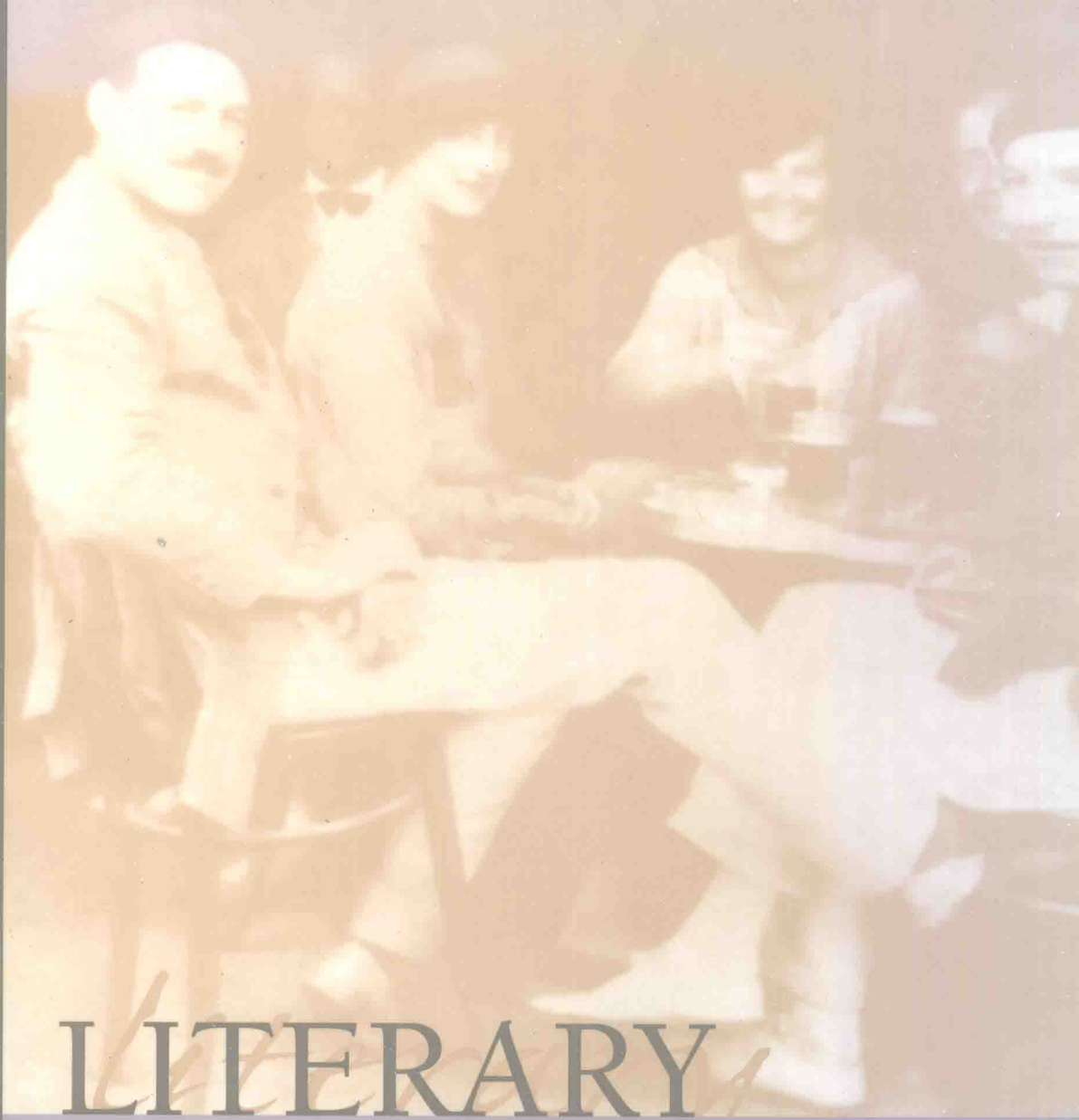
Study Guides to Great Literature



LITERARY TOPICS

Volume 2

Ernest Hemingway and the Expatriate Modernist Movement

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Ernest Hemingway and the Expatriate Modernist Movement

