20th Century American Literature

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Lecture Notes

**Ernest Miller Hemingway**

Birth: July 21, 1899; Death: July 2, 1961; Place of Birth: Oak Park, Illinois

1. Biography
	1. Hemingway was born in Oak Park, Illinois. After graduating from high school, he worked briefly as a newspaper reporter, before volunteering as an ambulance driver in Italy during World War I.
	2. He later was severely wounded in this war after he transferred to the infantry.
	3. After the war, he moved to Paris and was influenced by Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein.
	4. *The Sun Also Rises*(1926) was Hemingway's first critically acclaimed novel.
	5. In it, he details members of the "Lost Generation", young disillusioned men of the post World War I era.
	6. *A Farewell to Arms*(1929) is regarded as Hemingway's next important work.
	7. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*(1940) chronicles the loss of freedom in the Spanish Civil War.
	8. *The Old Man and the Sea*(1953) is the famous short novel about a Cuban fisherman and his quest to finally capture a huge fish.
	9. Hemingway spent time in Key West, Florida, Spain, and Africa after 1927.
	10. He was a war correspondent from 1936-1939 during the Spanish Civil War.
	11. After the war, Hemingway moved to Havana, Cuba, and in 1958 moved to Idaho.
	12. His death was thought to be a suicide.
2. Themes
	1. Hemingway believed that to write well, you should experience first hand the subject about which you write.
	2. Although his prose seems a bit simple to the uninitiated, it is actually a direct way of telling a complex story.
	3. Hemingway is regarded as one of the finest American authors.
	4. He won a Pulitzer Prize in 1953(for *Old Man and the Sea*) and the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954.
3. The Lost Generation:
	1. One of the foremost authors of the era between the two world wars, Hemingway in his early works depicted the lives of two types of people.
		1. One type consisted of men and women deprived, by World War I, of faith in the moral values in which they had believed, and who lived with cynical disregard for anything but their own emotional needs.
		2. The other type were men of simple character and primitive emotions, such as prizefighters and bullfighters. Hemingway wrote of their courageous and usually futile battles against circumstances.
	2. His earliest works include the collections of short stories *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923), his first work; *In Our Time* (1924), tales reflecting his experiences as a youth in the northern Michigan woods; *Men Without Women* (1927), a volume that included “The Killers,” remarkable for its description of impending doom; and *Winner Take Nothing* (1933), stories characterizing people in unfortunate circumstances in Europe.
	3. The novel that established Hemingway's reputation, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), is the story of a group of morally irresponsible Americans and Britons living in France and Spain, members of the so-called lost generation of the post-World War I period.
	4. Hemingway's second important novel, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), is the story of a deeply moving love affair in wartime Italy between an American officer in the Italian ambulance service and a British nurse.
	5. The novel was followed by two nonfiction works, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), prose pieces mainly about bullfighting; and *Green Hills of Africa* (1935), accounts of big-game hunting.
	6. War is one of the major themes examined in *A Farewell to Arms*, as is religion. He writes “all thinking men are atheists.”In this scene, early in the novel, Frederic Henry is in the mess when some of the officers begin teasing the priest. The major announces he is an atheist, and the priest tells Henry not to read a certain book. The major says then that "all thinking men are atheists," illustrating the novel's interpretation of God and religion, and the larger view of the world in general. For Hemingway, God did not exist, and the universe is indifferent. The resulting world is hostile and muddled, and without God and faith, moral values are also meaningless. The war is an example of this.
4. Writing Style
	1. Hemingway's economical writing style often seems simple and almost childlike, but his method is calculated and used to complex effect.
	2. In his writing Hemingway provided detached descriptions of action, using simple nouns and verbs to capture scenes precisely. He vary rarely uses adjectives and almost never uses adverbs.
	3. By doing so he avoided describing his characters' emotions and thoughts directly.
	4. Instead, in providing the reader with the raw material of an experience and eliminating the authorial viewpoint, Hemingway made the reading of a text approximate the actual experience as closely as possible.
	5. Hemingway was also deeply concerned with authenticity in writing. He believed that a writer could treat a subject honestly only if the writer had participated in or observed the subject closely. Without such knowledge the writer's work would be flawed because the reader would sense the author's lack of expertise.
	6. In addition, Hemingway believed that an author writing about a familiar subject is able to write sparingly and eliminate a great deal of superfluous detail from the piece without sacrificing the voice of authority.
5. Influence on other writers.
	1. Hemingway's stylistic influence on American writers has been enormous.
	2. The success of his plain style in expressing basic, yet deeply felt, emotions contributed to the decline of the elaborate Victorian-era prose that characterized a great deal of American writing in the early 20th century.
	3. Legions of American writers have cited Hemingway as an influence on their own work.
6. Quotes
	1. "I'm not going to get into the ring with [Tolstoy](05272003/Tolstoy.html)."
	2. Ernest Hemingway, when asked what was the most frightening thing he ever encountered, answered: "A blank sheet of paper."
	3. “There are some things which cannot be learned quickly, and time, which is all we have, must be paid heavily for their acquiring. They are the very simplest things, and because it takes a man's life to know them the little new that each man gets from life is very costly and the only heritage he has to leave.”
	4. “I am glad we do not have to try to kill the stars. Imagine if each day a man must try to kill the moon. The moon runs away. But imagine if a man each day should have to try to kill the sun? We are born lucky. Yes, we are born lucky.”
	5. “You expected to be sad in the fall. Part of you died each year when the leaves fell from the trees and their branches were bare against the wind and the cold, wintry light. But you knew there would always be the spring, as you knew the river would flow again after it was frozen. When the cold rains kept on and killed the spring, it was as though a young person had died for no reason.”
	6. “Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee.”
	7. “If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially.”