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Hemingway and French Writers

Ben Stoltzfus

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Unlike the many myopic Hemingway specialists, Stoltzfus moves easily among disciplines and cultures. His introduction, which offers a sense of the cultural setting in the effervescent Paris of the Post–WWI decade is worth the price of admission... Stoltzfus has made a valuable cultural foray that will be indispensable to Hemingwayfarers, one with the bonus of a fabulous bibliography. —CHOICE

In a 1946 Atlantic Monthly essay, Jean-Paul Sartre writes: “The greatest literary development in France between 1929 and 1939 was the discovery of Faulkner, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Caldwell, and Steinbeck.”

When Ernest Hemingway arrived in Paris in 1922, he was an unknown writer from America. The City of Light was where he learned his craft and gained legitimacy. Although much has been written about Hemingway’s apprentice years in Paris, little has been published about his literary convergences with French writers. In Hemingway and French Writers, Ben Stoltzfus illuminates the connections between Hemingway and the most important French intellectuals, such as Gustave Flaubert, Marcel Proust, André Gide, Jacques Lacan, Jean-Paul Sartre, Henry de Montherlant, André Malraux, and Albert Camus. A distinguished scholar of both French literature and Hemingway studies, Stoltzfus compares Hemingway’s major works in chronological order, from The Sun Also Rises to The Old Man and the Sea, with novels by French writers.

While it is widely known that France influenced Hemingway’s writing, Hemingway also had an immense impact on French writers. Over the years, American and French novelists enriched each other’s works with new styles and untried techniques. In this comparative analysis, Stoltzfus discusses the complexities of Hemingway’s craft, the controlled skill, narrative economy, and stylistic clarity that the French, drawn to his emphasis on action, labeled “le style américain.”

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Ben Stoltzfus
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The greatest literary development in France between 1929 and 1939 was the discovery of Faulkner, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Caldwell, and Steinbeck.
—Jean-Paul Sartre, “American Novelists”

I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows.
—Ernest Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon
Introduction

Paris was where the 20th century was.
—GERTRUDE STEIN, Paris France

I defy you to wear another hat than the hat of Paris.
—VICTOR HUGO, quoted in Casanova’s
The World Republic of Letters

In the world of letters there exists an international literary space that is relatively independent of the economic and political divisions of the world around it. This “field,” to use Pierre Bourdieu’s term, posits that world literature is defined by literatures at the “center” that dominate those at the margins. In her book The World Republic of Letters, Pascale Casanova demonstrates how, despite this domination, great writers everywhere have detached themselves from historical and geographical forces in order to invent a new literary freedom. Works and authors can thus be situated in relation to each other on the basis of what she calls a “world literary space” (xii). Thus, writers from the periphery can accede to the center if their work rises to the challenge and meets the expectations that are at work in the field.

The historian Fernand Braudel also emphasizes the relative independence of artistic space in relation to political and economic space. He notes that in the eighteenth century, London was the center of the world economy, but that Paris was able to impose its cultural hegemony. Furthermore, says Braudel, France in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although lagging behind the rest of Europe economically, was the acknowledged center of Western painting and literature (68).
Historically speaking, it was at the beginning of the Renaissance in Italy (Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch), in Spain (Cervantes), in France (Rabelais, Montaigne, and beyond), and in England (Shakespeare and beyond), not to mention the literary heritage of Greece and Rome, that the laws of literature were invented and codified. Due to their age, these “old” literary fields have become autonomous and, by devoting themselves exclusively to literature, as opposed to politics or economics, they feel no need to justify themselves beyond the pursuit of artistic excellence. Accordingly, they possess volume, prestige, and capital, and this freedom gives them an autonomy from national or economic pressures. This is what constitutes international literary space (Casanova 85–86).

Paul Valéry once noted that the older a nation’s literature is and the more numerous its canonical texts, the greater is its literary capital. The age of a national literature and its many classics define its wealth (“La liberté” 1081). A “classic” confers legitimacy, and this legitimacy then becomes the coin of the realm. A classic is a work that rises above the competition, and it also escapes from the vagaries of taste and time. It becomes ageless and is declared to be immortal. A classic thus assumes literary legitimacy and is declared to be timeless and invaluable, therefore, Literature.

The oldest literary spaces are thus the most endowed, and they exert enormous influence. Because of these pressures, every modern work will inevitably become dated unless it can free itself from the fluctuations of taste and critical opinion. If it rises above the competition and survives the test of time, it too will become a classic. Casanova emphasizes that “it is necessary to be old in order to have any chance of being modern or of decreeing what is modern” (89). Having a long national past is the sine qua non for claiming a literary existence in the present. Gertrude Stein was perhaps referring to this ageless modernism when she stated that Hemingway smelled of museums (Autobiography 216). While living in Paris, he was not only haunting the museums; he was also reading every classic he could lay his hands on.

