges traditional binaries of mind/body and visible/invisible affliction. The article further places Harry's cognitive dissonance within the cultural pressures of Hemingway's masculinist ethos, suggesting that the suppression of emotional vulnerability contributes to his spiritual and artistic demise. Ultimately, this reading of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" offers a unique understanding of Harry's identity as a disabled individual, and reveals how an examination of invisible disabilities can challenge the normative understanding of masculinity and artistic authenticity.

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1. Introduction

Ernest Hemingway's writing is known for its unique minimalist and journalistic style[1], which is most prominent in his short stories. This approach, which Hemingway pioneered in the early twentieth century under the label of the "iceberg theory," employs a simple language to convey the narrative, while deliberately leaving much unsaid for the reader to uncover through careful analysis. Hemingway famously compared the explicit content of the text to the tip of an iceberg, with the vast, hidden portion representing the implicit themes and emotions. In *Death in the Afternoon*, he explains

If a writer of prose knows enough about 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 iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. (Hemingway 1960, 192)

This method invites multiple interpretations, one of which is inspecting his works through the lens of disability studies. There are not many studies exploring disability in Hemingway's oeuvre, and those that do concentrate only on physical disabilities depicted in his novels. However, this article aims to trace cognitive dissonance as a form of invisible disability hidden beneath the mask of visible physical wounds within one of Hemingway's short stories, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (1936).

"The Snows of Kilimanjaro" narrates the story of the protagonist, Harry, who is suffering from gangrene as he lies dying at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, where he and his wife, Helen, are staying. The story offers a compelling example of the relationship between mental scars and physical injuries. Harry serves as a good example; his gangrenous leg showcases his physical decline and exacerbates his internal conflict. No longer the macho adventurer he once envisioned himself to be, Harry's current state clashes with his self-perception. This cognitive dissonance increases as he grapples with regret, failure, and unfulfilled artistic promise. In an effort to reduce the dissonance, he externalizes and rationalizes his suffering, thereby masking his invisible disability beneath the surface of a visible wound.

Disability studies examines the representation of characters with physical and mental impairments in literature to offer a deeper understanding of these individuals and their experiences. As David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (2000, 49) mention in *Narrative Prosthesis*, in many literary works, characters with disabilities are depicted as marginalized figures whose identities are reduced to mere narrative tools; they are often dehumanized, stripped of individuality, and reduced to metaphors. Yet disabilities are not always overt or immediately

[1] See the following in order to get more insight on the role of repetition in Hemingway's minimalist style: Mansouri, Mehrzad. 2008. "The Role of Repetition of Linguistic Elements in the Analysis of a Short Story." *Research in Contemporary World Literature* 13 (46): 117-133.

apparent; some are "invisible," requiring a more in-depth exploration to reveal their presence and significance. As defined by Ellen Samuels (2017, 504) in Lennard J. Davis's *The Disability Studies Reader*, an invisible disability is one in which an individual's physical appearance does not immediately signal impairment. Within this context, the issue of "coming out" becomes particularly salient: an individual with an invisible disability may choose to "pass" by downplaying or concealing aspects of their disabled identity.

This notion of "passing" is central to "Cognitive Dissonance," where Leon Festinger examines how individuals reconcile conflicting elements of their self-perception. Festinger first proposed the concept of cognitive dissonance to describe the psychological discomfort that arises when a person holds two or more contradictory beliefs, values, or self-perceptions. In other words, it refers to the inner tension people feel when their actions or realities conflict with their beliefs or ideals. He states, "two items of information that psychologically do not fit together are said to be in a dissonant relation to each other" (Festinger 1962, 93). Much like Hemingway's characters, who struggle with the tension between outward strength and internal vulnerability, individuals who experience cognitive dissonance may alter their perception to reduce psychological discomfort. In Hemingway's world, masculinity is often predicated on the suppression of pain, which reinforces a cognitive dissonance where characters rationalize their suffering rather than confront it.

Another crucial aspect of disability studies is the dichotomy between mental and physical wounds, a theme that recurs in Hemingway's narratives and challenges the traditional mind/body dualism. Hemingway's work is predominantly masculine, filled with themes of ableism that often dismiss the disabilities of his characters. His narratives frequently involve characters with physical injuries, yet these injuries are seldom isolated phenomena; in fact, they lead to the formation of deep mental scars. These mental wounds, raised from repressed emotions and the oppressive pressures of an ableist, masculine environment, are intricately linked to their physical counterparts. Moreover, the omnipresent cultural concern with masculine toughness in Hemingway's oeuvre discourages the acknowledgment of physical wounds as signs of vulnerability and aggravates the formation of hidden, psychological scars.

This article examines Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance in Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" to explain Harry's experience of invisible disability and the resulting psychological torment. Drawing on Lennard J. Davis's theoretical framework, it explores how regret, memory, and counterfactual thinking increase this dissonance and helps us gain a better understanding of Harry's disabled identity. It employs Davis's critique of normalcy as a construct and the medical model to reveal the overlooked aspects of Harry's condition and reinterpret his internal conflict through the lens of disability studies.

