

The  
Ernest Hemingway  
Primer

by

TIMELESS

*Hemingway*

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# The Ernest Hemingway Primer

By Timeless Hemingway

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**E**rnest Miller Hemingway was born on July 21, 1899 in Oak Park, Illinois to Dr. Clarence Edmonds Hemingway and Grace Hall Hemingway. The second of six children, Ernest enjoyed an adventurous boyhood, fishing and hunting with his father in the northern woods of Michigan. He attended Oak Park High School where he excelled in his classes, particularly English. He tried his hand at football and swimming, edited the school paper (the *Trapeze*), and contributed pieces to the school's literary magazine (the *Tabula*). After graduating high school, Ernest traveled to Kansas City and worked as a cub reporter for *The Kansas City Star*. In 1918, he began service as an ambulance driver for the Italian army. On July 8, he was wounded at Fossalta on the Italian Piave while delivering chocolates, cigarettes, and postcards to soldiers.

He married Elizabeth Hadley Richardson on September 3, 1921. The newlyweds soon entered the literary community of Paris, living off of Hadley's trust fund and Ernest's pay as a foreign correspondent for the *Toronto Star*. The 1920's were extremely productive writing years for Hemingway. *Three Stories and Ten Poems* was published in 1923, *In Our Time* in 1925. In 1926, *The Torrents of Spring* and the widely successful novel, *The Sun Also Rises* were published. A collection of short stories titled *Men Without Women* followed in 1927. This year also signified the end of Hemingway's marriage to Hadley and his subsequent marriage to Pauline Pfeiffer on May 10, 1927. Ernest and Pauline would spend the majority of their years together at 907 Whitehead Street in Key West, Florida. On December 6, 1928, Hemingway was dealt a devastating emotional blow as his father, suffering from severe diabetes and concerned about his financial future, shot himself.

Hemingway continued to write producing what many critics still feel is the best novel ever written about World War I. *A Farewell to Arms* was published in 1929 and solidified Hemingway's reputation as one the greatest writers of his generation. The 1930's would see the publication of Hemingway's bible on bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), a recount of his African safari in *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) and two famous short stories, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (1936) and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" (1936).

In the late 1930's, Hemingway ventured to Spain to give his encouragement to the Loyalists fighting in the Spanish Civil War. His experiences as a war correspondent for the North American Newspaper Alliance would inspire his other great war novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Exactly one month after the 1940 publication of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway married fellow writer and war correspondent Martha Ellis Gellhorn. It was a marriage that would last only five years. He married fourth and final wife Mary Welsh Monks on March 14, 1946. For the next fourteen years, the couple would live in Hemingway's Finca Vigía (Lookout Farm) in San Francisco de Paula, Cuba.

After a disappointing reception of his 1950 novel, *Across the River and into the Trees*, Hemingway rallied producing *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), a short work that earned him a 1953 Pulitzer Prize and ultimately the 1954 Nobel Prize for Literature. Physically unnerved from two plane crashes earlier that year, Hemingway was unable to attend the prize ceremonies. He would live another seven years.

On July 2, 1961, in his home in Ketchum, Idaho, Hemingway died of a self-inflicted shotgun wound to the head. His wife Mary found him and relayed word of her husband's death to the world. Ernest Hemingway was two and a half weeks shy of his sixty-second birthday. Three sons and millions of loyal readers would preserve his memory.

## Books by Ernest Hemingway

II.

*Three Stories and Ten Poems*. Paris: Contact Publishing Co., 1923.  
*in our time*. Paris: Three Mountains Press, 1924.  
*In Our Time*. New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925.  
*The Torrents of Spring*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926.  
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**Q** What were some of Ernest Hemingway's nicknames?

**A** Ernest Hemingway had many nicknames throughout his lifetime. To his sister Sunny, he was "Oinbones." While in high school, he gave himself the nickname of "Hemingstein." Because of his love of boxing and the great outdoors, he became known as "Champ." His first wife Hadley and son John (by Hadley) affectionately referred to him as either "Ernestoic," "Tatie," "Tiny," or "Wax Puppy." Even the child shared in the fun, acquiring his own nickname of "Bumby." Hemingway was also known in some circles as "Wemedge." More obvious nicknames included "Ernie," "Hem," and "Hemmy." The most enduring and most recognized nickname for Hemingway would be "Papa."