In France, the age of its literature, the number of its classics, and the accumulated literary capital were so great that the land of Napoleon exerted dominion over all of Europe, from the eighteenth century to at least 1960 (Hemingway died in 1961). The decolonization that occurred after World War II accelerated the phenomenon of Francophone literature, that is, works written in French by writers from France’s former
colonies, thereby shifting interest, even though Paris remains the publishing powerhouse, from the center to the periphery. But before 1960, the concentration of literary capital in Paris had established it not only in France but throughout the world as the capital of a republic without borders or boundaries. Paris became the center of the literary world because it possessed an exceptional concentration of resources that had been accumulating over the course of centuries. As a result, the city of light shone with the greatest literary luminance on earth (Casanova 23–24).

Paris became the intellectual capital of the world, the arbiter of good taste, and the ongoing source of political democracy. It embodied historical conceptions of freedom: it symbolized the Revolution of 1879, the overthrow of the monarchy, and the proclamation of the rights of man, thus projecting an image of tolerance toward foreigners. Paris became an asylum for political and intellectual refugees. It was an idealized city where freedom reigned supreme; it was the center not only of the arts, but also of fashion and luxurious living. Because Paris had become a universal city, it had the power to confer recognition—a recognition that affected the course of literary history (Casanova 29). James Joyce, among others, settled and published in Paris because there he felt free to experiment and write without censure or constraint from Ireland, its morals, or its nationalist tradition. Samuel Beckett did likewise, as did many other writers, including Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and Edith Wharton. They all wanted literary freedom and cultural liberalism. As a result, Paris became the center of artistic internationalism.

Today, London and New York vie with Paris for recognition as the publication centers of the world, and it is this magnetism that attracts writers from the periphery. Eugene Ionesco, a Romanian, moved to Paris and wrote in French in order to assert his legitimacy. Joseph Conrad, of Polish origin and born in Ukraine, chose to write in English. T. S. Eliot, an American, like Henry James, also moved to London in order to write, as did V. S. Naipaul, who was born in Trinidad, in the British West Indies, but moved to England in order to become a writer. Both Eliot and Naipaul won the Nobel Prize in literature, the highest form of consecration in international literary space.

Léopold Sédar Senghor, although born in Senegal, studied in Paris and wrote in French. Aimé Césaire and Edouard Glissant were born in Martinique, studied in Paris, and wrote in French. We thus have the phenomenon
of writers from the periphery adopting French or English in order to claim a place in the field, and writers from the periphery who may not be French or English but are born into one of the dominant languages. There is also Vladimir Nabokov, who first wrote in Russian, then French, and finally in English. His novel *Lolita* was an international blockbuster.

Hemingway fits this pattern: a novice writer from the literary backwater of America moves to Paris; learns how to write; is consecrated by the highest authorities; and, in time, also becomes a Nobel laureate. Consecration in Paris was indispensable for writers from dominated spaces and, at the beginning of the twentieth century, America was still, literarily speaking, compared to France and England, a dominated country. Although America had Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, and Mark Twain, it was a relative newcomer to literary space. To escape America and achieve literary salvation, Henry James chose English nationality. He made the gap between America and Europe the subject of much of his work while noting the literary destitution of America at the end of the nineteenth century. Says Casanova:

> The United States in the 1920s was literarily a dominated country that looked to Paris in order to try to accumulate resources it lacked. Any analysis that fails to take into account the world literary structure of the period and of the place occupied in this structure by Paris and the United States, respectively, will be incapable of explaining Stein’s permanent concern to develop a modern American national literature (through the creation of an avant-garde) and her interest in both American history and the literary representation of the American people (of which her gigantic enterprise *The Making of Americans* is no doubt the most outstanding proof). (42)

It was in Paris that Hemingway acquired literary legitimacy in the international arena. Such legitimacy transcends linguistic boundaries and national claims to texts. By appropriating the literary assets of Europe, particularly those of France and Russia, Hemingway succeeded in establishing a transatlantic patrimony. He was accepted, and his works were reviewed, translated, and discussed. In due course, his success as a newcomer to literary space and time allowed him to break into the ranks
of the established moderns and earn for himself the right to participate in defining what is modern.

The concept of modernity is frequently and emphatically invoked by writers claiming to embody literary innovation. Charles Baudelaire in the mid-nineteenth century formulated the necessity of being up to date, and Arthur Rimbaud insisted on being modern, even shocking. One hundred years later, Jean-Paul Sartre founded his influential review, *Les Temps Modernes*.

