

Ernest Hemingway

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in this: he gave the century a way of making
literary art that dealt with the
remarkable violence of our time."

- Frederick Busch, "Reading Hemingway without Guilt," *New York Times* (1/12/92).

BY JESSICA TEISCH

First he perfected a prose — an understated, modern, lean style that removed barriers between narrator and reader. Then he wrote the classics: *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, and dozens of short stories, tales born out of war, adventure, and life abroad with expatriates Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Through all this he created the man, Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899–1961) — a larger-than-life persona of a fistfighting, hard-drinking lion-shooter that often overshadowed his writing. Novelist James Carroll described Hemingway as "a great writer" and "also the first writer-celebrity," whose "story as an expatriate and as an adventurer competes with his work" (CNN.com, 4/12/99). Now, more than three decades after his suicide, the challenge remains to move past Hemingway's public image and focus on his writing.

Hemingway's adventures in Africa's wild, on Europe's front lines, and at Pamplona's bullfights inspired stories of wartime love and soldiers, hunters, and matadors who pitted hope against society's brutality. In the public eye, Hemingway *was* a macho war hero and womanizer. Underneath, he exhibited a sensitivity toward life that reaffirmed the gravity of his subjects. "The themes

have always been love, lack of it, death and its occasional temporary avoidance which we describe as life, the immortality or lack of immortality of the soul, money, honor and politics," he told *The New York Times* (9/17/50).

The second of six children, Hemingway was born in 1899 in the affluent suburb of Oak Park, Illinois to Dr. Clarence and Grace Hall Hemingway. He acquired his sportsman's habits while fishing and hunting with his father along Lake Michigan. After high school, Hemingway reported for the *Kansas City Star*, where he mastered his declarative, deceptively simple style. When he turned 18, he signed up as a volunteer ambulance driver for the Red Cross. A few weeks after his arrival in Milan, Italy, he was wounded. He recovered at a Milan hospital, falling in love with a nurse and fictionalizing his heartbreak years later in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).

Returning home, Hemingway met and married the first of his four wives, the wealthy Hadley Richardson. Soon after, he joined the *Toronto Star* as its European correspondent. The Hemingways arrived in Paris in late 1921. With an introduction from Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway befriended Ezra Pound, Ford Madox Ford, and Gertrude Stein, whose salon culture

WHERE TO START

If haven't read Hemingway since high school, it's time to revisit some of his classics. **THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA** distills his trademark themes and style. **A FAREWELL TO ARMS** and **FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS** are classic war love stories; **THE SUN ALSO RISES** is considered his best. For shorter pieces, try "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," and "Big Two-Hearted River."

he captured in *A Moveable Feast* (1964). During this time Hemingway published his first work, *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923), and Hadley gave birth to their first son. The next year Hemingway published his critically acclaimed *In Our Time*. He also met the more established F. Scott Fitzgerald, beginning a tumultuous lifelong friendship.

Hemingway gained international success with *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) just as his personal life faltered. He divorced Hadley and married *Vogue* editor Pauline Pfeiffer in 1927. They moved to Key West, where Hemingway fished and wrote. In 1928, the year he had his second son, his father committed suicide. A third son arrived in 1931. The next year, he published his bullfighting classic, *Death in the Afternoon*.

An African safari in 1933 inspired *The Green Hills of Africa* (1935) and one of his best short stories, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." He soon started an affair with journalist Martha Gelhorn, and both traveled to Spain in 1937 as war correspondents. By 1940, Hemingway had married Martha and completed his Spanish Civil War tome, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. World War II drew him back to Europe's front lines. At the end of the war, Martha left Hemingway, who subsequently married journalist Mary Welsh, his fourth wife. They moved to a home at Finca Vigia, Cuba. He didn't write another bestseller until *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), which won the Pulitzer and Nobel Prizes. Yet physical ailments suffered in two plane crashes in Africa, combined with severe depression and a flagging reputation, took their toll. He killed himself in Ketchum, Idaho, on July 2, 1961.

PAPA, ARE YOU IN OR OUT?