Ernest Hemingway is one of the most canonized figures in American literature, yet critical engagement with his work through the lens of cognitive dissonance and invisible disability remains unexplored. Within the field of disability studies, Lennard J. Davis stands as a foundational scholar. In *Bending Over Backwards: Essays on Disability and the Body*, Davis emphasizes the importance of inclusivity in the conceptualization of disabled identity, arguing that society cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the role of disability. He also draws a critical distinction between impairment and disability, asserting that "impairment is the physical fact of lacking an arm or leg. Disability is the social process that turns an impairment into a negative by creating barriers to access" (Davis 2002, 12). In *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*, Davis (1995, 23) further discusses how the concept of normalcy is socially constructed, claiming that "to understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body."

In *The Disability Studies Reader*, a collection of essays edited by Davis, Ellen Samuels explores the often-hidden nature of certain conditions termed "invisible disabilities." She explores "constructions of coming out or passing in a number of social contexts" (Samuels 2017, 504). In "A Qualitative Investigation of Persons with Invisible Disabilities," Gillian Hendry et al. (2022, 146) address this issue and argue that "as the boundary between disabled and non-disabled is less clear for those with invisible disabilities, the possibility to pass as not having a disability is more likely than when the individual has a visible disability."

Cognitive and psychological impairments constitute a significant subset of disabilities across societies. In "Invisible Disabilities and Inequality," Jane McLeod (2023, 6) argues that these disabilities result in inequality and that "basic social psychological processes ... can help us understand how invisible disabilities shape outcomes over the life course." One such condition is addressed by Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. This theory posits that "if a person knows various things that are not psychologically consistent with one another, he will, in a variety of ways, try to make them more consistent" (Festinger 1962, 93). Accordingly, a person may try to change their behaviors or perceptions to reduce the dissonance and appear more "normal."

One important concept in disability studies' reorientation of the "normal" is crip time. It refers to a deliberate reorientation of temporality away from ableist clocks and linear life-course expectations. In *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Alison Kafer (2013, 27) writes that "crip time is flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time," insisting that assumptions about "how long things take" are built around "very particular minds and bodies," so "rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock,

crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds." She emphasizes that this is "more than" a blanket extension of deadlines; it is a reorientation to time itself (Kafer 2013, 26-27).

Scholarship on disability in Hemingway's oeuvre has predominantly focused on representations of the ideal masculine body and visible physical impairments in his novels. For instance, Taylor Hagood (2010, 388) examines the character of Jake Barnes, the war-wounded protagonist in *The Sun Also Rises*, and asserts how Hemingway's narratives navigate the intricate interplay between physical and societal ideals, shedding light on the pervasive impact of disability within cultural, political, and economic frameworks. In "The Abuses of the Human Body in *A Farewell to Arms*," Emily Dykhouse also explores the same concept, arguing that the protagonist's response to his injury reflects deeply internalized ableism. She writes, "Fredric's inability to view or accept himself as whole following the mortar explosion reveals his internalized ableism" (Dykhouse 2022, 3). Moreover, in a chapter titled "Masculinity and Disability" in the book *Phallacies*, Carolyn Slaughter points out Hemingway's obsession with the ideal masculine body. She asserts that "for Hemingway, anyone who lacked physical excellence had no authenticity, neither in his world nor his fiction. Without manly action there was nothing and no one, no I, no self, just a hollow man" (Slaughter 2017, 322). In "Primitivism and Masculinity in the Work of Ernest Hemingway," Tom Burnam (1955, 21) similarly discusses the primal masculine attributes often associated with Hemingway's characters and how "these so-called primal masculine characteristics turn out to be quite something else."

Another important aspect of disability studies in relation to Hemingway's work is the exploration of the connection between disability and sexual degeneration, particularly in *The Sun Also Rises*. For instance, Dana Fore (2007, 81), in "Masculinity, Disability, and Guilt in *The Sun Also Rises*," argues that Jake must "rid his consciousness of the idea that sexual mutilation can only trigger mental and physical degeneration." Martina Kübler (2023, 115)), in *White Male Disability in Modernist Literature*, further analyzes the novel through the lens of crip/queer corporeality, examining how disability intersects with non-normative expressions of masculinity and sexuality.

Although some scholars have acknowledged the psychological dimensions of disability in Hemingway's work, their primary focus often lies elsewhere. In "A Space to Be: Ability, Disability, and the Inevitability of Corporeal Decline in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea,"*[1] Dominic Robin (2024) briefly notes the mental aspect of Santiago's condition, stating that "while Santiago's hands and back do limit him, it is his mind as much as his body that betrays him." Nevertheless, Robin's analysis centers primarily on corporeal decline. Similarly,

[1] See the following for getting more insight on Hemingway *The Old Man and the Sea*: Azizi, Nemat, and Shirin Karami. 2025. "Tracing Literary Influence: Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea and Munif's The Unfinished Bridge." Research in Contemporary World Literature 30 (2): 635-663, doi: https://dx.doi.org/10.22059/jor.2025.380331.2554.