In Paris, Hemingway prepared himself for the challenge of being modern by borrowing books from Sylvia Beach’s bookstore, Shakespeare and Company, and reading copiously: Stendhal, Flaubert, Maupassant, Zola, Chekhov, Turgenev, and Tolstoy, among others. But he valued only what he himself could use artistically. He praised *Madame Bovary* but dismissed *L’éducation sentimentale* (Sentimental Education). He admired Stendhal’s descriptions of the Waterloo battle scenes in *Le rouge et le noir* (The Red and the Black) but dismissed most of *La chartreuse de Parme* (The Charterhouse of Parma). Of Maupassant he liked *La maison Tellier* (The House Tellier) but says little about his other works. Hemingway frequently did figurative battle in the boxing ring of fame with Flaubert, Maupassant, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Tolstoy, usually besting them in three rounds, at least in his opinion. He considered Honoré de Balzac a “professional writer,” but he did not like Emile Zola, despite the extraordinary influence the father of naturalism has had on writers in underdeveloped countries, that is, those on the margins of literary space.

Paris attracted writers, painters, and musicians, all of whom came in order to gain knowledge and the technical expertise of modernity. Some of them returned to their homelands and rejuvenated their own literatures through the innovations they brought back with them. Having made his reputation at the center of the literary world, Hemingway returned to America and settled in Key West, Florida. His innovations in style helped to accelerate modernity not only in America but throughout the world.

When Hemingway said that “all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. . . . There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since” (*Green Hills 22*), he was dismissing all the other nineteenth-century American writers but, nevertheless, making the point that *Huckleberry Finn* introduced a
distinctive American oral language, a conversational quality that Hemingway went on to master in his own use of dialogue. He combined Twain’s “Americanness,” Flaubert’s proleptic images, Maupassant’s and Chekhov’s craft of the short story, Gertrude Stein’s aural repetitions, and cablese (a journalist’s omission of unnecessary words in a cable to his editor) into a distinctive style noted for its compression, omission, and deceptive simplicity, all of which managed to connote “the dignity of movement of an ice-berg” whose seven-eighths is below the surface and therefore invisible (Death 192).

In the ABC of Reading, Ezra Pound refers to the power and authority that are granted to a writer when his or her work is recognized. Once someone has gained acceptance by the establishment, he or she acquires value and then, says Pound, credit is conferred (25). Credit is what Valery Larbaud—a writer and acquaintance of Hemingway’s in Paris—called “spiritual gold” (“Tor spirituel,” in “Paris de France” 15). This spiritual gold shines through The Sun Also Rises, the novel in which the word “value” is repeated many times in comic and parodic contexts, and almost everybody, except Robert Cohn, knows the values—be they monetary, oenological, social, amorous, or taurine—particularly Count Mippipopolous, who says that “you must get to know the values” (60). Hemingway is poking fun at wimps, stuffed dogs, and pretentious people, but he is dead serious when it comes to the value of good writing and the credit a writer can accumulate when he is recognized and accepted in the literary marketplace, that is, the literary space where the highest value is placed on excellence.

When Ernest and Hadley Hemingway settled in Paris in 1922, there was already a great interest in American letters, a predisposition that would be of inestimable value to Hemingway’s career. His first short story to appear in French was “L’invincible” (“The Undefeated”), published in March 1926 in Adrienne Monnier’s Le Navire d’Argent, along with translations of Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Robert McAlmon, and E. E. Cummings. in our time had already been published in English (1924), but the French took no notice of it, nor did they pay much attention to The Torrents of Spring, which was published in May 1926, or, for that matter, The Sun Also Rises, published in October of the same year. But all that was about to change. Hemingway had the good fortune and the talent to tap into the French interest in American letters, and interest in his fiction grew exponentially as his short stories and novels were translated,
published, and reviewed. For an examination of Hemingway’s reception in France, I recommend Ernest Hemingway in France, 1926–1994: A Comprehensive Bibliography by Geneviève Hily-Mane.1

After the publication of *in our time* and the translation into French of several short stories, Paris decided to consecrate Hemingway. Greater consecration was to follow, but for the moment, at the early stages of his career, this was an important beginning. Translation into another language is essential for international recognition and accession to literary space. After *As I Lay Dying* was translated into French by Maurice Coindreau, one of Faulkner’s and Hemingway’s preeminent translators, Faulkner was hailed as an important writer, first in Paris, and later in the United States. Hemingway passed through the same stages of translation and acceptance. “Translation,” says Casanova, “is the major prize and weapon in international literary competition” (133), because translation, like criticism, establishes value and provides enrichment. Critics, like translators, contribute to the growth of the literary heritage and the expansion of literary space. Paris had the power (still does) to confer recognition and to consecrate emerging writers and that is what happened to Hemingway.

