**Ernest Hemingway**

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) was an American writer who burst onto the modernist literary scene in Paris during the 1920s and subsequently became one of the most famous authors of the twentieth century. He developed a minimalist style characterized by an emotionally detached point of view, understated irony, the omission of key information from the story’s telling, and the conveyance of psychological states through exterior details. Although this style was frequently imitated and parodied, Hemingway actually experimented with style and narrative form throughout his career, for example using more complex sentence structures and forms (such as his unfinished land-sea-air trilogy) in his later work. In 1954, he received the Nobel Prize in Literature for his “mastery of the art of narrative.” He wrote poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction, but his most successful work was in fiction. The Hemingway “code hero”—the man who shows grace under pressure in dangerous situations such as war, bullfighting, or big game hunting—is a formula often applied to his work, but with the benefit of posthumous publications and archives, critics have recognized the vulnerabilities of his male protagonists, the strengths of his female characters, and his life-long interest in taboo or controversial topics such as homosexuality, incest, gender inversion, fetishism, and miscegenation. Following a series of serious injuries and health problems, Hemingway committed suicide in 1961.

Hemingway was born in Oak Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, and spent the summers of his youth with his family in northern Michigan where he became an enthusiast of outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, and hiking. His earliest stories, formulaic genre fiction, were published in his high school’s yearbook *Tabula* and newspaper *Trapeze*. After graduating from high school, he worked as a cub reporter for the *Kansas City Star*, whose style sheet he called “the best rules I ever learned in the business of writing.” It included instructions such as “Use short sentences,” “Avoid the use of adjectives, especially extravagant ones,” and “Eliminate every superfluous word.” He was also a correspondent for the *Toronto Star* in the early 1920s. In 1918, while serving in World War I as a Red Cross ambulance driver in Italy, Hemingway was seriously wounded by the explosion of a trench mortar. While being treated in a Milan hospital, he fell in love with his nurse, Agnes von Kurowsky, who broke off the relationship after he returned to the states. In 1921, Hemingway married Hadley Richardson, and at the urging of Sherwood Anderson whom Hemingway had met in Chicago, they moved to Paris, which Anderson insisted was the best place for an aspiring writer to hone his craft. Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound became two of his earliest Parisian mentors, but Hemingway also immersed himself in the influential literature they recommended—classics such as those written by Homer, Ovid, Dante, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, de Maupassant, and Chekov as well as contemporary work by writers such as Henry James, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Joseph Conrad. He borrowed many of these books from Sylvia Beach’s *Shakespeare & Company* bookstore/library*.* He was also influenced by the paintings of impressionists, surrealists, and cubists, including Cézanne, Picasso, and Miró, whose art hung not only in museums around Paris but also in the apartment of Stein and Alice B. Toklas.

In 1923, Hemingway’s first book, *Three Stories and Ten Poems*, was published in Paris by Robert McAlmon’s Contact Publishing. The next year, his collection *in our time* appeared as a limited edition; he then incorporated its very short stories into his first major work, *In Our Time* (Boni & Liveright 1925). The book is organized around a pattern of longer stories alternating with vignettes (also known as interchapters) with the central figure Nick Adams appearing in about half the stories and one vignette. The cumulative effect is a cubist-like portrait of the chaos, heartbreak, and violence of a modern life marked by war, miscommunication, troubled relationships, environmental destruction, crime, and trauma. During this time, Hemingway was working out his theory of omission or iceberg theory of writing in which 7/8th’s of the story lay beneath the 1/8th that was told: “A good writer,” he argued, “should know as near everything as possible” but “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.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

Hemingway’s fourth book was a short novel, *Torrents of Spring* (1926), a parody of Sherwood Anderson’s *Dark Laughter* (1925). Subtitled *A Romantic Novel in Honor of the Passing of a Great Race*, *Torrents* was written quickly in Hemingway’s successful effort to break from Boni & Liveright (which published Anderson and couldn’t risk offending him) and sign with Scribner’s, a more commercially successful literary publishing firm that had been recommended to him by F. Scott Fitzgerald. A few months later, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) was published by Scribner’s to critical acclaim. Told from the perspective of writer Jake Barnes, whose genitals had been injured in the war, the novel focused on a group of expatriates who, except perhaps for Jake, mistook motion and drama for meaning and depth of feeling. One of the novel’s epigraphs, “You are all a lost generation,” seemed to reflect not only the situation of the characters but also the state of the modern world devastated by a catastrophic war that had taken the lives of an entire generation of men and shaken many people’s faith in religion, government, and science.