Trevor Dodman (2006, 249), in "'Going All to Pieces': *A Farewell to Arms* as Trauma Narrative," discusses the debilitating effects of war, arguing that Frederic's unique narration reflects his ongoing struggle with the psychological aftermath of shell shock. However, neither of these studies explicitly frames their analysis within the context of invisible disabilities. Moreover, they both focus exclusively on Hemingway's novels, Robin on physical disability and Dodman on Trauma, without extending their discussions to his short stories.

Regarding Hemingway's short stories, and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" in particular, which is the focus of this article, there has been little to no scholarship applying the lens of disability studies. However, existing articles such as Jennifer Harding's examination of regret and counterfactual thinking, as well as Oliver Evans's study of the story's plot elements, contribute to the foundation of this article's argument. Building on their discussion, this article seeks to fill that scholarly gap by examining how Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance illuminates Harry's internal conflict as a form of invisible disability. It explores how regret, counterfactual thinking, and masculine norms intensify this dissonance, engaging Lennard J. Davis's critique of the medical model of disability. Through this framework, the study reveals how Hemingway's story exposes the psychological dimensions of disability and challenges traditional constructions of masculinity and normalcy.

2. Theoretical Framework: An Interpretive Bridge between Disability Studies and Hemingway

Disability studies as an academic discipline is primarily concerned with how society and culture construct and treat impairment. Although impairment originates in the individual's physical or mental condition, disability itself is understood as a social, cultural, and political construct; it is a phenomenon shaped by normative expectations. As Davis (1995, 2) states in *Enforcing Normalcy*, "disability is not an object but a social process." This perspective emphasizes that our understanding of disability is not merely an individual failing but a reflection of broader societal attitudes and institutional structures. This Foucauldian-inflected approach displaces the medical model's pathologization of individual bodies and repositions disability within regimes of power, surveillance, and normalization (Davis 1995, 103). Furthermore, not all disabilities are immediately detectable; some, by nature, are invisible. For example, an individual suffering from a wartime knee injury might also experience concomitant difficulties with communication or cognitive function. In such cases, the impact on cognitive abilities may remain obscure even if the physical injury is evident. This is apparent in certain Hemingway stories, where the interplay of visible physical damage and imperceptible mental distress demonstrates the complexity of the characters' experiences.

Hemingway's work has often been critiqued as predominantly masculine and marginalizing toward women; however, one may argue that certain male characters in his narratives are also marginalized, which renders them "disabled" under their inability to express themselves or to cope with internal conflicts. This article indicates that the world depicted in Hemingway's works inhibits his characters from articulating their inner struggles, resulting in cognitive dissonance and impairing their capacity to function effectively within society. Festinger's findings on temptation and prohibition further reinforce this argument. In his forbidden toy experiment, children who were given a mild deterrent against playing with a toy later convinced themselves that they never wanted the toy in the first place, whereas those given a severe threat still desired it (Festinger 1962, 100). Hemingway's male characters operate in a similar psychological landscape: because their environment offers only mild social deterrents against emotional vulnerability, they must internally rationalize their emotional suppression.

This article first examines how Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance contributes to the understanding of invisible disability in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," particularly as experienced by the protagonist, Harry. It then moves on to explore the roles of regret and counterfactual thinking in intensifying Harry's psychological dissonance and shaping his disabled identity, drawing on Davis's concepts to support this analysis. Furthermore, the study engages with Davis's critique of the medical model of disability, particularly the binary of "kill or cure," and investigates the role of Harry's wife, Helen, in his spiritual death. Next, the discussion considers the influence of the hypermasculine world in Hemingway's fiction and how it contributes to the marginalization of Harry as a disabled subject while underscoring the failure of his aspirations. Finally, the study shows how this failure can be reframed as a partial success through a reorientation of temporality in crip time, wherein time bends to meet Harry's temporality in the italicized memory sequences of the story. Through a close examination of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" within the theoretical framework of disability studies, the article unmasks the invisible dimensions of Harry's disability and offers a new understanding of his internal struggle.

3. Analysis

3.1. Cognitive Dissonance as Psychological Impairment: Understanding Harry's Invisible Disability

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance indicates why Hemingway's male characters resist acknowledging their mental scars. He explains that those faced with two contradictory cognitions will often attempt to reduce dissonance by altering their attitudes or perceptions. Festinger describes an experiment in which high school girls were asked to choose between two equally attractive records and later justified their decision by re-evaluating their choices. He

maintains that "according to the theory, the process of dissonance reduction should lead, after the decision, to an increase in the desirability of the chosen alternative and a decrease in the desirability of the rejected alternative" (Festinger 1962, 95). This mechanism mirrors how Hemingway's characters, particularly those with disabilities, construct a self-narrative that denies their vulnerability. They are not just physically or emotionally wounded; they are psychologically entrapped by a culture that demands resilience and, at the same time, denies space for vulnerability. Applying Festinger's approach, one can see how these men, who are caught between competing self-perceptions, unconsciously reshape their realities to endure the burdens of a world that demands their silence.