In August 1927, *La Nouvelle Revue Française* published “Cinquante mille dollars” (“Fifty Grand”), and as Max I. Baym notes, this journal played an important role in promoting American writers after World War I (135). In 1928, Gallimard published a collection of Hemingway’s stories under the collective title *Cinquante mille dollars (Fifty Grand)*, and it immediately attracted the attention of many critics who praised its overall excellence. In March 1928, Bernard Faÿ reviewed *Men without Women* in the *Revue Européenne*, saying that Hemingway was the best writer of his generation (Asselineau, “French Reactions” 43). Régis Michaud, in his *Panorama de la littérature américaine contemporaine*, reviewed both *The Sun Also Rises* and *Men without Women*, praising Hemingway’s “verbal stenography” (254–55).

In 1932, Hemingway’s celebrity in France took a quantum leap when Gallimard published *L’adieu aux armes*, Maurice Coindreau’s translation of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Coindreau was teaching French at Princeton and he was a gifted translator. Drieu La Rochelle’s foreword, in which he compared Hemingway to Maupassant (10), and Denis Marion’s review in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (1933), both praising Hemingway’s artistry, also helped. In 1933, Gallimard published *Le soleil se lève aussi*, Coindreau’s
translation of *The Sun Also Rises*, this time with a foreword by Jean Prévost, in which he compared Hemingway to Stendhal (9). Hemingway now had three books in French translation. In 1933, Philippe Soupault, the surrealist poet, reviewed them all in *Europe*, praising their warmth, naturalness, humanity, and refined art (Asselineau, “French Reactions” 44–46).

In the April and August 1933 issues of the *Revue Anglo-Américaine*, Charles Cestre wrote favorable reviews of *In Our Time* and *The Torrents of Spring*, and in the April–June 1938 issue of *études anglaises*, Jean-Jacques Mayoux praised Scribner’s 1937 publication of *To Have and Have Not*, which Marcel Duhamel eventually translated and Gallimard published in 1945 as *En avoir ou pas*. Coindreau’s earlier enthusiasm for Hemingway had been waning, and he panned the novel in a 1938 review in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. The year before, in 1937, Gallimard published *Les vertes collines d’Afrique*, Jeanine Delpech’s translation of *Green Hills of Africa* (1935), but the reviews were lukewarm. In 1938, Gallimard published *Mort dans l’après-midi*, René Daumal’s excellent translation of *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), but it too was received with general indifference, as was *Dix indiens* (1946), Marcel Duhamel’s translation of *Ten Indians and Eleven Other Short Stories*. In June 1946, Duhamel also translated “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” which was published as “Propre et bien éclairé” in *Solstice*. In the February–March 1949 issue of *Carrefour*, Duhamel translated “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” (“L’heure triomphale de Francis Macomber”).

This is a cursory overview of Hemingway’s emergence as a writer of note and the reception of his work. Despite some diminishing enthusiasm among the critics, he was attracting a great deal of attention. In 1946, his reputation was greatly enhanced by an essay that Jean-Paul Sartre published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, in which he said that “the greatest literary development in France between 1929 and 1939 was the discovery of Faulkner, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Caldwell, and Steinbeck. . . . At once, for thousands of young intellectuals the American novel took its place together with jazz and the movies, among the best of the importations from the United States” (“American Novelists” 117).

The author of *La nausée* (1938; *Nausea*, 1964) had been reading Hemingway in the 1930s, and he admired what Claude-Edmonde Magny, in *L’âge du roman américain* (see 44–61), calls “the objective technique in the American novel” (“la technique objective dans le roman américain”).


Sartre believed that psychological analysis, the hallmark of the French style from Madame de LaFayette to Marcel Proust, could no longer mirror the complexities of the new era or the sense of the absurd generated by the events of World War II. In their book Transatlantic Migration: The Contemporary American Novel in France, Thelma M. Smith and Ward L. Miner state that in the wake of the American influence, “it was much more important to express the social interactions rather than indulge in psychological analyses” (41). Smith and Miner chronicle the reception of the American novel in France both before and after World War II, and they detail the reactions of French critics and readers to the so-called objectivity of *le style américain*. Hemingway, in particular, was to have an immense impact on French writers. His use of dialogue, short declarative sentences, and an emphasis on action, instead of inner monologue, appealed to Sartre and Albert Camus, both of whom wanted to express new sensibilities in keeping with the accelerated rhythms of the machine age. In *La force de l’âge* (1960; *The Prime of Life*, 1962), Simone de Beauvoir writes that a great many of the rules that she and Sartre observed in their novels were inspired by Hemingway (145).

