
Ernest Hemingway

Global American Modernist

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Iconic American modernist Ernest Hemingway spent his entire adult life in an international (although primarily English-speaking) modernist milieu interested in breaking with the traditions of the past and creating new art forms. Throughout his lifetime he traveled extensively, especially in France, Spain, Italy, Cuba, and what was then British East Africa (now Kenya and Tanzania), and wrote about all of these places: “For we have been there in the books and out of the books – and where we go, if we are any good, there you can go as we have been” (Hemingway 1935, 109). At the time of his death, he was a global celebrity recognized around the world. His writings were widely translated during his lifetime and are still taught in secondary schools and universities all over the globe.

Ernest Hemingway was born 21 July 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois, also the home of Frank Lloyd Wright, one of the most famous modernist architects in the world. Hemingway could look across the street from his childhood home and see one of Wright’s innovative designs (Hays 2014, 54). As he was growing up, Hemingway and his family often traveled to nearby Chicago to visit the Field Museum of Natural History and the Chicago Opera House. Because of the 1871 fire that destroyed structures over more than three square miles of the city, a substantial part of Chicago had become a clean slate on which late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century architects could design what a modern city should look like. The internationally known Chicago School of architecture transformed the city’s skyline with increasingly lofty skyscrapers. Thus Hemingway grew up in a region where modernist architecture thrived, showing him in vivid detail the exciting artistic possibilities of a new modernist aesthetic.

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Despite being surrounded by avant-garde architecture, however, Ernest was raised and educated in an artistically conservative Anglophile tradition. His parents' favorite book (after, of course, the Bible) was *John Halifax, Gentleman*, by Dinah Craik, a conventional Victorian novel (first published in 1856) about a British orphan who makes good (Spilka 1990, 17–42; Nagel 1996). Grace Hall Hemingway, the author's mother, named their Michigan cottage on Walloon Lake "Windemere," a slight misspelling of Lake Windermere, which the poet William Wordsworth frequented in the Lake District (Dearborn 2017, 20); Hemingway and his first wife, Elizabeth Hadley Richardson, later honeymooned at the cottage. In high school, with the exception of Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, Ernest and his classmates were assigned to read British writings almost exclusively, including *Ivanhoe*, *Silas Marner*, *David Copperfield*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Paradise Lost*, *The Faerie Queene*, *The Rape of the Lock*, and several Shakespeare plays: *Twelfth Night*, *Macbeth*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *King Lear* (Reynolds 1981, 39–41). Only after World War I, during his correspondence with Hadley, the woman who would become his first wife, did he begin to read works of literature by continental writers.

After Hemingway graduated from high school, he went to work for the *Kansas City Star* from October 1917 to April 1918. He first learned to strip his work of adjectives and other modifiers as a cub reporter in Kansas City. The "Star Copy Style," a newspaper style sheet now readily available on the internet, specified how reporters for the newspaper should write: "Use short sentences. Use short first paragraphs. Use vigorous English" and "Eliminate every superfluous word" ("Star" n.d.). Judging by Hemingway's writing, he took those recommendations to heart. "Those were the best rules I ever learned for the business of writing," he told a reporter more than 20 years later ("Back" 1940, 21). Near the end of his life, he wrote in *A Moveable Feast*, his posthumously published memoir of his years in Paris,

If I started to write elaborately ... I found that I could cut that scrollwork or ornament out and throw it away and start with the first true simple declarative sentence I had written. (Hemingway 1964, 12).

Eager to join World War I, Hemingway volunteered for the Red Cross, which sent him to Italy as an ambulance driver in May 1918. He spent less than two months in Italy before he was severely wounded in the right leg by shrapnel from an exploding mortar shell. He recovered from his injury in a military hospital in Milan and before returning home fell in love with his nurse, who abruptly jilted him by mail shortly after he arrived in America. The evidence suggests that Hemingway, confronted with his own mortality at only 18, experienced post-traumatic stress disorder after the war (Hays 2014). He wrote extensively about his war experiences in his short fiction and in his semi-autobiographical 1929 novel *A Farewell to Arms*, which along with German author Erich Maria Remarque's 1929 novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* became one of the iconic representations of World War I.