By the early 1950s, Hemingway had become an American legend. He received an exorbitant \$80,000 for the 1932 film adaptation of *A Farewell to Arms* and \$150,000 for *The Old Man and the Sea*. *Time's* December 13, 1954 cover, for example, billed "Novelist Hemingway" alongside a giant marlin with his quote: "The luck, she is still running good."

Despite this "luck," few critics can pinpoint Hemingway's exact place in the American literary canon today. After his death, the literati showered Hemingway with praise. "There is no one in the whole range of literature of the modern world," Lionel Trilling said, "who has a better claim than he to be acknowledged as a master" of the short story. Tennessee Williams argued that twentieth-century literature "began with... *The Sun Also Rises*." And William Faulkner called him "[o]ne of the bravest and best" (*New York Times*, 7/3/61).

A spate of posthumous works, including *A Moveable Feast* (1964) and *By-Line* (1967) strengthened, if complicated, Hemingway's reputation. Others, including *Islands in the Stream* (1970) and *The Garden of Eden* (1986), detracted from his luster. So did the backlash against the Vietnam War and the rise of environmentalism, feminism, and political correctness in the 1970s, which soured Hemingway's pro-war, anti-Semitic, homophobic, and sexist persona. And maybe his works weren't timeless, after all. "His place in our culture today?" asked the *New York Times*. "Honored but unsteady... slipping quietly into history" (3/29/81). "He is so very incorrect," wrote Frederick Busch, "except in this: he gave the century a way of making literary art that dealt with the remarkable violence of our time" (*New York*

HEMINGWAY: AN OVERVIEW

Due to space constraints and reprint collections, we have identified but not described Hemingway's short story collections with "[SS]"

* Discussed in Major Works

Three Stories and Ten Poems (1923)

Published in Paris, this collection contains the short stories, "Up in Michigan," "Out of Season," and "My Old Man." Critics largely dismissed the poems but praised the prose.

* *In Our Time* (1925)

The Torrents of Spring (1926)
Fitzgerald called *Torrents of Spring*

the finest comic novel ever written by an American, though other critics disdained it. The novella parodies the Chicago School of Literature.

* *The Sun Also Rises* (1926)

Men Without Women (1927) [SS]

* *A Farewell to Arms* (1929)

* *Death in the Afternoon* (1932)

Winner Take Nothing (1933) [SS]

Green Hills of Africa (1935)

Hemingway captures the fascination with big-game tracking and hunting, the richness of the East African landscape, and, of course, all of the problems with European and American literature.

To Have and Have Not (1937)

Hemingway pieced together this novel from previously published sto-

ries. To support his family, a fishing-boat captain carries contraband between Cuba and Florida and starts an unlikely love affair.

The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories (1938)

Hemingway's only full-length play, inspired by his adventures as a newspaper correspondent in Madrid, portrays the devastating psychological effects of the Spanish Civil War.

* *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940)

Men at War: The Best War Stories of All Time (1942)

Hemingway edited and introduced this collection of war stories by writers including Faulkner, Kipling, Forester, Crane, and Churchill.

Across the River and Into the Trees (1950)

At the close of World War II, an ill

Times, 1/12/92).

Centennial celebrations of Hemingway's birth spawned new debate. "There were certain skills I learned from him that I will always be grateful for," said Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer, though she criticized his depictions of Africa. Annie Proulx described Hemingway's fictional women as "dummies," and Francine Prose criticized Hemingway's beloved story, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" as "terrifyingly misogynist" (CNN.com, 4/12/99). It might not be fashionable these days to praise the man of short words, but we well know that fashion ebbs and flows. Said Raymond Carver: "Hemingway did his work, and he'll last" (*New York Times*, 11/17/85).

MAJOR WORKS

In Our Time (1925)

With *In Our Time*, initially published in 1924, Hemingway stepped into the international literary scene. Most of his critics, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, praised his unique, spartan style. The *New York Evening Post* even argued that Hemingway redefined the short story.

THE STORY: The small collection of vignettes and stories, some previously published in *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923), introduced Hemingway's aesthetic theory, which stressed economy of action and dialogue. "These plotless sketches and stabbing bits of interwoven prose which achieve in their ensemble a clarified unity are written in what might be called a sort of fundamental language. . . . One may not like this prose but it



American colonel falls in love with a young Italian countess, encouraging him to envision a future just as he realizes his own mortality.