Throughout the 1920s, Hemingway published short stories in the “little magazines,” and he collected a number of these in *Men Without Women* (1927), a volume unified by an absence of the “softening influence” of women. He also had an affair with Pauline Pfeiffer, who worked for *Vogue* magazine, which dissolved his first marriage. Pauline and Hemingway married in 1927. In 1929, *A Farewell to Arms* was published to critical acclaim and strong sales; also serialized in *Scribner’s Magazine*, it was banned in Boston. The plot centered on the love affair between a young American, Frederic Henry, serving as a lieutenant in the Italian army during WWI, and a British nurse, Catherine Barkley, who helps bring him back to health after he is injured. Prostitution, venereal disease, excessive drinking, sex and pregnancy outside of marriage, desertion from the army, and the embarrassing retreat of the Italian army in Caporetto—such topics were deemed unacceptable by some people of the time. However, Scribner’s printed a compelling defense of Hemingway’s artistic rendering of his subject matter, and the novel never faced an obscenity trial, as did the works of some other modernist authors such as James Joyce and Radclyffe Hall.

In the 1930s, Hemingway experimented with style and form in the genre of nonfiction. *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), a treatise on bullfighting, and *Green Hills of Africa* (1935), a recounting of his first African safari, put off critics and much of the general public with the braggadocio of Hemingway’s narrative voice and senseless killing of animals. Although both books contained some important insights into Hemingway’s creative process and values, they lacked the subtlety and finesse of his earlier work, promoted a self-indulgent, hyper-masculine persona, and seemed irrelevant at a time when the U.S. was facing a serious economic depression. Another collection of short stories, *Winner Take Nothing* (1933), contained some short-fiction gems, such as “The Sea Change” “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” and “Fathers and Sons.” Its subject matter—such as homosexuality, lesbianism, self-castration, suicide, prostitution, insanity—demonstrated that Hemingway had a recurring interest in non-normative behavior, including the sexual “perversions” that had been catalogued by sexologists such as Havelock Ellis, whom he had avidly read in the 1920s. During this decade, Hemingway also wrote several stories and a number of articles for *Esquire*, a new men’s magazine, and composed a full-length play, *The Fifth Column*, which he later called “probably the most unsatisfactory thing I ever wrote.”[[2]](#endnote-2) In the late 30s, Hemingway supported the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), contributing newspaper reports for the North American Newspaper Alliance (NANA). He also co-wrote and narrated the English version of *The Spanish Earth* (1937), a propaganda film made by Dutch documentary filmmaker and avowed communist Joris Ivens.

Returning to the novel form in *To Have and Have Not* (1937) and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), Hemingway continued to experiment with modernist techniques, such as observing the same character or scene through multiple viewpoints and using stream of consciousness to convey sensation uncontrolled by the rational mind. *To Have and Have Not*—focused on Harry Morgan, a fishing boat captain in Cuba forced to carry illegal cargo to make ends meet—includes a Molly Bloom-like interior monologue by Harry’s wife, Marie. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* employs stream of consciousness to present an earth-moving sexual encounter between American Robert Jordan and Maria, a young Spanish woman, who fall in love after he is sent to help a band of antifascist guerrillas blow up a bridge during the Spanish Civil War. Both novels also confirmed Hemingway’s investment in Leftist politics, although some felt he had not advanced the cause strongly enough because both books were ultimately cynical about politics. In 1936, Hemingway became involved with writer Martha Gellhorn, marrying her in 1940 after his divorce from Pauline was finalized. In 1944, he traveled to Europe to report on World War II and, embedded with the troops, witnessed several battles and was even involved in one. Gellhorn and Hemingway divorced in 1945; by that time, he was involved with journalist Mary Welsh, who became his fourth and final wife in 1946.