In less than twenty years Hemingway had gone from obscurity to celebrity. He had traveled from the periphery of literary space to the center, and there, once consecrated, he was in a position to define by example what would become modern. This is what Casanova calls *littérisation*, that is, the operation by which works from a literarily deprived country come to be regarded by the legitimate authorities as literary (136). As the guru of French existentialism after World War II, Sartre’s immense celebrity gave him the power to consecrate and define literary taste, and Hemingway was the beneficiary.

In addition to stylistic changes and an emphasis on social interactions, Hemingway’s work, from the beginning, was imbued with a deep sense of loss and the absurd. When Gertrude Stein referred to the author of *The Sun Also Rises* as a member of the “lost generation,” she was already alluding to the alienation in these authors’ lives and in their works—an alienation that Sartre strove to overcome in his literature of commitment and that Camus defined so eloquently in *L’étranger* (1942; *The Stranger*, 1946) and *Le mythe de Sisyphe* (1942; *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1955). Coming to grips with the secular implications of death and the absurd is the essential theme in all their works. Jean Bruneau, in “Existentialism and
the American Novel,” was among the first to point out that existentialism was a French literary movement on which the American novel exercised a strong and acknowledged influence. There was an artistic reciprocity at work, with Hemingway learning the craft of writing from masters both living and dead, and then, having mastered his craft, transferring it to a generation of new writers who would, in turn, hail him as the master of modernity.

In his Atlantic essay, Sartre pointed out that Camus’ L’étranger was influenced by Hemingway’s objective style. Indeed, part 1 of Camus’ novel shows all the earmarks of the Hemingway technique: short declarative sentences, action, and the absence of introspection. In part 2 of L’étranger, after the death of the Arab and Meursault’s incarceration, the tone changes and the objective style becomes introspective. Meursault is facing a death sentence, and as he contemplates his human condition and the meaning of life, his thoughts become philosophical. Hemingway’s style has changed. What has happened?

Camus believed that le style américain was one dimensional because action describes only the outside of consciousness, whereas to capture thought we need to reproduce a character’s inner life. In an interview with Jean Desternes in Combat about the influence of American novelists, Camus said that this objective style was an easy style. He called it a technique de facilité: “The novel, then, ignores all that which up to now has been considered the proper subject-matter of literature, that is to say, broadly speaking, man’s inner life. Man is described but is never explained or interpreted. The result is that one can write a novel simply by drawing upon his memory or upon direct observation” (qtd. and trans. by Coindreau, “William Faulkner” 86). At his worst, said Camus, such a novelist is no better than a reporter and such fiction is no more than journalism. It may be a first-rate document, but it has no relation to art.

In a 1947 interview with Jean Desternes in Combat, Camus called Hemingway’s novel Pour qui sonne le glas (1950; For Whom the Bell Tolls, 1940) the work of a child compared with André Malraux’s L’espoir (1937) (2). It is obvious that Camus misunderstood Hemingway’s iceberg technique of writing—the technique that Hemingway defines in Death in the Afternoon (192). There is Camus, perched on the iceberg, contemplating the flat sea, but had he dived below the surface, he would have discovered the stylistic complexity of the invisible seven-eighths. He thought Hemingway’s writing was simplistic because stream of consciousness was missing,
whereas in fact Hemingway has infused this consciousness into the narrative descriptions and the action. His proleptic images and time shifts, as in Flaubert’s and Proust’s fiction, form a network of recurring tropes whose submerged meaning, like the iceberg, is invisible even as it supports the visible portion. The reader must provide the meaning that seems to be absent, and the role of the reader, as we will see in the chapters that follow, becomes all important. In due course Camus adapted the “simplistic” surface of Hemingway’s writing to part 1 of *L’étranger*, because in part 1 Meursault is all surface, a man without depth who is leading an absurd existence. For him, conscious life begins only after he is condemned to death, and like Blaise Pascal’s “thinking reed,” he comes to understand what it means to be a sentient being. Camus is thus an interesting example of an author who misunderstood Hemingway’s fiction yet managed to adapt it to his own ends and do so brilliantly.