* *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952)

* *A Moveable Feast* (1964)

By-Line: Ernest Hemingway: *Selected Articles and Dispatches of Four Decades* (1967)

This nonfiction collection, spanning the years 1920 to 1956, includes snippets from Hemingway's days as a journalist and war correspondent.

Islands in the Stream (1970)

Published posthumously, this "mature" novel follows a lonely divorced painter on the island of Bimini to his Nazi-hunting adventures off the coast of Cuba during World War II.

The Nick Adams Stories (1972) [SS]

Ernest Hemingway, Selected Letters, 1917-1961 (1981)

Dateline Toronto: The Complete Toronto Star Dispatches, 1920-1924 (1985)

Edited by William White. These 172 articles share glimpses of daily life in Toronto and Europe, offering memories of Christmas, bullfighting, male-female relations, and political relations.

The Dangerous Summer (1985)

This brutal firsthand account of a season of bullfights began as an article in *Life* magazine in 1960.

The Garden of Eden (1986)

Hemingway worked on this novel erratically from 1946 until his death. It involves the sexual exploits of a young, honeymooning American couple. E. L. Doctorow called it "bad

would be impossible to deny it a vigor and actuality that is unusual." H. S. Gorman, *New York World*, 10/18/25.

"... dull, suffering from low blood pressure. . . . not enough to be great." Robert Wolf, *New York Tribune*, 2/14/26.

THE BOTTOM LINE: A worthwhile introduction to Hemingway's prose, themes, and characters, particularly Nick Adams and the Michigan wild.

The Sun Also Rises (1926)

Modern Library's 100 Best Novels # 45

The novel made Hemingway what Gertrude Stein called the spokesman for the "Lost Generation."

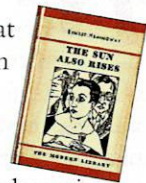
THE STORY: In France and Spain in the 1920s, a group of aimless American and English postwar expatriates, including the beautiful Lady Brett Ashley and the impotent Jake Barnes, suffer from psychological and physical angst. As they romp from Paris's Left Bank to the "wonderful nightmare" of Pamplona's bloody bullfights, they fulfill the moral and spiritual decay of their "Lost Generation."

"The dialogue is brilliant. If there is better dialogue being written today I do not know where to find it." Conrad Aiken,

New York Herald Tribune, 10/31/26.

"[Hemingway's] characters are as shallow as the saucers in which they stack their daily emotions, and instead of interpreting his material – or even challenging it – he has been content merely to make a carbon copy of a not particularly significant surface of life in Paris." Dial, 1/27.

"It is magnificent writing, filled with that organic action



Hemingway" in his review in *The New York Times* (5/18/96).

* *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: The Finca Vigia Edition* (1987) [Stories]

The Only Thing That Counts: The Ernest Hemingway-Maxwell Perkins Correspondence (1996)

Captures the writer and editor's day-to-day relationship.

True at First Light: A Fictional Memoir (1999)

This posthumous "fictional memoir," edited by Hemingway's son, Patrick, recounts a safari in Kenya in 1953, during the Mau Mau rebellion. It provides vivid glimpses of Hemingway's godlike role among the African game scouts and his relationships with Mary, his fourth wife, and Debba, a beautiful young African woman. ■

which gives a compelling picture of character. . . . It is a truly gripping story, told in a lean, hard, athletic narrative prose that puts more literary English to shame." New York Times, 10/31/26.

BOTTOM LINE: The novel that launched Hemingway's career and embodied American postwar literature.

A Farewell to Arms (1929)

♦ Modern Library's 100 Best Novels # 74

Hemingway based what he called his "Romeo and Juliet novel" on his experiences as an 18-year-old ambulance driver on the Italian front, where he fell in love with nurse Agnes von Kurowsky. Before Hemingway sent in the final page, he asked F. Scott Fitzgerald for advice. Fitzgerald enclosed nine pages of suggestions and a note that read: "Our poor old friendship probably won't survive this but there you are." Hemingway finished the novel to a level of critical acclaim unmatched until *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.



