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# Hemingway in Hollywood: From Page to Screen

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Hemingway in Hollywood: From Page to Screen

by

Hayden Hendricks

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requirements for the degree of

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## INTRODUCTION

The first adapted literary work was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, produced in 1903 by the Edison Manufacturing Company. The exhibitor brochure read, "The popularity of the book and play of the same title is a positive guarantee of its success. The story has been carefully studied and every scene posed in accordance with the famous author's version" (qtd. in Tour 54). However, many changes were made to condense the book into a one-reel film—about twenty minutes of footage. The film drew inspiration from the theatrical "Tom Show," a popular form of entertainment at the time featuring melodramatic scenes loosely based on the book. However, the serves more as a record of traveling Tommers' blackface minstrelsy than a cinematic translation of Stowe's novel of protest.

Due to the different aesthetic conditions of literature and film, mutations occur during adaptation. Film partakes of the phenomena of other media through augmentation. "Like two intersecting lines, novel and film meet at a point, then diverge. At the intersection, the book and shooting script are almost indistinguishable. But where the lines diverge, they not only resist conversion; they also lose all resemblance to each other" (Bluestone 63). The autonomy of a book is always subject to the practical considerations of film production, where costs include more than pen and paper and artistic responsibilities are shared among many active participants. An adaptation uses analogy to capture the spirit of the literary work while remaining faithful to the medium-specific values of film.

Of course, some adaptations criticize their source text. For instance, in adapting *Starship Troopers*, Paul Verhoeven, who survived the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, chose to parody the novel's fascist and militarist themes: "I stopped after two chapters because it was so boring...It's a very right-wing book" (qtd. in Smith and Williams). Verhoeven was disappointed

when critics largely mistook his satire for praise: “They couldn't see that all I have done is ironically create a fascist utopia” (qtd. in Smith and Williams). In the interpretative role of adaptation, film critiques the ideologies contained in the source work and, in doing so, becomes a new and separate text. Therefore, the most productive approach to adaptation criticism is dialogical analysis, which displaces the book as the ultimate source of meaning and instead seeks to explicate the motivations behind the textual differences.

While “infidelity” may accurately describe the feeling of betrayal when an adaptation fails to perform what was most appreciated in a literary work, fidelity as an exclusive analytic principle operates on a biased system of valuation because it privileges the authority of the literary work over the aesthetic integrity of the adaptation. In “Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest,” André Bazin argues that adaptations and their source texts should be viewed as a single work merely reflected through different art forms: “The [director] need simply possess enough imagination to create cinematic equivalences of the original’s style...fidelity to one form, whether literary or some other, is illusory; what matters is the *equivalence in the meaning of the forms*” (42; original emphasis). For Bazin, the important relationship between the texts is not fidelity but dialogue. By treating the works as individual entities, an analysis can move beyond cataloging surface-level similarities and instead identify a more nuanced relationship between texts.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, literary adaptations have comprised more than half of the industry’s releases and nearly three-fourths of the Academy Awards for Best Picture (Barlowe 37). Ernest Hemingway has been one of the most frequently adapted American authors, with more than fifty film and television adaptations released to date. In 1957, *Parade* magazine featured Hemingway on the cover. The caption read, “At 58, he’s Hollywood’s favorite

author” (qtd. in Laurence 5). At the time of the *Parade* issue, there were four Hemingway adaptations in production: *The Sun Also Rises* (1957), *A Farewell to Arms* (1957), *The Gun Runners* (1958), and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1958). Jerry Wald, who produced the Hemingway adaptations *The Breaking Point* (1950) and *Hemingway’s Adventures of a Young Man* (1962), said, “Hemingway is as big a name in Hollywood as any Hollywood star” (qtd. in Laurence 6). David O. Selznick, who produced *A Farewell to Arms* (1957), said, “Hemingway is himself a star. He has box office” (qtd. in 6).

Hemingway is known for his macho persona as much as for his writing, if not more so. Since the publication of his first novel *The Sun Also Rises*, a *roman à clef* based on his life in Paris in the 1920s, he established a reputation for fictionalizing his own life through “selective reporting” (Littell 303). The journalistic style derives from his initial training as a cub reporter for the *Kansas City Star* and later as a foreign correspondent for the *Toronto Star*. His active participation in three major wars—as an ambulance driver during World War I, a front-line reporter for the North American Newspaper Alliance during the Spanish Civil War, and a war correspondent for *Collier’s* during World War II—brings a sense of immediacy to his depictions of war in his fiction.

While it can be unsound to use an author’s biography as a basis for interpreting their work, the practice is commonplace in Hemingway scholarship due to the autobiographical nature of his fiction. As Hemingway explained in his 1932 nonfiction bullfighting book *Death in the Afternoon*, “People in a novel, not skillfully constructed characters, must be projected from the writer’s assimilated experience, from his knowledge, from his head, from his heart and from all there is of him” (182-183). In a letter to his editor Max Perkins, Hemingway admitted, “...whatever success I have had has been through writing what I know about” (*Selected Letters*

73). The correlations between life and fiction are most visible in the semi-autobiographical character Nick Adams, a recurring protagonist in Hemingway's short fiction whose experiences closely resemble the author's. Philip Young formulated a "wound theory" of Hemingway's life and work based on his injury during World War I:

The Hemingway hero, the big, tough, outdoor man, is also the wounded man, and descriptions of certain scenes in the life of Nick Adams have explained how he got that way. The man will die a thousand times before his death, but from his wounds he would never recover so long as Hemingway lived and recorded his adventures (55).

Jackson J. Benson observes that Hemingway's doctrine of writing from experience takes the form of a framing device from which he asks imaginative "what if?" questions: vis-à-vis his war wound, Hemingway asks, "What if I were wounded in such a way that I could no longer have sex—what would life be like?" (352), a question manifested in the character Jakes Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, who suffered a wound during World War I that made him impotent.

Ostensibly, Hemingway's literary origins as a member of the Parisian expatriate community conjure an image of a high-art elite. Public suspicion of intellectuals was a common discourse in American culture at the beginning of the twentieth century, emerging in the stereotype of the artist as pretentious and effete. As a result, the machismo dimension of Hemingway's persona made him all the more intriguing to the American public because it contradicted the popular image of the literary figure. Hemingway worked tirelessly to build his persona during his three-year stint (1933-1936) at *Esquire*, where he reached one and a half to two million readers a month (Raeburn 46). His articles instructed on "how to catch a marlin, what to look for in a bullfight, how to stalk a lion, where to buy good champagne in Paris, and what brand of beer to drink on a fishing cruise" (46-47). For American readers, his exploits

appeared tantalizingly out of reach enough to be exotic yet close enough to home to feel a sense of kinship.

One effect of Hemingway's self-mythologization of a virile, risk-taking brand of masculinity was the proliferation of exaggerated and wholly invented tales. One anecdote reported by the *New York Times* describes an altercation between Hemingway and writer Max Eastman. In a scathing review of *Death in the Afternoon*, Eastman wrote, "Come out from behind that false hair on your chest, Ernest. We all know you" (qtd. in "Hemingway Slaps Eastman In Face"). After Hemingway found Eastman in a Scribner's office, Hemingway opened his shirt, bared his chest, and punched Eastman. Hemingway told the *New York Times*, "I didn't really sock him. If I had I might have knocked him through that window and out into Fifth Avenue...He jumped at me like a woman—clawing, you know, with his open hands. I just held him off. I didn't want to hurt him." He promised to donate \$1,000 to charity if Eastman would meet him in a locked room with all legal rights waived ("Hemingway Slaps Eastman In Face"). In promoting his masculine persona, he indulged in telling shameless lies about his past: he claimed to have fought in both world wars, led Arditi stormtroopers into battle, and been appointed a captain of the Free French (Dearborn 525).

The Hollywood popularizations of Hemingway's fiction are largely responsible for cementing his enduring position in popular culture. Seven Hemingway adaptations were released during the nine-year span between 1943 and 1952 when nearly sixty percent of the American public visited the theater weekly (Pautz 63). However, Hemingway held an acrimonious relationship with the industry throughout his life. Commenting on F. Scott Fitzgerald and William Faulkner's screenwriting careers, he said, "If you go out [to Hollywood] they get you writing as though you were looking through a camera lens. All you think about is pictures, when



you ought to be thinking about people” (qtd. in Murray 218). When Darryl F. Zanuck asked Hemingway’s advice for shortening “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” to fit a marquee, Hemingway reportedly suggested: “F as in Fox, U as in Universal, C as in Culver City, and K as in RKO. That should fit all the marquees, and you can’t beat it as a sex symbol” (qtd. in Elder et al. 187). However, the story is dubious because Zanuck was working for Fox at the time and would not have been involved in Benedict Bogeaus’s independent production. Hemingway might have been motivated to invent the story after Zanuck went on to adapt *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (1952) and *The Sun Also Rises* (1957), both of which he hated. His anger reached new heights when a loophole in his rights contracts meant he did not earn any money from remakes. Though not contractually obligated to do so, David O. Selznick offered Hemingway \$50,000 of the profits of his 1957 remake of *A Farewell to Arms*. Hemingway told Selznick he could turn the \$50,000 into nickels and “shove them up his ass until they came out his ears” (qtd. Elder et al. 192).