Over the years, on both sides of the Atlantic, despite the literary dominance of Paris, American and French novelists were enriching each other’s works with new styles and new techniques that have been digested, adapted, and transformed. Faulkner’s time dislocations would presumably be different if he had not read Proust; the social consciousness of Dos Passos’s *USA* trilogy was profoundly influenced by Balzac and Zola, and its form by Guillaume Apollinaire and cubism; a certain epic quality of Jean Giono’s *Le chant du monde* (*The Song of the World*) owes much to *Moby-Dick*; Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le sang des autres* (*The Blood of Others*) reveals her indebtedness to Faulkner; Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Le sursis* (*The Reprieve*) is a deliberate imitation of Dos Passos’s “simultaneity,” which he in turn absorbed from Jules Romains and Apollinaire. Sartre described these influences in his 1946 essay in the *Atlantic Monthly*. However, it is Félix Ansermoz-Dubois’ *L’interprétation française de la littérature américaine d’entre-deux-guerres* (1944), Magny’s *L’âge du roman américain* (1948), and Thelma M. Smith and Ward L. Miner’s *Transatlantic Migration: The Contemporary American Novel in France* (1955), all three milestone studies in the art of refraction and convergence, that have given impetus to the many comparative essays, articles, and books that have been written and published since then.

Despite the enormous prestige of France’s literary space, the French have always been interested in America and its writers. Literary cross-breeding, more specifically the French-American brand of Harry Levin’s
“transatlantic refraction,” can be traced to Charles Baudelaire’s admiration for Edgar Allan Poe and beyond. It was the conviction of Ezra Pound—the Pound who was to take Ernest Hemingway under his wing in Paris in the 1920s—that between 1830 and 1910 virtually all technical growth in the art of writing had taken place in France (Kenner 54). While Pound was emphasizing his indebtedness to Stendhal, Gustave Flaubert, Jules Laforgue, Arthur Rimbaud, and Tristan Corbière, the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne were being discussed and written about in French intellectual circles.

While French intellectuals were discussing American authors, Henry James was writing essays on Honoré de Balzac, Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, and Emile Zola. Various critics were stressing Baudelaire’s, Stéphane Mallarmé’s, and Paul Valéry’s attraction to Poe, and they would canonize him by placing a diaeresis over his name: Poë, poète, poésie (Levin 214). Indeed, the musicality of Poe’s “poetic principle” has shaped the aesthetics of all French symbolist poets: “Music before everything” (“De la musique avant toute chose,” 513), said Paul Verlaine in his “Art Poétique” (1882). Poe’s life was legendary, and the Parisian setting for his mysteries (a fictional rue Morgue where crimes would be solved by Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin, a Frenchman) would make him an icon of French letters. The debt owed to Zola and French naturalism by Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, and American realism did not go unnoticed. The poetry of Walt Whitman was a source of inspiration for Léon Bazalgette, Jules Romains, and the Unanimists. Critics were also studying the effects of French symbolism on the poetry of T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens.

But France’s interest in America dates back even further. François René de Chateaubriand visited the New World in 1791 and, after his return to France, wrote Atala (1801) and René (1802), works in which he presented an exotic vision of the American wilderness with its thick forests, tigers, and Native Americans. Chateaubriand’s influence on French romanticism was enormous. Three decades later, the hero of Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve’s semi-autobiographical novel, Volupté (1834), spoke of America as the hope of the world, and Sainte-Beuve himself evoked l’Abbé Prévost’s vivid descriptions of the American landscape in Manon Lescaut (1731), despite the fact that Prévost had never set foot on American soil. For the French, America has always been a dream frontier, what Armand Hoog
calls an “elsewhere” (see “The Romantic Spirit”), the elsewhere that Gilbert Chinard has analyzed in detail in *L’Amérique et le rêve exotique dans la littérature française* (16).

One hundred years after the publication of *Volupté*, and some two hundred years after *Manon*, Georges Duhamel excoriated an industrialized America in *Scènes de la vie future* (1930). North America had changed radically during those two hundred years, and Duhamel was not the only one to lament the destruction of nature and the loss of innocence. Hemingway himself decried the clear-cutting of virgin forests in upper Michigan, and when writing about Spain, he compared its culture and unspoiled landscapes to the bespoiled land of America. As France moved closer to those dreaded scenes of future life that were being regulated by mass production and mass consumption, French readers were, nonetheless, showing an interest in the reflection of those mechanized elements in American literature.6

Even before the impact of technology, French magazines were publishing Henry James, Jack London, and Ezra Pound. Edith Wharton’s novels were being published in French and English simultaneously, and they revealed her indebtedness to Stendhal and Paul Bourget, among others. André Gide said that he was among the first to admire Melville. Gide also recalls a conversation with Flaubert, who once told him that *Walden* was an extraordinary book (M. Baym 136). Although Gide owned a big American car, he, like Duhamel, mistrusted the influence of American technology, as did Giono, the novelist and translator of *Moby-Dick*. Giono’s novels are a paean to nature and to men’s and women’s interrelatedness with the natural rhythms of the world.7