When he later returned to Europe with Hadley in 1921, they rented an apartment in Paris, and he wrote for the *Toronto Star* as its international correspondent. He often conveyed his stories to the newspaper by telegram, for which the newspaper had to pay by the word. As a result, he developed the ability to write "cablese," an extraordinarily

succinct method of communicating information. When journalist Lincoln Steffens praised Hemingway's writing, Ernest directed his attention elsewhere: "... [J]ust read the cablese, only the cablese. Isn't it a great language?" (quoted in Baker 1969, 102). Hemingway's experience as a reporter taught him the art of compression – conveying vivid specific details in as few words as possible. The brief but compellingly vivid vignettes between the short stories of his 1925 collection *In Our Time* attest to his mastery of that skill.

In Paris, he and Hadley soon joined an international expatriate community of modernist writers, editors, and artists, many of them veterans of World War I. Hemingway spent time in the salon of Gertrude Stein, whose literary innovations he later dismissed as unreadable. Editor and poet Ezra Pound mentored the young writer, and Sylvia Beach, owner of Shakespeare and Co. bookstore, recommended books he should read. He met and associated with a host of other writers of talent, including James Joyce, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ford Madox Ford – as well as artists such as Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró. It was in Paris that he wrote the first fiction he was able to publish, and his experiences there inspired his financially successful and critically acclaimed 1926 *roman-à-clef* *The Sun Also Rises*.

One of the novel's epigraphs was taken from Ecclesiastes in the King James Version of the Bible. The other relayed an anecdote from Gertrude Stein in which she described Hemingway and his contemporaries as a "lost generation," apparently feeling – understandably – that they had been irreparably damaged by the global trauma of World War I. The epithet stuck, and Hemingway and his friend F. Scott Fitzgerald have long been considered Lost Generation writers.

Hemingway's most significant literary contribution is undoubtedly his innovative style, characterized by short declarative sentences, the avoidance of modifiers, emotional reticence, and objectivity (in other words, a lack of authorial intrusion). Hemingway is also justly famous for the vivid sensory details in his writings, particularly with reference to the natural world. A life-long hunter and fisherman, he learned from childhood to pay attention to detail as a naturalist would (Beegel 2000), as his short story "Big Two-Hearted River" demonstrates. He tends to begin *in medias res* – in the middle of events, without first introducing the characters and situation. His fiction was particularly celebrated for his skill in writing realistic dialogue. Hemingway uses the vernacular (the language of everyday speech) in his writings, a choice he learned from Mark Twain:

All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn* ... All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since. (Hemingway 1935, 22)

Unlike many of his fellow modernists, whose work could be obscure and difficult, Hemingway prided himself on the accessibility of his writing. As he wrote to his first American publisher of his short story collection *In Our Time*, "My book will be praised by highbrows and can be read by lowbrows. There is no writing in it that anybody with a high-school education cannot read" (Baker 1981, 155).

His work frequently examines the impact of violence, especially wartime violence, bullfighting, and crime, three of the focuses of the stories and vignettes (the short sketches between the stories, also called interchapters) of *In Our Time*. But (as stories like "Indian Camp," "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife," "Soldier's Home," and "Fathers and Sons" attest) he is also interested in the psychological violence of the American nuclear family

and the lasting damage that kind of violence can cause (Tyler 2006, 2016). Hemingway consistently emphasizes sensory detail and the concrete rather than the abstract: “I was trying to write then and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing truly what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel, was to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced” (Hemingway 1932, 2).

An anonymous reviewer writing for the *New York Times* praised Hemingway’s “lean, hard, athletic narrative prose that puts more literary English to shame,” concluding, “It is magnificent writing ... This novel is unquestionably one of the events of an unusually rich year in literature” (“Marital Tragedy” 1926). Not everyone was equally enamored, however. In her 1929 novel *Hudson River Bracketed*, Edith Wharton satirizes Hemingway, writing disparagingly of her fictional protagonist’s “blunt telegraphic prose” and his “brilliant verbal gymnastics – or the staccato enumeration of a series of physical aspects and situations” (Wharton 1929, 194, 335).