This psychological mechanism directly parallels Harry's self-justifying behavior in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." Like Festinger's participants, who convince themselves that their chosen record was the better one, Harry reframes his life decisions to protect his ego and preserve a sense of coherence. His dismissive attitude toward his gangrene-inflicted leg exemplifies this process. His justifications, self-deceptions, and aggressive outbursts are both character traits and manifestations of a deeper psychological struggle to maintain internal consistency, a shared experience among individuals with invisible disabilities. Hendry et al. (2022, 152) point to this in their discussion:

People with invisible disabilities "travel between two worlds" as they adjust to the new situation in which they find themselves. They emphasize or de-emphasize aspects of their identity, highlighting whatever they think does not 'fit' into any one category at any one time due to the invisibility of their disability.

Harry experiences a similar dissonance. His physical disability is a site of cognitive dissonance, reinforcing his existential anxieties and leading him to rewrite his past in a way that would align with his present suffering. Harry preserves his masculine self-image and shields himself from the emotional weight of acknowledging his mortality. He does so by reframing his suffering as an inevitable consequence of his artistic failures rather than considering it the result of a medical condition.

The relationship between physical and mental scars is complex. Physical injuries in Hemingway's stories not only catalyze the formation of mental scars but also serve as a mask that conceals them. The conspicuous nature of physical wounds can cover the more subtle, underlying psychological injuries. This dynamic is exemplified in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." Harry, debilitated by gangrene, becomes a powerful symbol of both physical decay and mental frustration. His deteriorating body indicates his inner turmoil, which disrupts his ability to communicate effectively with his wife and ultimately leads him to express himself in harsh,

destructive ways. In this sense, Harry's physical ailment adds to his mental debilitation, creating a feedback loop in which each form of injury reinforces the other.

Festinger's study on insufficient justification provides another perspective through which one can interpret Harry's plight. In Festinger's classic experiment, individuals who were given $20 to lie about a boring task experienced little cognitive dissonance since they had an external justification. However, those who were paid only $1 later convinced themselves that the task had actually been enjoyable (Festinger 1962, 100). Similarly, Harry, deprived of external validation for his suffering, reframes his past to align with his present reality; he justifies his artistic failures and lost opportunities by connecting them to external constraints rather than personal shortcomings, a classic case of dissonance reduction.

Festinger presents his cognitive dissonance theory to explain how people experience distress when their beliefs, behaviors, or self-conceptions conflict with reality. This drive for coherence is so strong that, as he puts it, "Just as hunger impels a person to eat, so does dissonance impel a person to change his opinions or his behavior" (Feastinger 1962, 93). Harry's entire arc in the story is structured around this psychological struggle. He sees himself as a great writer, yet as he lies dying, he realizes he has wasted his talent and potential. He has gone through experiences, such as wars, travels, and relationships, but at the end of the day, he has failed to transform them into the literary masterpieces he once envisioned. This internal conflict is at the heart of his dissonance, forcing him into a desperate process of rationalization and regret.

3.2. Regret and Counterfactuals: The Psychological Core of Harry's Dissonance

Jennifer Harding's study on regret and counterfactual thinking shows how Harry's memories function as imagined alternatives to his failed reality. She writes, "The explorations of 'what might have been', which appear in some form in every section of 'Snows', unite the story's fragments and provide the key to its total thematic effect" (Harding 2011, 22). Harry's flashbacks, including his past loves, his war experiences, and his youthful ambitions, serve as a counterfactual, an alternative path his life could have taken. This mechanism allows him to reconcile his cognitive dissonance by imagining that he could have been the writer he once aspired to be, even if, in reality, he never fulfilled that destiny.

However, as Davis's critique of disability demonstrates, Harry's suffering is not merely internal but also culturally constructed. Davis (1995, 2) argues that disability, like race and gender, is not just an individual physical condition but a socio-political category that has been shaped by historical forces. In this light, Harry's gangrenous leg is not just a medical condition; it is a marker of social deviance. He is not just dying; he is dying as a man who failed to live up to his own and society's expectations.

Next to the utilization of Davis's critical framework in reading Harry, Festinger's theory would also highlight the role of violated expectations in creating cognitive dissonance. He gives the example of someone standing in the rain and not getting wet, a disruption of an expected reality, as a source of cognitive distress (Festinger 1962, 94). Similarly, Harry's entire crisis stems from his failed expectations of himself. Harding (2011, 27) describes this as Hemingway's use of counterfactual thinking to illustrate Harry's disillusionment:

Harry repeatedly thinks and talks about the things he will never do. If he once was fooled into thinking that wealth exempted him from making hard choices between desirable options, he now seems to realize that it was all an illusion.