**Q** What does "Papa Hemingway" signify?

**A** For a long time critics and scholars have found two Hemingways emerging. The first is Ernest Hemingway, the brilliant writer, "the most important author living today, the outstanding author since the death of Shakespeare" according to John O'Hara. The second is Papa Hemingway, "Papa" having long signified Hemingway's more masculine public alias. Whether it was "Papa" hunting in Africa, or "Papa" in Spain watching the bullfights, or "Papa" at a café in Paris chatting with acquaintances over a bottle of cognac, this was the public image Hemingway projected to others, rough and tough, a real "man's man." To those who knew Hemingway more personally, "Papa" might have been used as a term of affection, an intimate reference to the softer, gentler Hemingway that they had all come to know. In his biography, Carlos Baker explores some of the darker connotations of "Papa," as he notes the phrase, "Yes, Papa," which according to Baker was suggestive of "subservience" and "brought out the less admirable traits in his character."

I see the term "Papa" encapsulating all of these qualities, as well as Hemingway's unique need to see himself as a father type figure. He once had an obsession with a young and beautiful Venetian girl named Adriana. She too saw him as fulfilling this father type role (incidentally, she would also later commit suicide). Hemingway frequently referred to certain women in his life as "Daughter" and had hoped of having a female child of his own one day.

**Q** How do we explain Ernest Hemingway's many marriages?

**A** A few of Ernest Hemingway's contemporaries had theories as to why the great author was so prone to walking down the aisle. F. Scott Fitzgerald felt that Hemingway needed a new woman for every big book and William Faulkner perceptively noted: "Hemingway's mistake was that he thought he had to marry all of them." Hemingway married four times and divorced three times. According to A. E. Hotchner, Hemingway supposedly was considering a fourth divorce. In a new preface to *Papa Hemingway*, Hotchner reports that Hemingway once told him: "I wish I could leave her, I really do, but I'm too old now to afford a fourth divorce and the hell Mary would put me through."

By most accounts, Hemingway was not the easiest man to keep house with. He also had a tendency of falling out of love once married or acting in a manner, which left his spouse with no other choice but to fall out of love with him. Towards the end of his life, what Hemingway needed more than a live-in wife was a live-in nurse, and unfortunately for Mary, she had to fill this roll. Hemingway biographer Jeffrey Meyers has noted that Mary "could take an infinite amount of abuse." She was determined to be the *final* Mrs. Hemingway. Mary got her wish, but at what a price.

Out of his four wives, I think Hadley (his first wife) was the one he cared for most. Hemingway never

forgave himself for how he had betrayed her. For a further discussion of Hemingway's relationship with his wives, see Bernice Kert's *The Hemingway Women*.

**Q** How has Ernest Hemingway been commercialized?

**A** In 1992, Ernest Hemingway's sons established Hemingway, Ltd. for the purpose of licensing their father's name and image. From this venture has come a vast selection of products.

Ernest Hemingway has his own line of clothing, furniture, hunting gear, fishing tackle, pens (he wrote in pencil), and even a teddy bear (manufactured by Boyds Bears) dressed in a hunting vest and hat and christened with the name, "Hemingway K. Grizzman." There is a house design in Hemingway's name as well as hardwood flooring and wallpapers in the so-called style of Hemingway. Other items that have been scheduled for possible release include pillows, desk sets, African masks, and picture frames. Scott Donaldson notes in *Hemingway vs. Fitzgerald: The Rise and Fall of a Literary Friendship*: "According to Marla A. Metzner, president of Fashion Licensing of America, thirteen separate manufacturers have opted to use Hemingway's name and image in connection with their products."

When it comes to biographies, Hemingway truly is "the undisputed champion." More than a dozen biographies have been written about him. Add to that, the dozen or so memoirs authored by close friends and relatives.

The legacy that Hemingway himself would likely be most proud of is the fact that the majority of his work is still in print. Worldwide sales of his books show that he remains a powerful literary force.

