

Ernest Hemingway



ERNEST MILLER HEMINGWAY

born on July 21, 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois., U.S.-
died on July 2, 1961, Ketchum, Idaho.

The first son of Clarence Edmonds Hemingway, a doctor, and Grace Hall Hemingway, Ernest Miller Hemingway was born in a suburb of Chicago. He was educated in the public schools and began to write in high school, where he was active and outstanding, but the parts of his boyhood that mattered most were summers spent with his family on Walloon Lake in upper Michigan. On graduation from high school in 1917, impatient for a less sheltered environment, he did not enter college but went to Kansas City, where he was employed as a reporter for the *Star*. He was repeatedly rejected for military service because of a defective eye, but he managed to enter

World War I as an ambulance driver for the American Red Cross. On July 8, 1918, not yet 19 years old, he was injured on the Austro-Italian front at Fossalta di Piave. Decorated for heroism and hospitalized in Milan, he fell in love with a Red Cross nurse, Agnes von Kurowsky, who declined to marry him. These were experiences he was never to forget.

After recuperating at home, Hemingway renewed his efforts at writing, for a while worked at odd jobs in Chicago, and sailed for France as a foreign correspondent for the *Toronto Star*. Advised and encouraged by other American writers in Paris--F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound--he began to see his nonjournalistic work appear in print there, and in 1923 his first important book, a collection of stories called *In Our Time*, was published in New York City. In 1926 he published *The Sun Also Rises*, a novel with which he scored his first solid success. A pessimistic but sparkling book, it deals with a group of aimless expatriates in France and Spain--members of the postwar "lost generation," a phrase that Hemingway scorned while making it famous. This work also introduced him to the limelight, which he both craved and resented for the rest of his life. Hemingway's *The Torrents of Spring*, a parody of the American writer Sherwood Anderson's book *Dark Laughter*, also appeared in 1926.

The writing of books occupied him for most of the postwar years. He remained based in Paris, but he traveled widely for the skiing, bullfighting, fishing, or hunting that by then had become part of his life and formed the background for much of his writing. His position as a master of short fiction had been advanced by *Men Without Women* in 1927 and thoroughly established with the stories in *Winner Take Nothing* in 1933. Among his finest stories are "The Killers," "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." At least in the public view, however, the novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) overshadowed such works. Reaching back to his experience as a young soldier in Italy, Hemingway developed a grim but lyrical novel of great power, fusing love story with war story. While serving with the Italian ambulance service during World War I, the American lieutenant Frederic Henry falls in love with the English nurse Catherine Barkley, who tends him during his recuperation after being wounded. She becomes pregnant by him, but he must return to his post. Henry deserts during the Italians' disastrous retreat after the Battle of Caporetto, and the reunited couple flee Italy by crossing the border into Switzerland. There, however, Catherine and her baby die during childbirth, leaving Henry desolate at the loss of the great love of his life.

Hemingway's love of Spain and his passion for bullfighting resulted in *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), a learned study of a spectacle he saw more as tragic ceremony than as sport. Similarly,

a safari he took in 1933-34 in the big-game region of Tanganyika resulted in *The Green Hills of Africa* (1935), an account of big-game hunting. Mostly for the fishing, he bought a house in Key West, Fla., and bought his own fishing boat. A minor novel of 1937 called *To Have and Have Not* is about a Caribbean desperado and is set against a background of lower-class violence and upper-class decadence in Key West during the Great Depression.

By now Spain was in the midst of civil war. Still deeply attached to that country, Hemingway made four trips there, once more a correspondent. He raised money for the Republicans in their struggle against the Nationalists under General Francisco Franco, and he wrote a play called *The Fifth Column* (1938), which is set in besieged Madrid. As in many of his books, the protagonist of the play is based on the author. Following his last visit to the Spanish war he purchased Finca Vigía ("Lookout Farm"), an unpretentious estate outside Havana, Cuba, and went to cover another war--the Japanese invasion of China.

The harvest of Hemingway's considerable experience of Spain in war and peace was the novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), a substantial and impressive work that some critics consider his finest novel, in preference to *A Farewell to Arms*. It was also the most successful of all his books as measured in sales. Set during the Spanish Civil War, it tells of Robert Jordan, an American volunteer who is sent to join a guerrilla band behind the Nationalist lines in the Guadarrama Mountains. Most of the novel concerns Jordan's relations with the varied personalities of the band, including the girl Maria, with whom he falls in love. Through dialogue, flashbacks, and stories, Hemingway offers telling and vivid profiles of the Spanish character and unsparingly depicts the cruelty and inhumanity stirred up by the civil war. Jordan's mission is to blow up a strategic bridge near Segovia in order to aid a coming Republican attack, which he realizes is doomed to fail. In an atmosphere of impending disaster, he blows up the bridge but is wounded and makes his retreating comrades leave him behind, where he prepares a last-minute resistance to his Nationalist pursuers.

All of his life Hemingway was fascinated by war--in *A Farewell to Arms* he focused on its pointlessness, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* on the comradeship it creates--and as World War II progressed he made his way to London as a journalist. He flew several missions with the Royal Air Force and crossed the English Channel with American troops on D-Day (June 6, 1944). Attaching himself to the 22nd Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division, he saw a good deal of action in Normandy and in the Battle of the Bulge. He also participated in the liberation of Paris and, although ostensibly a journalist, he impressed professional soldiers not only as a man of courage in battle but also as a real expert in military matters, guerrilla activities, and intelligence collection.

Following the war in Europe, Hemingway returned to his home in Cuba and began to work seriously again. He also traveled widely, and on a trip to Africa he was injured in a plane crash. Soon after (in 1953), he received the Pulitzer Prize in fiction for *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), a short, heroic novel about an old Cuban fisherman who, after an extended struggle, hooks and boats a giant marlin only to have it eaten by voracious sharks during the long voyage home. This book, which played a role in gaining for Hemingway the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954, was as enthusiastically praised as his previous novel, *Across the River and into the Trees* (1950), the story of a professional army officer who dies while on leave in Venice, had been damned.

By 1960 Fidel Castro's revolution had driven Hemingway from Cuba. He settled in Ketchum, Idaho, and tried to lead his life and do his work as before. For a while he succeeded, but, anxiety-ridden and depressed, he was twice hospitalized at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., where he received electroshock treatments. Two days after his return to the house in

Ketchum, he took his life with a shotgun. Hemingway had married four times and fathered three sons.

He left behind a substantial amount of manuscript, some which has been published. *A Moveable Feast*, an entertaining memoir of his years in Paris (1921-26) before he was famous, was issued in 1964. *Islands in the Stream*, three closely related novellas growing directly out of his peacetime memories of the Caribbean island of Bimini, of Havana during World War II, and of searching for U-boats off Cuba, appeared in 1970.

Hemingway's characters plainly embody his own values and view of life. The main characters of *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* are young men whose strength and self-confidence nevertheless coexist with a sensitivity that leaves them deeply scarred by their wartime experiences. War was for Hemingway a potent symbol of the world, which he viewed as complex, filled with moral ambiguities, and offering almost unavoidable pain, hurt, and destruction. To survive in such a world and perhaps emerge victorious, one must conduct oneself with honour, courage, endurance, and dignity, a set of principles known as "the Hemingway code." To behave well in the lonely, losing battle with life is to show "grace under pressure" and constitutes in itself a kind of victory, a theme clearly established in *The Old Man and the Sea*.