Over the years there have been many essays comparing Hemingway with French writers, but there is no full-length study of Hemingway’s transatlantic refractions or the literary space they occupy. Perhaps the closest thing to it is Richard Lehan’s *A Dangerous Crossing: French Literary Existentialism and the Modern American Novel* (1973). Lehan compares the fiction of Dos Passos, Hemingway, and Faulkner with the works and philosophy of Sartre and Camus. Here my material and his overlap somewhat, but our views and treatment are different and his discussion of Hemingway is relatively brief. John Killinger’s *Hemingway and the

From time to time the Hemingway Review has published articles on Hemingway and Stendhal, Hemingway and Maupassant, and Hemingway and Camus. The North Dakota Quarterly has published special issues on Hemingway, perhaps the most noteworthy being Malraux, Hemingway, and Embattled Spain 60.2 (1992). The most recent book on Hemingway in Paris is Milton A. Cohen’s Hemingway’s Laboratory: The Paris in our time (2005). It discusses the composition, style, structure, and rhythms of Hemingway’s collection of short stories entitled in our time (1924). Although they were written in Paris while Hemingway was living there, there is no mention of French writers or the subservience of American letters with respect to France. Many other books have been published on Hemingway in the past several decades, but none deals with French and American refractions.

In addition to these preliminary comments, there is also much to say about recent revisionist criticism of Hemingway. This criticism questions his status as the legendary macho hero, and it seems to have begun with an essay by Aaron Lathan, “A Farewell to Machismo.” Gerry Brenner, in
Concealments in Hemingway’s Works (1983), refers to Hemingway’s “homoerotic wishes” (20). Mark Spilka, in Hemingway’s Quarrel with Androgyny (1990), alludes to Hemingway’s “suppressed femininity” (204). Carl P. Eby, in Hemingway’s Fetishism: Psychoanalysis and the Mirror of Manhood (1998), speaks of Hemingway’s “transvestic impulses” (212). Debra A. Moddelmog, in Reading Desire: In Pursuit of Ernest Hemingway (1999), refers to Hemingway’s “queer desires” (42). Most recently, Richard Fantina (2003), in “Hemingway’s Masochism, Sodomy, and the Dominant Woman,” addresses Hemingway’s “masochism” (85). This important criticism sheds new light on Hemingway’s writing and helps dispel many of the myths surrounding his status as a writer, including the charge that he was superficial.

Some of the chapters in this study have appeared as articles in journals and books, but I have not assembled them here merely to republish. There is an affinity between Hemingway’s writings and those of the French authors I compare him with. Indeed, there is a structural necessity to their coupling and the chronological order of the chapters. Together, they are more than the sum of each part, because each one of these writers is an important link in the chain that defines literary space. I discuss Hemingway’s major books in the context of French letters in order to focus on the progression from The Sun Also Rises (1926) to The Old Man and the Sea (1952).

In chapter 1 I look at Hemingway’s six years in Paris (1922–1928), where he met French, British, and American writers. It was in the city of light that he read the old masters and absorbed the ferment of innovative art that was to influence his own writing. It is appropriate, therefore, that I compare Hemingway with the major French writers who were his contemporaries, and this comparison begins even earlier with Flaubert, because Flaubert worked with proleptic images and wanted to write poetry as prose. These were also Hemingway’s goals, and this is why Madame Bovary (1857) adumbrates A Farewell to Arms (1929).

In chapter 2 I discuss A Farewell to Arms before The Sun Also Rises because Flaubert is Hemingway’s precursor and the acknowledged father of the modern novel. Also because A Farewell to Arms describes events during World War I, whereas The Sun Also Rises describes the behavior of the “lost generation” that followed the war. In chapter 3 I incorporate Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories into my discussion of The Sun
Also Rises because they elucidate its wordplay, its parody, and the role of the unconscious in orchestrating the novel’s love games. Lacan, France’s Freud, introduced linguistics into psychoanalysis, and this pushed Lacanian theory to the forefront of literary criticism.

In chapter 4 I discuss Henry de Montherlant, the novelist and bullfighter whose novel Les bestiaires (1926; The Bullfighters, 1927) probably influenced Death in the Afternoon (1932) and The Dangerous Summer (1960)—Hemingway’s two books on the corrida. In order to fully understand Hemingway’s “tauromachia” (Death 453), we need to grasp the historical context of the primitive sun god, Mithra, and his influence on bullfighting in Spain. Hemingway never mentions Mithraism, even though the history of the cult provides the missing seven-eighths of the iceberg beneath the surface that we need to intuit when reading Death in the Afternoon.

