



SELECTED NOVELS OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY:A REVIEW

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Born in 1899, Ernest Miller Hemingway was one of those writers who attained prominence during the period of the First World War (1914-19). Hemingway belonged to the generation that experienced war in its youth and came to be known as the 'lost generation'. The Great War drew in American literature the dividing line between the old generation and the new, between the past and the present, between the Orthodox and the Bohemian. Ernest Hemingway wanted above everything else to write well. The passion of his life was to write "absolutely truly—absolutely with no faking or cheating of any kind" (Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* p. 268). He repeated himself on this score hundreds of times throughout his career, as for example, when speaking to the Writers Guild in 1937. "A writer's problem", he said, "does not change . . . It is always how to write truly" (Baker, *Ernest Hemingway*, p. 314). He early decided to be the best possible writer, better than anyone else, and to that end he dedicated his life.

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Ernest Hemingway was an American novelist, short story writer and journalist. Numbered by many, among the greatest American writers, Hemingway is master of the objective prose style which became his trademark. War and athletic competition often make up the subject matter of his works, allowing Hemingway to explore man's physical and metaphysical strivings. He was confounded by both the idea and the reality of death. (270) His renowned style, for his firmly non-intellectual fiction, is characterized by understatement and tense dialogue. (231)

Ernest Hemingway, above everything else, wanted to write well. The passion of his life was to write "absolutely truly – absolutely with no faking or cheating of any kind. (268) He emphasized this point all through his career, as for example, when speaking to the writers guild in 1937, he said, "A writer's problem does not change... it is always how to write truly". (268) He wanted to be the best possible writer better than anyone else, and to that end he dedicated his life.

An associate of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway fought in World War-I, the Spanish Civil War, and led resistance action against the Germans in France during World War-II. A recipient of the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction in 1953 and the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954, Hemingway committed suicide in 1961.

Ernest Hemingway, the legendary figure of America, had his affiliations and kinship with the writers of the 'lost generation'. His works reveal a sense of disenchantment, alienation and revulsion from the horrors of war. He has depicted war as a great calamity and has harped on the wound, death and the distress in his works. Hemingway has written about bull-fights, prize-fights, war, sex and fishing and hunting, the manly pursuits. Hemingway has also experimented with the prose style. He is the founder of a new simple technique. In the words of Philip Young: "Next to Thoreau, Hemingway is the greater prose stylist in our literature. He is the writer of some of the cleanest, freshest, subtlest, and most brilliant and most moving prose of our time". (173)

No study of Hemingway can be complete without an understanding of the author's life because he is one of those authors whose life and

works are interdependent. The author has derived most of his ideas for his novels and short stories from his personal experiences. Hence it is necessary to trace briefly Hemingway's early life influences that shaped his writings. Besides the two novels, *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the subject matter of this research study, Hemingway has to his credit a long list of novels, short stories and even dramas. An outline of his major works is given in the following lines.

In Our Time (1924), has fifteen "Chapters", each consisting of a vignette and a short story, plus an introductory scene entitled "On the Quai at Smyrna," and "L'Envoi", which is a concluding vignette. There is no discernible theme holding the pieces together, although some ingenious attempts to isolate an Organizing principle have been offered including one by Hemingway himself. The central figure in eight of the stories and one vignette is Nick Adams, the fictional hero of twenty four of Hemingway's stories. Philip Young later gathered them together in a volume entitled *The Nick Adams Stories* (1972). The introduction, four of the stories, and seven of the vignettes deal with war, while six of the vignettes focus on bullfighting. Violence is a dominant theme, whether expressed in boxing, bullfighting, quarrelling, fighting, or killing. And nature is evident as a healing force in these early stories, a refuge from cities and crowds and battlefields.

The Sun Also Rises (1926) is divided into three books of unequal length, but the action proceeds through four major phases. Jake Barnes, rendered impotent by a war injury, is the central figure in the novel. He is a European correspondent for a stateside newspaper, busy writing dispatches from his Paris base as the novel opens.

