



HEMINGWAY. AGRIDULCE STRAIN

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Few writers have managed to unite in their person adjectives as disparate as egotistical, misogynistic, self-centered, arrogant, but, at the same time, combative, brave, lover of life and great writer. The life of Ernest Hemingway (Oak Park Illinois 1899 – Ketchum Idaho 1961) is full of contradictions that make him unique and that, to this day, continues to be one of the fundamental pillars on which the building of American literature is based. The son of a doctor father and an opera singer mother, he always lived on the edge of what life could give to an individual or, at least, that was the image he projected because, in the case of Hemingway, myth and man are difficult to separate. Journalist, he practiced soccer, hunting, boxing and deep-sea fishing. He was the first American wounded in combat on the Italian front during the First World War. He traveled all over the world, lived in Paris during the 1920s, visited Spain at that time, and later wrote for the NANA (*North American Newspaper Alliance*) the chronicles of the Spanish Civil War. He made safaris in Africa where he had two near-fatal plane crashes. He covered the D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge, and was twice decorated for military valor. He had four marriages and multiple lovers. He was a bad father of three children from two of his marriages. When he found himself as a shadow of what he was, he decided to commit suicide.

Perhaps the adjective “ambiguous” is the one that could best describe Hemingway's personality. He represented the example of masculinity at a time and in a place where the gender role was changing and when men saw their predominant position in society falling in the face of the emergence of the female role. All his biographers¹ agree that the image he projected, and his personal reality were far from

¹ Hemingway's most relevant biographies are Carlos Baker's best-known *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (1969) or Mary V. Dearborn's most current and controversial *Ernest Hemingway* (2017).



being the same, but, despite this, Hemingway managed to maintain until the end a harmony between those two dissonant notes.

It is not unreasonable to affirm that the country that most influenced Hemingway's work was Spain. The “*agridulce* strain” that Brennan (1951, Preface) spoke of regarding the country with its opposites in harmony, life and death, pain and pleasure, the ugly and the beautiful, contributed to young Hemingway—who had forged himself as a writer in Paris—creating his particular vision of the world. The idyll began in the spring of 1923 thanks to the mediation of his friend John Dos Passos. His first trip to Spain was preceded by a sentimental education typical of Anglo-Saxon romanticism, and that romantic image is precisely what he wanted to confirm. For Hemingway, Spain could be summed up in a resounding phrase by the English hispanophile of the 19th century, Richard Ford: “bull-fights, bandits and black eyes” (in Stanton 1989, 13). He immersed himself in Spanish life and portrayed it in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *Dead in the afternoon* (1932), being this the first book written in the United States about bullfighting. However, the episode that will leave a mark on Hemingway regarding Spain and its way of living life to the extreme is his participation in the civil war. It is worth pointing out that in 1936 Hemingway was not the successful writer we have in mind. Since the publication of *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929 that had catapulted him to fame, his African stories or *Dead in the Afternoon* itself had not achieved the success of his first book, and criticism was incisive with him. For example, in 1933 the critic Max Eastman published in the *New Republic* the article “Bull in the Afternoon” in which he mocked the writer and accused him of “wearing of false hair on the chest” (Eastman 1933) to show his virility. According to Amanda Weil, Hemingway travels to Spain looking for the certainty that the success of his first novel had not been a coincidence (Vaill 2015, 74) and thus find catharsis as a writer.

In Spain he will live at the Hotel Florida, write his only known theatre play *The Fifth Column*, chronicles of the battles of Guadalajara, Brunete, Teruel, the Ebro, and will film together with Joris Yvens the documentary *The Spanish Earth* (Herrero Martínez 2017) with the aim of obtaining support of the western democracies for the Spanish Republic. The beautiful epilogue to all the ugliness seen in the war is the work *For Whom the bells tolls*, published in 1940, which returned him to the Olympus of writers.

During the 1940s and 1950s Hemingway grew in his way of writing and in the management of his public image. Deep-sea fishing in Cuba (which will inspire his *The Old man and the Sea* (1951), safaris to Africa or escapes to Francoist Spain between taverns and bullfighters (about which he will still write a late novel, *A Dangerous*

In 2011, his granddaughter Mariel Hemingway edited a highly recommended graphic volume with a multitude of photographs (some previously unpublished) of her grandfather Ernest Hemingway (Vejdovsky and Hemingway 2011).



Summer written in 1959 but published posthumously in 1985) mingle with the successes of the Pulitzer Prize (1953) and the Nobel Prize (1954) establishing the archetypal image of “Papa” Hemingway, the bushy-bearded man who writes in short and well-aimed sentences as gunshots that whistle at night not knowing where they come from and ignoring what body they will sink to.

Bullets from a shotgun that Hemingway directed against himself one morning, at dawn, at his home in Ketchum, Idaho, five days before his beloved “Sanfermines”. There are still doubts about the writer's suicide, but biographers agree that the lack of physical health he suffered due to his fatigued life led him to make the decision not to continue if he could not enjoy it to the fullest. They say that when the bullfighter Juan Belmonte, Hemingway's friend since the 1920s, learned of the writer's suicide, he responded with a simple “Well done” (in Michener 1968, 578). So arrogant and so brilliant, so selfish and so human. The last romantic hero.

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