**Q** How do we explain Ernest Hemingway's timelessness?

**A** During a 1999 Hemingway conference at the JFK Library in Boston, MA, one of the topics of discussion among the panelists was the question of Hemingway's timelessness both as writer and celebrity. Why has this 20th century American author endured while so many others have disappeared into a black hole of obscurity? One speaker answered the question by saying, "we all write through Hemingway."

Ernest Hemingway's style of writing continues to be emulated today. The old joke about 20th century writers is that they can be divided into two distinct groups: those trying to write like Ernest Hemingway and those trying not to. Hemingway's famous commentaries on the process of writing, his advice to beginners, and his criticisms to his contemporaries are simply unparalleled. He is considered by many the most well recognized writer of the 20th century and perhaps the best American writer ever to put pencil to paper. Aside from his innovative style, the themes of his works are very human and enduring. From death to loss to perseverance to courage, Hemingway writes of the subjects that affect us all.

I am reminded of the Public Broadcasting Service, an organization that takes great pride in creating what they themselves call "non disposable television," which is television that a person can come back to again and again. The same thing might be said of Ernest Hemingway's literature. It too is "non disposable." One can reread Hemingway and always find something new and compelling. This does not apply to every author. One of Hemingway's major criticisms against fellow writer William Faulkner was the immense difficulty of rereading him.

**Q** What is the "Hemingway code hero"?

**A** The phrase, "Hemingway code hero" originated with scholar Philip Young. He uses it to describe a Hemingway character who "offers up and exemplifies certain principles of honor, courage, and endurance which in a life of tension and pain make a man a man."

It's important to note the difference between the "Hemingway hero" and the "Hemingway code hero." Some people (myself included) have fallen into the habit of using these terms interchangeably. The "Hemingway hero" is a living breathing character essential to the story's narrative. Nick Adams is an example of a "Hemingway hero." The "Hemingway code hero" is often times a living breathing character as well, but he doesn't always have to take a human form. Sometimes the "Hemingway code hero" simply represents an ideal that the "Hemingway hero" tries to live up to, a code he tries to follow. An example of the "Hemingway code hero" (in human form) would be white hunter Robert Wilson from "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." To simplify the theory some, Earl Rovit developed a unique naming system. He refers to the "Hemingway hero" as the *tyro* and the "Hemingway code hero" as the *tutor*.

For a more detailed discussion of the "Hemingway code hero," you should see Philip Young's 1966 book, *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration* (in particular the chapter titled, "The Hero and the Code"). See also Earl Rovit's book, *Ernest Hemingway* (in particular the chapter titled, "Of Tyros and Tutors").

**Q** How is Ernest Hemingway's life reflected in his writing?

**A** Many parallels have been drawn between Ernest Hemingway's life and fiction. Scholars generally agree that Nick Adams is the character who most closely represents Hemingway the man. There is some dissension, however, regarding whether it is in fact Hemingway's personality or simply his experiences which are being personified by his characters. Most of Hemingway's fiction is based on his own personal experience. When creating the fiction, he invents from this experience.

Read anything by scholar Philip Young, particularly *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration*. Young has done some interesting work in regards to the parallels between Hemingway's life and fiction. He pays particular attention to the injury Hemingway suffered at age eighteen when he served as an ambulance driver for the Italian army, and how and why this episode resurfaces in his literature.

Also, Carlos Baker's biography, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* provides a detailed account of the many parallels existing between the events in Hemingway's life and the events transpiring in his stories.

**Q** What is Ernest Hemingway's "nada" philosophy?

**A** The Hemingway hero is a restless man, doesn't like the night, often will sleep through the day and stay awake during the night. The darkness of the night represents nothingness, the state in which things will be when one is dead, absolute oblivion. Darkness and sleep must be avoided, for in these states there is nothingness, "nada." Hemingway's discourse on "nada" is his way of exploring the darker side of his spiritual self.

### **Examples of "Nada":**

In "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," the idea of "nada" causes the older waiter to contemplate suicide, to

question whether or not the example of the old man is one in which he should follow. He doesn't follow the old man's example, and then, judging from the last sentence of the story, feels the need to make excuses for his cowardice.