Harry once believed that his adventurous life, meaning his encounters with war, love, and hardship, would naturally translate into great artistic achievement. Yet, as he faces death, he realizes that he has done nothing with these experiences. McLeod (2023, 9), in his article, illustrates that "invisible disabilities influence later outcomes, in part, through processes of cumulative disadvantage, that is, independent of continuity in disabilities over time." Hemingway (1991, 47) demonstrates this dynamic in Harry's character:

Now he would never write the things that he had saved to write until he knew enough to write them well. Well, he would not have to fail at trying to write them either. Maybe you could never write them, and that was why you put them off and delayed the starting. Well he would never know, now.

One can observe that Harry's unacknowledged psychological distress and internalized dissonance contribute to his artistic stagnation. His expectation that experience alone would make him a great writer is false, and the resulting dissonance leads him to a sense of regret and despair.

Davis's analysis of modern normalcy further deepens this analysis of cognitive dissonance. He explains that the statistical concept of normalcy, which emerged with industrialization and eugenics, established rigid categories of "normal" and "abnormal," reinforcing social exclusion. He believes that modern statistical models, such as the bell curve, created the illusion that disability and deviation were failures rather than natural variations (Davis 2002, 105). Harry's disability places him outside the realm of "normal" masculinity, which demands strength, success, and control. His physical weakness, the gangrene, and his artistic failure combine to render him socially "disabled." According to Davis (2002, 12), disability is not just a medical condition but a social status, and Harry's status as an artist who failed to fulfill his potential compounds his physical impairment with a deeper cultural dissonance.

3.3. Negation of Kill or Cure Dichotomy in Medical Mode of Disability: The Result of Looking at Harry's Spiritual Death

Davis (2002, 12) critiques the medical model of disability, which frames impairment as a defect that requires correction or elimination. Instead, he goes with Foucault's theory of power, arguing that disability is regulated by societal norms and institutions and that it "should be understood not as a medical condition but as a socially constructed identity, shaped by cultural and economic forces." Fore, in his analysis of Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, discusses Hemingway's awareness of this medicalized understanding of disability. He notes that "the novel's downbeat ending suggests that a philosophy that continually denies bodily realities can be as physically and mentally destructive as a literal wound" (Fore 2007, 76). While Harry's leg wound in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" is the most visible marker of his physical decline, the true source of his suffering is not medical but existential, and his condition is not something to be treated.

This medicalized understanding aligns with Hemingway's larger themes of stoicism and fatalism. Harry does not seek treatment, nor does he fight to live; he accepts death as inevitable, which reflects society's broader exclusion of disabled bodies. As Davis notes, the social response to disability is often one of rejection. He points out that rather than adapting to disability, society often reinforces the idea that disabled bodies are failures, beyond redemption (Davis 1995, 132). Harry's hallucination of rescue, the episode where he imagines being flown to Kilimanjaro, can be read in this light. Harding (2011, 30) suggests that Hemingway's use of a dual ending, one in which Harry imagines he escapes and one in which he dies, creates another counterfactual, further emphasizing his dissonance. She points out that "the existence of two mutually incompatible endings provides the reader with a third experience of counterfactuals in the story."

From Davis's perspective, the aforementioned instance of hallucination can also be seen as a rejection of the medical and social systems that failed him. Robin (2024), in his analysis of *The Old Man and the Sea*, discusses the kill or cure dichotomy and notes how the text avoids the conventional overcoming narrative, in which "disability is depicted as a mental or physical barrier that can be overcome through willpower." In this Hemingway's novella, Santiago neither triumphs over his physical limitations nor succumbs to them, thus subverting this reductive binary. In contrast, Harry's death in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" appears to conform to the stereotype and reinforces the kill or cure dichotomy. This parallels the situation in *A Farewell to Arms*. Dykhouse describes the characters as this:

[They] are presented only with the devastating and false dichotomy of fighting or dying, a false dichotomy that is only fully challenged once it is too late, and Frederic has already perpetuated systemic abuses to the human body that have suffocated him throughout seemingly endless and total warfare. (Hemingway 1991, 10)

However, Harry's final moments may still be read as a subtle form of resistance against these constraints and his socially constructed "failure" as a disabled and unfulfilled man.

The varied aspects of this failure are evident in Oliver Evans's interpretation of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," which provides a compelling framework that contrasts Harry's lost idealism with his present state of decay. The leopard represents his former self, frozen at the peak of ambition, while the hyena embodies his physical and moral decline. Harry's wife, Helen, according to Evans (1961, 605) is not just a character but a metaphor for the suffocating comfort that led to Harry's spiritual death. This analysis highlights the conflict between moral idealism and materialism, which further strengthens how Hemingway's story critiques artistic compromise.

The leopard, introduced in the story's epigraph, is crucial to understanding Harry's internal struggle. Hemingway describes, "Close to the western summit of Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa, there is the dried and frozen carcass of a leopard. No one has explained what the leopard was seeking at that altitude" (Hemingway 1991, 45). Evans (1961, 604) interprets the leopard as a symbol of Harry's youthful purity and ambition, which is now lost to time; the leopard climbed higher than it needed to, driven by an instinctual pursuit of something greater. Likewise, Harry once had lofty artistic ambitions, but unlike the leopard, he failed to sustain them.