What Hemingway admired in a film was realism. He was involved in the production of at least one film, *The Spanish Earth* (1937), an anti-fascist documentary of the Republican side of the Spanish Civil War. At the invitation of fellow American novelist John Dos Passos, Hemingway worked as a grip for director Joris Ivens (Guill 55). During the post-production phase, Hemingway wrote the commentary and performed the narration. The experience would inform his reception of the adaptations of his fiction.

When Hemingway read an early draft of Dudley Nichols’s screenplay for *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, he wrote a letter of complaint, arguing that Republican guerilla fighters would have said “salud” instead of “adiós,” diction such as “assassin” and “treachery” was too magniloquent for peasant speech, and long mustaches were anachronistic in Spain by more than a hundred

years (Laurence 17). “[He] urged Nichols to get the script back into the finest tradition of realism in American pictures...[and] suggested that producer-director Sam Wood should see a screening of *The Spanish Earth* so that he could tell what Spanish peasants and the Spanish war really looked like” (Laurence 18, 20). Hemingway complimented *Under My Skin* (1950), an adaptation of his short story “My Old Man,” for shooting on location in Paris (19). He complimented A.E. Hotchner’s television play *The Killers* (1959) for casting Ingemar Johansson, who was the current world heavyweight champion from Sweden (19).

In tracing how the Hollywood adaptations affected Hemingway’s celebrity (and vice versa), this thesis discusses three case studies: *A Farewell to Arms* (1932), *The Killers* (1946), and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1958). Each is adapted from a novel, a short story, and a novella, respectively. By examining texts of difficult lengths, this thesis identifies how the filmmakers adapted the stories to fit a feature film runtime. Further, the adaptations span three decades, allowing for an analysis of how changing historical contexts affected the films’ modifications of their source texts. This thesis provides an interpretation of the Hemingway stories and their adaptations, sets this interpretation within the contexts of their publication and production histories, and explicates the motivations behind the differences between the texts. In doing so, it investigates the adaptations not as superficial renderings of classic literature but as indications of the larger forces affecting mass culture. It shows that in translating Hemingway’s works to the screen, Hollywood often followed prevailing generic conventions. It examines how changing censorship stringencies, developing technologies, and filmmakers’ aesthetic preferences influenced the adaptations’ fidelity to their source texts. Finally, it details how Hollywood’s image-making machine shaped Hemingway’s popular image through a dialectic of art, mass culture, and ideology.

## A FAREWELL TO ARMS

*A Farewell to Arms* (1932) was the first film adaptation of a Hemingway work. It was based on Hemingway's novel of the same name, published in 1929. Paramount produced the picture, with Frank Borzage directing and Helen Hayes and Gary Cooper appearing in the starring roles. Shortly before the December 1932 premiere at the Criterion Theater in New York, Paramount sent a telegram to Piggott, Arkansas, where Hemingway was visiting his wife's family: "Two prints unexpectedly available make possible private showing of the motion picture version of *A Farewell to Arms* to your family and friends at Piggott on the night of the Broadway premiere or before. Immediate reply appreciated so arrangements can be made" (qtd. in "Hemingway Mad" 40). Hemingway wired back, "Use your imagination as to where to put two prints unexpectedly available of Borzage version of *A Farewell to Arms* but do not send here" (qtd. in 40). Though Paramount had bought his book, they did not "also get the right to [his] sanction of the picture version" (qtd. in 40). Nevertheless, Paramount went ahead with the Piggott screening, postponing the New York premiere a day because—they claimed—"Ernest Hemingway wanted to invite the whole town of Piggott, Ark., to the world premiere of his *A Farewell to Arms*" (qtd. in 40). Hemingway fled Piggott before the prints could arrive.

Hemingway was infuriated by the changes made to his novel's characters and plot, including a happier ending that was more aligned with Hollywood conventions. In the novel, an American lieutenant named Frederic Henry serves in the Italian ambulance corps during World War I. While recovering from a war injury in a Milan hospital, he falls in love with an English nurse named Catherine Barkley. Frederic decides to desert the army and flee with Catherine to neutral Switzerland. A few months after, Catherine suffers complications during childbirth, resulting in the death of both Catherine and their son.

The novel's plot closely reflects the details of Hemingway's early life. At eighteen, he enlisted in the Red Cross as an ambulance driver during World War I. He was wounded by a mortar shell at the Italian front and consigned to a hospital in Milan, where he met and fell in love with an American nurse named Agnes von Kurowsky, seven years his senior. When he returned to the States, he expected her to follow in a few months to be married, but Kurowsky broke off the engagement, writing, "I am still very fond of you, but, it is more as a mother than as a sweetheart...I am now & always will be too old" (qtd. in Villard and Nagel 163). According to Hemingway's sister Marcelline, Kurowsky's letter affected him so much that he became bedridden with a fever after reading it (Dearborn 78). Biographer Peter Griffin wrote, "The real explosion that affected Hemingway was the broken heart Kurowsky gave him, not so much...being blown up" (31).

Hemingway's emotional and physical injuries resulted in his feeling of disillusionment on returning to Oak Park, Illinois. He found solace in fishing and camping, the rituals of which helped distract him from his pain. These experiences would inspire the short story "Big Two-Hearted River," which follows Nick Adams as he copes with an unspecified wound through immersion in the outdoors.

Hemingway's hospitalization in Milan is also the basis for many of his early stories. An *In Our Time* vignette titled "A Very Short Story" tells of a Red Cross nurse falling in love with a wounded soldier during World War I. In the first 1924 Paris edition of the collection published by Three Mountains Press as *in our time* (without capitals), the story takes place in Milan, and the nurse is named Ag. For Boni & Liveright's 1925 New York edition, Hemingway rewrote the story and reduced its autobiographical details by relocating the hospital to Padua and renaming the nurse Luz. Another story titled "In Another Country" from *Men Without Women* follows Nick

Adams as a hospitalized American officer in Milan, healing from a leg wound. However, it was not until 1929 that Hemingway developed a novel from his wartime experiences: *A Farewell to Arms*.

The novel's first adaptation was as a play in 1930, written by Laurence Stallings. Frank Borzage directed the first film adaptation in 1932, and David O. Selznick produced a remake in 1957. Clark Gable narrated a one-hour radio dramatization for Lux Radio Theater, which aired on April 5, 1937. The Brazilian television network Rede Tupi produced a Portuguese-language television adaptation in 1961. In 1966, the BBC produced a three-part television series.

This chapter focuses on Paramount's 1932 production of *A Farewell to Arms*. As a case study, the Paramount version supports this thesis's aim to trace the development of Hemingway's celebrity through the Hollywood adaptations of his work because it is the first Hemingway film adaptation. In 1932, Hemingway held coterie fame within literary circles but had not yet achieved a position in the popular culture. By the time of the second Hemingway adaptation, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943), the combined blockbuster success of the 1932 picture and the *Esquire* articles had established his celebrity. Unique among the later adaptations, which were forced to reconcile the preeminence of Hemingway's literary and popular reputation, Borzage was free to exercise his directorial authorship and dramatically alter the novel according to the traditions of melodramatic romance. In addition, though it predates the 1934 Production Code Administration's strict enforcement of the Code's rules, the production was still subject to scrutiny and political pressure due to the novel's controversial publication history. As a result, the 1932 version fails to preserve the novel's modernist elements onscreen. The film occupies the uncomfortable position of adapting a source novel written in the modernist tradition, intent on offending Victorian-era sensibilities, while at the same time being subject to the prevailing

conservatism of intra-industry censorship authorities. Frederic and Catherine's love story takes center stage. The uncompromising realities of war, detailed in matter-of-fact thoroughness in the novel, are reduced to a shadowy overtone. The effect is a diminishment of the novel's political and existential themes. Further, due to the Hollywood tradition of third-person point of view, the novel's limited first-person perspective, an essential part of modernism's deconstruction of objective truth and experience, is largely lost.

### **Background**

Hemingway's style of literary realism sometimes offended contemporary sensibilities. He wrote that his mission as a writer was to make "a picture of the world as I have seen it, without comment... Naturally much will be unpleasant, much will be obscene and much will seem to have no moral viewpoint" (qtd. in Reynolds 141). For *A Farewell to Arms*, this meant writing dialogue that captured how soldiers really talked. As a result, Scribner's found it impossible to publish the manuscript due to obscenities such as "fucking," "cocksucker," and "balls." Charles Scribner II, the successor to his father's publishing house, was known for his conservative publishing practices. Charles Scribner IV described Scribner II as carrying himself with the "stiffness of the Victorian and Edwardian regimes" (4). As John Hall Wheelock, Chief Editor at Scribner's at the time, remembered, Charles Scribner II "would no sooner allow profanity in one of his books than he would invite friends to use his parlor as a toilet" (Donaldson, *Fitzgerald and Hemingway* 85). After reading the manuscript, Max Perkins wired Scribner's headquarters: "Book very fine but difficult in spots" (qtd. in Leff, *Hemingway* 98). Perkins later elaborated, "It is Hemingway's principle both in life and literature never to flinch from facts, and it is in that sense only, that the book is difficult. It isn't at all erotic, although love is represented as having a very large physical element" (Donaldson, "Censorship" 86). As expected, Scribner's

Editor-in-Chief Robert Bridges found *A Farewell to Arms* “unavailable” for publication in its uncensored form (Leff, *Hemingway* 98). Perkins advised Hemingway to omit the obscenities and “reduce somewhat the implications of physical aspects in the relationship” (qtd. in Trogdon 77). Hemingway resisted the changes, believing censorship to be an existential threat to his art:

You know what I want—all we can possibly get. It’s a fight with me for the return to the full use of the language and what we accomplish in that direction may be of more value in the end than anything I write. I never use a word if I can avoid it, but if I must have it I know it (qtd. in Trogdon 5).

