

The Fiction of Ernest Hemingway in a Literary and Cultural context

Professor Emeritus Charles Scruggs

Overview

Hemingway is one of the great American writers of the Twentieth Century, famous for his innovative prose style as well as his insights into the human condition. A problem arises in any study of Hemingway because the popular myths surrounding him too often obscure the importance of his writing. Hemingway the big game hunter, Hemingway the hard drinking macho man, Hemingway the avid fan of the violent “sport” of bullfighting—these are things that keep people from reading him. And yet there is perhaps no other American writer who has had a greater influence on his contemporaries. And for good reason—he was a great writer.

This course will focus upon his fiction in context. First: we will begin with an analysis of his brilliant short story cycle *In Our Time* (1925) in its relationship to modernity, modernism (especially the collage as a modernist form) and World War I (1914-1918). Second: I want to talk about Hemingway’s novel *A Farewell To Arms* (1929) as a love story within the context of WWI, which George Kernan has called the “seminal event of the Twentieth Century.” Third: I want to focus on *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) as an answer to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s great novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Both novels treat the fallout from the Great War--the disillusionment and rootlessness that beset a generation—at home (Fitzgerald) and abroad (Hemingway). Fourth: Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) is set in Spain during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), an event that foreshadowed World War II. Fifth: we will end the course with the treatment of a theme that occurs throughout Hemingway’s writing: memory and mortality. The texts here will be *The Old Man and The Sea* (1952) and short stories such as “In Another Country,” “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” “A Clean Well-Lighted Place,” and “The Capital of the World.”

Outline of Course Sessions

- The First class will focus on the short story proper and the short story cycle as a modernist form. The text will be *In Our Time*, with a nod to Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), a text I recommend. We will also discuss Hemingway’s dazzling short story “The Killers,” (1927). That story would have a directly impact on American *film noir*. It would be filmed twice under that title, and two more times under other titles.
- The Second class will treat *A Farewell to Arms* as a love story set in a fallen world. We will also discuss other Hemingway stories about war such as “A Natural History of the Dead” and “A Way You Will Never Be.”
- The Third class will focus on *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sun Also Rises* as post Great War texts that depict a generation in crisis.
- The fourth class will deal with Hemingway’s evolving view of war in terms of the problematic “whom” in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Hemingway clearly favors the Spanish Republic over the Fascists, arguing the some wars need to be fought, but the moral lines

between the two sides are often blurred.

- The Fifth Class will deal with the theme of loss, mortality and memory. The text will be *The Old Man and the Sea*. I will try to relate this story to Hemingway's posthumously published memoir *A Moveable Feast* (recommended).

Texts: *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: The Finca Vigia Edition*. Hemingway, *In Our Time*. Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*. Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*. Hemingway, *For Whom the Bells Tolls*. Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Schedule

5 two-hour sessions starting at 10 A.M. on Wednesdays in August 4, 2021. First hour: 40 minute lecture, 10 minute discussion. 10 minute break. Second hour: 40 minute lecture, 20 minute discussion.