THE STORY: When American Lieutenant Frederic Henry, an ambulance driver on the Italian front, falls in love with Catherine Barkley, a beautiful English nurse, he tries to make his passion and love rise above the brutalities of war. He deserts the army and the couple decides to flee to Switzerland, only to realize their love's tenuous nature.

"His book is not merely a good book but a remarkably beautiful book; and it is not merely modern, but the very apotheosis of a kind of modernism. . . . It is certainly Hemingway's best book to date." C. P. Fadiman, *Nation*, 10/30/29.

"*Farewell to Arms* is an erotic story, shocking to the cold, disturbing to the conventional who do not like to see mere impersonal amorousness lifted into a deep, fierce love, involving the best in both man and woman, without changing its dependence upon the senses, nor trafficking with social responsibility. It deals with life where the blood is running and the spirit active – that is enough for me." H. S. Canby, *Saturday Review of Literature*, 10/12/29.

BOTTOM LINE: A classic story of love in a time of war; perhaps the best American novel of World War I.

Death in the Afternoon (1932)

Hemingway wrote this book "as an introduction to the modern Spanish bullfight and [as an attempt] to explain that spectacle both emotionally and practically." Many reviewers criticized Hemingway's arrogant tone and insertion of himself as a character.

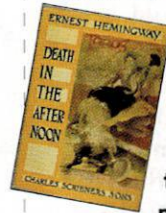
THE STORY: Hemingway considered bullfighting one of humankind's most powerful rituals. Through portraits of the great Spanish matadors of the '20s and '30s, he

THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE 1954

In 1954, Hemingway received the Nobel Prize in Literature "for his mastery of the art of narrative, most recently demonstrated in *The Old Man and the Sea*, and for the influence that he has exerted on contemporary style." Hemingway, who had been injured in two successive plane crashes in Africa, was too ill-mentally and physically to attend the ceremony. The U.S. Ambassador read his banquet speech:

"... Writing, at its best, is a lonely life. . . . For he does his work alone and if he is a good enough writer he must face eternity, or the lack of it, each day. For a true writer each book should be a new beginning where he tries again for something that is beyond attainment. He should always try for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed. Then sometimes, with great luck, he will succeed. . . . It is because we have had such great writers in the past that a writer is driven far out past where he can go, out to where no one can help him." -Ernest Hemingway, 12/10/54 ■

describes "the emotional and spiritual intensity and pure classical beauty that can be produced by a man, an animal, and a piece of scarlet serge draped on a stick." He also delves into much of Spanish culture.



"I emerge cherishing a hope that bullfighting will be introduced at Harvard and Yale, or, if not at Harvard and Yale, then at least in the Lynching Belt of the South, where it would offer stiff and perhaps ruinous competition to the frying of poor blackamoors. Imagine the moral stimulation in rural Georgia if an evangelist came to town offering to fight the local bulls by day and baptize the local damned by night!" H. L. Mencken, in H. L. Mencken on American Literature (edited by S. T. Joshi).

"Praise can scarcely be too high for Mr. Hemingway's exposition of the technique of the *corrida* or his description of the slow unrolling of the three-act tragedy that is the bullfight. His prose style is irritating, his supercharged 'he-manishness' is brutal and infuriating, but his description of the various *suertes* is extremely felicitous." *Times* [London] Literary Supplement, 12/8/32.

BOTTOM LINE: One of the best books ever written about bullfighting.

For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940)

Hemingway started this novel in 1939 in Cuba. It was both a critical and commercial success, selling more than 500,000 copies in six months. The Pulitzer Prize Committee voted it the best novel of the year, though political controversy prevented the committee from awarding the prize.

THE STORY: Robert Jordan, a young American de-

molitions expert detailed to blow up a bridge, finds himself enlisting the aid of anti-fascist guerrillas in the mountains of Spain in 1937, during the Spanish Civil War. Jordan destroys the bridge, but his actions inspire an examination of war, love, valor, personal honor, and defeat.

"This is the best book Ernest Hemingway has written, the fullest, the deepest, the truest. It will, I think, be one of the major novels in American literature." J. Donald Adams, *New York Times*, 10/20/40.