By compromise, Hemingway agreed to the omissions so long as a dash indicated them. The story was first published in 1929 in the May-October issues of *Scribner's Magazine*. Scribner’s paid \$16,000 for the rights, the most the firm had ever paid for a serialized work (Leff, *Hemingway* 155).

Hemingway and Perkins hoped a serialization would attract an offer of a screen adaptation:

The serialization—since Scribners had little contact with the motion picture studios—could introduce the movie companies to the novel. Moreover, the serialization would go not only into the offices of Broadway and Hollywood executives, to be scanned by story department readers, but into executives’ homes, where the discussion of the first installment over cocktails would lead to studio offers the following morning (89).

Hemingway must have felt he was close to a Hollywood offer. In 1928, Fox had considered *Men Without Women*’s “The Killers” for \$2,500, but nothing came of it (87). Hemingway wrote Perkins, “Christ knows I need money—not money advanced or loaned but money earned” (qtd. in 126).

On June 20, 1929, Boston Police Chief Michael H. Crowley banned the second installment of the six-part serial. Scribner's defended the publication, arguing, "'A Farewell to Arms' is in its effect distinctly moral...If good can come from evil, if the fine can grow from the gross, how is a writer effectually to depict the progress of this evolution if he cannot describe the conditions from which the good evolved?" (qtd. in "Boston Police Bar Scribner's Magazine" 2). Scribner's was not overly worried about the ban. Its magazine was selling well, and the ban accorded it free publicity. The *New York Herald Tribune* wrote, "Many readers had doubtless missed Mr. Hemingway's powerful story...and they will be grateful to the [Boston police] chief for calling their attention to it" (qtd. in Donaldson, "Censorship" 89). In September 1929, Scribner's published the story in book form. It was a bestseller (Gandal 27).

As early as October 1929, David O. Selznick, working for Paramount, was interested in acquiring the rights, but his bosses rejected it because of the "tragic unhappy ending" (qtd. in Leff, "Thunderous Reception" 37). Paramount's story department reported, "This is a magnificently written story and a great one...but it is not a story for a picture" (qtd. in 44). MGM thought it would be too expensive to produce and offered only \$10,000 (37). Hemingway's agent advised holding out for more (37). Perkins expected Laurence Stallings's theatrical adaptation to encourage a more lucrative offer: "I hear the play is going on this fall," Perkins wrote. "If only it makes a grand success, that would bring a big movie price" (40).

Stallings's three-act play, directed by Rouben Mamoulian and starring Glenn Anders and Elissa Landi, kept much of the novel's original dialogue and romantic material. However, due to the stage's spatial restrictions, it reduced or excised most of the war material. The Motion Picture Association's Lamar Trotti wrote, "In a word the play accentuates the objectionable features of the novel, and while I still think a treatment can be found in which delicacy and good taste will



be exercised, the stage play certainly offers no hope in that direction” (qtd. in Leff, *Hemingway* 139). Though Stallings’s play was short-lived, it proved the novel’s dramatic possibilities. Two days after the premiere, Paramount bought the rights to the book and the play for \$80,000 (Leff, “Thunderous Reception” 42). Hemingway netted \$24,000 from the sale (42). Despite this windfall, the author held little faith in Paramount’s artistic intentions. One clause in the rights contract stated:

no composition by a composer and lyricist creating a score and/or lyrics and/or the introduction of dances and/or the adaptation of the dramatic work into a dramatico-musical or any other form of musical compositions, shall be permitted (qtd. in Pierce 48).

Having initially turned down the picture in 1929, Paramount may have changed its mind after the success of Universal’s adaptation of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930). The 1928 British novel had initially been barred by the United States Customs Bureau, resulting in Little, Brown and Company publishing a heavily redacted version for American readers. Similarly, *A Farewell to Arms* was a scandalous, bestselling war novel, and Paramount hoped to reproduce Universal’s success.

In the 1930s, Hollywood was still struggling to adapt to synchronized sound film when the Depression effectively obliterated ticket sales. By the time of *A Farewell to Arms*’s December 1932 release, weekly theater attendance figures were down forty percent from 1929 (Leff and Simmons 29). However, studios’ vertical integration of production, distribution, and exhibition venues allowed theaters to encourage attendance by reducing ticket prices. Studios increasingly focused on escapist fiction in exotic locations and codified the formulae for fantastical genres such as swashbuckler adventures and monster horror. The studio system also

enjoyed relative creative autonomy. The Production Code, published in 1930, was only rigorously enforced from 1934 onward when an amendment required productions to obtain a certificate of approval from the newly established Production Code Administration.

The Production Code Administration was presaged by the Supreme Court's 1915 decision in *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio*, which defined the government's position on film production censorship until the 1950s. The court ruled that the right to free speech did not apply to motion pictures because they "are mere representations of events, of ideas and sentiments, published and known; vivid, useful, and entertaining, no doubt, but...capable of evil, having power for it, the greater because of the attractiveness and manner of exhibition" (*The American and English Annotated Cases* 1184). To prevent possible government intervention, Hollywood established an intra-industry censoring board under the leadership of William H. Hays for the purpose of self-regulating films during all phases of production. The key points of the Production Code of 1930 came from a list of "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" codified by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in 1927.

Ostensibly, the 1930 Code problematized Paramount's production of *A Farewell to Arms*. The Code states, "A book describes; a film vividly presents...The sanctity of the institution of marriage and home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing" (*The American and English Annotated Cases* 120, 128). A significant and unremovable part of *A Farewell to Arms* includes premarital sex and subsequent pregnancy. According to the Motion Picture Association's Lamar Trotti, "Much profanity—very much! Illicit love! Illegitimate birth! Desertion from the Army! Not very flattering picture of Italy in war days! A great book nevertheless" (qtd. in Leff, *Hemingway* 126). However, working

around the Code was standard practice in Hollywood at the time. Productions that tamed their material according to the Code could not compete with productions that did not.

On the verge of bankruptcy, Paramount “decided to free up a large part of its budget, staking everything on the eagerly awaited project” (qtd. in Barlowe 30). At a time when Paramount’s average budget for a feature film was \$306,000, *A Farewell to Arms* was set at \$900,000 (Leff, “*A Farewell to Arms*” 71). Hays was informed that Paramount was “determined to put aside the conservative policy which has characterized the studio for years and to be as daring as possible” (qtd. in Leff and Simmons 24). Paramount appeased the MPPDA by signing respected Hollywood names. Adding Frank Borzage as director and Helen Hayes as female lead reportedly relieved some of Trotti’s concerns about the screenplay (Leff and Simmons 25).

A renowned stage actress, Helen Hayes had entered Hollywood only the year before. Her Academy Award for *The Sin of Madelon Claudet* (1931) had already established her reputation. Frank Borzage was a prolific and respected filmmaker, directing more than sixty feature films before 1932 and winning Academy Awards for Best Director for *Seventh Heaven* (1927) and *Bad Girl* (1931). Though Gary Cooper had played World War I soldiers in *The Shopworn Angel* (1928) and *Lilac Time* (1928), his relaxed, informal acting style initially disqualified him from the picture. Still, Cooper fought hard to get the part, and Borzage found his curt, unaffected manner well suited to Hemingway’s writing style. Cooper even resembled the Hemingway hero: tall, rugged, and self-possessed. His love for sports and outdoor activities would bring him into a close friendship with Hemingway later in life.

Once the cast and crew were finalized, Paramount worried about not only Cooper and Hayes's acting styles but also their heights. Cooper towered more than fifteen inches over Hayes. To address the height difference, Borzage limited scenes with both standing (Dumont 177).

Borzage shot the film in sequence in eight weeks at the Paramount studio lot, the Paramount Ranch, and Devil's Gate Dam in Pasadena (Leff, "*A Farewell to Arms*" 71).

In December 1932, a few weeks before the picture's planned premiere date, Dr. James Wingate succeeded Jason Joy as head of the MPPDA. Wingate denied the film a certificate of approval, citing its graphic depiction of childbirth (Black 91). On December 7, Paramount appealed to a Hollywood committee of producers, who unanimously concluded that "because of the greatness of [the] picture and the excellence of direction and treatment that the childbirth sequence was not in violation of [the] Code" (American Film Institute, "*A Farewell to Arms*"). On December 10, Hays wrote Adolph Zukor of Paramount, maintaining that despite the film's "greatness," it still violated the Code. Hays asked Paramount to "eliminate the footage showing phases of the actual childbirth" (American Film Institute, "*A Farewell to Arms*"). On December 14, Zukor wrote to Hays that the childbirth scene no longer depicted labor pains, gas, and hemorrhaging.