In chapter 5 I discuss Jean-Paul Sartre’s nothingness and Hemingway’s nada. These concepts imbue L’être et le néant (1943; Being and Nothingness, 1956) and the two African stories, “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” (1936) and “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” (1936), with reflections and refractions about death, authenticity, and creative freedom.

Sartre declined the Nobel award in literature in 1964, and he could afford to turn it down because he was the very embodiment of literary modernity. He helped define the parameters of literary art, and his power of consecration was immense. He and Camus emerged from World War II as the two dominant writers of the postwar period. Friends at first, Sartre and Camus engaged in one of the fiercest philosophical debates of the 1950s, and it is only now, years after Sartre’s death and the collapse of the Soviet Union, that critics have come to acknowledge the legitimacy of Camus’ arguments. In chapter 6 I discuss Camus’ and Sartre’s concepts of rebellion, commitment, and history, which echo ideas that Hemingway was expressing in To Have and Have Not (1937) and The Fifth Column (1938). These two works represent Hemingway’s uneven attempts to engage in a form of writing that is, in the existentialist sense, socially and politically committed. Such commitment prompted both André Malraux and Hemingway to travel to Spain in 1937 in order to support the Republican cause against Franco’s Fascist forces. L’espoir (1937; Man’s Hope, 1938) and For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940) are their separate responses to the Spanish civil war—two novels that I compare and contrast in chapter 7 while comment-
ing on the rivalry between the two men. Malraux, the novelist, art critic, and minister of culture under Charles de Gaulle’s government, was Sartre and Camus’ precursor, because in his early fiction he had already explored the ideas of alienation and commitment that were to become the stock-in-trade themes of existentialism. In Camus’ Nobel acceptance speech in Stockholm in 1957, he said that Malraux should have won the prize because he was the first to explore ideas that Camus and other members of his generation were to adopt and write about.

The calculus of time and remembrance in Across the River and into the Trees (1950) echoes similar themes in Marcel Proust’s A la recherche du temps perdu (1912–1927; In Search for Lost Time). Proust is, arguably, the world’s premier novelist, and he should have received two Nobel awards, one for the early volumes of his monumental novel (3,134 pages in the three-volume Pléiade edition) published between 1913 and 1922—the year of his death—and another award for the posthumous ones that appeared between 1922 and 1927. I discuss these convergences in chapter 8.

In his play Oedipe (1930; Oedipus), André Gide explored the theme of pride—a theme that Hemingway also dramatizes in The Old Man and the Sea (1952): pride in what it means to be human, pride in achievement, and pride in essence. As one of the fathers of modernism, Gide helped propel literature from the allusive symbolism of the nineteenth century into the linguistic immediacy of the twentieth. He was a Nobel laureate in 1947. Pride and immediacy are the theme and influence I discuss in chapter 9.

In my conclusion I look at Hemingway’s life and achievements in the light of Camus’ Le mythe de Sisyphe (1942; Myth of Sisyphus, 1955). Sisyphus, says Camus, is the parable for twentieth-century man, who, like his Greek counterpart, is condemned to roll a rock toward the summit only to see it roll back down the mountain. But, says Camus, despite the paradoxical nature of achievement and defeat, we must imagine Sisyphus happy. Why happy, when death is the normal and final outcome of all endeavor? This is a replay of the absurd and of Hemingway’s winner-take-nothing theme, a theme that Camus develops philosophically and that Hemingway demonstrates artistically. We must also imagine Hemingway happy because despite old age, debility, and death, he, as a writer, reached the pinnacle of success: a Nobel Prize in 1954, worldwide recognition, and sizable royalties. Like Sisyphus in his effort and Flaubert in
his craft, Hemingway strives for perfection; struggles to achieve it; and, when all is said and done, shoots himself as though to demonstrate that, in his pride, he is truly a winner with nothing.

Although the purpose of this book is to compare Hemingway with French writers, its subtheme is the craft of writing—Hemingway’s writing—which he transforms into poetry and art. From one narrative to another, time and memory also combine to elicit fourth and fifth dimensions—dimensions that emerge from a lifetime of effort, pride in achievement, and the inevitable tragedy of loss. The French novelists with whom I compare Hemingway are all major writers who occupy important literary spaces. They have contributed to the ongoing dominance of Paris as an artistic capital, although now rivaled by London and New York. It is fitting that Hemingway and his New York publisher, Scribner, also assume their rightful place at the center of literary space.


Gallimard’s publication confirms the fact that Hemingway’s short stories have been consecrated as classics, and they, like his novels, occupy a permanent and prominent place in international literary space.