Much of Hemingway’s fiction and nonfiction written during the 1950s remained in manuscript form until after his death, although he did publish two novels. The first, *Across the River and Into the Trees* (1950), presented a love affair between a battered war hero, Colonel Richard Cantwell, and a much younger, Venetian woman, Renata. The novel takes place on the last day of Cantwell’s life, with much of it told in flashback and through layers of symbolism. It was a critical failure, unlike Hemingway’s other novel of that decade, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), which tells the story of an aging Cuban fisherman who catches a massive marlin only to have sharks destroy it before he is able to bring it back to land. *Old Man* won the Pulitzer Prize and helped to earn Hemingway the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954.

Since Hemingway’s death on July 2, 1961, fourteen books containing previously uncollected or unpublished material have been published under his name. The first of these, *A Moveable Feast* (1964), was a fictionalized and melancholic memoir of his early years in Paris as a young writer, husband, and father. A version of this memoir published in 2009 restored material cut from the original manuscript. The posthumous publications have also included some of the more transgressive and controversial material from the Hemingway canon. *The Garden of Eden* (1986), a heavily edited version of a lengthy and unfinished manuscript, tells the story of a threesome consisting of two women and one man (the manuscript includes a second threesome composed of two men and one woman) engaged in gender reversals, lesbianism, wife sharing, hair fetishism, and obsessions with changing racial identities. Critics subsequently argued that most of these interests had been present in Hemingway’s work all along, and biographies such as Kenneth Lynn’s controversial *Hemingway* (1987) suggested that Hemingway’s own gender identity had been confused by his mother’s same-sex twinning of him and his older sister when they were children. Other posthumous work includes *Islands in the Stream* (1970), *The Nick Adams Stories* (1972), *Complete Poems* (1979; rev. ed. 1983), *The Dangerous Summer* (1985), *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (Finca Vigía ed., 1998), and *Under Kilimanjaro* (2005). The latter, a fuller version of the manuscript on which *True at First Light* (1999) was based, is about Hemingway’s second African safari (1953-54) during which he developed a more complex understanding of Africa, courted an African woman, and imagined himself becoming a member of the Wakamba tribe. Hemingway’s collected letters (over 6,000) are being published by Cambridge University Press. The richest repository of Hemingway manuscripts, photographs, and other materials is housed in the Hemingway Collection at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston: <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/The-Ernest-Hemingway-Collection.aspx>

**Chronology of All Works**

Collections

*Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923)

*in our time* (1924)

*In Our Time* (1925)

*Men Without Women* (1927)

*Winner Take Nothing* (1933)

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

Novels

*Torrents of Spring* (1926)

*The Sun Also Rises* (1926)

*A Farewell to Arms* (1929)

*To Have and Have Not* (1937)

*For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940)

*Across the River and Into the Trees* (1950)

*The Old Man and the Sea* (1952)

Nonfiction

*Death in the Afternoon* (1932)

*Green Hills of Africa* (1935)

Posthumous Work

*A Moveable Feast* (1964; restored ed. 2009)

*Islands in the Stream* (1970)

*Complete Poems* (1979; rev. ed. 1983)

*The Dangerous Summer* (1985)

*The Garden of Eden* (1986)

*The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (1988)

*True at First Light* (1999)

*Under Kilimanjaro* (2005)

Biographical Works

Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (1969)

Kenneth Lynn. *Hemingway* (1987)

James R. Mellow, *Hemingway: A Life Without Consequences* (1992)

Michael Reynolds, five-volume biography: *The Young Hemingway* (1986), *Hemingway: The Paris Years* (1989), *Hemingway: The Homecoming* (1992), *Hemingway: The 1930s* (1997), *Hemingway: The Final Years* (1999)

Wagner-Martin, Linda. *Ernest Hemingway: A Literary Life*. London: Macmillan, 2007.

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Eby, Carl. *Hemingway’s Fetishism: Psychoanalysis and the Mirror of Manhood*. New Albany: SUNY, 1999.

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1. Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Scribner’s, 1932): 191-92. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Qtd. in Philip Young, “The Fifth Column,” *New York Times* (21 Sept. 1969): <http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/07/04/specials/hemingway-fifth.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)