Paramount's advertising for the production was ostentatious: "Ernest Hemingway's world famous story of two who began in passion's reckless abandon with a love that grew until it heeded neither shame, nor danger, nor death," "The most tumultuous, passionate romance yet written or screened! The mad mating of two souls lost for love's sake to the thunder of a world gone mad!" and "Let's Live Tonight... There may be no tomorrow!" (qtd. in Laurence 41-42). Much of the promotion was directed toward women: "If You're a Woman, You'll Live the Life of Helen Hayes in *A Farewell to Arms*—and Understand!" (50). One elaborate scheme involved theater managers sending a flyer to the women on their mailing list. The flyer looked like an envelope addressed to Lt. Frederic Henry, 1st Hospital Corps, Piave, Italy was struck through and rubber-stamped REJECTED BY CENSOR. Inside the envelope was a form letter:

Dear Madam:

War-time! Suppose you were alone in a dark, drab, Swiss hotel room! In a few weeks you were to become a mother—and the man you loved was miles away—on the shell-torn Italian front. You write letter after letter to him—twenty-one of them—and they are all returned stamped REJECTED BY CENSOR.

This is just one of the dramatic situations in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, which comes to the \_\_\_\_\_ Theater on \_\_\_\_\_ (date).

As you read it in the novel, you'll see *A Farewell to Arms* on the screen! (42).

Paramount intended to produce a “woman’s picture” along the lines of *The Sheik* (1921), *Seventh Heaven* (1927), and *Waterloo Bridge* (1931), a genre that flourished during the 1930s and 40s. The films’ female protagonists are often allowed “significant access to point of view structures and the enunciative level of the filmic discourse” (Doane 3). Because the films center on the female perspective, the woman protagonist is elevated to the status of an actor rather than a bystander, allowing her to author her own destiny. Though a subgenre of Hollywood melodrama, the woman’s picture contains many subtypes, often centering on subjects within what is defined as the “female” sphere: domesticity, motherhood, reproduction, self-sacrifice, and enduring love.

While publicly emphasizing the film’s female perspective and sensitivity—aspects which, though not wholly absent from the book, are not its most salient characteristics—Paramount also made a point of advertising the film’s fidelity to its source text: “The film follows the Hemingway novel with remarkable fidelity...To the thousands who have read *A Farewell to Arms*, the sensitive, intelligent film version cannot be other than a fulfillment” (qtd. in Laurence 42). Benjamin Glazer, one of the screenwriters, wrote: “The country is filled with avid Hemingway fans who would resent any great liberties being taken with this book or with the

dialogue” (qtd. in Laurence 43). Paramount only needed to appear faithful to his book because most viewers would not have read it anyway. Selznick would later confirm the discrepancy between public viewership and readership during research for his adaptation of *Jane Eyre* (1943), finding that because so few people had read Charlotte Brontë’s novel, his film did not need to be particularly faithful to it (Sconce 151).

Paramount’s press releases also highlighted the film’s autobiographical nature. One studio-written article read, “Author Lived Story Showing on Screen Here” (qtd. in Laurence 46). In response, Hemingway asked Scribner’s to issue a statement on his behalf, which read, in part:

[Hemingway disclaims] the romantic and false military career imputed to him in a recent film publicity release...he deprecates it and asks the motion picture people to leave his private life alone” (qtd. in Reynolds 105).

Of course, the open hostility Hemingway displayed toward Hollywood only intrigued the public to want to learn further details of his private life.

### **Analysis**

Screenwriters Oliver H.P. Garrett and Benjamin Glazer used Stallings’s play as the basis for their preliminary screenplay treatment. Hemingway’s scenes rely more on dialogue than narration, making them appear easily transferable to film. However, what reads fine on the page can sound strange and pretentious when spoken by actors. As author Graham Greene, whose own work was often adapted to the screen, notes,

What has the right rhythm in the book may seem unrealistic on the screen and must be modified. Dialogue in fiction must have the flavor of realism without having to be real, while on the screen the camera emphasizes the realism of the situation. You have to be

closer in a film to real-life conversation in order that the dialogue will match the realistic furnishings of the sets, so to speak (qtd. in Phillips 9).

Faced with the difficulty of turning Hemingway's chiseled dialogue into believable, performable scenes for Cooper and Hayes, Garrett and Glazer resorted to the romantic conventions forerun by Borzage's World War I melodrama *7th Heaven* (1927), for which Glazer was the writer.

Following the genre's rules that the lovers meet in some happenstance way, Garrett and Glazer invented a humorous early scene of mistaken identity to introduce Catherine and Frederic. At a brothel, Frederic drunkenly pontificates on the origins of architecture and its relation to the arch of a sex worker's high-heeled shoe. Suddenly, air raid sirens sound, and the sex worker loses her shoe in the chaos. When Frederic and Catherine bump into each other in an air raid shelter, Frederic mistakes Catherine for the sex worker from earlier and attempts to return the shoe to her foot. The Cinderella-esque scenario separates Catherine from Frederic's past casual sexual relationships. Later, when Catherine and Frederic formally introduce themselves to each other at a party, Catherine says, "We seem fated to bump into each other in the dark," referencing their earlier encounter. Though wholly invented by the screenwriters, the line and its obvious sexual connotations were included in the film's promotional trailer.

Though the production was technically "Pre-Code" in the sense that the MPPDA did not rigorously enforce the Code until 1934, Paramount still paid superficial heed to its stipulations. A scene added to the beginning of the film establishes the film's moral stance on Catherine and Frederic's affair. One of Catherine's fellow nurses, Molly, is sent home because she is pregnant and unmarried. The military officer interrogating her tells her she is "just as guilty as a soldier would be deserting his post under fire." When Frederic enters the hospital, he discovers Catherine spying on the interrogation from another room. It is their first encounter, and he

chidingly waves his finger at her in mock disapproval. When the other nurses learn Molly is to be dismissed, Catherine's friend Nurse "Fergie" Ferguson (Mary Philips) says, "She has only herself to blame." Catherine defends Molly: "This is war, Fergie, and she loved him." When Catherine offers to help Molly pack, the head nurse tells the other nurses, "I'm sorry Catherine Barkley seems to sympathize with one who has disgraced the uniform we all wear." The scene foreshadows the events to follow, where Catherine experiences a similar situation to Molly's. Though the rules of war may seem cruel and unfair, they are, according to the film, nevertheless firm and necessary.

Garrett and Glazer rewrite Catherine's best friend, Fergie, to be a kind of shoulder angel for Catherine. Fergie preaches traditional values and condemns Frederic and Catherine's affair. Frederic's best friend, Rinaldi (Adolphe Menjou), is rewritten as a shoulder devil, representing sin and deceit and encouraging Frederic in the same. The dynamic is demonstrated after Frederic and Catherine's first night together. Rinaldi, who initially courted Catherine, envies Frederic: "Miss Barkley prefers you to me. That is very clear." This jealousy results in his censoring Frederic and Catherine's letters later in the film. Fergie scolds Catherine: "You're only another conquest to him. One in a hundred. You'll probably never see him again."

Garrett and Glazer invent a marriage ceremony to appease the censors' concerns about Frederic and Catherine's illicit affair. Because of army regulations, the couple is not legally allowed to marry. However, the priest (Jack La Rue), who "can tell by their faces that they are in love," provides them with religious sanction: "It was a foolish notion, perhaps. I have not the right to say you are married, yet it has made me happy to do this. For now, from my heart, I can say I bless you in His name."



The original dialogue that survives in the film is aphoristic. Garrett and Glazer hoped to remain faithful to Hemingway's novel by transplanting dialogue directly into the screenplay. For example, the memorable expression about wine that "took the enamel off your teeth and left it on the roof of your mouth" (41) can be found both in the film and in the book. In the book, it is one of Frederic's private thoughts, but the film, abstaining from voiceover narration, converts the line to dialogue. Other colorful drinking expressions survive: Rinaldi tells Frederic, "I will get you drunk and take out your liver and put you in a good Italian liver and make you a man again." During the scene in which Frederic waits in a bunker with the other drivers, Manera's line, "If everybody would not attack the war would be over" (54), appears out of context. Therefore, in the film, it appears as an awkwardly inserted nonsequitur. In the book, Manera says the line in response to a story about the Italian army executing cowardly soldiers. The book shows how the working-class drivers, though they despise the military police, care little for the soldiers executed for inaction: "They were afraid. The officers all came from such good families" (52). They blame the war on the wealthy upper class: "There is a class that controls a country that is stupid and does not realize anything and never can. That is why we have this war" (54). The drivers' populist politics, however, are lost in the film version, where Manera's denatured line attempts profundity but succeeds only in elliptically suggesting the context which gave it meaning in the book.

Sayres Rudy argues that the film *A Farewell to Arms* cannot convey the novel's textual vagueness because of cinema's tendency toward specificity. During the garden scene, Catherine tells Frederic she was brought up to believe there was an answer to everything. When Frederic responds, "[t]hat's awfully nice" (18), the reader experiences uncertainty—and, by extension,

Catherine's uncertainty—about whether Frederic's attitude is resigned or petulant. Cooper erases that silence when he performs the line and interprets it for the viewer.

The novel's textual silences juxtapose two dimensions of reality: perceptual (subjective) meaning and objective (experiential) meaning (Dasgupta 265). For the protagonists, the "picturesque" perception of the front proves contrary to their direct experience. When Rinaldi asks Frederic what heroic acts he was committing when he was wounded, assuring him of a medal for his bravery, Frederic says he was blown up eating cheese. As a war nurse, Catherine has treated soldiers who receive more than a "sabre cut," a "shot through the soldier," or something else "picturesque" (20). The following lines are from when Catherine tells Frederic about her fiancé, who was killed in the war:

"This is the picturesque front," I said.