Harry's flashbacks reinforce the contrast between his idealistic past, filled with the aforementioned artistic ambitions, and his compromised present. He recalls moments of authentic experience, war, hardship, and love that once inspired his writing. However, he never fully utilized these moments in his work, allowing them to become mere memories instead of masterpieces. Davis's critique of normalcy and cultural expectations adds another layer to this interpretation. Davis (1995, 24) asserts, "The concept of a norm is constructed, historically speaking, as a reaction to the concept of the ideal human body." Harry once embodied an artistic ideal, but as society's expectations of success shifted toward wealth and comfort, he succumbed to materialistic normalcy rather than continuing the pursuit of artistic excellence. This shift left him frozen, much like the leopard, unable to fulfill the purpose he once sought. Unlike the noble, frozen leopard, the hyena lurks near the ground as a scavenger drawn to death and decay:

While it grew dark they drank and just before it was dark and there was no longer enough light to shoot, a hyena crossed the open on his way around the hill. "That bastard crosses there every night," the man said. "Every night for two weeks." "He's the one makes the noise at night. I don't mind it. They're a filthy animal though." (Hemingway 1991, 52)

This appears repeatedly throughout the story, reinforcing Harry's physical deterioration and approaching the end. Hemingway (1991, 59) describes the hyena's presence in other unsettling terms: "the hyena stopped whimpering in the night and started to make a strange, human, almost crying sound." This disturbing imagery aligns with Davis's critique of the medical model of disability, which reduces human suffering to a biological defect rather than acknowledging the social and psychological aspects that surround it. Harry's gangrene is not just a physical ailment; it covers his moral and artistic decay. He has allowed himself to become passive, to waste his potential, much like a scavenger surviving on the remnants of others' success rather than creating something of his own.

Whenever Helen appears, the hyena is nearby, suggesting a deeper connection between her presence and Harry's decline. Evans's most striking argument is that Helen is not just a character, but a symbol of spiritual death. She is not malicious, yet she represents the life that has smothered Harry's artistic drive (Evans 1961, 605). As Hemingway (1991, 51) writes, Helen "loved [Harry] dearly … as a proud possession", but "the way in which she had finally fallen in love with him [was] all part of a regular progression in which she had built herself a new life and he had traded away what remained of his old life. He had traded it for security, for comfort too" (Hemingway 1991, 51). Hemingway further connects her presence with Harry's awareness of death: "and just then it occurred to him that he was going to die" (Hemingway 1991, 52). Looking at her, this awareness becomes inevitable, and he senses his own end approaching: "He saw her well-known, pleasant smile, he felt death come again" (Hemingway 1991, 54). In other words, Helen's association with wealth, comfort, and security makes Harry complacent.

Davis's argument about normalcy as a social construct applies here. Helen embodies the "norm" of success, yet that very normalcy is what has eroded Harry's artistic soul. Evans ties this to Hemingway's broader theme of women as inhibitors of male ambition. In "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," Margot prevents Macomber from fully realizing his masculinity, ultimately killing him when he gains independence (Evans 1961, 605). Similarly, Helen is not Harry's murderer, but she represents the life he chose over his art; a life that led to his creative and spiritual death.

In the same way that Helen represents Harry's spiritual death, the gangrene can be read as the physical manifestation of what obstructs his moral and artistic accomplishments. This interpretation coheres with Davis's critique of modern society's rigid categorization of ability and worth. Just as disability has been medicalized and marginalized, Harry's decline is framed not just as a failure of the body, but as a failure of the soul. Hemingway presents Harry as a man trapped between two worlds; the leopard's world is connected to ambition, purity, and the

pursuit of artistic truth, and the hyena's world embodies decay, compromise, and a slow descent into death. Helen, though not evil, belongs to the latter world, representing a life of comfort that ultimately proves fatal to Harry's artistic potential.

3.4. The Myth of Primal Masculinity: Disability and Harry's Failure as the Hemingway Hero

Another factor that plays a significant role in all this is the masculine world of Hemingway's stories. Carolyn Slaughter (2017, 321) describes Hemingway's public life as a desperate performance of physical excellence, noting that "over the years, it led to a creation of a sprawling mythology that he helped create and was obliged to prove." She characterizes this performance as an endeavor to uphold the persona of a macho adventurer obsessed with violence, danger, and stoic endurance. Slaughter (2017, 329) further argues that this hypermasculinity functions as a mask, concealing deep insecurities: "what Hemingway's hypermanliness tried so desperately to conceal was his greatest fear, that at any moment he would be found out." Tom Burnam's article, "Primitivism and Masculinity in the Work of Ernest Hemingway," offers a compelling critique of the "primitive" masculinity often associated with Hemingway's male characters. He argues that while critics have long described Hemingway's work as "primitive" in its depiction of masculinity, violence, and "ritual," this characterization is misleading (Burnam 1955, 20). Instead, Hemingway's men are shaped by complex cultural constructs of masculinity, which emphasize aggression, physical endurance, and emotional detachment. Burnam (1955, 21) also critiques Hemingway's binary portrayal of women, dividing them into witch-like figures who threaten masculinity and idealized figures who mirror male attributes.

