

# Ernest Hemingway — A Survey

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## I

### Hemingway's Literary Development Shown in His Works

Ernest Hemingway's first published work, except a group of poems and articles in newspapers and a high-school magazine, was a thirty-page booklet called *in our time*. But it is not to be confused with *In Our Time*, capitalized, the book of stories issued in New York the following year (1925), for *in our time* contains only the "chapters," or "interchapters," of the later volume, *In Our Time*, capitalized. So it can be said that *In Our Time* is Hemingway's first collection of stories as well as his first American book.

Those days, from 1921 to 1925 when Hemingway wrote enough stories to make up a volume called *In Our Time*, might be the period of apprenticeship for him. In 1921, after finishing his service as a correspondent in the Middle East, Hemingway stayed in Paris which was his home for many years. In Paris, Hemingway set about learning to become a writer. He had met Sherwood Anderson,

who sent him to Gertrude Stein with a letter of introduction. He also became a good friend of Ezra Pound's. These three seem to have been his principal teachers. Hemingway afterwards said that when he sent his early manuscripts to Pound, they came back to him blue-penciled, with most adjectives gone, and that Miss Stein was content to make general comments, but they were generally followed. And he told John Peale Bishop, "Ezra was right half the time, and when he was wrong, he was so wrong you were never in any doubt about it. Gertrude was always right." What did Miss Stein, who was always right to Hemingway, give him?

Gertrude Stein's importance, so far as literature is concerned, lay less in her actual writings than in her reforming influence on the tones and cadences of prose. According to her opinion, it appears that words for her had qualities—colours and sounds—besides their meaning, and sentence had—or ought to have—something like what music would be called a tune. One thing Gertrude Stein gave Hemingway was necessity and possibility of re-creating the style of prose narrative. And Hemingway has shown a facility in the manipulation of the colloquial that is one of the secrets of his extraordinary effectiveness, since the outset of his career. Another thing that Miss Stein, including the other two, gave him was an ideal of complete objectivity, or objective naturalism. With his insistence on "presenting things truly" Hemingway seems to be a writer in the naturalistic tradition, and has been called "the founder and master of the 'hard-boiled' novel." (Millett's *Contemporary American Authors*; p. 35) But Hemingway's naturalism is not subjective one but objective one,

if he is a naturalist, and the 'hard-boiled' elements in his earlier fictions turned out to be technical rather than psychological. That is to say, Hemingway let the story take form from whirling sensations and the monosyllabic utterances of the characters, not from the author's psycho-analysis of the characters. Hemingway used these literary devices with extreme effectiveness in his earlier four works; *In Our Time* (1925), *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *Men Without Women* (1927), *A Farewell To Arms* (1929).

Though the method Hemingway followed in those four works was very successful, it had, so to speak, self-imposed limitations, of which some explanation will be given below. The method of his objective naturalism was of course implicatory rather than explicatory, and implication was one of Hemingway's major powers. Hemingway, in his earlier works, told naked stories in a naked language whatever his subject might be, and his stories seem to be nothing but fact, set one after another without any comment. His reticent characters only furnish readers with the material for an imaginative construction of their personalities and values. His dialogue and narrative details have been retained as being absolutely necessary to the communication of a mood or the rendition of an incident. By this economy of means he attained an incomparably powerful effect. Usually his monosyllabic dialogue gains much of its force from the sense it gives of something beneath it that the laconic speakers are trying not to express. And he was in those earlier days to lay stress on the kaleidoscopic whirl of sensation rather than on freely associated ideas or deeply felt emotions, or in other words, he was trying to state everything behavioristically.

