

HEMINGWAY AND PARIS: «THE CAVALRY OF WOE»*

Literature and journalism, it has become a critical commonplace to insist, speak distinct and separate kinds of truth. Early in his career, Ernest Hemingway began to realize that in journalism it was possible to suggest a greater degree of expertise, authority, and background information than one actually had. When he was given a post as the *Toronto Daily Star's* foreign correspondent he was in search of another kind of knowledgeability, a balance between fact and fiction, a truth paradoxically more provisional and more permanent than the here and now, a writer's truth. In 1934 Hemingway would write: "All good books are alike in that they are truer than if they had really happened and after you are finished reading one you will feel that all that happened to you and afterwards it all belongs to you; the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse and sorrow, the people and the places and how the weather was. If you can get so that you can give that to people, then you are a writer."¹

When Hemingway and his wife Hadley arrived in Paris at Christmas, 1921, following Sherwood Anderson's conviction that it was the place for an aspiring writer to be, he plugged into a complex, foreign scene, at a time when he was struggling to construct an expatriate self and to understand the contradictions of American identity. No matter how hard it was for Hemingway to adjust to a radically new cultural network, Paris fascinated him because it represented the two poles of emotion that characterized his life: hope and anxiety. In Paris he became a modern risk-taker, an expatriate experimental writer, a master of that malleable combination of the real with

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¹ WHITE, William (ed.) — *By-Line: Ernest Hemingway*, New York, Scribner's, 1932, p. 184.

fiction. The satire of Ring Lardner or *The Kansas City Star's* rules for prose writing had been an important part of his early education; now, he was rightly looking for a more sophisticated and worthy climate for his art. Paris helped him reject the decadence of nineteenth-century American culture and the confinement, dullness, and formalism of his Oak Park upbringing. He became well-known even before the publication of his first texts and the concomitant road to success. But his Paris life was not only lived under the pressure of literary guidance; he experienced psychological, environmental pressures, which at times caused his artistry to be uneven and which, on the other hand, functioned as a subtext for the bleak tones of his Paris fiction or, to use Michael Reynolds' formulation, for "a literature of loss from one who needed most to win."² Paraphrasing Hemingway's words, and since they apply to the transactions of an entire lifetime, we may venture to say that Hemingway would not disagree with the assumption that, once you have lived as a young man with a feeling of loss, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for it is a moveable feeling. Loss and suicide were present in Hemingway's mind during the late Paris years. And he never managed to get rid of this haunting memory.

In our informed common sense, the City of Light was the intellectual center of the 1920's in literature, music, painting, and dance. And no aspiring or great writer could easily survive in those days without grasping the spirit of the place, without internalizing the fascinating mixture of his outsider's perspective and the insider's mystifications, without witnessing the twentieth-century avant-garde revolution. For American novelists, poets, editors, and composers, the place-within-the-place to be was the Left Bank salon of Gertrude Stein, the *locus classicus* of experimentalism, where the famous and the not-so-famous met; the bookshop Shakespeare and Co. was where one went to get acquainted with Sylvia Beach, "den mother to the post-war literary generation."³ Hemingway's literary indebtedness to Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and Ford Madox Ford — among other examples in the young author's apprenticeship-taught him that it was dedication to his craft that counted, that work was the key to all secrets as far as writing was concerned.

We receive through Hemingway's prose an affectionate portrait of a physical Paris, a world that proved to be a source for his accomplishment as

² REYNOLDS, Michael — *Hemingway: The American Homecoming*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1992, p. 93.

³ *Idem*, p. 13.

an artist, but also for transitory moments of joy and happiness. But for Hemingway life in Paris was in many ways problematical. In a sensitive overview of Hemingway's mind and personality, Scott Donaldson rightly acknowledges that Hemingway sides with Emily Dickinson in the dilemma of having to cope with the other side of the equation of enchanted satisfaction. As the poet from Amherst put it:

For each ecstatic instant
We must an anguish pay
In keen and quivering ratio
To the ecstasy

For each beloved hour
Sharp pittances of years-
Bitter contested farthings-
And Coffers heaped with Tears!