"Yes," she said. "People can't realize what France is like. If they did, it couldn't all go on. He didn't have a sabre cut. They blew him all to bits."

I didn't say anything (20).

When the narrator states Frederic does not "say anything," the reader perceives Frederic's deliberate blankness, but Cooper cannot perform absent action—he can only stand there (Rudy 89). Evan Horowitz makes adjacent observations vis-à-vis significant absence in literary iconography (e.g., Dorian Gray's portrait, Mr. Hyde's face, and Quasimodo's monstrosity); these symbols are not "specific, delimitable, embodied, [or] picturable" (470). Rather, they are powerful because of their inexplicability, a quality that can prove difficult to preserve on film.

One manifestation of *A Farewell to Arms*'s experiential juxtaposition is prolepsis. Catherine fears rain "because sometimes I see me dead in it" (135), foretelling her death at the end of the novel: "After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in

the rain” (355). Prolepsis plays to near comic effect during the bunker scene mentioned earlier. Voraciously consuming wine, spaghetti, and cheese, Frederic and the other drivers guess the make of the bombs exploding around them. “Four hundred twenty,” one says. “No, three hundred fives,” says another. “Sounded like a Skoder to me,” Frederic says. Moments later, the bunker explodes, wounding Frederic. One of the drivers carrying Frederic says, “You were right, Lieutenant Henry—it was a Skoder gun!” These lines are adapted directly from the novel except for the last. It is a clever addition, capitalizing on the dark humor that lies between perception and experience.

However, the film fails to provide a visual equivalent for the absence of commas, repetitions, and conflated pronouns that stylize Hemingway’s description of the explosion:

I felt myself rush bodily out of myself and out and out and out and all the time bodily in the wind. I went out swiftly, all of myself, and I knew I was dead and that it had all been a mistake to think you just died. Then I floated, and instead of going on I felt myself slide back. I breathed and I was back (58).

The film shows the explosion in a single, static shot. There is a flicker of light, an eruption of earth, and a rolling cloud of dust. The sound of the explosion—deep, bassy, and rumbling—is impressive, and Harold C. Lewis won the Academy Award for Best Sound for such a feat.

However, Cooper’s performance, moaning “my leg,” fails to relate the metaphysical nature of Frederic’s experience in the book. The film’s ability to perform Frederic’s subjectivity is restricted by classical Hollywood’s conventionally third-person perspective.

Cinematographer Charles Lang meets this problem with a sequence of innovative first-person camera perspectives, for which he won an Academy Award. When a wounded Frederic arrives at a hospital in Milan, the camera takes on a restricted narrative perspective. The

audience is only able to see what Frederic can see laid out on a stretcher. Attendants pop in and out of frame from above, looking and speaking directly into the camera. At one point, the nurse superintendent retrieves his medical papers from his coat pocket. When Frederic sees only the vaulted ceiling passing by, the viewer experiences the lack of information along with him. Both Frederic and the viewer, trapped in unfamiliar surroundings, desperately want to see Catherine. Eventually, Catherine appears and kisses Frederic (i.e., the camera). Borzage directed Hayes to “make love to the camera” (qtd. in Phillips 26). After Catherine leaves, the nurse superintendent checks Frederic’s temperature. “Fetch the doctor!” she cries. “It’s a miracle you’re not delirious with such a fever!” Frederic replies, “It’s not what you think.” Though the sequence addresses the discrepancy between the book and film’s narrative perspectives, it does not solve it. Most of the rest of the film is shot in an objective, third-person camera perspective.

Though *A Farewell to Arms* boasts high production values, Borzage relegates the war to the background and foregrounds the love story. In doing so, the narrative perspective shifts from Frederic to Catherine. When Frederic takes a train to Bainsizza to return to the war after his convalescent leave, the narrative focuses on Catherine’s perspective. Secretly, she follows him and watches his train depart. A close-up shows the blinking light from the gaps between the train cars flashing across her face. Lighting in the film is often dark, and the heavy use of shadow in the scene, especially on her face, is virtuosic.

Another scene shows Catherine in Brissago, Switzerland, writing a letter to Frederic about her “luxurious” hotel suite. As she reads the letter out loud, the camera pans across the room, revealing its actually poor condition. When Catherine says the “maroon-velvet carpet is ankle-deep,” the camera exposes a tattered rug. “I’m an awful liar darling,” she confesses to a portrait of Frederic. “It’s a terrible place.”

Frederic's letter-writing follows Catherine's, fading from the portrait on Catherine's desk to Rinaldi fixing his mustache in a mirror. The two frames act as a portal, a connection between the lovers that is obstructed by Rinaldi's censorship of their letters. Turning away from the mirror, Rinaldi tries to persuade Frederic to accompany him to a party at the Villa Rosa brothel. Frederic declines: he is not drinking and wants to write Catherine a letter instead. While Frederic used alcohol and sex in the past to anesthetize himself against the suffering that surrounded him, his newly discovered love has replaced such protection—a vivifying agent rather than a numbing one, yet just as addictive and consuming.

Though the narrative partly shifts to Catherine's perspective, Borzage depicts Frederic's experience in beautifully framed moments. After lying with Catherine in the garden, Frederic returns to the room he shares with Rinaldi. He lights a cigarette from a candle, blows the candle out, and lies awake smoking in bed. Moonlight from his bedside window faintly illuminates his face. As he draws on his cigarette, his face glows with its growing fire. The same scene from the book reads: "I knocked over [Rinaldi's] candle with the pillow and got into bed in the dark. Rinaldi picked up the candle, lit it and went on reading" (28). Hemingway's version is stoic. Borzage's version is quite moving.

Borzage's decision to focus on the lovers rather than the war is signaled in the opening shot of the film, which shows an idyllic Venetian countryside. Panning to the left, the camera reveals a soldier who initially appears to be sleeping under a tree until the frame exposes his left leg ends in a stump. Abruptly, the soundtrack music fades to the rumbling of ambulance engines, visible in the background making their way up a steep mountain road. The camera briefly stays on the dead soldier, temporarily foregrounding the war before cutting away to Frederic.

War is only explicitly shown in one scene: an expressionistic montage of the Battle of Caporetto. Strafing planes fire upon refugees, wounded soldiers, and Italian troops alike. A gauze-wrapped soldier collapses in a crucifix pose. Shells blast a white-crossed veteran cemetery. Various close-ups of Frederic reinforce his perspective of the atrocities. The sequence successfully depicts the atrocities of war while ignoring the novel's condemnation of the Italian army.

Hemingway details the Italian defeat at Caporetto and the chaos of the retreat to the Piave in great detail, where Frederic's decision to desert is both existential and moral. While Frederic fears execution by the military police, he is also disillusioned by the war's senselessness. In the film, Frederic deserts because he has not received any letters from Catherine. However, even this motivation is anesthetized. The film invents an exchange in which Frederic tells the priest about his plan to desert and find Catherine. The priest grants his moral sanction: "May the lord bless and preserve you." The changes betray the novel's nihilistic worldview. In the novel, it is precisely due to the failure of religious, political, and national ideologies to provide the war with any source of meaning that Frederic deserts.

The reduction of war material was partly due to censorship concerns. The catastrophe at Caporetto was a source of national shame for Italy. Hays warned Paramount that the novel's war material could cause Italy to ban not only *A Farewell to Arms* but all Hollywood films (Laurence 158). The Italian Embassy and prominent Italian American banker Dr. A. H. Giannini served as counsel during the production (Leff and Simmons 49). The film's deference to Italian political pressure is evident in the text prologue, which recalls Italy's victories at the Piave and Marne rivers: "Disaster as well as victory is written for every nation on the record of the World War, but

high on the rolls of glory two names are inscribed—The Marne and the Piave.” The prologue ignores the ignominious defeats that preceded them.

Other insertions and alterations ensure Italy’s satisfaction with the picture. When Frederic deserts and flees to Milan, he puts an advertisement in the newspaper telling Catherine to meet him at the Hotel Strassa. The newspaper headline reads, “Italian Armies Successful In Great Piave Offensive: Heroic Defense On Mount Grappa.” Later, at a café across the street from the hospital where Catherine is giving birth, Frederic hears about a great Italian victory. In the book, he only reads about a breakthrough on the British front.

Borzage ignores the novel’s apprehensive faith by showing Frederic praying to God to save Catherine’s life. Frederic struggles to speak through his tears, promising Catherine he will always love her. Catherine’s dignity in the face of death is compelling. She tells the doctors not to inform Frederic that she is dying. She brushes her hair and applies blush because, she says, “[Frederic] never liked to see me pale.”