Kirk Curnutt

A MANLY, INC. BOOK

GALE GROUP

Detroit
San Francisco
London
Boston
Woodbridge, CT

ERNEST HEMINGWAY AND THE EXPATRIATE MODERNIST MOVEMENT

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The Gale Group

27500 Drake Road

Farmington Hills, MI 48331

ISBN 0-7876-3963-X

ISSN 1526-1549

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A NOTE TO THE READER

by Denis Donoghue, Henry James Professor of English and American Letters, New York Unviersity

Gale Study Guides are designed to be helpful by being informative, by removing tedious and unnecessary obstacles, and by pointing you toward further thought. They are also designed to be responsive to the changed conditions of reading literature which have arisen in the past fifteen or twenty years in schools, colleges, and universities. What are these conditions?

They are mainly imposed by Theory. There was a time when students read literature—and were instructed to read it—without a theory of reading or a theory of literature. Even a critic as far-reaching as William Empson seemed to play it by ear and to trust to his hunches. It was assumed that everybody knew what a work of literature was and what reading such a work entailed. Teachers tried to offer a persuasive interpretation of the work, and that was that. One interpretation might be more interesting than another, but both interpretations were in the same field of assumption and reference. These assumptions don't hold any longer. If we say that such-and-such a book is a work of literature, we have to explain what we hold a work of literature to be, why it is such, and how it has become such. No attribute of the book can be taken for granted. Theory asks not, primarily, what the book is or what it means or how it works but what are the conditions under which it has come into being. Those conditions are deemed to be social, political, economic, linguistic, formal—and perhaps most insistently, cultural. A novel, a play, or a poem is said to be a work of cultural production. What does that mean? It means that many diverse forces have come together to produce the book. Not just the intention of an author.

One result of this emphasis is that the context of a work of literature is not deemed to be a static "background" or scene. In a celebrated essay called "The Historical Interpretation of Literature" (1941), Edmund Wilson assumed that "history" could be called upon to steady the work of literature, to curb its mobility, and to ground it in some value more ascertainable than the author's intention or the formal properties of

the work. History is no longer thought to provide such a ground. If there is a contemporary sense of history, it features rather the conviction—or the fear—that history itself is partly fictive. There are histories, but there is no single or stable History. A history of the French Revolution is not a sequence of characters and actions, transcribed. What or who is the real Julius Caesar? In the second chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses* Stephen Dedalus asks himself: "Had Pyrrhus not fallen by a beldam's hand in Argos or Julius Caesar not been knifed to death?" and in answer to himself he murmurs: "They are not to be thought away. Time has branded them and fettered they are lodged in the room of the infinite possibilities they have ousted." Yes: in some sense, yes. But it is hard to establish "Julius Caesar" as an entity independent of my sense of him, or your sense of him. Granted that he was knifed to death. But that is not enough to establish him or to remove from the image of him the taint of fictiveness. The philosopher E. M. Cioran asserted, in *Précis de décomposition* (1949), that "history is merely a procession of false Absolutes, a series of temples raised to pretexts, a degradation of the mind before the Improbable." We are not obliged to agree with Cioran, but we can't shrug off his skepticism or assume that we are free to invoke History, as Wilson did, without misgiving. The concept of History is, as we have been schooled to say, problematic. History may be everything that is the case, but the force of fictiveness in constituting it can't be ignored.

So a question arises: is literary history possible? If it is: is it necessary or desirable? Why do we talk about literary movements and schools, if the very concept of History is questionable? Was there ever such a thing, for instance, as Romanticism or Modernism?