To fight aloud, is very brave
But *gallanter*, I know
Who charge within the bosom
The Cavalry of Woe.⁴

To be in need of a balance between public investment and private stability was very much at the core of Hemingway's ordeal in Paris. To the working, producing expatriate, experimenting and revising incessantly until he had achieved a style in fiction which satisfied his demanding judgement, Paris had come to suggest a purposeful activity. Hemingway was not a charter citizen of the fabled city, mythified by those who came to it only to find and stimulate an aimless condition of escapism, dissipation, and irresponsibility. For Hemingway, this drifting impulse represented, to use Robert Frost's words, "the road not taken". Hemingway in the early Twenties, like Frost in his poem, stood at a fork in the road, and had a sensitive awareness of the "two roads" that "diverged" in the Parisian milieu. He also "took the one less traveled by,/And that has made all the difference".⁵ The moment of choice was important and the author's

⁴ DONALDSON, Scott — *By Force of Will: The Life and Art of Ernest Hemingway*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978, pp. 21-22; JOHNSON, Thomas H. (ed.) — *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, London, Faber & Faber, 1975, pp. 58-59.

⁵ *Robert Frost's Poems*, New York, Pocket Books, 1955, p. 223.

“difference” is evident in him from the beginning, when he sets out on his career. In one of the first dispatches he sent the *Toronto Star Weekly* from Paris in 1922 he expresses his absolute indignation about his fellow Americans on the Left Bank, representatives of a degenerate expatriate mystique:

“You can find anything you are looking for at the Rotonde — except serious artists. The trouble is that people who go on a tour of the Latin Quarter look in at the Rotonde and think they are seeing an assembly of the real artists of Paris. I want to correct that in a very public manner, for the artists of Paris who are turning out creditable work resent and loathe the Rotonde crowd.

The fact that there are twelve francs for a dollar brought over the Rotonders, along with a good many other people, and if the exchange ever gets back to normal they will have to go back to America. They are nearly all loafers expending the energy that an artist puts into his creative work in talking about what they are going to do and condemning the work of all artists who have gained any degree of recognition. By talking about art they obtain the same satisfaction that the real artist does in his work. That is very pleasant, of course, but they insist upon posing as artists.”⁶

In another sense, Hemingway, the serious artist, felt that Paris had increasingly become a version of the wasteland that had emerged in the aftermath of the First World War. He experienced a sense of sterility and emptiness in the city, the decadence of values, the bitterness of failure, tremendous loss. And it is precisely at this point that the public and the private worlds suggest a clearly interwoven process, by which Hemingway tried to neutralize the stress of his exceptionally wide-ranging experience and the upheavals of his tormented life.

What is implied here is the fact that there is a “second part of Paris”, the period after 1925-26, when Hemingway was working on the manuscript of *The Sun Also Rises*, when his first (happy) marriage was beginning to end: things would never again be quite the same. It is possible to call into question the 1964 edition of *A Moveable Feast* that Charles Scribner’s Sons issued under Mary Hemingway’s instructions. The Items in the Kennedy Library on Columbia Point seem to confirm that Hemingway’s fourth and last wife

⁶ WHITE (ed.) — *By-Line*, pp. 24-25.

modified, eliminated, and added relevant material. And it is also likely that, in certain ways, *A Moveable Feast* may not give us the “‘real gen’ on those far-off times”,⁷ as Hemingway had intended. However, it is still possible to hear the unique Hemingway voice under and between the lines, Hemingway talking to himself in a long soliloquy, Hemingway trying to guide an understanding of the city that belonged to him, of those he liked — Ezra Pound, especially, but also the unambitious Evan Shipman —, of those who collided with his idea of dignity or with his will to fame and public recognition — Gertrude Stein, Ford Madox Ford, Wyndham Lewis, Ernest Walsh, F. Scott Fitzgerald. Pervading all these recollections is Hemingway’s “cavalry of woe”, his private anxiety, a typical sadness which signalled depression. In the last chapter of the published version, he remembers the pleasures of the Schruns winters, while trying to deal as frankly as possible with contradictory feelings and black remorse. Of his first wife he says:

“I loved her and I loved no one else and we had a lovely magic time while we were alone. I worked well and we made great trips, and I thought we were invulnerable again, and it wasn’t until we were out of the mountains in late spring, and back in Paris, that the other thing started again.

