

HEMINGWAY'S HOSPITALITY IN A *MOVEABLE FEAST*

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When people asked her why she wrote about food instead of love or struggles for power and security, M. F. K. Fisher responded, “when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it, and warmth and the love of it and the hunger for it . . . and then the warmth and richness and fine reality of hunger satisfied . . . and it is all one” (ix). A decade later, Alice B. Toklas published *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* (1954) instead of the conventional autobiography publishers desired. In this literary climate, Ernest Hemingway wrote his posthumously published memoir *A Moveable Feast*. Reading *Feast* as a culinary memoir places Hemingway (and his ever-present, often overwhelming hunger) in conversation with other writers who privilege the culinary and the gastronomic as a legitimate form of self-representation.¹ Seeming to build on Fisher’s assertions about hunger, Hemingway recalls a conversation that he and Hadley had as they waited for a table. He writes that he wondered how much of what they felt was “just hunger,” to which Hadley responded, ““There are so many sorts of hunger,”” and ““Memory is hunger”” (*MF* 56-57). Food and hunger, and the memories of food and hunger, are the prisms through which Hemingway presents his Parisian recollections, but those memories reinforce and characterize his relationships to others. Illuminating the connection between Hemingway’s hungers, his memories, and his hospitality asks readers to consider how he negotiates the contested spaces of home and city, and his own positions therein—as host, as guest, as writer.

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Scholars have long noted Hemingway's connection to food and placed him staunchly in the category of writers who revel in gastronomic pleasures. Susan Beegel, for example, opens her chronicle of gastronomy in *Feast* by writing that "Food and drink are omnipresent" in the memoir (14). In this essay, Beegel takes great pains to delineate how and where food appears in the memoir, and why. She writes that while most Paris memoirs are likely to reference the city's variety of gastronomic experiences, "Hemingway deliberately selects and shapes such reference to serve his thematic ends" (15). This grounding of structure and organization in food is a hallmark of the culinary memoir: certainly autobiographical, culinary memoir foregrounds how foodways— traditions and practices of cooking, preparing, consuming, and eating— influence self-representation. In this sense, culinary memoir narrativizes memory in the context of foodways to make meaning out of the daily practice of eating. Foregrounding the culinary also implicitly foregrounds the body in relation to itself and to others. While Hemingway presents himself by himself, writing or walking, he is never entirely alone—the city of Paris and its myriad denizens are never out of earshot. Scott McCracken observes that authors who must negotiate urban modernity present eating as "more than a necessity" because the urban diner is interpolated in the city's vast systems of production and consumption. Such writers thus describe eating as a "threshold" practice, "mediat[ing] between immediate sensation and the network of social relations" (qtd. in Rich 73). *Feast* is an exploration of precisely that network of social relations, which often manifest over a glass of wine or a plate of oysters.

The threshold in *Feast* negotiates between self/other, private/public, art/life, and mediating this space is central to the memoir. While the culinary is often a portal to the domestic, Hemingway's use is rooted not in the traditional spaces of home but in the urban modernity of Paris. He presents himself in cafés—on the Place St. Michel and elsewhere—not

only writing but also entertaining people who stop by to visit. Hemingway thereby collapses the spaces of home and public cafés, negotiating his position as host to visitors in ambiguous or liminal spaces. This construction is especially clear as the memoir progresses: he moves from learning from others, to navigating the cartographies of his own hunger, and finally to hosting other writers. The book then closes with the series of selections devoted to his relationship with Fitzgerald. Hemingway's participation in the culinary world of Parisian cafés and restaurants illuminates his self-presentation as both as a young, expatriate writer who learns from his environment and as a mature, self-assured writer whose retrospective narration and focus on hospitality profoundly influences the memoir's construction, thereby demonstrating his own strategy for self-construction.