The film’s most significant alteration is the ending. In the book, neither Catherine nor her baby survives childbirth. However, Paramount executives thought a happy ending was more commercially viable. Only a year before, when the ending of Universal’s war romance *Waterloo Bridge* (1931) saw the female protagonist killed during an air raid, audiences were so upset that exhibitors cut the last few minutes of footage for future screenings (Laurence 45). Perhaps hoping to prevent a similar problem, Borzage filmed two endings: one in which Catherine survives and another more faithful to the book. In the happy ending, it only seems Catherine has died. After church bells declare armistice, Frederic carries her to the hospital window, stricken by the cruel irony of her death amid the celebration. Then, miraculously, she revives. “Armistice!” Frederic says. “Peace,” Catherine says. The tragic ending differs only in the final

moments. Catherine does not revive. With Catherine in his arms at the window, Frederic says, “Peace...peace.” Paramount allowed exhibitors to choose which version to screen. However, most theaters showed the tragic ending because it was the version that had been screened by the major critics and been favorably received by them (Phillips 25).

When the Associated Press reported that Paramount believed he “had in mind a happy ending when he wrote the book,” Hemingway answered: “I did not intend a happy ending” (qtd. in “Hemingway Mad” 40). The ending Hemingway wrote in the book was the result of a long, deliberative writing process. Scribner’s 2012 edition of *A Farewell to Arms* includes the forty-seven different endings Hemingway attempted in his original manuscripts. Allowing Catherine to live would have violated what might be taken as the novel’s thesis statement:

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 in 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. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry (267).

The mysterious evil force described in the passage befalls Catherine because she is brave. Frederic tells her through the novel, “They won't get us...[b]ecause you're too brave. Nothing ever happens to the brave” (149) and “You're a good brave girl” (334). World evil was too pessimistic a concept for a film’s commercial viability in 1932. Audiences needed a villain, so Rinaldi was refashioned for the role. In the book, Frederic and Catherine’s letters are censored by the Italian military. In the film, Rinaldi personally censors the letters. Later in the film, when Catherine finds her letters have been returned, she faints and, consequently, has a miscarriage.



Even the film's tragic ending diverged considerably from the novel. Armistice is not yet declared in the book but was invented for the film to heighten the ending's pathos. Hemingway describes Catherine's death dispassionately: "It seems she had one hemorrhage after another. They couldn't stop it. I went into the room and stayed with Catherine until she died. She was unconscious all the time, and it did not take her very long to die" (355). Of the book, a *New York Times* reviewer wrote,

A Victorian telling the story of Henry and Catherine would have waxed sentimental; he would have sought the tears of his reader. And he would surely have shed tears as he wrote. We do not attempt to say how much Mr. Hemingway may have been affected by his narrative; but it is certain he has no desire to see his readers weep (Hutchison 3).

However, Borzage was still wedded to Victorian sensibilities. Borzage's ending waxes sentimental, playing Wagner's "Liebestode" from *Tristan und Isolde*, which describes a lover rising after death. Borzage visually reinforces the life-after-death theme when Frederic lifts Catherine from her deathbed and carries her to a window shining with heavenly light.

### **Conclusion**

Though Borzage claimed, "[w]e followed the book more closely...than ever has been done before in Hollywood" (qtd. in Dumont 175), Borzage used Hemingway's book merely as a pretext for one of his signature melodramas. Borzage's films often depict young lovers in political distress and portray love as a redemptive force capable of disrupting narrative logic, such as in *7th Heaven* (1927), *Green Light* (1937), and *The Mortal Storm* (1940). Borzage's oeuvre defines the spiritual nature of love against backgrounds of conflict and oppression. The protagonists' hostile surroundings are both the originary condition of their love and the ultimate

obstacle to the sublimation of their happiness in films such as *Lucky Star* (1929), *Man's Castle* (1933), and *History is Made at Night* (1937).

*A Farewell to Arms* was a great success, appearing on the 1933 Motion Picture Herald roster of Box Office Champions (Leff, "Thunderous Reception" 46). The film was re-released in 1938. With censorship standards much stricter than in 1932, the Production Code Administration conducted a significant recutting of the film, reducing the original runtime from ninety minutes to seventy eight. Studios' use of the fade-out as a stand-in for sexual intimacy had become so well-known that the fade-out during the garden scene was substituted for a straight cut. A shot of Frederic placing a wedding ring on Catherine's finger was even inserted into the time-lapse following the hospital bedroom scene to emphasize the legitimacy of the lovers' affair (Leff, "*A Farewell to Arms*" 73).

In 1946, Paramount sold the rights to Warner Bros. The studio produced a new adaptation of the story, Michael Curtiz's *Force of Arms* (1951), which did not credit Hemingway. It changed the names of the characters and took place during World War II instead. David O. Selznick purchased the rights four years later and produced a critically and commercially disastrous 1957 remake starring Rock Hudson and Jennifer Jones.

Hemingway's well-published aversion to the Paramount version intrigued the public with the autobiographical nature of its content, so much so that Richard Attenborough's *In Love and War* (1996), starring Chris O'Donnell as Hemingway and Sandra Bullock as Agnes von Kurowsky, would depict the events upon which *A Farewell to Arms* was based.

On one occasion, Hemingway took his friend Josie Merck to see Paramount's *A Farewell to Arms*. During the final shot, when a flock of doves soars across the sky before fading to black, Hemingway whispered, "Josie, those are just damn sea gulls" (qtd. in Reynolds 110).

## THE KILLERS

The chapter discusses *The Killers* (1946), the fourth film adaptation of a Hemingway work. It was based on Hemingway's short story "The Killers," which first appeared in the March 1927 issue of *Scribner's Magazine*, accompanied by illustrations by C. LeRoy Baldrige. It was collected in *Men Without Women* (1927) and anthologized in *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories* (1938), *The Snows of Kilimanjaro and Other Stories* (1961), and *The Nick Adams Stories* (1972). Mark Hellinger produced the first film adaptation in 1946, starring Burt Lancaster and Ava Gardner. In 1956, Andrei Tarkovsky, Alexander Gordon, and Marika Beiku directed a student film adaptation for the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography. A.E. Hotchner wrote and produced a television film for CBS's *Buick-Electra Playhouse* dramatic anthology series in 1959. In 1964, Universal produced the story as the first made-for-TV movie, starring Lee Marvin, Angie Dickinson, and John Cassavetes. As evidenced by its frequent anthologization and adaptation, it is one of Hemingway's most popular and enduring stories.

Hemingway wrote that Robert Siodmak's *The Killers* (1946) "is a good picture and the only good picture ever made of a story of mine" ("Art" 11). The film has since been considered a classic film noir, one covering a wide range of the genre's tropes and themes. However, only the first twelve minutes are from Hemingway's story, which might be why he always fell asleep after the first reel (Hotchner 11).

In Hemingway's short story, three men spend a quiet evening in Henry's lunchroom in the small town of Summit, Illinois: George, who runs the place; Sam, the cook; and Nick Adams, the sole customer. Two hitmen named Al and Max invade the lunchroom, tie up Sam and Nick, and await the arrival of their target, an ex-prizefighter named Ole "Swede" Anderson. When Swede does not show, the hitmen leave, and Nick runs to warn Swede about the attempt on his

life. Swede refuses to flee the town, saying he is “through with all that running around.”

Disturbed by Swede’s passivity in the face of death, Nick decides to leave Summit.

The 1946 film version adapts the story verbatim as its prologue and then continues where Hemingway leaves off. A life insurance investigator named Jim Riordan (Edmond O’Brien) is assigned to pay Swede’s (Burt Lancaster) \$2,500 death benefit. The payee is Mary Ellen “Queenie” Daugherty (Queenie Smith), a maid who once saved Swede’s life. Riordan soon becomes obsessed with the mystery behind Swede’s murder and doggedly pieces together the events leading up to his death, despite the disapproval of his boss, R.S. Kenyon (Donald MacBride). His investigation stimulates a series of flashbacks from characters who were close to Swede. Riordan learns that after a hand injury ended his boxing career, Swede took up a life of crime and became involved with a woman named Kitty Collins (Ava Gardner). Swede ended up serving time for a piece of Kitty’s stolen jewelry. While Swede was in prison, Kitty took up with a criminal named “Big Jim” Colfax (Albert Dekker). After his release, Swede agreed to participate in a robbery organized by Colfax. When the gang split up after the robbery, planning to divide the loot later, Kitty came to Swede’s hideout and told him that Colfax and the rest of the gang were planning to double-cross him and cut him out of his share of the loot. Following Kitty’s information, Swede double-crossed his associates and stole the whole loot at gunpoint. Kitty then stole the loot from Swede and disappeared. Betrayed by the woman loved, and with the rest of the gang believing he still had the loot, Swede started a quiet new life as a gas station attendant. Years later, Colfax accidentally discovered Swede at his gas station. Tired of running and knowing Colfax’s assassins were on their way, Swede resigned himself to his fate. Riordan’s investigation reveals that Collins went straight to Colfax, to whom she secretly became engaged,

with the money she stole from Swede. Colfax framed the whole setup so he could keep the take for himself.

In expanding the short story, the film attempts to imitate the common tropes and themes found in Hemingway's fiction. In depicting Swede as attractive, physically prodigious, and slightly stupid, the film consciously recreates the attributes of the typical Hemingway hero. The expanded story remains faithful to Hemingway's themes because Swede's tragic fate arises from his breaking his code of honor when he falls for Kitty's lies and betrays his associates. Following the conventions of noir, the film invents two characters: Kitty Collins as the femme fatale and Jim Riordan as the hard-boiled detective. Even here, the film continues to follow Hemingway's lead: Kitty Collins bears certain similarities to Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*. Riordan is not the film's protagonist but functions primarily as a vehicle for inciting the flashbacks in which Swede, the real protagonist, appears. However, the film violates Hemingway's philosophy of omission by making explicit the narrative material intended to remain implicit in the story. Finally, by centering on Swede as the main character, the film displaces Nick Adams's role as the apprentice hero in the story.