Hemingway’s work is celebrated for his well-known theory of omission:

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 if the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. (Hemingway 1932, 192)

In *A Moveable Feast*, he cited as an example his 1932 short story “Out of Season,” indicating that the drunken guide committed suicide after the story’s close – an event which he omitted from the story:

This was omitted on my new theory that you could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they had understood. (Hemingway 1964, 75)

Hemingway’s writing is also distinctive for its themes. He is particularly interested in masculinity and specifically how an individual must repeatedly demonstrate that masculinity before an approving audience to assert his claim to manhood (Strychacz 2003). Here his critics have done him a disservice, sometimes criticizing him for allegedly celebrating attitudes widespread in his own time but now perceived as deplorable. Twenty-first-century literary critics are increasingly acknowledging Hemingway’s ambivalence about the “too rigid and slightly murderous” demands of stereotypical masculinity (Hemingway 2005, 46).

Hemingway wrote about topics that audiences at that time perceived as shocking and sometimes morally inappropriate for literature, including homosexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, and prostitutes. As Hemingway’s older sister Marcelline later recalled, Hemingway’s parents were particularly horrified by *in our time*, a limited-edition collection published in 1923 by expatriate William Bird:

Daddy was so incensed that a son of his would so far forget his Christian training that he could use the subject matter and vulgar expressions this book contained that he wrapped and returned all six copies to the Three Mountains Press in Paris. (Sanford 1999, 219)

After the publication of *The Sun Also Rises*, which featured both a protagonist who sustained a war injury that left him sexually incapacitated and a sexually active woman who had left her husband, both parents wrote Ernest to beg him to stop writing such filthy books in the future (Mellow 1992, 336). (His morally conservative Congregationalist parents were even more horrified when he later divorced Hadley to marry his second wife, Pauline Pfeiffer.) When *A Farewell to Arms* was serialized in *Scribner's Magazine*, the magazine was banned in Boston, Massachusetts, because of its vulgar language and theme of illegitimate pregnancy (Donaldson 1991). The ban had the unintended effect of increasing sales of the magazine.

Throughout his career, Hemingway repeatedly offered remarkably diverse lists of authors whose works he respected. For example, in a 1935 article in *Esquire*, Hemingway listed books he “would rather read again for the first time ... than have an assured income of a million dollars a year” (Hemingway 1968, 161). Russian writers on the list included Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Ivan Turgenev. In addition to German author Thomas Mann (see Thomas Mann) and Americans Mark Twain and Sherwood Anderson, he also cited three French authors, Guy de Maupassant, Alexandre Dumas, and Stendhal, and three Irish authors, George Moore, James Joyce, and W.B. Yeats. Later that year in *Esquire*, he published a second list, this time of books an aspiring writer should read. In addition to many of the works already recommended, he added works by Stephen Crane, Henry James, Frederick Marryat, and Henry Fielding (Hemingway 1968, 189). He later offered a similar list to Lillian Ross of the *New Yorker*, with the additions of Baudelaire, Gogol, Proust, and Hawthorne (Ross 1961, 23–24).

In a 1958 interview with George Plimpton of the *Paris Review*, Hemingway named writers and artists who had influenced his work. In addition to repeating some of the same names in the 1935 list, he added Gustave Flaubert, Anton Chekhov, Dante (see Dante's *Divine Comedy* and *World Literature*), Vergil, and several British authors, including Andrew Marvell, John Donne, William Shakespeare, and Rudyard Kipling (see Rudyard Kipling). Throughout his career, then, he considered his writings part of an international conversation, a dialogue with other writers – and musicians and painters – of excellence throughout history and around the world.

Many of those authors directly influenced Hemingway's own work. Hemingway alluded to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* repeatedly in *A Farewell to Arms*, for example (Tyler 1995), and Thomas Mann's (see Thomas Mann) 1912 novella *Death in Venice* clearly influenced the themes of infatuation and premature death in Hemingway's 1950 novel *Across the River and into the Trees* (Seypel 1957; Baker 1972, 266–267). Hemingway took the title of Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* for one of his best short stories, a subtler (if no less emotionally fraught) story of intergenerational conflict. As he himself explained, drawing on a metaphor taken from one of his favorite sports, boxing:

I started out very quiet and I beat Mr. Turgenev. Then I trained hard and I beat Mr. De Maupassant. I've fought two draws with Mr. Stendhal, and I think I had an edge in the last one. But nobody's going to get me in any ring with Mr. Tolstoy unless I'm crazy or keep getting better. (Ross 1961, 48–49)

Although Hemingway has historically been perceived as a writer who based his fiction on his own life experiences, critics have increasingly come to appreciate how well read Hemingway was and how vitally important his reading was to his fiction.