The chapter titled "Birth of a New School" exemplifies his negotiation of café hospitality. The selection begins: "The blue-backed notebooks, the two pencils and the pencil sharpener (a pocket knife was too wasteful), the marble-topped tables, the smell of early morning, sweeping out and mopping, and luck were all you needed" (*MF* 91). These ingredients allow the writer to "make the country so that you could walk into it," and Hemingway's use of the second person suggests a recipe that a reader might follow. Hospitably, he demonstrates how he prepares a story for the reader's enjoyment. He continues: "A pencil-lead might break off in the conical nose of the pencil sharpener and you would use the small blade of the pen knife to clear it or else sharpen the pencil carefully with the sharp blade and then slip your arm through the sweat-salted leather of your pack strap to lift the pack again, get the other arm through and feel the weight settle on your back" (91). Immediately following this threshold moment, though—the moment when all of the writer's careful preparation transports him into the story—"you would hear someone say, 'Hi, Hem. What are you trying to do? Write in a café?'" (91). This is, of course,

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precisely what he's "trying to do." He writes, "If you could keep your temper it would be better but I was not good at keeping mine" (91-92).

At stake in this scene is the absence of privacy in a public space, which the exchange between the nameless visitor (an unsuccessful writer soon to become a critic) and Hemingway exemplifies. "There were other good cafés to work in," he explains, "but they were a long walk away and this was my *home café*. I had to make a stand or move" (*MF* 92, emphasis mine). Hemingway then asks the "visitor" why he's there, and the visitor responds, "I just came to have a drink. What's wrong with that?" Hemingway says, "At *home* they'd serve you and then break the glass," to which the visitor asks, "Where's *home*? It sounds like a charming place" (92, emphasis mine). The repetition of "home" here forces readers to consider the important absence of home spaces in this essay—that Hemingway has a "home café," for example, reminds readers that he is looking to do the private (and solitary) work of writing in a public (and crowded) space instead of at home. The visitor's question, "Where's home?" echoes. What's more, the position of the visitor places Hemingway in the position of host—behaving in an inhospitable manner here as he gets angry (which, he suggests, "you" wouldn't do).

"Birth of a New School" continues and, in many ways, imitates the structure of a domestic dispute wherein one person makes the other feel guilty for working. Hemingway writes that ignoring the "tall fat young man with spectacles" did little to dissuade him (*MF* 93). Boundary crossing is on display here: the visitor is not welcome and invades what has been established as the home-space, intruding on the privacy and intimacy of the writing. It seems as if the visitor's sole purpose for intruding is to be consoled for his own lack as a writer; he rehearses a conversation that seems disproportionately personal. Once Hemingway gets "ahead" in his writing, he puts his pencil down and has an exchange with the intruder:

“Don’t be vulgar,” he said. “Don’t you want me to tell you the rest?”

“No,” I said. I closed the notebook and put it in my pocket.

“Don’t you care how it came out?”

“No.”

“Don’t you care about the life and the suffering of a fellow human being?”

“Not you.”

“You’re beastly.”

“Yes.”

“I thought you could help me, Hem.”

“I’d be glad to shoot you.”

“Would you?”

“No. There’s a law against it.”

“I’d do anything for you.”

“Would you?”

“Of course I would.” (93-94)

The tenor, word choice, and dialogic structure mark this passage as quintessentially Hemingwayesque—in many ways, it resembles a domestic argument. Words like “beastly” and “vulgar,” as well as the suggestion that the visitor would “do anything” help underscore Hemingway’s complicated position as host both in this chapter and throughout *A Moveable Feast*. Hospitality is a way of engaging and relating to others, an exchange rooted in the deepest of traditions. As Jacques Derrida suggests, “*There is no hospitality without memory*” (144, italics original). It is especially concerned with spatial placement and displacement. As Mustafa Dikeç, Nigel Clark, and Clive Barnett remind us, hospitality “explores the idea of a receptiveness

to the arrival of an other which breaks through any prior assignment of roles, duties, [or] conventions.” It is also a way to address that other “in a complex interplay with a more careful, contained or ‘conditional’ engagement—one that is acted out in the expectation that provisions offered will be met with some form of reciprocation” (3). Hemingway does not want either the “breaking through” into his “prior duties” or the promise of reciprocal engagement. All he desires, in fact, is his solitude.

However, inhabiting public spaces as he does, Hemingway is forced to accept the ethical responsibility or well-mannered position of host, as hospitality is a foundation for cultural or social bonds. Without hospitality, a person is “beastly” or “vulgar,” or, as the visitor continues, “cruel and heartless and conceited” (*MF* 94). In this scene, Hemingway does finally bend to the visitor’s will, engaging in conversation and making the Closerie a temporary “home café” for them both, but he ends by insisting that the visitor find his own space. The limits of hospitality in the public sphere resonate throughout this book as Hemingway tries to make space for himself and his writing, and encourages other writers and thinkers (and, presumably, readers) do the same.