By incorporating Davis's critique of disability as a socially constructed category, we can further analyze Hemingway's portrayal of masculinity as an unattainable ideal that is threatened by physical impairment and social expectations. This perspective allows us to reframe Hemingway's depiction of wounded or "broken" men, such as Harry in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," as more than just meditations on masculinity; they also serve as examples of the failure of the rigid societal norms that define strength, success, and worth. Hemingway deliberately leaves the relation between the physical traits associated with masculinity and social norms uncertain through his minimalist style. This stylistic withdrawal permits analysis of how the bodily wound (gangrene), which undermines the masculine ideal of able-bodiedness, both amplifies and masks the cognitive dissonance produced by social norms and expectations.

Burnam (1955, 21) challenges the popular notion that Hemingway's men are primitive warriors who are driven by instinctual violence and primal urges. Instead, he argues that these characters are products of Anglo-American-European cultural expectations of masculinity:

"Hemingway's men are men and they involve themselves constantly with such obviously elemental things as death and sex; their approach is masculine, direct, even brutal; they cut through the complexities of contemporary society to the so-called 'primal' drives" (Burnam 1955, 20). However, Burnam critiques this view by pointing out that what we perceive as "primitive masculinity" is actually a constructed ideal that varies across cultures. He highlights how Hemingway's male characters engage in activities, such as hunting, fishing, drinking, and war, all of which are celebrated in Western culture as marks of masculinity, rather than universal human traits (Burnam 1955, 21). They are "men" primarily because they engage in activities we associate with masculinity in terms of our culture.

Davis's critique of normalcy and ability aligns with Burnam's argument. He explains how societal structures define certain traits, such as strength, aggression, and endurance, as masculine norms, marginalizing those who fall outside these categories. Hemingway's obsession with physically strong, hyper-masculine men reflects these cultural constructions, but it also sets his characters up for failure. When physical impairment or emotional sensitivity disrupts this ideal, the result is social exclusion. As a result, once a Hemingway hero is physically impaired (as with Harry), he becomes "socially disabled" and cannot fulfill the expectations of masculinity imposed upon him.

Burnam notes that Hemingway's portrayal of women often falls into two categories: the "witch" figure who emasculates men, such as Margot Macomber in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," and the "ideal" woman, who possesses the same virtues as Hemingway's men, like Maria in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (21). He argues that women who fail to fit into the masculine ideal are often "punished" within the narrative:

Does it not seem obvious that easily—a line can be drawn on one side of which are ranged what can only be called Hemingway's witches, while on the other stand women who are hardly women at all, but simply Hemingway men only slightly, even superficially, altered?" (Burnam 1955, 21).

Evans's analysis of Helen in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" aligns with this categorization. He argues that Helen is more than just a character; she is a symbol of "death-in-life" (Evans 1961, 605). Her presence coincides with Harry's realization of his impending death, reinforcing the idea that she represents the comfort and materialism that have suppressed his creativity. Her association with the hyena, an animal linked to carrion and decay, further manifests her symbolic role as a representation of Harry's spiritual death.

Davis's critique of disability and normalcy helps deepen this reading. He argues that societal structures define worth based on productivity and ability, rendering those who are physically impaired or dependent as lesser. Harry's physical impairment, meaning his gangrenous leg,

serves as a mask for his failure to meet the masculine and artistic ideals society has imposed on him. Helen's wealth and stability, rather than empowering him, highlight his stagnation. Harry's decline is not just biological but cultural; his gangrene is a sign of how society discards those who are no longer strong, independent, and productive.

Thus, Hemingway's masculine world not only marginalizes physical weakness but also suppresses alternative modes of living and creating. The rigid expectations of strength, productivity, and emotional control leave little space for the disabled or the unproductive body. Yet in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," Harry's physical immobility creates a new relationship to time, which challenges these able-bodied, masculine ideals. This naturally leads to the concept of crip time, in which disabled temporality redefines what counts as achievement or success.

3.5. "He Had Never Written a Word of that": Harry's Writing in Crip time

One way to reconsider Harry's failure as a partial success is to read the story through the lens of crip time. Alison Kafer's notion of crip time reframes temporality as something that should bend toward embodiment rather than force bodies to keep pace with standardized clocks. In *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Kafer (2013, 27) defines crip time as "flex time not just expanded but exploded," a reorientation of "what can and should happen in time," culminating in the now-classic formulation: "rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds." In "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," Harry's gangrenous leg quite literally reschedules the day; time is counted in pain waves, in the circling of vultures, and in the interval before "the plane" that may or may not arrive. Hemingway's opening makes this temporal re-scripting obvious: "'The marvellous thing is that it's painless,' he said… 'That's how you know when it starts,'" (Hemingway 1991, 46) and then immediately synchronizes the scene to the scavengers' patient drift. This is a textbook instance of crip time: story-time is paced by bodily crisis rather than by itinerary or productivity (Kafer 2013, 26).

