

Earnest Hemingway: Sketches Of Life And Works

Dr. Lubab El Tayeb El Mikashfi*

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to bring to light the essence of Hemingway's literary achievements for the benefit of the audience who are concerned with English literature in general and American literature in particular. Investigating Hemingway's life and works reveals his invaluable contribution to English literature in USA and the world-over. His variety of themes related to the period between the two world wars and the simple journalistic style he adopted speak for his mastery of the art of modern narration.

1. Introduction

It is probably safe to express the view that no other author perhaps no other author in the Twentieth Century- has achieved both literary importance and reputation gained by ability as Hemingway did. Success did come early in 1927 when the 'Atlantic Monthly' published his short story " Fifty Grqnd" in Men Without Women."The first two books - the collection of stories 'In Our Time' (1925). and 'The Sun Also Rises' (1926) had already paved the way for the twenty- eight year old author for literary stardom, in particular, onthe expatriate scene in Paris.

Assistant Professor of English, Faculty of Education - Hantoub, University of Gezira.

2. Biographical Notes

Earnest Hemingway was born in Oak Park near Chicago in 1899. Hemingway was the second of six children of Grace Hemingway, a Christian Scientist, and Clarence Edmonds Hemingway, a medical doctor who loved hunting and fishing. It is clear, then, that he was brought up in a middle - class environment. Camping, music, drama and games are his main concerns. He was both a good shot and an excellent fisherman.

As a school student at Oak Park High School, Hemingway was active in athletics and journalism, writing for the school newspaper 'The Trapeze'. Moreover, he used to participate in school debates and write for school.

In 1917, he volunteered to work in the US Army but was deferred because of poor vision. He became a cub reporter for the Kansas City Star. After a brief but formative period as a Kansas City reporter, he joined the American ambulance unit in Italy where he was seriously wounded on the Italian front. He returned to the US in January 1919. Then he went to Toronto to write for the Star as a foreign correspondent in Paris in 1921. Thus he became an expatriate. Deciding to stop being a journalist and to continue writing fiction, Hemingway became a full — time writer in 1927. He had probably been influenced by his surroundings. In Paris, at the time, he knew a group of expatriates, among whom were James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Pablo Picasso.

When the Second War began, Hemingway was living in Cuba. He became a war correspondent in London, flying on missions with RAF

(Royal Air Force) observing the invasion of France and Campaign in Germany. The war took its toll of Hemingway's health. 1954 was the year in which he was later to win the Noble Prize for literature for his novel 'The Old Man and the Sea' .

In his last years, Hemingway suffered from nervous depression and high blood pressure. He was not able to write and in 1961 he shot himself with a double barrelled shot gun at his home in Ketch, Ldaho (1986:172)

3. A Summary Account of Hemingway's Major Works

1-3 The Sun Also Rises (1926)

This novel tells of the moral collapse of a group of expatriated Americans and Englishmen weakened and exhausted by the war and who turned toward escape through all possible strong unlawful diversions. The significance of the novel undoubtedly lies in the historical documentation of what Gertrude Stein labelled as the 'Lost Generation'. Actually, it is a real success in fictional artistry and skillful portrayal of the mind of an era. The novel in focus maintained a place in history - after the First World War, many young Americans departed from their homeland, feeling bitter over the war and seeking adventure. This circle of artistic expatriates include Hemingway, Sherwood Andersen and Pablo Picasso among others. They are under the guidance of Gertrude Stein sharing the same revolutionary ideas on art.

While attending the Fiesta de San Fermin in Pamplona, Spain with friends in 1925, Hemingway conceived the idea of 'the Sun Also Rises.'

It is worth mentioning that 'The Sun Also Rises' is considered one of the masterpieces of the Lost Generation.

3-2 The Plot of the Novel

The novel reveals the story of Jake Barnes, an American newspaper man, and Lady Brett Ashley, an English woman. Brett, Lady Ashley, described as "Gharming" when she is drunk. When she is sober, she is travelling one the continent, waiting for a divorce in order to marry Michel Cambell. Among her other satellites are Jake Barnes, an American newspaper correspondent, Bill Gorton, Robert Cohn, an American Jewish novelist and an eccentric Greek count. Cohn falls in love with Brett after being weary of his mistress, despite the fact that Brett did not feel real affection for him and neither did his other acquaintances.

