The History of American Literature

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**Lecture Notes: Ernest Hemingway (**1899-1961)

1. Biography
	1. Hemingway was born in Oak Park, Illinois.
	2. After graduating from high school, he worked briefly as a newspaper reporter, before volunteering as an ambulance driver in Italy during World War I. He later was severely wounded in this war after he transferred to the infantry.
	3. After the war, he moved to Paris and began to pursue a career as a writer of fiction. During this time he was influenced by other writers including Janet Flanner, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein.
	4. *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) was Hemingway's first critically acclaimed novel. In it, he details members of the "Lost Generation.” young disillusioned men of the post World War I era. *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) is regarded as Hemingway's next important work.
	5. Hemingway spent time in Key West, Florida, Spain, and Africa after 1927.
	6. He was a war correspondent from 1936-1939 during the Spanish Civil War.
	7. Hemingway was married four times. He seemed to find staying in love with one woman very difficult. He had three boys from his first two wives.
	8. Throughout his life Hemingway struggled with alcoholism and by the end of his life this had taken a toll on his mind. Late in his life he was unable to write at all. It is believed that this inability to no longer live the life he chose led to his eventual suicide.
2. Themes
	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 was about men of simple character and primitive emotions, such as prizefighters and bullfighters. Hemingway wrote of their courageous and usually futile battles against impossibly difficult circumstances.
	2. War is one of the major themes examined in *A Farewell to Arms*, as is religion. 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.
	3. Although many of his works deal with very “manly” themes, Hemingway also wrote extensively about romantic love. Some of his works have very frank observations about human sexuality.
3. Writing Style
	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 some readers, it is actually a very direct way of telling a complex story. Hemingway's economical writing style often seems simple and almost childlike, but his method is carefully used and used to complex effect.
	3. In his writing Hemingway provided detached descriptions of action, using simple nouns and verbs to capture scenes precisely. He very rarely uses adjectives and almost never uses adverbs. 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.
4. Important Works
	1. Hemingway is regarded as one of the finest American authors. He won a Pulitzer Prize in 1953 (for *The* *Old Man and the Sea*) and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.
	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.
5. Influence on other writers.
	1. Hemingway's stylistic influence on American writers has been enormous. 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. Legions of American writers have cited Hemingway as an influence on their own work.
6. Quotes
	1. Ernest Hemingway, when asked what was the most frightening thing he ever encountered, answered: "A blank sheet of paper."
	2. “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.”
	3. “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.”