

A Moveable Feast

Ernest Hemingway

(Full name Ernest Miller Hemingway) American novelist, short-story and novella writer, memoirist, journalist, playwright, and poet.

The following entry provides criticism of Hemingway's memoir *A Moveable Feast* (1964). For additional information about Hemingway, see *TCLC*, Volumes 203 and 388, and *CLC*, Volumes 1, 3, 6, 8, 10, 13, 19, 30, 41, and 50; for additional information about the novel *A Farewell to Arms*, see *TCLC*, Volumes 115 and 405; for additional information about the novel *The Sun Also Rises*, see *TCLC*, Volume 391, and *CLC*, Volume 61; for additional information about the novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, see *CLC*, Volume 80; for additional information on the influence of Hemingway, see *TCLC*, Volume 162.

INTRODUCTION

Published in 1964, *A Moveable Feast* is Ernest Hemingway's (1899-1961) posthumous collection of autobiographical sketches, centering primarily on the author's life from 1921-26, when he was living in Paris, France. He describes his relationships with fellow expatriates with whom he has been associated for decades, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, Ford Madox Ford, and Ezra Pound. Rich with descriptions of food, drink, and leisurely activities, the collection also provides intimate, and at times unflattering, details about his contemporaries and his first wife, Hadley Richardson, including a description of the breakdown of their marriage. Critics have debated the level of fact and fiction in the memoir, as well as the process of composition of both its initial version and the revised *A Moveable Feast: The Restored Edition*, published in 2009, making it a frequent subject for discussions of how genres of literary works are determined. Scholars have also included it in studies of Hemingway's treatment of gender and sex, place, food, and his biographical and historical contexts.

TEXTUAL HISTORY

In 1927, Hemingway housed his notebooks, newspaper clippings, and other papers in trunks at the Ritz Hotel in Paris, where he left them for almost three decades. In 1956, the Ritz management convinced him to take the trunks to Cuba. Reunited with this material, he was spurred both to remember those early years in Paris and to write about them. He began composing what he called "Paris Sketches" in 1957 and worked on them for the next several years. By the end of 1959, he had sent a draft of the manuscript to his publisher; it lacked only a title, introduction, and final chapter. In the editor's note which accompanies the initial version of *A Moveable Feast*, Mary Hemingway writes that Hemingway had finished the book in the spring of 1960 and revised it that fall. In December of 1960, Hemingway was a patient at the Mayo Clinic, where he received many rounds of electroconvulsive therapy; he was released in January 1961. A few months later, he was readmitted, but in June 1961, he committed suicide. In the three years between Hemingway's death and the publication of *A Moveable Feast*, Mary Hemingway and Harry Brague of Scribner edited the manuscript and readied it for publication.

In 2009, Hemingway's grandson, Seán Hemingway, re-edited the text and published *A Moveable Feast: The Restored Edition*, which draws on manuscripts and archival material to provide what he sees as a version more in line with what Hemingway would have wanted. *A Moveable Feast: The Restored Edition* adds several previously unpublished sketches, reorders some of the chapters, removes the introductory letter, includes scans of manuscript material and photographs, and provides some editorial adjustments. Of particular note is the edition's reinstatement of the frequent use of the second person and scans of the manuscripts that show Hemingway's shifts to and from second person. It also provides a supplementary section of sketches and scenes that, at the time of Hemingway's death, was in various stages of completion; this edition both includes that material and acknowledges its incompleteness. In addition to serving as editor, Seán Hemingway wrote an introduction and his father, Hemingway's son Patrick, provides a foreword.

PLOT AND MAJOR CHARACTERS

Hemingway's sketches trace his experiences in Paris and nearby environs during the 1920s. In 1918, Hemingway volunteered to be an ambulance driver for the Red Cross in Italy during World War I, where he was seriously wounded. After returning to the United States to recuperate, Hemingway began to work as a journalist and met Richardson, who became his first wife. By the fall of 1921, he and Hadley had moved to Paris with the encouragement of novelist Sherwood Anderson; at the time, Hemingway served as a foreign correspondent for the *Toronto Star*. They lived at 74 rue Cardinal Lemoine and rented a room nearby in which he could write; they later moved to 113 rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs. The sketches in *A Moveable Feast* rely on and illuminate these experiences. The opening chapter, "A Good Café on the Place St.-Michel," is one of the most celebrated in the collection. It shows Hemingway considering the shift from fall to winter weather, walking to a particular café that he finds "pleasant," as well as "warm and clean and friendly," and where he spends some time writing and watching café patrons.

This collection also features Hemingway writing about parts of his biography that are well known. He details the terrible loss of all his writing when Hadley, hoping to surprise him, brought all his manuscripts, including carbons, to Switzerland, where they were stolen. He describes the texts and writers he was reading during the period, providing conversations he had with other writers about what they were reading, and explains his reading preferences. The episodes feature some of his experiences as a new father to Jack, called Bumby in the text, including when they took him to Schruns, Austria, for the winters. The collection also presents the dissolution of his first marriage. Hemingway writes that they thought they were "invulnerable" but were not, and what he sees as "the end of the first part of Paris" ushers in the conclusion of the collection. He writes vaguely about his relationship with Pauline Pfeiffer, who became his second wife, and the anguish he feels looking back on loving both of them.