### **Background**

Two important sections are missing from the beginning and the end of Hemingway's short story: what Anderson did to warrant a contract on his life and a description of his death at the hands of the killers. Hemingway later recalled, "That story probably had more left out of it than anything I ever wrote...I left out all Chicago, which is hard to do in 2951 words" ("Art" 11). The narrative ellipses are characteristic of Hemingway's "iceberg theory" of omission, which is defined in *Death in the Afternoon*:

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water (183).

Hemingway believed that, like an iceberg, the bulk of a story's thematic depth should remain hidden below the surface. "Once the reader has become aware of what Hemingway is doing in those parts of his work which lie below the surface," writes Carlos Baker, "he is likely to find symbols operating everywhere, and in a series of beautiful crystallizations, compact and buoyant enough to carry considerable weight" (117). Hemingway first practiced the style as a cub reporter for *The Kansas City Star*. On his first day on the job, he was handed the *Star's* style sheet, a set of rules governing the kind of writing expected from the paper's employees. Its maxims included, "Use short sentences," "Use vigorous English," "Avoid the use of adjectives," and "Eliminate every superfluous word" ("The Star Copy Style"). Hemingway called them "[t]he best rules I ever learned in the business of writing" (qtd. in *Ernest Hemingway, Cub Reporter* xi). He later applied the doctrine to his fiction, paring prose and narrative structure to their barest possible forms.

Because narration in "The Killers" is limited, the reader must look to the dialogue for information. The short story's opening scene is suspenseful because Al and Max do not initially reveal what their mission is. When Nick is directed to move to the other side of the lunch counter, he asks, "What's the idea?" "There isn't any idea," Max answers (82). The reader gradually understands the two men are assassins by piecing together clues from the narration. The men wear matching derby hats and overcoats, a cliché uniform of 1920s-era mobsters. They

eat with their gloves on to avoid leaving fingerprints. They watch the mirror behind the bar so they can shoot Swede when he comes in for dinner.

The killers' meaningless banter stands in stark contrast to Swede's quiet stoicism. "I got in wrong," (93) is the only clue Swede provides about his past. "He must have got mixed up in something in Chicago," George guesses. "Double-crossed somebody. That's what they kill them for" (95). As the only character present in all four scenes, Nick performs the role of observer. By omitting a description of Swede's death and centering the last act on Nick's decision to leave town, Hemingway makes Nick's discovery of evil the story's thematic focus. Throughout the Nick Adams story cycle, Nick often comes into manhood under the influence of a code hero, such as his father in "Indian Camp" or the Italian Major in "In Another Country." "[I]t is by observing their behavior under stress," writes Gene D. Phillips, "that he learns how to face the harsher and more perplexing aspects of adult life" (67). Sam and George already possess the jaded wisdom of manhood. After the incident, Nick finds them returning to business as usual: "They did not say anything. George reached down for a towel and wiped the counter" (95). For Nick, who "had never had a towel in his mouth before" (89), the world now appears bleak and senseless. Though Nick has borne witness to Swede's grace under pressure, he resists his initiation. However, Nick's willful ignorance cannot last. He cannot escape his fate by leaving town—just as Swede could not. Nick and Swede's final reckonings lie beyond the story's last page.

Manuscripts from the Ernest Hemingway Collection at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library reveal an early title for the story was "The Matadors" (Fleming 313). Certain parallels exist between a matador's ritualistic killing of a bull and the business-like way Al and Max hunt Swede. It is no coincidence that Swede is called "Ole" after the bullfighting cheer. George

Monteiro compares how a matador uses a bull's habitual behavior against him to bring him to his death and how Al and Max wait for Swede to come into the lunchroom for his ritual dinner (40). Further, Kenneth G. Johnston notes that the killers enter the lunchroom at five o'clock—the time when a bullfight traditionally begins (248). In the short story, Hemingway mentions the wall behind Swede no fewer than six times. By staying in his room, Swede has chosen his *querencia*: “a place which develops in the course of the fight where the bull makes his home...[i]n this place he feels that he has his back against the wall” (Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* 145). Though a bull is usually most dangerous in his *querencia*, Swede's fighting spirit has already died, making his gangland execution a mere formality. Swede is in the final stage of the bullfight, the *aplomado*: “he has usually lost his wind, and while his strength is still intact, his speed is gone. He no longer carries his head high...since he has obviously been beaten, to himself as well as the spectator, in everything he has attempted up to that time” (Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* 142). “The Killers” applies the profound realities of life and death present in Spanish bullfighting to the mundane setting of the Midwestern US. The contrasting elements emphasize the characters' existential struggles and inability to escape their fate.

Hollywood had been interested in adapting the story since 1928 (Leff, *Hemingway* 87). It was not until 1946, however, that Universal obtained the rights for a low-budget, independent production by the newly formed Mark Hellinger Productions, Inc. After postwar labor strikes raised production costs and international import quotas restricted foreign box office revenues, many Hollywood studios turned away from star-filled, special effects-laden genre films and toward more realistic, smaller-scale dramas tackling the social problems of postwar life. “At Universal, noir-photographed thrillers and crime melodramas...became the studio's in-house



style. They were also dependable and profitable: in 1946, *The Dark Mirror* and *The Killers* were box-office hits for Universal” (Greco 10).

During the 1930s, German émigré directors and technicians at Universal had applied German Expressionism to the horror genre with such success that the entire cast of classic monsters, including Dracula, Frankenstein’s monster, the Mummy, and the Wolf Man, was affectionately dubbed “Universal Studios monsters.” During the 1940s, the same directors—including Robert Siodmak, who had directed *Son of Dracula* (1943)—applied German Expressionism to the crime drama.

They found their stride the year after the war, a period that might arguably be called the greatest in film noir: *Gilda*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *The Big Sleep*, *Notorious*, *The Blue Dahlia*, *The Stranger*, *Deception*, and *The Killers* all held premiers in that calendar year. The films of 1946 addressed the dramatic increase in violent crime rates following World War II, when millions of GIs returned home from overseas (Klebba 196). “Whoever went to the movies with any regularity in 1946,” screenwriter D.M. Marshman wrote, “was caught in the midst of Hollywood’s profound post-war affection for morbid drama. From January through December, deep shadows, clutching hands, exploding revolvers, sadistic villains, and heroines tormented with deeply rooted diseases of the mind, flashed across the screen in a panting display of psychoneuroses, unsublimated sex, and murder most foul” (qtd. in Schatz 378). Making violent crime its subject and disillusionment its atmosphere, film noir “held up a dark mirror to postwar America and reflected its moral anarchy” (Cook 452-453).

During the 1940s, rationing, blackouts, and other wartime restrictions ended Hollywood’s public image of Dionysian plenty. Many of the industry’s leading talent were away fighting the war, including Clark Gable, Henry Fonda, and James Stewart. Many others worked with the

United Service Organization (USO) to entertain Allied troops abroad. Directors such as William Wyler, Frank Capra, John Ford, George Stevens, and John Huston made propaganda documentaries for military and government agencies. By the end of the war, a quarter of Hollywood's male employees were serving in uniform (Mintz et al. 20). Those who remained worked with the Office of War Information's (OWI) Bureau of Motion Pictures to produce patriotic entertainment about the importance of home front responsibility and self-sacrifice. OWI Director Elmer Davis wrote, "The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized" (qtd. in Koppes and Black 64). During the war, Hollywood posted record-breaking profits. The major studios' combined profits surged from \$20 million in 1940 to \$60 million in 1943 (Schatz 131). The American public flocked to theaters not only to escape the stresses of wartime life but also to see the newsreels showing the latest news from the front.

As industrial mobilization became an increasingly vital part of the war effort, Franklin D. Roosevelt formed the National War Labor Board in 1942 to mediate labor-management disputes and prevent disruptions in the supply chain. Organized labor largely supported the government's war efforts, agreeing to no-strike pledges and wage controls to help industries meet wartime contracts. "Meanwhile, they watched business leaders move for the first time directly into the government, taking up positions on the War Board, which set the industrial policies that governed them. Due to these policies, business profits exceeded 250% during this period" (Broe 170). When industries commenced massive layoffs after the war, workers felt exploited by a united government-business front. The subsequent strikes were opposed by government and business leaders, resulting in the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which greatly restricted unions' organizing power and caused organized labor to move outside the law.

The labor movement found many affinities to the hardboiled detective figure that emerged after the war: a cynical attitude toward authority, a dogged determination to get paid, and a sense of justice extrinsic to that prescribed by law. Before the war, the classical detective represented a hero of law and order, typified in James Cagney's portrayal of the "government man" in *G Men* (1935). After the war, police often presented an obstacle to the hardboiled detective's investigation. After Sam Spade, the private detective of *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), becomes a suspect in a murder, he must find the real murderer and clear his name. In *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), a police interrogation of Philip Marlowe about two murders provides the frame for his narration of the rest of the story.