But he seems to have come, by 1930, to feel the limited effectiveness of those literary devices. However truly he wanted to "present what truly happened," his earlier works might have been nothing but *reportages* unless they had had pictures of a vast power of suggestion and what might be called his personal demon. After all these devices Hemingway followed in those days were more suitable to the smaller canvas of the experimental short story, for the best prose style always has been direct, plain and searching. But considering more extended works of fiction, the effectiveness of these devices has its limitation. In the modern novel one of the most indispensable factors is the description of the inner world of its characters, and its success or failure depends upon how one describes changes and conflicts of an inner world. Hemingway also, in order to get over the limitation, came to realize the importance of psychological description of characters that he had avoided in the beginning, when he was teaching himself to write "commencing with the simplest things." But Hemingway's attitude towards psycho-analysis of the characters' inner world is not like what writers in the naturalistic tradition has showed in their wrings. He began to make a deliberate use of symbolism, together with other literary devices that were contrasts with his earlier technique. For instance, his latest story (so far as I know), "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (1936), becomes a stream of consciousness, or rather two streams on different levels, those of dream and those of waking. And he in his earlier works seems to have warned himself against describing the thoughts and emotions of characters directly, but in those days of technical innovation he used the sentence structure

beginning with "He began to say to himself," or with "He continued the conversation with himself," instead of using "He thought." We can find many examples of this in the story, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" in *Winner Take Nothing* (1933). And in this story he began to use another technique—the repetition of the same words in the hero's monologue such as "nada" and "nothing", and it is now one of the characteristics of Hemingway's style. But in *To Have and Have Not* (1937), in which he frequently performs psycho-analysis of Harry Morgan, the hero, he has come, at last, to insert "he thought," in Morgan's monologue.

Hemingway, in his earlier writings before 1930, dealt with various sensational events of war (in *In Our Time* and *A Farewell To Arms*) and the post-war (in *The Sun Also Rises* and *Men Without Women*). Here let us consider Hemingway's view of life implicit in those earlier novels and stories. Hemingway's experience during the war and post-war induced in him a revulsion from idealism, a cynicism concerning civilized value, and hostility toward all kinds of sham. Hemingway seems to have found certain simple values—the values of a primitive stoicism, of physical courage, and of the elementary physical satisfaction of mankind. In expression of such values Hemingway, (as it has already been discussed above), used mechanism in his technique that defended him against the demand of a compassionate and complex personality. At any rate, in his earlier works he seems to have enthusiastically reproduced cruelty, horror and ugliness of war—a production of conventional civilization—to the bitter end.

But Hemingway, after he wrote *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929,

came to show less interest in presenting tense incidents of war. He ran to bullfights and to sports that he endowed with various values, escaping from realities that had now become a nightmare to Hemingway. As a matter of course Hemingway had to confront seriously with the subject of the human — or to speak more strictly, with the metaphysical aspects of human nature. But he was too obstinate to change immediately his insistence on “presenting things truly,” — either because of his innateness or because of his experience which had prepared him for the hard world. On the one hand, Hemingway attempted — as he said in *Green Hills in Africa* — “to write an absolutely true book to see whether the shape of a country and the pattern of a month’s action can, if truly presented, compete with a work of the imagination.” And on the other hand, he began to write new psychological fictions. In *Winner Take Nothing* (1933), his third book of stories, Hemingway wrote on the aftermath of tragic events rather than the events themselves in a tone of somber resignation. This collection may be said to be a work in his technical innovation as has already been mentioned. Then Hemingway began to write longer stories, presenting both sides of the world; inner and outer worlds. “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” (1936) is his first story of that sort. And “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” (1936) is his second story of that sort. In these two works there is a contrast with his earlier works, which consists of mere facts of the outer world; readers have to guess at the characters’ inner world. In “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” he used symbols explicitly, while he had been using symbols unconsciously before. Here the story turns inward,

using death symbols such as the vultures, the hyena, airplane and the square top of Kilimanjaro gleaming white in the sun.