The group leave Paris for an excursion in Spain, where they visit the fiesta at Pamplona. The group are enthusiastic fans of the bull-fights. Brett and Jake are in love, but unhappy because a wartime injury has emasculated him. She falls in love with a young bullfighter, Pedro Romero, with whom she elopes. Then Cohon departs, expressing his anger by beating Jake, Michel and Romero. When Romero wants to marry her, Brett decides to return to Michel, who is one of her own type.

3-3 A Farewell to Arms (1929)

The novel is based upon Hemingway's wartime experience in Italy; Rejected from the US Army for his poor eye-sight, Hemingway's determination to join the war effort landed him a post with the Red Cross as an ambulance driver on the Italian Front. On July, 1918 he

was hit in the leg by an Austrian mortar shell. Despite the wound, he managed to carry an Italian soldier to the nearby command post. However, a machine gunfire struck him in the knee and foot, and he was eventually sent to a hospital in Milan, Italy. During the period 'he stayed in hospital, the 19 year old Hemingway had an affair with an American Cross nurse who is several years older than him. This experience obviously inspired him to write 'A Farewell to Arms'. However, it seems that Hemingway most likely embellished the romance with Catherine in the novel. For the simple reason that, in reality the nurse, Agnes Von Kierowsky did not respond to nor reciprocate Hemingway's intense feelings. Above that, Agnes did not die during the war as Catherine does.

Nevertheless, 'A Farwell to Arms' (1929) is considered by some critics (e.g. Conn, 1989) as the finest novel to come out reflecting the widespread disillusionment with war, and a world that allows such savage cruelty. The painful emotions of a broken body and heart, no doubt, embittered Hemingway.

3-4 The Plot of 'A Farewell to Arms' (1929)

Frank Henry, an American Lieutenant in the Italian ambulance service during the World War I, falls in love with an English nurse, Catherine Barkley. She reciprocates his feelings. When Henry is wounded during a bombardment, he is sent to a hospital in Milan and Catherine comes to nurse him. They spend a happy summer together while he recuperates. In the autumn, Catherine confesses that she is pregnant, but she does not intend to marry him, fearing that she will be sent back to England.

Henry returns to his post, finding his comrade Rinaldi depressed by the shocking horrors of the war. Henry shares the suffering during the disastrous retreat from Caporetti. Learning that Catherine has been transferred to Stresa, Henry deserts the scene to join Catharine. Although he is in civilian clothes, he is suspected and forced to flee to Switzerland. Both Henry and Catherine go to Laussane for the birth of their child. Unfortunately, the mother and the baby die, leaving Henry desolate and alone in a strange world.

3-5 For Whom the Bell Tolls' (1940)

It is Hemingway's longest novel on an incident in the Spanish Civil War. The novel has universality in its thesis in that the loss of liberty in one place means a loss everywhere else. The novel can be classified as a complex one, dealing with the Spanish Civil War and highlighting an operation behind fascist lines; which involves the blowing up of a bridge. This mission is to be carried out by an American university professor, Robert Jordan: Choosing an intellectual as a major character is indicative of allowing the introduction of ideas into the novel. Jordan, without the slightest doubt, is a typical of Hemingway's hero regarding bravery, honesty and compassion.

It could be said that For Whom the Bell Tolls was inspired by Hemingway's experiences as a foreign correspondent, first in Paris and then in Spain itself, during the Spanish Civil War. When the Spanish Civil War began in 1936, Hemingway had written articles and delivered speeches to raise money for the leftist. Hemingway travelled to Spain to cover the war for the Northern American Newspaper Alliance. Only a few months after his arrival, did Hemingway

announce to the literary world that he was working on a novel whose subject was the Spanish Civil War.

3-6 The Plot of 'For Whom the Bell Tolls'

Robert Jordan, an American, has entered the Loyalist army during the Spanish Civil War of the 1930's. He has been sent to join a guerilla band in the mountains near Segovia to blow up a strategy bridge at the exact minute that will help a Loyalist advance.