As part of a group of expatriate artists living in Paris after the end of the first World War, Hemingway features in many of the chapters some of the most well-known writers of the era, including Stein, Pound, Ford Madox Ford, James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, and Fitzgerald. Often seen as trafficking in gossip, Hemingway presents these individuals unflatteringly; their relationships were often as competitive as they were collaborative. In "Miss Stein Instructs," "Une Génération Perdue," and "A Strange Enough Ending," Hemingway writes explicitly of his

relationship with Gertrude Stein and her partner, Alice B. Toklas; the salons at their home, 27 rue de Fleurus; and how their friendship began and ended. He also features those who supported writers, including Sylvia Beach and her bookstore/lending library, Shakespeare and Company, which was at 12 rue de l'Odéon. These episodes trace some important moments in literary history, allowing readers to learn about how certain little magazines came to be, such as the *Dial*, *This Quarter*, and *transatlantic*; what their editorial processes were like; and how particular works appeared in those texts.

Major Themes

As a memoir about Hemingway's younger years, *A Moveable Feast* in some senses can be read as a *künstlerroman*, or an artist's coming-of-age story. In addition to writing about writing—his processes, successes, and failures—he writes as well about reading. Most of the entries take place in Paris or feature his travels while he lived there, rendering the city's food, drink, sports, and geography of the 1920s in precise detail. This focus on the city and its denizens is one of the most remarkable elements of the text. The collection is also, though, Hemingway's retrospective consideration of his relationships and work. Composed near the end of his life, it presents the writer negotiating the vagaries of memory, the challenges of a writerly life, and the complexities of relationships, both marital and social. Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin described the sketches as “a reconstruction of the past rather than a recollection of it,” emphasizing that the stories are descriptions of past moments and are intimately associated with what passed in subsequent years. Indeed, the text is in conversation with autobiographical texts of the era by other authors, such as Stein and Fitzgerald. Elements of nostalgia and Hemingway's reassessment of his formative literary and cultural experiences make *A Moveable Feast* special both within Hemingway's oeuvre and as an important work of American life writing. Tavernier-Courbin notes that, ultimately, “*A Moveable Feast* is indeed [Hemingway's] last great achievement.”

Critical Reception

The first, and most long standing, area of scholarly debate on *A Moveable Feast* centers on its generic classification as fact or fiction. In Mary Hemingway's 1964 article in *The New York Times* about the publication of *A Moveable Feast*, she mentioned that the book is “not much about [him]” and that she “thought it was going to be autobiography,” to which he replied “It's biography by *remate*,” meaning “By reflection.” In the preface, signed by Hemingway and dated 1960, he concludes, “If the reader prefers, this book may be regarded as fiction. But there is always the chance that such a book of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact.” While always a rich area of inquiry in autobiography studies, the question of what is fact and what is fiction is especially central to the critical landscape of this text because of Hemingway's stature by the 1960s as well as the celebrity of many of the people implicated in his sketches. While this preface was removed in the *Restored Edition* because, the editors suggest, it was composed by Mary Hemingway from manuscript fragments, the suggestion of “fiction” has nonetheless been part of the text's critical consideration for decades. The uncertainty of the work's genre therefore stems both from the text itself and from the initial paratexts in which it is surrounded.

Immediate reviews of *A Moveable Feast* frequently mentioned both the introductory letter and the question of fiction in their consideration of the text, noting the considerable period of time between when the events occurred and the time of their composition. Though Robert Emmet Long celebrated the “brilliant style” of *A Moveable Feast* and its “verbal tautness and precision which make the book a controlled aesthetic experience,” he criticized the “dishonesty” of Hemingway’s harsh representations of his contemporaries, describing it as “autobiography simulating fiction.” A *Time* magazine reviewer noted, “Perhaps it is better to read the book as fiction.” Andrew Lytle suggested that this choice Hemingway gives readers is a “false choice,” and Jill Rubenstein argued that *A Moveable Feast* should be read as literary autobiography. This critical trajectory largely aligned with the development of the interdisciplinary field of autobiography studies as scholars began to think more capaciously about the possibilities for considering literary life writing beyond exclusively discerning fact from fiction. Accordingly, scholars have discussed the book in relation to autonarration, the concept of *remate* and genre, forensic psychiatry, relationality versus individuality, and memory studies.

Given the posthumous publication of *A Moveable Feast*, scholars have also considered the role of Hemingway’s manuscripts and personal archival material in its composition. Discussions have included Hemingway’s selection of titles and textual comparisons with the 2009 restored edition. Scholars have analyzed not only the use of manuscripts but also the trauma Hemingway sustained by the loss of his juvenilia and early manuscripts and the effect such a loss had on his writing, particularly the posthumous publications and other unpublished works.

Since Hemingway focused as much on other writers as on himself in *A Moveable Feast*, scholars have analyzed the artistic milieu in which Hemingway wrote, paying attention to his relationships with and representations of Fitzgerald, Stein, Ford, Lewis, and the larger moment in Paris. Scholars have also focused on representations of gender identity, sexuality, and embodiment in Hemingway’s works and self-representations, moving from the concept of the “Hemingway Code” to masculinity more specifically, as well as gender ambiguity, transgender themes and representations, and masculinity’s relationship to anorexia. The geographic space of Paris in the 1920s has interested scholars and continues to be compelling, from the specifics of Paris to the larger scholarly interest in environmental and place studies, including food and drink, Hemingway’s sense of place, Hemingway’s experiences in World War I, hospitality, terroir, Parisian sports, and cafes.

Nicole Stamant

Nicole Stamant is Associate Professor of English at Agnes Scott College and specializes in Life Writing Studies and American Literature. She is the author of *Memoirs of Race, Color, and Belonging* (2022) and *Serial Memoir: Archiving American Lives* (2014), along with numerous journal articles and chapters in collections.