Hemingway was not always sympathetic to the projects of his fellow expatriate writers, of course. For example, he was intensely critical of Tristan Tzara, the Romanian poet and founder of Dadaism (Mellow 1992, 257). He wrote scathingly of the fiction of New Zealand expatriate Katherine Mansfield: "I had been told Katherine Mansfield was a good short-story writer, even a great short-story writer, but ... Mansfield was like near-beer" (Hemingway 1964, 133). He was particularly savage when writing about writers to whom he felt indebted for their assistance with his work, such as Anderson, Stein, and Fitzgerald, all of whom he viciously disparaged once he no longer needed them as mentors.

His work of the 1930s was not as commercially or critically successful as his earlier books. *Death in the Afternoon*, his 1932 treatise on bullfighting, did not sell well, perhaps because of its somewhat esoteric topic and the widespread unemployment around the world as a result of the 1929 stock market crash. When *Green Hills of Africa* was published in 1935, few people wanted to read a meandering non-fiction narrative about an expensive African safari in the midst of the Great Depression. His 1937 novel *To Have and Have Not* was aesthetically unsatisfying, its three parts never quite cohering into a successful whole. Only in 1940 did he redeem his literary reputation by publishing *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, a novel about an American college professor who joins the fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War. Hemingway had covered the war as a foreign correspondent for the North American News Alliance and met his third wife, war correspondent Martha Gellhorn, while reporting from Spain. He drew on his experiences there in writing the novel, a story about a guerrilla band fighting for the Loyalist cause against overwhelming odds.

During his repeated visits to Spain, Hemingway developed a deep and lasting affinity for that nation's culture. "Spanish literature and art had a far deeper impact on Hemingway's work than has generally been acknowledged to date," Angel Capellán wrote in 1985 (183), citing the influence of the Spanish epic *El Cid* (see Conquest and Crusade in *The Epic of the Cid*), Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (see Cervantes: *Don Quixote*), the picaresque novels of Francisco de Quevedo, the religious mysticism of Saint Teresa of Ávila (see St. Teresa of Ávila) and Juan de la Cruz (St. John of the Cross), and the novels of Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, among other Spanish works. Hemingway was so devoted to Spanish writer Pió Baroja that he paid homage by visiting him on his deathbed in 1956, accompanied by *Life* magazine (Baker 1969, 535; Bruccoli 2006, 140).

By 1950, when he published his novel *Across the River and into the Trees*, Hemingway's style had become so famous that it was often parodied. The novel, about an aging American colonel who spends a weekend with his 19-year-old beloved in her native Venice before he dies, was attacked by reviewers as tired and artistically bankrupt. In the novel, Hemingway's protagonist, Richard Cantwell, alludes intelligently to the writings of several Italian authors, most notably Dante (see Dante's *Divine Comedy* and World Literature) and Gabriele D'Annunzio, the latter of whom Hemingway had also mentioned in his poetry as early as 1921 (Hemingway 1979, 28).

Hemingway received both the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize in Literature shortly after publishing his 1952 novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. Cubans still consider him one of their own, his celebrity second only to that of the late revolutionary dictator Fidel Castro, and Castro in turn called Hemingway his favorite author, claiming (probably apocryphally) to have learned guerrilla tactics from *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Morgan 2016). Hemingway's home is now preserved by the Cuban government as a museum.

By the 1950s, Hemingway had become an international celebrity, particularly after the publication of *The Old Man and the Sea*, which was translated into nine languages within a year and more than 26 languages by 1957 (Reynolds 1999, 258). He could rarely go out in public anywhere in the world without being besieged by autograph seekers, and at home his work was frequently interrupted by uninvited visitors who wanted to meet the great author. When he was hospitalized for mental illness, he had to be admitted into the Mayo Clinic under an assumed name to avoid unwanted publicity. When he committed suicide in 1961, his death made the front page of newspapers around the world. Because of the stigma surrounding suicide at that time, his death was initially reported as accidental.