That was the end of the first part of Paris. Paris was never to be the same again although it was always Paris and you changed as it changed.”⁸

This is a strange and painful happiness which brought on the burden which he carried all his life, the guilt for the breakup of his and Hadley’s marriage. The “other thing” that fascinated him and that put an end to “the first part of Paris” was obviously his emotional involvement with Pauline Pfeiffer, who, on the other hand, is left out of the text of *A Moveable Feast*.

In his writing room at the Taube Inn, Schruns 1926, when he was revising a novel in progress — *The Sun Also Rises* —, Hemingway was simultaneously revising the period in Paris when mere living and mere loving and mere writing were all there was. In 1926 life was changing and with change came bitterness. Michael Reynolds points out a lasting effect of the self-disgust that visited the writer at work: “... it was hard for Hemingway not

⁷ BAKER, Carlos — *Hemingway: The Writer as Artist*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 350.

⁸ HEMINGWAY, Ernest — *A Moveable Feast*, New York, Scribner’s, 1964, pp. 210-11.

to be satirical about Paris. His real story of the city was not about Lady Ashley, but about Pauline Pfeiffer, a story he could not tell anyone yet. It was not the trip to New York or his Scribner's contract that made him think of suicide; it was the firm small body of Pauline Pfeiffer in her Paris bed that gave him dark thoughts."⁹ Malcolm Cowley, in his well-known *Portable* introduction, pointed out that Hemingway was not primarily a realist or naturalist, but more easily related in his writing to the dark writers of nineteenth-century literary Renaissance, to Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville, to the issues of innocence, identity, and guilt. On the other hand, when we analyze Hemingway's fiction carefully, we conclude that he is never writing biography, that he always tries to get down on paper what he actually saw, heard, smelt, and tasted, that he constantly rearranged the sensations he experienced, that he wrote the truest sentences he could write, paring them down and giving his writing a subtle texture and a special touch, the Hemingway touch. To reconstruct this complex and private history of Paris that informs and forms the background of his fiction is to acknowledge that the disturbing, modern newness and openness of the city not only eventually contributed to the collapse of his first marriage but also constituted a subtext for *The Sun Also Rises* and for the short fiction of the second part of Paris. With the exception of "The Undeclared", written in 1924, and "Fifty Grand" and "Ten Indians" (1925), the date of composition of most stories of *Men Without Women*, published in New York in October 1927 and dedicated to Evan Shipman, is either 1926 — "In Another Country", "The Killers", "A Canary for One", "An Alpine Idyll", "Today is Friday", and "Banal Story" — or 1927 — "Hills Like White Elephants", "Che Ti Dice La Patria?", "A Simple Enquiry", "A Pursuit Race", and "Now I Lay Me".

These are dark stories in which "the softening feminine influence through training, discipline, death or other causes"¹⁰ is absent. There is a nightmarish quality in them which permeates their thematic motifs: bowed professionals, miscommunication between male and female, unsuccessful marriages, lonely, depressed, broken-hearted men. "The Cavalry of Woe" pervades, just to name a few stories included in *Men Without Women*, "A Canary for One", "In Another Country", and "Now I Lay Me". In the first of these stories, all of them marriage stories,¹¹ the narrator and his wife are

⁹ REYNOLDS, pp. 5-6.

¹⁰ BAKER, Carlos (ed.) — *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters 1917-1961*, New York, Scribner's, 1981, p. 245.

¹¹ REYNOLDS, pp. 52, 78, 90.

“returning to Paris to set up separate residences.”¹² What he contemplates, staring out the window, are the desolate shadings of a wasteland, “a farmhouse burning in a field” [258], “three cars that had been in a wreck” [261]. He looks back to what he was leaving and losing for good and knows that what lies ahead is a burnt, wrecked marriage. To go back to Paris is not to reenter a fascinating city but to reach the end of the line, to plunge into a painful emptiness. In a typical Hemingway fashion, there is no action in the story, nothing happens in a straight narrative, while the reader is forced to supply the meaning and has to be prepared for the very last sentence of the story, the end of a marriage.