Taking all of Hemingway's novels and short stories together, let us consider again his view of life implicit in them. The point is that of a man bent on complete honesty concerning himself and the rest of the world. It is because they are honest, true, not hypocritical and not sham, that Hemingway seized on certain values, such as values of wine, women, and sports. But the limitation of these primitive values became increasingly conspicuous, they brought reaction into Hemingway himself. He had to find genuine values which would help him to escape from nihilism of 'lost generation' and the desperate situation like Harry Morgan's in *To Have and Have Not*. Those primitive values developed or broadened or returned themselves into values of truth itself which had been the ground for his primitive values. With these values of truth Hemingway opened the way for his new and active life as a writer.

Hemingway became absorbed by the problems connected with the civil war in Spain, and went to Spain to aid the Loyalists. Before the Second National Congress of American Writers (June, 1937), he declared that writers could not avoid the realities of war in Spain and that if truth, projected vividly into the reader's experience, is the objective, fascism, based upon lies backed by force, can never produce good literature. (Millet: *Contemporary American Authors*, p. 386) This statement tells us Hemingway's rediscovery of the value of truth in an active side of him. And on the preface of *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories* (1938), Hemingway makes brief comment on "The Fifth

Column", one of his only two plays: "This is only a play about counter espionage in Madrid. It has the defects of having been written in war time, and if it has a moral it is that people who work for certain organizations have very little time for home life." Certainly there is no unfair concoction of morals for the purpose of his political requirements. He admits that Fifth Column members are shot. Politically Hemingway seems, in this play, to have wanted to present the nobility and dignity of the cause of the Spanish people, but he says on the preface, "It will take many plays and novels to do that, and best ones will be written after the war is over," Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), the longest of Hemingway's novels, is the first of Hemingway's heroes with political and social purposes. He takes death almost willingly for the cause of what he believes truth. This attitude of the hero is quite a contrast to those of the other heroes in his earlier works. This change of attitude toward life—from negative to positive—is also a development of Hemingway's view of life. Jordan's death is very important to mankind, and this is Hemingway's thought implicit in the title quoted from John Donne: "No man is *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent* a part of the *maine*: if a *Clod* bee washed away by the *Sea*, *Europe* is the lesse, as well as if a *Promontorie* were, as well as if a *Mannor* of thy *friends* or of thine *owne* were; any mans *death* diminishes me, because I am involved in *Mankinde*: And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*." Technically there is, in this novel, a subtle and highly conscious application of theories of writing which have developed with the years, as well as a

complicated personality they serve to express. Here Hemingway seems to have felt no limitation to presenting both the outer and inner worlds.

## II

### Symbolism in Hemingway's Writings

Looking back over the years of his laborious apprenticeship, Hemingway tells us at the beginning of *Death in the Afternoon* as follows:—

‘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. In writing for a newspaper you told what happened and, with one trick and another, you communicated the emotion aided by the element of timeliness which gives a certain emotion to any account of something that has happened on that day; but the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or in ten years or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always, was beyond me and I was working very hard to try to get it.’

In those days, Hemingway was working laboriously “to put down what really happened in action,” and “to get real things,” that aroused his own emotion. And he believed that if he could describe it accurately in the proper sequence, it was possible to arouse the emotion of his readers. To him stories seem to

have been machines for arousing emotion. He never put emotion itself in the story. That was the method Hemingway followed in his earlier works, and within its self-imposed limitations, it was extremely successful. It was even successful beyond those limitations. Why was it successful inspite of those limitations? Let us consider taking some passages from *In Our Time*. Chapter III reads in full:—

“We were in a garden in Mons. Young Buckly came in with his patrol from across the river. The first German I saw climbed up over the garden wall. We waited till he got one leg over and then potted him. He had so much equipment on and looked awfully surprised and and fell down into the garden. Then more came over further down the wall. We shot them. They all came just like that.”

Chapter V begins: “They shot the six cabinet ministers at half-past six in the morning against the wall of a hospital.” Chapter VI begins: “Nick sat against the wall of the church where they had dragged him to be clear of machine-gun fire in the street.”