In an opening epigraph to the novel, Hemingway quotes Gertrude Stein's comment, "You are all a lost generation" and parts of Ecclesiastes 1:4-7, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever ... The sun also riseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose ... "A dominant theme emerges, given such hints, in the abiding permanence in nature—her streams and fish and bulls and glorious redemptive panorama—in contrast



to the fitful, fretful lives of self-serving men and women. *Death in the Afternoon* (1933), is Hemingway's attempt to explain the "corrida de toros", the Spanish bullfight, as a tragedy in three acts. He describes and explains the entire institution from breeding ranch to major bull rings, occasionally using a question-answer device between an old woman and the narrator to add liveliness to the text. There are, two or three useful passages in the book on his own literary theory: the one on the need for writers to generate emotion through well-selected detail, and the other on his strategy of deliberately omitting detail while at the same time communicating a sense of completeness to the reader.

Green Hills of Africa (1935), is a narrative record of Hemingway's first safari. Hemingway made the expedition with his wife, Pauline, and Charles Thompson, referring to them in the book as P.O.M. (Poor Old Mamma) and Karl, and he takes the reader with him from one hunting ground to the next, after lion, water buffalo, kudu, rhinoceros, sable, and other game. Hemingway's joy in nature—in sheer killing, perhaps—is evident in this "novel", in which "none of the characters or incidents... is imaginary" ("Foreword").

To Have and Have Not (1937), is largely Harry Morgan's story, Down on his luck, saddled with a wife and two daughters during very hard times, Morgan turns to illegal ways to make money with his 38-foot boat. Harry represents the have-nots. A second major character, the writer Richard Gordon, dominates the haves. He is frustrated in his work and alienated from his wife. The wealthy yachting crowd which surround him are pathetic in their adulteries, their frenetic play, their bored excesses. The novel is a ragtag effort, published originally as two short stories, then expanded to a novel. Point of view changes unaccountably from section to section, and little character development occurs. The have-note crowd the first half of the book, and when the unpleasant haves appears in the last half, the reader wonders why. There is no thematic tie between the two groups except that ugliness and violence and hard drinking are common to both.

Hemingway has attempted to follow the principle that writer's job is to tell the truth. The love

for truth and realism is not only inherent in the variety of facts and experiences portrayed in Hemingway's short stories and novels, but also has found place in his prose style which has excluded rhetoric and false verbiage. His standard of truth is high and he is not prepared to incorporate second rate experience in his work.

Hemingway's artistic strength lies in his sense of place, the sense of fact, and the sense of scene. Hemingway's novels and short stories have immortalized the topography, the geographical background, and the external details of the places in order to present a convincing account of life and reality. The sense of place is a strong passion with Hemingway. Few writers have been more place-conscious. Few have so carefully chartered out the geographical ground work of their novels while managing to keep background so conspicuously unobtrusive. He has trained himself rigorously to see and retain those aspects of a place that make it "that place", even though will an odd skill; he manages at the same time to render these aspects generically. Hemingway's prose is easily recognized. For the most part it is characterized chiefly by a conscientious simplicity of diction and sentence structure. The words are normally short and common ones and there is a severe economy, and also a curious freshness in their use. The typical sentence is a simple declarative one, or a couple of these joined by a conjunction. The opening passage of *A Farewell to Arms* can be cited as an example: In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and the boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees..."

Hemingway wrote *A Farewell to Arms* against the background of his Italian War experiences. It is a story of one man's withdrawal from the war into love, a love which ends in futility. Frederic Henry, an American Lieutenant in the medical section of the Italian Army is the hero of the novel, and as the novel proceeds we find him in love with Catherine Barkley, a British nurse. Then Henry is



wounded and sent back to a hospital where he is nursed by Catherine, and there begins an intimate sexual relationship. After his recovery, Henry returns to the battle front, but gets involved in a disorderly retreat, is arrested and about to be shot by military police, but frees himself and makes his way to the town where Catherine is living and escapes with her down the lake to neutral Switzerland. Here, away from the war and in outwardly idyllic circumstances, the whole series of events reach its accidental conclusion with Catherine's death at the maternity hospital.

In *A Farewell to Arms* Lieutenant Henry becomes bitter about the society responsible for the war and turns his back upon it after Caporetto. Following his personal objectives, he abandons his friends, his responsibilities as an officer, the entire complex of organized social life represented by the army and the war and signs a 'separate peace'. Maxwell Geismer remarks: "*This farewell to Arms* is accomplished without request or permission".115

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