There was, but not in any fixed or steady sense. Writers who live at a particular time often feel a certain commonality of purpose. They respond in similar ways to the conditions they face. They share, in some degree, a conviction of the expressive possibilities. The revolutionary writers are those few who intuit or divine, among those possibilities, the ones that clamor to be fulfilled. T. S. Eliot saw the possibility of putting fragments of verse together in a seemingly arbitrary or at least unofficial way which would make a rather esoteric kind of sense: the result was *The Waste Land,* a kind of poetry no other writer thought of writing. It soon began to emerge that *The Waste Land,* Ezra Pound's *Cantos,* W. B. Yeats's *The Tower,* Hart Crane's *The Bridge* and a few other poems had something in common—a distinctive sense of their time—despite their formal and rhetorical differences. The concept of Modernism seemed to be called for, to note similarities of purpose among such writers: Eliot, Pound, Valéry, Yeats, Rilke, Joyce, Proust. This does not mean that these writers thought

of themselves as associates. Pound and Eliot did, but not Eliot and Yeats. The concept of Modernism is a worthy one, provided we deal with it flexibly: it is not a place of residence for the writers it designates. Differences, then, persist and have to be acknowledged; but they are folded within a grand sense of "the modern spirit" or Modernism. So we can still use this word. It is more useful to think of a certain consanguinity of purpose among various writers than to assume that one writer is utterly separate from other writers.

So too with the concept of the author, another once-steady notion that has come into question. Of course Shakespeare or Emily Dickinson or F. Scott Fitzgerald or James Dickey wrote the book, but not in utter freedom or sky-blue autonomy. They had to deal with the exigencies of cultural performance: specifically, with questions of language, communication, ideology, audience, readership, money patronage, publishers, genre, literary form, the social forces issuing in taste. Not that any one of these was absolutely coercive. Pierre Bourdieu has maintained, in *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966), that "a writer never reflects mechanically or rigorously the ideology which he represents, even if his sole intention is to represent it; perhaps because no ideology is sufficiently consistent to survive the test of figuration." Otherwise put: the force of an ideology is not irresistible, it must yield in some degree—bend if not break—to the force of the language, the figures of speech and thought, which are entailed by writing in English, French, Greek, Latin, or another language. Total freedom is not available in the production of literature. Writers may proceed as if such freedom were available. They would be wise not to capitulate to the social, economic, or cultural forces at large. A certain measure of resistance is possible. Kenneth Burke maintained, in *Counter-Statement* (1931), that the motto of the imagination is: "When in Rome, do as the Greeks." But it's not quite as straightforward as that.

It is hoped that these *Gale Study Guides* will help you to negotiate these and other issues. They won't tell you what to think about, say, *The Great Gatsby,* or dictate the limits of your experience in reading that book; but they will open up new possibilities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was produced by Bruccoli Clark Layman, Inc. R. Bland Lawson is the series editor and Penelope M. Hope is the in-house editor.

Production manager is Philip B. Dematteis.

Copyediting supervisor is Phyllis A. Avant. Senior copyeditor is Thom Harman. The copyediting staff includes Brenda Carol Blanton, James Denton, Worthy B. Evans, Melissa D. Hinton, William Tobias Mathes, and Jennifer Reid.

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Typesetting supervisor is Kathleen M. Flanagan. The typesetting staff includes Mark J. McEwan, Kimberly Kelly, and Patricia Flanagan Salisbury.

Ford Madox Ford, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and John Quinn, Paris, early 1920s, photograph.

Ernest Hemingway at Shakespeare and Company, photograph. Princeton University Library. Reproduced by permission.

Ernest Hemingway, Hadley, John Dos Passos, and the Murphys, photograph. John F. Kennedy Library.

Ernest Hemingway in a suit and tie, photograph. John F. Kennedy Library.

Ernest Hemingway on a motorcycle, Paris, photograph. Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Reproduced by permission.

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Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, photograph. Reproduced by permission of the Gertrude Stein Estate.

Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson, photograph. Reproduced by permission of the Gertrude Stein Estate.

Gertrude Stein, portrait by Pablo Picasso. Reproduced by permission of the Gertrude Stein Estate.

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CHRONOLOGY: MODERNISM

1900 Sigmund Freud publishes *The Interpretation of Dreams;* Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim,* Stephen Crane's *Whilomville Stories,* and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* are published.