Though there are no editorial reflection on the horrors of modern warfare, all these walls have the power of arousing emotion in the readers. The walls are so vivid that, for the reader, tend to become a sort of metaphor for all the impassable obstacles we see in nightmares. Generally speaking, the real things Hemingway presents in his writings have a tendency to become metaphors or images of that sort. So we, reading them, come to feel as if we were in an uncanny dreamland and they were nightmares at noonday, although most of them are copied

from life. Hemingway says in the beginning of the preface of *Green Hills of Africa*, "I was trying to learn to write, commencing with the simplest things and one of the simplest things of all and the most fundamental is violent death." These walls may have been the images of death in his unconscious mind, though we do not know if he regards them consciously as symbols. With the conscious or unconscious use of symbols such as the walls quoted here, Hemingway's pictures proved to have a vast power of suggestion. This power of suggestion made his stories meaningful and successful. Hemingway's "the real things" change into metaphors for obstacles in nightmare; here images can be put for metaphors; images are symbols of an inner world. Therefore, "the real things" become symbols of an inner world or an inner meaning; the inner meaning is death because the images are those in nightmares. After all "the real things" finally become symbols of death. Therefore, Hemingway's pictures containing the various real things of the sort have a vast power of suggestion, — that is to say, Hemingway's technique in his earlier days was a suggestive one, and 'suggestive' is synonymous with 'implicatory' and, in a sense, even with 'symbolical'. It may sound paradoxical that Hemingway's technique has been symbolical ever since he began to write. Nevertheless, it may be true, as it has been proved, that his works contain a sort of symbolic element. Hemingway, essentially, is a symbolist and not a writer like Dreiser who writes in the naturalistic tradition. By the way, when we read those chapters concerning walls and recognize them as nightmarish images of death, we reflect that Jean Paul Sartre tried to achieve the effect of *existentialism* by using a

wall of the same sort in his novel "*Le Mur*". That may be one of the reasons why in France Hemingway, as well as Faulkner, has been read and studied among the people who call themselves *existentialists*.

Be that as it may, Hemingway was trying in those early days to describe everything behavioristically in accordance with his insistence, as we have already discussed in chapter I. But later he began consciously to make a deliberate use of symbolism, together with other literary devices—such as psycho-analysis of characters — which he had avoided when he was teaching himself to write "commencing with the simplest things." Later, in *A Farewell To Arms*, the rain becomes a conscious symbol directly of disaster, and indirectly of death. Rain falls almost all the time in the novel, and this novel begins with the rain and ends with the rain. On the other hand, it is snow that is used as a symbol of death in "The Snows of kilimanjaro" and in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

We have treated Hemingway as, essentially, a symbolist. Here we are to qualify his symbolism. His symbolism is absolutely Hemingway's, unique, and not the one that has been ordinarily thought of.

Ordinary symbolic fiction is thought to be a type of writing in which its effects depend upon the values of ambiguity and accordingly the author has his eyes fixed on something else. Authors of most symbolic fictions tend to be preoccupied with inner meanings so much that they come to lose their sense of the real world. That may be an error for them because the effect based upon ambiguity ought to be used when they have to

express abstract or inner meaning in concrete words, and that is almost never the case with Hemingway. His eyes are always fixed on reality. He uses symbolism to endow his fictions with shadowy meanings that contribute to the force and complexity of his writing.

It is possible that a writer possesses various elements of technique simultaneously in his writings, and that is not an exceptional case with Hemingway. Upon the critical analysis of his technique, some may define him as a naturalist, some may say he is a psychologist and others may call him a symbolist each from a different standpoint of interpretation. Just and fair as each of those treatments of Hemingway may be, we would like to state that his naturalism, psychological description and symbolism are uniquely Hemingway's, and that they have one more dimension than the traditional ones.