In "The Killers," Ole Anderson shows similar cowardice in his unwillingness to leave his room. He simply waits for the killers to come and get him. This is his response to "nada," to give up, to do nothing in this world of nothingness. Death is the ultimate fate of everyone. He accepts that. Nick doesn't want to accept it and is propelled into action, telling George that he is going to leave town.

Q

What are a few characteristics of Ernest Hemingway's writing style?

A

Below are some characteristics:

- Stark minimalist nature
- Grade school-like grammar
- Austere word choice
- Unvarnished descriptions
- Short, declarative sentences
- Uses language accessible to the common reader

Ernest Hemingway is a master of dialogue. It's not so much that he is recreating precisely how individuals speak, but through his brilliant use of repetition, he is able to make the reader remember what has been said. Hemingway's style of writing was probably most influenced by his early work as a cub reporter for *The Kansas City Star*. There he was forced to adhere to a stylebook for young reporters, which included the following advice: "Use short sentences. Use short first paragraphs. Use vigorous English, not forgetting to strive for smoothness. Be positive, not negative."

Hemingway's words are essentially just words like any other words, but the way he stirs them together is his own unique formula, a stylistic recipe that no other writer has been able to recreate. There are sentences that only Hemingway could get away with because we know that Hemingway wrote them. Take this short sentence from *For Whom the Bell Tolls*: "He was dead and that was all." This is and always will be a Hemingway sentence. For a reader to immediately recognize that "Hemingway wrote this" by reading the words alone is a remarkable legacy for a writer to leave. Hemingway is truly alive in his words because his words are truly *his*. His style is uniquely *his*. This is what makes him a writer in the truest sense.

Q

How is the "iceberg principle" used in Ernest Hemingway's works?

A

Ernest Hemingway's theory of omission is widely referred to as the "iceberg principle." He explains this principle in chapter 16 of his 1932 book, *Death in the Afternoon*. Essentially, the principle states that by omitting certain parts of a story, a writer actually strengthens that story. The writer must be conscious of these omissions and be writing true enough in order for the reader to sense the omitted parts. When the reader senses the omitted parts, a greater perception and understanding for the story can be achieved.

Let's apply Hemingway's "iceberg principle" to the endings of some of his most famous works. At the end of *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes and Brett Ashley contemplate a life together. At the end of *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry walks back to his hotel alone in the rain. At the end of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Robert Jordan awaits his impending death. The fate of these characters is never directly stated. Hemingway doesn't tell the reader that Jake Barnes and Brett Ashley will never be together. Instead, it is "pretty to think" that they could have had a damned good life together. Hemingway doesn't tell the reader what lies in store for Frederic Henry after he leaves his dead lover in the hospital. Does his walk alone in the rain represent emotional freedom or devastation? Robert Jordan is surely to die at the end of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but Hemingway leaves the



reader with the image of Jordan's "heart beating" against the forest floor.

Hemingway disliked discussions regarding the symbolism in his works. The "iceberg principle," however, by its very nature, invites symbolic interpretations and I think Hemingway acknowledged this in his own subtle way. Fraser Drew once quoted him as saying: "No good writer ever prepared his symbols ahead of time and wrote his book about them, but out of a good book which is true to life symbols may arise and be profitably explored if not over-emphasized."

**"There are only three sports: bullfighting, motor racing, and mountaineering; all the rest are merely games."**

This is one in a long list of quotations mysteriously attributed to Ernest Hemingway. While the general public seem to agree that this is in fact a Hemingway quotation, scholars have some reservations and for good reason. The early Hemingway did not believe that bullfighting was a sport. For him it was a tragedy. See his October 20, 1923 article titled "Bullfighting A Tragedy" reprinted in *By-Line: Ernest Hemingway Selected Articles and Dispatches of Four Decades* edited by William White. Hemingway reiterates his beliefs regarding the tragedy of bullfighting in his 1932 book, *Death in the Afternoon*.