1901 Pablo Picasso's first exhibition opens at Galeries Vollard in Paris; American experimental composer Charles Ives completes his Symphony No. 2.

1902 Photographer Edward Steichen has a one-man show in Paris; Claude Debussy's *Pelleas et Melisande* premieres in Paris; Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is published.

1903 Gertrude Stein moves to Paris; Henri Matisse exhibits paintings at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris.

1904 Conrad's *Nostromo* is published.

1905 Albert Einstein proposes his theory of relativity; Matisse exhibits *La Femme au Chapeau* at the Autumn Salon; Isadora Duncan opens her modern-dance academy in Berlin; Alfred Stieglitz opens the first show at his Photo-Secession gallery in New York; Claude Debussy composes *La Mer;* Freud publishes *Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory.*

1906 Ruth St. Denis introduces modern dance to Americans on her U.S. tour.

1907 New York galleries feature the works of American impressionist Mary Cassatt.

1908 Italian artist Emilio Marinetti publishes the *Futurist Manifesto;* Matisse publishes *Notes d'un peintre,* setting forth his artistic principles.

1909 Picasso begins his portrait of Stein, which ushers in his Cubist period. Sergei Diaghile's Ballets Russe performs for the first time in Paris; Stein's *Three Lives* is published.

1910 Artists Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc publish *The Blue Rider* in Munich, inaugurating the Postimpressionist movement; Picasso has a one-man show at Stieglitz's 291 Gallery in New York.

1911 Pound's *Canzoni* and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* are published; Georges Braque paints *Man with a Guitar.*

1912 Ezra Pound establishes Imagism with H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Richard Aldington; Marcel Duchamp completes *Nude Descending a Staircase; L'Après Midi d'un Faune,* featuring dancer Vaslav Nijinsky of the Ballets Russes, has its premiere in Paris; Carl Jung's *Theory of Psychoanalysis* is published.

1913 The Armory Show opens in New York. Igor Stravinsky premieres *Le Sacre du Printemps,* a ballet commissioned for Sergei Pavlovich Diaghilev's Ballets Russes; *Swann's Way,* the first volume of Marcel Proust's seven-volume *Remembrance of Things Past,* is published; D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* is published.

1914 World War I begins; Duncan's modern-dance company performs in New York City; James Joyce's *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are published.

1915 Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* is published; the Provincetown Players stage their first performance in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

1916 Hugo Ball and Ricard Hülsenbeck launch the Dada movement in Zurich.

1917 Pound, living in London, becomes foreign editor of *The Little Review;* Pound and Wyndham Lewis found vorticism; America enters World War I.

1918 Germany surrenders, ending World War I.

1919 Sylvia Beach opens her bookstore, Shakespeare and Company, at 8, rue Dupuytren (later moves to rue de l'Odeon; Paris Peace Conference results in the Treaty of Versailles; Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* is published.

1920 Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is published.

1921 Avant-garde artist-photographer Man Ray arrives in Paris; Picasso paints *Three Musicians.*

1922 Beach's Shakespeare and Company publishes Joyce's *Ulysses* in Paris; T. S. Eliot publishes the first issue of his journal, *The Criterion,* which includes his poem *The Waste Land; The Little Review* moves its

operation to Paris; E. E. Cummings's *The Enormous Room* is published.

1923 Robert McAlmon establishes the Contact Publishing Company; The "Exiles Number" of *The Little Review* appears, including works by Ernest Hemingway, Cummings, and Stein; Hemingway's *Three Stories and Ten Poems* is published by McAlmon; *Within the Quota,* a ballet by Cole Porter and Gerald Murphy premieres in Paris; William Carlos Williams's *Spring and All,* which includes "The Red Wheel Barrow," is published.

1924 Hemingway helps edit Ford Madox Ford's *transatlantic review;* Hemingway's *in our time* is published; André Breton publishes the *Surrealist Manifesto.*

1925 Stein's *The Making of Americans* is published; George Antheil's *Le Ballet mecanique* has a preview in Paris (the official premiere is in 1926); F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby,* John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer,* Pound's *A Draft of XVI. Cantos,* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* are published.