In “In Another Country”, the wounded Italian major with a disfigured hand has therapy sessions in a Milan hospital where he establishes a certain friendliness with other wounded people, namely the young unnamed American narrator. Within the Hemingway pattern of focusing and refocusing nuances, the Major assumes the leading role in a story that could have been another war story and ends up in a rough discussion about marriage:

“Are you married?”
“No, but I hope to be.”
“The more of a fool you are, “he said. He seemed very angry. “A man must not marry.”
“Why, Signor Maggiore?”
“Don’t call me ‘Signor Maggiore.’”
“Why must not a man marry?”
“He cannot marry. He cannot marry, “he said angrily. “If he is to lose everthing, he should not place himself in a position to lose that. He should not place himself in a position to lose. He should find things he cannot lose.”[209]

Later in the story the reader is informed that the Major’s wife has died. The shock had put him “in another country”. In 1926 Hemingway was living “in another country” as well, feeling the loneliness of his separation, the temporary absence of Pauline, and the uncertainty of a second marriage.

¹² *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, New York, Scribner’s, 1987, p. 261. Subsequent parenthetical page references to Hemingway’s short stories will correspond to this edition.

Nick Adams in "Now I Lay Me" tries many ways to stop thinking back on the psychic shock he had suffered. At a certain point a dialogue is established between Nick and John, his Italian-American orderly. The latter's cure for Nick's worries, sleeplessness, and insomniac ruminations is marriage. James Mellow writes that "Hemingway, at one point, had considered naming the story 'In Another Country-II'. He had begun it, too, in the *woebegone* period when he was separated from Pauline... That Hemingway wrote his story of the wounded Nick Adams and his sleepless nights... during the time he was tormented by worries over his affair with Pauline suggests his state of mind at the time."¹³ In a 1926 letter to his "Dearest Pfi", Hemingway admits his "pretty terrible shape", "the horrors at night and a black depression." And he continues: "I know, or anyhow I feel, that I could be faithful to you with my body and my mind and my spirit for as long as I had any of them — and I know now too that because being the same guy and yet a whole something started with my body that had gotten to be an integral part of everything that being alone and just lonesome all sorts of things seem to damn up and the balance of it all be thrown off and it attacks the spirit and it isn't good for the head either. You lie all night half funny in the head and pray and pray and pray you won't go crazy. And I can't believe it does any good and I do believe it does hell's own amount of harm."¹⁴

John is the opposite pole of the Italian major: "A man ought to be married. You'll never regret it. Every man ought to be married" [281]. Hemingway is being ironic about John's advice, a married man and routine addict, incapable of looking beyond the strict limits of his venality. Hemingway is at the crossroads, fearing (and looking forward to) another country. He chose "Now I Lay Me" as the final story in *Men Without Women*. But in direct contradiction to John, he did not seem to be absolutely "certain about marriage" and he did not know for sure "it would fix up everthing" [282]. There was hope but there was also anxiety, that black depression which, among other evidences, made him write and include in the 1927 volume a macabre story like "An Alpine Idyll", a reflection of Poe and the Gothic tradition, "as twisted a marriage tale as he [Hemingway] knew, a woman used up in marriage, a spring burial too close to the sun."¹⁵

¹³ MELLOW, James R. — *Hemingway: A Life Without Consequences*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1993, p. 354, emphasis added.

¹⁴ BAKER (ed.) — *Letters*, pp. 234-35.

¹⁵ REYNOLDS, p. 95.

Paris changed Hemingway's life for better and worse. In 1927, in his innermost self, he had already left the city. After a troubled education at the hands of a domineering mother, after the discovery of his mortality at the Piave, the threat of meaninglessness — of *nada* — besieges Hemingway in the second part of his life in Paris.

For better and worse, “there was never any end to Paris.” But, like Jay Gatsby, Hemingway possessed “some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life”, “an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness.”¹⁶ It was this sensibility that enabled him to look back nostalgically to Paris, trying to envision the “clean, well-lighted places” of the City of Light and to get rid of “the cavalry of woe” by writing about it. Some of Hemingway's readers may feel that, unlike Gatsby, Hemingway did not turn out all right at the end. But his end, after all, was probably only “what preyed” on him, “what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams.”¹⁷ Many must have it.

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¹⁶ FITZGERALD, F. Scott — *The Great Gatsby*, New York, Scribner's, 1925, pp. 1-2.