In July of 2006, Gerald Roush, a visitor to Timeless Hemingway, provided a possible source for the "three sports" quotation. He cited a story titled "Blood Sport" by Ken Purdy, which originally appeared in the July 27, 1957 edition of the *Saturday Evening Post*. The story is reprinted in *Ken Purdy's Book of Automobiles* (1972). Gerald provided a scan of where the quotation appeared and it reads as follows: " 'There are three sports,' she remembered Helmut Ovden saying. 'Bullfighting, motor racing, mountain climbing. All the rest are recreations.' " Gerald noted that the character of Helmut Ovden is modelled after Ernest Hemingway. This could explain why the quote has been so widely attributed to Hemingway over the years.

In May of 2007, Rocky Entriken wrote to Timeless Hemingway with another possible author of the quotation: "As I am told, the quote belongs to Barnaby Conrad, a writer of the same era as Hemingway and a San Francisco raconteur of some note. Mostly he did magazine articles but his books include *The Death of Manolete*. My source is Dan Gerber, yet another writer of the era."

**"Grace under pressure"**

The phrase "grace under pressure" first gained notoriety when Ernest Hemingway used it in a profile piece written by Dorothy Parker. Parker asked Hemingway: "Exactly what do you mean by 'guts'?" Hemingway replied: "I mean, grace under pressure." The profile is titled, "The Artist's Reward" and it appeared in the *New Yorker* on November 30, 1929. The first published use of the phrase, however, was in an April 20, 1926 letter Hemingway wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald. The letter is reprinted in *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters 1917-1961* edited by Carlos Baker, pages 199-201.

**"For sale: Baby shoes, never worn."**

As legend has it, Ernest Hemingway was sitting with writers at the Algonquin Hotel and bet them that he could write a short story in only six words. He won the bet with this clever creation: "For sale: Baby shoes, never worn."

Snopes.com suggests that the six-word story did not originate with Hemingway, but rather with a one-man play titled *Papa* written by John deGroot. Commenting on the authenticity of his play, deGroot said: "Everything in the play is based on events recounted by Ernest Hemingway and those who knew him. Whether or not all these events actually happened is something we'll never know truly. But Hemingway and those who knew him claimed they did."

In January 2013, quoteinvestigator.com thoroughly researched the origins of this quotation and concluded that there is "no substantive evidence that Ernest Hemingway composed a six or seven word story about an unworn pair of baby shoes or an unused baby carriage."

**Four things one must do to become a man**

The four things are: plant a tree, fight a bull, write a novel, and father a son. Whether Hemingway actually said this is questionable. A source for the statement has never been found.

## **Ernest Hemingway's Nobel Prize acceptance speech**

*(Read for him by John C. Cabot, the then US Ambassador to Sweden, December 10, 1954)*

Members of the Swedish Academy, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Having no facility for speech-making and no command of oratory nor any domination of rhetoric, I wish to thank the administrators of the generosity of Alfred Nobel for this prize.

No writer who knows the great writers who did not receive the prize can accept it other than with humility. There is no need to list these writers. Everyone here may make his own list according to his knowledge and his conscience.

It would be impossible for me to ask the Ambassador of my country to read a speech in which a writer said all of the things which are in his heart. Things may not be immediately discernible in what a man writes, and in this sometimes he is fortunate; but eventually they are quite clear and by these and the degree of alchemy that he possesses he will endure or be forgotten.

Writing, at its best, is a lonely life. Organizations for writers palliate the writer's loneliness but I doubt if they improve his writing. He grows in public stature as he sheds his loneliness and often his work deteriorates. For he does his work alone and if he is a good enough writer he must face eternity, or the lack of it, each day.

For a true writer each book should be a new beginning where he tries again for something that is beyond attainment. He should always try for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed. Then sometimes, with great luck, he will succeed.

How simple the writing of literature would be if it were only necessary to write in another way what has been well written. It is because we have had such great writers in the past that a writer is driven far out past where he can go, out to where no one can help him.

I have spoken too long for a writer. A writer should write what he has to say and not speak it. Again I thank you.

## Further Reading

## VI.

### **On *The Sun Also Rises***

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