Crip time also exposes a conflict between curative time and embodied temporality. Throughout the story, Harry and Helen repeat the promise that "the plane will come" (Hemingway 46), projecting a linear rescue that would return the body to normative futurity, hospital, cure, and work. Kafer (2013, 3) argues that ableist futures cast disability as "the sign of no future," making cure (or its failure) the only imaginable result. Seen this way, the narrative's halting present, interrupted by involuntary flashbacks, refuses the expectation that the only "timely" endings are cure or punctual death; crip time slows, detours, and suspends progression even as the plot moves toward the end. Read alongside crip-temporal theory, the text stages a contest between reproductive, achievement-oriented time and a counter-chronology that unsettles the life-course's fetish for longevity and stability.

Since crip time is relational, the story maps temporal power across bodies and nonhuman actors. Helen's care-work tries to extend time: "Maybe they will be back with another truck today. Maybe the plane will come" (Hemingway 1991, 46). Yet her appeals to patience, optimism, and decisiveness reproduce the affective discipline of able-bodied time. By contrast, the animal chronometry of the camp, vultures that "sailed," and the hyena's sporadic keening marks a parallel, non-instrumental temporality that syncs more closely with Harry's immobilized body (Hemingway 1991, 46 & 58). In Kafer's terms, the scene is not simply about waiting but about reimagining what counts as an event and a future when the clock is set by impairment rather than itinerary (Kafer 2013, 26-27). The camp thus becomes a meeting point between different ways of experiencing time: curative futurity, care's flexible but still normative extensions, and crip time's asynchronous, contingency-driven pacing.

Crip time further troubles the story's anxiety about work and achievement. Harry blames himself for "wasting" time and for failing to write the stories he "had saved to write" (Hemingway 1991, 47), measuring a life by output under an ableist schedule of productivity. Kafer (2013, 25) enables a reframing: delays, detours, or alterations in ambition are not moral failures but evidence that the metric itself excludes disabled temporality. Literary form often converts disability into a device that resolves plot through cure or elimination, or what Mitchell and Snyder (2000, 49) call "narrative prosthesis." In Hemingway's text, however, the recursive montage of unwritten scenes, structured through bodily crisis, resists easy resolution. The work of memory is not redeemed by new pages produced on time, but by a form that lets the body's timing dictate sequence and emphasis.

Finally, it should be mentioned that this temporal re-scripting allows us to trace Harry's partial success. Within this altered temporality, he finally manages to narrate experiences that had remained unwritten; these passages appear in italics and constitute a significant portion of the text. By asserting that "he had never written any of that" (Hemingway 1991, 54), the narrative discloses precisely what he has not written, thus permitting those episodes to be told, amid waves of pain and hallucination, in an alternate time frame. We read of his life in Paris, his relationships before Helen, his earlier ambitions, and the stories he intended but failed to write before finding himself in Africa awaiting death. In this way, time bends, and, in crip time, Harry at last produces the story we read.

4. Conclusion

Ernest Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" is a tale of failure, masculinity, and societal expectations. According to Leon Festinger's theories of cognitive dissonance and Lennard J. Davis's notions of disability studies, Harry can be read as a dying writer wounded by his unfulfilled ambitions and a fractured self-image. The condition of his gangrenous leg is

more than a medical state; it is an embodiment of a deeper psychological stagnation formed by strict ideals of masculinity and success. As disability studies suggests, disability is not only medical but also socially constructed, meaning Harry's dissonance becomes a disabling element that alienates him from both his sense of identity and prevailing societal norms.

Hemingway's layered characterization of Harry sets the ground for further exploration of his disability using cognitive dissonance. First, the manner in which Harry deceives himself and rationalizes his failure in response to his gangrenous leg signifies cognitive dissonance as a form of invisible disability that renders him mentally stagnated. His imagined ascent to Kilimanjaro, instead of signifying victory, represents his inability to escape this state. Invisible disabilities, such as unresolved cognitive dissonance, thus, can be just as limiting as physical impairments in shaping a person's destiny. Moreover, the story blurs the boundaries between mind and body, and visible and invisible impairments, as Harry's physical decline masks his mental pain. In this way, the story undermines binary frameworks often used to categorize disability. The presentation of a hypermasculine environment further highlights the socially constructed nature of disability, which makes cultural imperatives of stoicism and emotional repression significant sources of Harry's existential despair and artistic failure. Finally, crip time reframes this failure in the italicized memory sequences that allow Harry to write belatedly about the experiences he long wanted to write but could not. These findings illustrate the story's exploration of normative ideals and its engagement with disability as a complex and socially constructed phenomenon.

Ultimately, this article contributes to Hemingway studies through its foregrounding of the intersectional point of disability, gender, and temporality in one of his most psychologically complex short stories. It also widens the field of disability literature by demonstrating just how canonical modernist texts can illuminate the cultural construction of invisibility, dissonance, and the human condition itself.

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