During the three days and nights that he spends in the guerrillas cave, he awaits with a romantic opposition to heroism what he suspects will be his own destruction and that of his companions. He falls in love with Maria, a daughter of a Republican major, who has seen her parents killed and was raped herself by Falangists Jord helps her to regain her desire to live. Their passionate love is abetted by Pilar, who dominates the group by her force of character, gusto a love of the Republic. Her man Pablo lacks belief and hence courage. The others include foul- mouthed Augstin, pedantic, dignified Fernando, the gypsy Rafael and the adoring Andres.

A sense of impending disaster develops, with smoldering opposition within the group. The Guerilla leader El Sordo was under attack from the Falangist on a neighbouring hill. Pablo acted cowardly Andres is sent to Loyalist headquarters carrying a note from Jordan saying that the advance is likely to fail. The message was impeded by the communists bureaucracy and suspicion. The generals, finally, realize that they should have cancelled the attack. Leaving the retreat, Jordan successfully blasts the bridge. In the attempt to flee, he is wounded and he forces the others to leave him. He lies on the hillside

almost delirious, restraining himself from suicide hoping that he may shoot the leader of the Fascists.

3-7 The Old Man and the Sea' (1952)

The Old Man and the Sea was published in 1952, Hemingway wrote to the publisher Charles Scribner on October 1951 saying "This is the prose that I have been working for all my life; that should read easily and simply and seem short and yet have all the dimensions of the visible world and the world of man's spirit. It is as good prose as I can write as of now".

Published in its entirety in one edition of Life Magazine, it was an instant success. Many critics enthusiastically acknowledged it as Hemingway's best work. William Faulkner pointed out that 'Time may show it to be the best single piece of any of us, I mean his and my contemporaries'.

The Old Man and the Sea was awarded the 1953 Pulitzer prize and American Academy of Arts and Letters' Award of Merit Medal for the novel which played a significant role in Hemingway's selection for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.

3-8 The Plot of 'The Old Man and the Sea' (1952):

The novelette is a parable of man's struggle with nature and of his noble courage and endurance. A Cuban fisherman, Santiago, who for 84 luckless days has rowed the skiff into the Gulf stream in quest of marlin. At first he was accompanied by the boy Manolin, with whom he talked of better days and about the great sport of baseball. Being solitary and very old, he goes far out and hooks a great fish that tows his boat all the afternoon and night and into the following day; as he

pits his skill and waning strength against it the way he once did as a wrestler. As the second night turns to dawn, he finally harpoons his catch, lashes it down his small boat, wearily and makes his way I home.

As he sails slowly to port, sharks attack his catch and he fights them as best he can with a knife lashed to the tiller, gripped in raw hands. When he reached land the marlin was a mere skelton. Proud in defeat, Santiago furls his sail and staggers to his shack, to be found by the boy and other fishermen, who marvel at his catch while the Old Man sleeps and dreams of past experiences.

4. Hemingway Themes, Characters and Style

4-1 Themes:

To begin with, understanding Hemingway's works demands a knowledge of his life i.e. in so many ways his life and art are intertwined.

With respect to the themes he expressed in his works, they vary from failure and moral bankruptcy to death deception and sterility in the post-World War I society. One of the most significant contributions reflected in his works is the depiction of the plight of the disenchanted lost group of post-world I expatriates. For the first time, Hemingway introduced the phrase 'Lost generation' in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). As the leading spokesman for the lost generation, he expressed the feelings of war wounded people disillusioned by the loss of faith and hope and thus thoroughly defeated by the collapse of the former values

Conn (1989, 354) expressed the view that "the struggle against fear that fills Hemingway's stories and novels with anxious tension is perhaps the characteristic subject".

It is crystal clear that Hemingway is most concerned with man's attitudes toward life with the presence of death. Added to that his stories mainly deal with 'tough people' either intelligent men and women who have dropped into cynicism or such primitives as frontiersmen, Indians and professional athletes whose essential courage and honesty are implicitly contrasted with the brutality of civilized society.

4-2 Characters

Regarding Hemingway's characters, it can be noticed that they are usually characters with inner moral discipline who are usually involved with rituals like bull-fighting, big game hunting and fishing. For instance, Santiago in "The Old Man and the Sea", (1952) has a simple faith, hopeful and charitable. Despite the fact that Santiago has been ruined by the battle with the fish, he is not wretched. "He is sustained by the code of the hunter (1988, XIII).