1926 Hemingway's *The Torrents of Spring* and *The Sun Also Rises* are published; William Faulkner's *Soldiers' Pay* is published.

1927 Charles Lindbergh completes the first solo transatlantic flight.

1928 Harry Crosby publishes his *Shadows of the Sun* at his Black Sun Press; Pound's *Selected Poems* with an introduction by Eliot is published; D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is published.

1929 Stein and Virgil Thomson's opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* is published in *transition;* Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is published; Black Sun Press publishes Kay Boyle's first book, *Short Stories;* the stock market crashes; the Great Depression begins.

1930 Dos Passos's *42nd Parallel,* the first volume of his *U.S.A.* trilogy, is published; Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* is published; Hart Crane's *The Bridge* is published by Black Sun Press in Paris; Pound's *A Draft of XXX Cantos* is published in Paris by Nancy Cunard's Hours Press; Tristan Tzara's Dadaist prose poem *Approximate Man* is published.

1931 Salvador Dalí paints *The Persistence of Memory;* Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and Woolf's *The Waves* are published.

1932 Dos Passos's *Nineteen-Nineteen,* the second volume of his *U.S.A.* trilogy, is published.

1933 Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is published.

1934 Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* is published.

1935 *Four Saints in Three Acts* debuts in New York.

1936 The Spanish Civil War begins; Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* is published; Dos Passos's *The Big Money,* the third volume of the *U.S.A.* trilogy, is published.

1937 Breton's Surrealist novel *L'Amour fou* is published; Paul Klee paints *Revolutions of the Viaducts;* René Magritte paints *The Pleasure Principle;* Joan Miró paints *Still Life with Old Shoe;* Wallace Stevens's poetry collection *The Man with the Blue Guitar* is published.

1938 Germany marches into Austria; Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée* is published.

1939 Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* is published; Abstract Expressionist painter Willem de Kooning exhibits his *Seated Man* in New York

1940 Jung's *Psychology and Religion* is published; Stravinsky composes his *Symphony in C Minor.*

HISTORY OF EXPATRIATE MODERNISM

Some years before his death in 1961, Ernest Hemingway began a series of autobiographical sketches describing his rise to literary eminence four decades earlier. As *A Moveable Feast* (1964) illustrates, an inspirational environment was essential to his success. No matter how skilled or disciplined, a writer cannot mature without surroundings that invigorate the imagination. For Hemingway, satisfying this need meant abandoning Chicago, where he worked as a writer for the *Cooperative Commonwealth,* for Paris, France, "the town best organized for a writer to write in that there is."[1] Once free to roam the scenic streets of Paris, he could carry his notebook and pencils in his coat until he happened upon an inviting café whose marble-topped tables and lingering aroma of café au lait were conducive to artistic creation. Yet, the subject of his writing was not necessarily the exciting sights and sounds of the *ville lumière* or "city of light." While the French capital provided the setting for some early prose sketches, the woods and rivers of northern Michigan where Hemingway learned to hunt and fish in his youth also preoccupied him.[2] Why journey all the way to Paris to write about Michigan? "I had already seen the end of fall come through boyhood, youth and young manhood," he explains, "and in one place you could write about it better than in another. That was called transplanting yourself, I thought, and it could be as necessary with people as with other sorts of growing things" (5). As *A Moveable Feast* makes clear, for Hemingway to become a great American writer, he first had to leave America.

Hemingway was one of dozens—hundreds even—of aspiring American artists who transplanted themselves to Europe in the 1920s. The actual amount of time he lived in Paris was relatively brief—roughly six of his sixty years, with additional extended stays in later periods of life (1929, 1937–1938, and 1956). Many of his novels, stories, and essays offer vivid descriptions of other exotic locales he visited during his lifelong adventures, from the battlefields of Italy and Spain to the plains of

Hemingway's passport photo, c. 1930.