"It contains all the strength and brutality, the 'blood and guts' of all the previous Hemingway books. . . and it is written with a degree of delicacy which proves that this fine writer, unlike some other fine American writers, is capable of self-criticism and self-development." R. E. Sherwood, *Atlantic*, 11/40.

"As a story this book offers not pleasure but mounting pain; as literature it lacks the reserve that steadies genius and that lack not only dims its brilliance but makes it dangerous in its influence." *Catholic World*, 1/41.

BOTTOM LINE: Considered one of Hemingway's masterpieces. Don't let the gore convince you otherwise.

The Old Man and the Sea (1952)

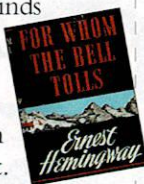
♦ Pulitzer Prize, 1953

In 1950, Hemingway's life started to unravel. His physical and mental health deteriorated; critics scorned his most recent novel, *Across the River and into the Trees*; and Batista returned to Cuba. Inspired by his 19-year-old muse Adriana Ivancich, he penned a story he had heard 15 years earlier from a Cuban fisherman. On September 1, 1952, *Life* magazine published the entire novel in a special issue, selling 5.3 million copies in 48 hours and saving Hemingway's flagging career.

THE STORY: A man, a fish, a pole: what more could you want? Santiago, an old Cuban fisherman, hasn't caught a fish in 84 days. He proves his courage when he hooks a monstrous marlin. Although he kills his catch, he's towed out to sea, returning only after sharks have devoured his prize.

"Despite its great virtues, its lucidity, its brilliantly compact evocation of the sea, of physical endurance, of the power of the great fish, its compassion and its impact, it does not plumb these depths of primitive tragic simplicity at which it obviously aims." J. D. Scott, *New Statesman & Nation*, 9/13/52.

"Hemingway has never written more cleanly, more precisely, with less waste. . . Here, because he knows so well the background against which he stages his miracle-play of Man against Fate, he evokes both struggle and sea with



a skill that ver few—oh, well, what few, then? no one else writing today—could touch." J. H. Jackson, *SF Chronicle*, 9/7/53.

"The Old Man and the Sea has almost none of the old Hemingway truculence, the hard-guy sentimentality that sometimes gives even his most devoted admirers twinges of discomfort. . . . Those who admire craftsmanship will be right in calling it a masterpiece." *Time*, 9/8/52.

BOTTOM LINE: Hemingway caught his first marlin in 1935. Where were you then? It's the ultimate story about dignity and the human spirit, written by a man subdued by age and illness.

A Moveable Feast (1964)

Published posthumously, this memoir remains one of Hemingway's most loved books, a nostalgic, self-mocking autobiography and a humorous, sharp look at the influential salon culture of the 1920s. "If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man," Hemingway wrote, "then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast."

THE STORY: This collection of sketches includes the skinny on Hemingway's friends, acquaintances, and foes. F. Scott Fitzgerald "did not write anything any more that was good until after he knew that [Zelda] was insane." Zelda, in turn, earned Hemingway's trust when she "said to me, telling me her greatest secret, 'Ernest, don't you think Al Jolson is greater than Jesus?'" Gertrude Stein, on the other hand, did not talk to wives; that job fell to Alice B. Toklas. Nor did Stein appreciate Ezra Pound (who tried to rescue T. S. Eliot from mundane bank work and taught Hemingway "to distrust adjectives,") for breaking her chair. Oh my.

"... an unabashed lyric poem and a swaggering final curtain call for a literary showman, still preoccupied at 60 with boasting in sniggering terms about alcoholic capacity and sexual prowess. At its best it is also an expert piece of impressionism, recovering not so much the exact look of Paris as the unique way it looked to a hungry young man ..." Melvin Maddocks, *Christian Science Monitor*, 5/14/64.

"This is, in some ways, Hemingway's best book since the 1920s and that makes it altogether exceptional. . . . It is an ingenious and deliberate way of revisiting the sources of a great writer's strength; and it displays that strength as very little else of his had done in thirty years." Frank Kermode, *New York Review of Books*, 6/11/64.

BOTTOM LINE: "If the reader prefers," Hemingway remarks in the preface, "this book may be regarded as fiction." Short and unforgiving, full of life and deliciously vicious gossip. ■