Another striking feature of Hemingway's characters is that these very characters live life to its fullest extent. They enjoy the sensual pleasures that life has to offer. Characters who are eating drinking and being merry, with the awareness that they may die the following day.

The surface of his stories (the tips of the iceberg) most often shows individuals whether in war, in the bull-ring, in a big hunt, or in some other life, in threatening situation. They are dealing either gracefully or in a cowardly way with death. In the novel 'For Whom the Bell

Talls' (1940), Jordan fights pain and suicidal thoughts with the hope that he can buy time for the fleeing guerillas: The novel closes as Jordan awaits death on the pine-covered ground.

Another observation which is worthy of underlining is that made by Lee(1987: 203) about Hemingways characters:

"Hemingway never found it easy to appreciate the independent reality of any one who was not a while Anglo-Saxon male, and his novels are considerably weakened by his patronizing portraits of women, Jews, Blacks and European peasants"

4-3 Style

It is worth mentioning that Hemingway himself owes a debt to among many others, Mark Twin, Sherwood Andersen, and above all Gertrude Stein who has exerted a powerful influence on him.

Hemingway contributed materially to the decline of the elaborate Victorian era prose, which was a feature of a great deal of writings in the early twentieth century. In his use of zero – ending which is counter to the well-made story, he has substantially influenced the form of the modern story. In point of fact, Hemingway's stories are distinguished from the 19th and early 20th century described as 'well - made' in that they are usually elliptical in form, rarely knitting up details with the intention of bringing the story to a conclusion.

Needless to say the type of story Hemingway wrote, as noted by Sheldon Grebsten, shows a belief in Alaton Chekov dictum in which scene and character and the selection of significant details are grouped

together so as to convey an image; which is the vital element in the work.

He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954 for his mastery of the art of modern narration. He employed a spare and journalistic type of prose. Another point to add is that he used the objective detached point of view and his vocabulary and sentence structure are deceptively simple.

Hemingway's works have influenced a large number of American writers through the compelling efficiency of economy, the cinematic focus on detail and the convincing way his characters are drawn.

All in all, it could be mentioned that, Hemingway's plain style was successful in expressing basic deeply felt emotions. Despite its simplicity and child like syntax, it has a complex impact on the audience.

5. Conclusion

Chinua Achebe, the greatest African writer, once said 'The person who has not read 'Things Fall Apart' has incomplete education.'

Borrowing the statement in favour of Hemingway's art, one can say that 'who has not read any of Hemingway's literary works is ignorant of an era of historical importance and revolutionary ideas on art.

To round off the essay, it would be reasonable to stress the point that Hemingway is one of the foremost authors of the era between the two world wars. His work dealt with two types of people. One type consisted of women and men-deprived by World War I of moral values in which they believed, and who lived with cynical disregard for anything but their emotional needs. The second type are of simple

character and primitive emotions such as prize fighters and bullfighters. Hemingway wrote of their courageous and usually futile battles against circumstances. The novel that established Hemingway's reputation is 'The Sun Also Rises', the story of a group of morally irresponsible Americans and Britans living in France and Spain، members of the so called generation of the post World War I period.

In 1954, he received the Nobel Prize, partly because of his splendid contribution, 'The Old Man and the Sea.'

5-1 Hemingway's Works

1. Three stories and ten poems (Paris, 1923).
2. In our Time (1925).
3. The Torrents of Spring (1926).
4. The Sun Also Rises (1926).
5. Men without Women (1927).
- .6 A Farewell to Arms (1929).
- .7 Death in the Afternoon (1923).
8. Winner Take Nothing (1933).
- .9 Green Hills of Africa (1935).
10. To have and Have Not (1937).
11. Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories (1938).
12. For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940).
13. Men at War (1942).
14. Across the River and into the Trees (1950).
15. The Old Man and the Sea (1952).

Posthumous Works:

16. A Mooable Feast (1964).
17. Islands in the Stream (1970).
18. The Wild (1962).
19. By- Lines (1967).
20. The Nick Adams Stories (1972).
21. 88Poems (1988).
22. Selected Letters (1981).

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Wesbites

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