### III

#### Ritualistic Elements in Hemingway's Writings

After insisting on the regeneration of England by the arising of a new blood-contact, D.H. Lawrence, in *Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover*, explains the reasons as follow:—

“The rhythm of the cosmos is something we cannot get away from, without bitterly impoverishing our lives. The Early Christians tried to kill the old pagan rhythm of cosmic ritual, the and to some extent succeeded. They killed the planets and the zodiac, perhaps because astrology had already become debased to fortune-telling. They wanted to kill the festivals of the year. But the

Church, which knows that man does not live by man alone, but by the sun and moon and earth in their revolutions, restored the sacred days and feasts almost as the pagans had them, and the Christian peasants went on very much as the pagan peasant had gone, with the sunrise pause for worship, and the sunset, and noon, the three great daily moments of the sun: then the new holy day, one in the ancient seven cycle:..... For centuries the mass of people lived in this rhythm under the Church. And it is down in the mass that the roots of religion are eternal. When the mass of a people loses the religious rhythm, that people is dead, without hope. But Protestantism came and gave a great blow to the religious and ritualistic rhythm of the year, in human life." Then Lawrence manifests his assertion explicitly:—

"We *must* get back into relation, vivid and nourishing relation to the cosmos and universe. The way is through daily ritual, and the re-awakening. We *must* once more practise the ritual of dawn and noon and sunset, the ritual of the kindling fire and pouring water, the ritual of the first breath, and the last. This is an affair of the individual and the household, a ritual of day. To these rituals we must return: or we must evolve them to suit our needs. Vitally, the human race is dying. It is like a great uprooted tree, with its roots in the air. We must plant ourselves again in the universe. It means a return to ancient forms. We have to go back, a long way, before the idealistic conceptions began, before Plato, before the tragic idea of life arose, to get on to our feet again."

In short, Lawrence asserts that we must practise rituals like primitive people in order to regenerate ourselves. There is

something of the same atmosphere in Hemingway's work. Lawrence expressed it consciously and explicitly with assertion, but Hemingway seized on it and never tried to insist on it. In an early story like "Big Two-Hearted River" in *In Our Time*, Nick Adams, Hemingway's most personal hero, seems to us readers to practise a series of little rituals. Take, for example, a passage from the story: "Another hopper poked his face out of the bottle, his antennae wavered. Nick took him by the head and held him while he threaded the hook under his chin, down through his thorax and into the last segments of his abdomen. The grasshopper took hold of the hook with his front feet, spitting tobacco juice on it." The grasshopper is playing its own part in the ritual as well as the hero. It is the same with the trout which swallows it. The hero's action is so slow and shows so little emotion that we tend to regard his fishing trip as rituals. And there are other rituals in Hemingway's writings.

Hemingway's experience during the war and the post-war period induced in him a revulsion from idealism, a cynicism as to civilized value, contempt for soft and silly people, and he himself returned to the primitive mode of life. Most of his heroes act like primitive people. For them drinking has a ritualistic meaning. Robert Jordan, in *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, finds that a cup of absinthe "took the place of the evening papers, of old evening in cafés, of all the chestnut trees that would be in bloom in their month . . . of all the things he had enjoyed and forgotten and that came back to him when he tasted that opaque, bitter, tongue-numbing, brain-warming, stomach-

warming, idea-changing liquid alchemy." There is much he wants to forget, and he personifies liquor as "the giant killer." Hemingway, as a post-war writer, may have had painful memories of which he wants to rid himself by setting them all down. For the painful memories expression became a kind of exorcism.

The primitive peoples like the Indian still have a strong passion for rituals and their elaborate system, as the old pagan, Lawrence says, had the same before the Early Christian had killed them. Memories of the Indian Hemingway knew in his boyhood play an important part in his works. They reappear in several of his stories. Robert Jordan, in *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, compares his own exploits to Indian warfare, and he strengthens himself by thinking of his grandfather, an old Indian fighter. *In Our Time* starts by telling that Dr. Adams performs a Caesarean section for an Indian woman without anesthetic. When the operation is finished, her husband is dead; he has turned his face to the wall and cut his throat, unable to bear his wife's pain. We can regard the young Indian's death as a rite of self-immolation. Hemingway himself seems to have a feeling for half-forgotten rituals; his cast of mind is pre-Christian and pre-Platonic.

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