“Birth of a New School” suggests that unconditional hospitality is unavailable to strangers and that a “home café” is not the same as home. Concluding the chapter, Hemingway writes:

I did not think that he would come back the next day but I did not want to take chances and I decided to give the Closerie a day’s rest. So the next morning I woke early, boiled the rubber nipples and the bottles, made the formula, finished the bottling, gave Mr. Bumby a bottle and worked on the dining room table before

anyone but he, F. Puss the cat, and I were awake. The two of them were quiet and good company and I worked better than I had ever done. (96)

This is an exceptional moment in the book—there are few scenes wherein he presents himself as a producer of food—but this description also provides a parallel to the forced café hospitality. Here, Hemingway writes at the dining room table and, although he is not alone, Mr. Bumby and the cat are quiet and “good company.” The hospitality here is relational and familial, not resentful.

Ending the chapter with this scene of both food production and creative production reinforces the usefulness of engaging with this text as culinary memoir. Although in culinary memoir strategies of self-making are often associated strictly with the creation of food, Hemingway demands that we read across the threshold of consumption and production more carefully. The subject presented throughout *A Moveable Feast* negotiates personal experiences with hunger and creativity, discipline and desire, in the complicated spaces of house, home, and café.

NOTES

¹ While the culinary is often associated with cooking rather than eating, expanding the scope of the culinary memoir to incorporate the practices that surround cooking—including the rituals of processing and farming, of consumption, and of hospitality—allows readers a more complete view of the culinary as it is presented in memoir.

¹ Successful, she published *Aromas and Flavors of Past and Present* four years later.

¹ In her recent essay on *remate*, Suzanne Del Gizzo “track[s] a potential misunderstanding of Hemingway’s notion of (auto)biography and memoir (and of *A Moveable Feast* in particular) that has extended from Mary’s statement that *remate* means ‘by reflection’” (122).

¹ Jeffery Meyers writes that Hemingway “describes meals to reveal character, express ideas, convey a mood, set the scene, and evoke the spirit of a foreign place,” and that readers “can tell where [his characters] are by what they eat” (426), while H. R. Stoneback, in his many essays on food and place in Hemingway’s works, writes about gardens and *boules* in *A Moveable Feast* and about memorable eggs and mackerel in *The Garden of Eden*.

¹ Such a strategy distinguishes the culinary memoir from the related genre of autobiography, in which the subject is presented as, more or less, an autonomous self. Memoir, instead, centers on more slight moments concerned with memory and, frequently, on relational subjectivity.

¹ From “Miss Stein Instructs,” “Shakespeare and Company,” and even “People of the Seine,” for example, to “A False Spring,” “The End of an Avocation,” and “Hunger was Good Discipline,” and finally in essays like “Ford Madox Ford and the Devil’s Disciple,” “With Pascin at the Dôme,” or “Evan Shipman at the Lilas.”

¹ Tellingly, while the Restored Edition alters the organization of some of the chapters in *Feast*, these Fitzgerald-centric selections are placed similarly in both texts, suggesting that their progression is, indeed, indicative of the development from guest to host.

¹ While incorporated into the text proper in the original publication of *Feast*, in the Restored Edition, “Birth of a New School” is relegated to the second section, titled “Additional Paris Sketches.” I suggest that “Birth of a New School” presents Hemingway-as-host in profoundly important ways, which may be lost if it is understood as simply supplementary instead of integral to the collection.

¹ Here, “mak[ing] a stand” demonstrates that he is now prepared to assume the mantle of host, unwilling to “move” or to be unsettled.

¹ Homi Bhabha describes “unhomeliness”: “To be unhomed is not to be homeless nor can the ‘unhomely’ be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and the public spheres” (141). Building on this idea, Lauren Rich suggests that “the public eatery is—almost by definition—an unhomely place” because it shifts the intimate act of eating to a “public, commercial space where the individual ingests commercially (and often industrially) prepared food” (72).

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