Hemingway's widow, Mary, and later his three sons and many grandchildren have authorized the publication of a series of posthumous works by Hemingway, including (among others): *A Moveable Feast*, his memoir of his years in Paris in the 1920s, in 1964; the novel *Islands in the Stream* in 1970; *The Dangerous Summer*, about a bullfighting rivalry, in 1985; the novel *The Garden of Eden* in 1986; and *True at First Light* and *Under Kilimanjaro*, two different versions of his memoir of his 1953–1954 African safari, in 1999 and 2005. Hemingway's most experimental work is probably *The Garden of Eden*, a 200 000-word manuscript for a novel that he began writing in 1946 and left unfinished at his death. A 70 000-word version, heavily edited by Tom Jenks, was published in 1986 (Oliver 1999, 113). Hemingway's contemporary and fellow Nobel Prize-winner William Faulkner (see William Faulkner and the World Literature Debate) once accused Hemingway of artistic cowardice because he never took risks with his writings, but the posthumous publication of *The Garden of Eden* effectively counters Faulkner's claim. Given the central characters' apparent gender fluidity, the novel is Hemingway's most radically unconventional, prompting E.L. Doctorow to title his review of the book for the *New York Times* "Braver Than We Thought" (Doctorow 1986).

Hemingway's work has influenced writers around the world. In the US, his influence is perhaps most obvious in the hard-boiled detective fiction of writers like Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler and the minimalism of Raymond Carver and Ann Beattie. But American writers as diverse as Ralph Ellison, Tim O'Brien, Joyce Carol Oates, Tobias Wolff, and Junot Diaz have acknowledged Hemingway's influence on their work. The Pulitzer and Nobel Prize-winning African American novelist Toni Morrison grappled with Hemingway's problematic legacy in her book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, in which she analyzed representations of race in American literature.

Hemingway's influence is not limited to the United States.¹ Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez (see Gabriel García Márquez and the Worlding of Latin American Literature), who himself received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982, wrote an affectionate tribute to Hemingway for the *New York Times* in 1981 in which he identified both Hemingway and William Faulkner (see William Faulkner and the World Literature Debate) as influences on his own writing, explaining:

Hemingway is the one who had the most to do with my craft – not simply for his books, but for his astounding knowledge of the aspect of craftsmanship in the science of writing. (García Márquez 1981)

Spanish novelist Enrique Vila-Matas titled an autobiographical novel *Never Any End to Paris*, an allusion to Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*. Published in English in 2011, it chronicles the two years the protagonist spent as a struggling writer in Paris. More recently, Japanese author Haruki Murakami paid homage to Hemingway in his short story collection *Men without Women* (2017), its title taken from Hemingway's 1927 short story collection. Hemingway wrote Maxwell Perkins in February 1927 that he had completed enough short stories for a collection to be published in the fall, adding, "In all of these, almost, the softening feminine influence through training, discipline, death or other causes, being absent" (Baker 1981, 245).² The same is true for the stories in Murakami's collection.

Hemingway's books are being reissued in Hemingway Library editions that incorporate previously unpublished materials, such as the many alternate endings he wrote for *A Farewell to Arms*, and the Hemingway Letters Project is publishing a multivolume edition of the more than 6000 letters Hemingway wrote in his lifetime. *A Moveable Feast*, his memoir of his years in Paris in the 1920s, unexpectedly became a bestseller in France after terrorist attacks killed 130 people in Paris in November 2015. Hemingway's work remains relevant worldwide in the twenty-first century.

SEE ALSO: Dante's *Divine Comedy* and World Literature; Conquest and Crusade in *The Epic of the Cid*; St. Teresa of Ávila; Cervantes: *Don Quixote*; Rudyard Kipling; Thomas Mann; William Faulkner and the World Literature Debate; Gabriel García Márquez and the Worlding of Latin American Literature

NOTES

- 1 For discussions of the influence of European culture on Hemingway, see for example Silvia Ammary (2015), Angel Capellán (1985), Carl P. Eby and Mark Cirino (2016), J. Gerald Kennedy and Jackson R. Bryer (1998), Robert W. Lewis (1990), Rena Sanderson (2006), Edward F. Stanton (1989), and Ben Stoltzfus (2010). See Roger Asselineau (1965) and Wayne E. Kvam (1973) for discussions of Hemingway's reception in Europe. For discussions of the influence of Cuban culture on Hemingway, see Grimes and Sylvester (2014) and Noble (2016).
- 2 Ironically, Hemingway's sentence is indebted to the letters of still another writer, Lord Byron: There is something to me very softening in the presence of a woman, – some strange influence, even if one is not in love with them, – which I cannot at all account for, having no very high opinion of the sex. But yet – I always feel in better humour with myself and every thing else, if there is a woman within ken. (Byron 1973–1994, vol. 3, 246)

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