Returning home from war, many GIs struggled to resume civilian life, a problem that was addressed by noir films such as *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), *Dead Reckoning* (1947), *Act of Violence* (1948), *Crossfire* (1947), and *Kansas City Confidential* (1952). Many others, such as *Out of the Past* (1947), *The Reckless Moment* (1949), and *Gun Crazy* (1950), dealt with the stresses on women, whose wartime jobs were threatened by men returning home from the war. By the end of the war, women represented a full third of the workforce, and most wanted to keep their jobs (Truhler ch. 13).

After World War II, the femme fatale came to embody many patriarchal anxieties: the unfaithful woman who committed infidelities while her partner was away during the war; the ambitious woman who refused to give up her wartime job, a job that rightfully belonged to a man; and the castrating woman who led men to their downfall and destruction. The femme fatale is defined by her sexuality: "The power of the femme fatale is augmented by formal aspects including composition and lighting, she is the center of the frame and the focus of attention" (Wackett 7). Janey Place writes, "Film noir is a male fantasy" (47). However, Place

acknowledges that “[noir] does give us one of the few periods of film in which women are active, not static symbols, are intelligent and powerful, if destructively so, and derive power, not weakness, from their sexuality” (47). While femmes fatales may fail to triumph over a delimiting male gaze that defines them only by aspects directly related to men (i.e., their sexuality), the representation can be appropriated, and its meaning changed.

Like Hemingway, the film’s producer, Mark Hellinger, began his journalism career as a Broadway reporter, writing for *Zit’s Weekly* and the *New York Daily News*. In 1931, he published his first book of short stories, *Moon Over Broadway*. A second collection, *The Ten Million*, followed in 1934. In 1936, he produced the Broadway play *Double Dummy*. During the war, he worked as a producer-writer under Hal Wallis at Warner Bros., overseeing Raoul Walsh’s hard-edged crime dramas *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) (based on Hellinger’s short story “The World Moves On”), *They Drive by Night* (1940), and *High Sierra* (1941). In August 1945, he formed an independent producing unit within Universal. For his premiere production, he followed the advice given to him by fellow producer Jerry Wald. “You’re nuts about Hemingway,” Wald told him. “Why don’t you buy some of his short stories? He’s a hard-boiled writer and you’re a hard-boiled producer. It could be a good team” (qtd. in Bishop 311). Hollywood’s three previous Hemingway adaptations had all been commercial successes, and Hellinger hoped Hemingway’s name would help put his new production unit on the map. In September 1945, Hellinger told Universal executive Bob Sparks, “The exploitation values are little short of gigantic” (qtd. in Server 114).

On November 24, 1945, Universal gave the project the green light, and Hellinger purchased the rights for \$36,750, making “The Killers” the most expensive short story ever produced up to that point. Apparently, Hemingway still distrusted Hollywood’s intentions. One

clause in the contract read, “Owner agrees no version thereof shall ever be presented in vaudeville” (qtd. in Server 115). As part of the deal, Hellinger agreed to exaggerate the price and say that he paid \$50,000 for the story, but he went ahead and claimed he paid \$75,000 to attract even more press (Server 114).

From the start, Hellinger’s production faced a problem the previous adaptations had not. Rather than compressing a novel to fit feature film length, the script needed to expand the original 2951-word short story. The screenplay would need to answer two questions: what Swede did in his past to warrant his death and why he would resign himself to it. Hellinger turned to Richard Brooks, whose recent novel *The Brick Foxhole* had just made the *New York Times*’s Best Seller list. According to biographer Douglass K. Daniel, Brooks flew to Sun Valley, Idaho to talk to Hemingway about the script. Brooks asked Hemingway, point blank, why Swede was killed in the short story. “Damned if I know,” said Hemingway. He asked Brooks the same question. “I don’t know,” said Brooks. “Probably had something to do with big money or a special woman.” “Or maybe both,” said Hemingway (qtd. in 39).

Hellinger and Brooks developed a backstory based on an actual Brooklyn heist, a meticulously planned and successful robbery of an ice factory payroll—but shortly afterward, “half the gang had been kicked off and the money had slipped away from the rest of ‘em” (qtd. in Buford 66). Hemingway’s story would serve as a prologue, and the rest of the film would follow as a flashback, covering the events leading up to Swede’s murder. As Hellinger explained to Hemingway’s agent Maurice Reiser,

Look, here’s my idea, for whatever it’s worth. As the story stands, the picture will run about eight minutes on the screen. A guy named Swede is warned that he’s going to be bumped off by torpedoes. Instead of running away he lies on his bed waiting for them to

come and get him. I figure after we run that part straight, just as Hemingway wrote it, the rest of the picture can be written as a gigantic flashback...finding out why they wanted to kill him and why he didn't try to save himself (qtd. in Bishop 313).

Brooks sent Hellinger a thirty-page treatment, including a high-stakes robbery and a dangerous femme fatale. Hellinger turned the draft over to John Huston, a filmmaker whose affinities to Hemingway in life and work led author Ian Freer to call him "cinema's Ernest Hemingway" (70). With the help of Anthony Veiller, Huston developed Brooks's draft into a full script. Because Huston was working for the US Army Signal Corps at the time and still under contract to Warner Bros., he had to forgo his writing credit: "I was in the Army and felt that a film credit might suggest to my superiors that I was not devoting all of my time to the job" (qtd. in Higham 65). He left his collaborator, Anthony Veiller, sole credit instead. "The script was in fact by Huston," Siodmak stated. "His name didn't appear on the credits because he was under contract to another studio at the time, but he wrote the script for us in his spare afternoons—with Tony Veiller cracking the whip occasionally" (qtd. in Taylor 182). Brooks's contribution went uncredited as well. Hellinger explained, "How's it going to look on the screen? 'Story by Ernest Hemingway and Richard Brooks.' People will say, 'Who the hell is Richard Brooks?'" (qtd. in Daniel 39-40). The arrangement became problematic when the screenplay was nominated for an Academy Award, leaving the trio uncertain who might have to accept the award if it ended up winning.

"[The] theory we have evolved for telling the story," Veiller informed Hellinger in December 1945, "[afforded] tremendous possibilities for something really off the beaten track" (qtd. in Server 116). The theory involved no fewer than eleven interlocking flashbacks, sequences occasioned by an insurance detective's investigation. Because the screenplay took great liberties in expanding the story, Universal executives feared incurring the author's wrath.

“[I]t might be a very good idea,” read one internal memo, “to have Mr. Hemingway bumped off before releasing the picture” (qtd. in Buford 66). Huston and Veiller completed the first draft in early February 1946. Hellinger made several revisions. He thought the film should start with Al and Max driving to the diner rather than arriving by train. Huston and Veiller had written that Swede’s face should be shrouded in shadow in the opening sequence, but Hellinger decided Swede’s expression of helplessness should remain visible. Hellinger wanted one of the gangster’s dying testimony modeled after American mobster Dutch Schultz’s deathbed stream-of-consciousness ravings (Server 117).

Hellinger forwarded the revised draft to the MPPDA for review. On March 5, it was returned with comments, including ten citations of excessive drinking. The MPPDA wrote that the final screenplay should “remove as much as possible the present over-emphasis on violence and murder...[and] illicit sex” (qtd. in Server 117). The original script specified a first-person perspective for the shot of Swede being gunned down, to which the MPPDA objected: “(Page 13) change showing of gun blasting straight into camera” (qtd. in Server 117). To reduce the sexual relationship between Swede and Collins, the MPPDA suggested, “(Page 65) Avoid showing unmade bed,” “(Page 115) Change line ‘she and the Swede shacked up together in an Atlantic City hotel,’” and “(Page 125) Should be played elsewhere than bedroom. Kitty and Swede should be fully clothed and end of sequence should be no suggestion of sex” (qtd. in Server 118). In one scene, Kitty’s line, “Break every bone in my body,” and the succeeding dissolve were found to be too suggestive of a sadomasochistic dimension to Kitty and the Swede’s relationship (Server 118). The killers’ sawed-off shotguns, which appeared in the short story and the first draft of the script, were classified as “modified weapons” and, therefore,

violated clause six of the Code's *Special Regulations of Crime in Motion Pictures*. In the final film version, they are changed to handguns.

The decline of censorship during the war became apparent in 1946 when the MPPDA allowed films to be distributed without a certificate of approval. The success of certificate-less blockbusters, including Howard Hughes's *The Outlaw* (1946) and David O. Selznick's *Duel in the Sun* (1946), proved the administration's growing irrelevance. As a result, some of the censor's comments were rejected in *The Killers*'s final version. Dumdum bullets—illegal missiles designed to expand upon impact—are used in the film despite the MPPDA's warning and even appear in one of the criminal's nicknames, "Dum-Dum" Clarke (Jack Lambert). Under the Code's rule that "the treatment of crimes against the law must not...make criminals seem heroic or justified" (qtd. in Leff and Simmons 298), the MPPDA asked for the removal of the "detailed method of payroll robbery" and "flaunting of loot" (qtd. in Server 118). The final film version contains both. Excessive drinking is retained in at least one scene, when Riordan elicits information from Swede's prison cellmate, Charleston (Vince Barnett), by getting him drunk. Sadomasochistic elements also recur throughout the film. Swede is gunned down in bed. During the sequence of the payroll robbery, the security guard is shot in the groin. "Blinky" Franklin (Jeff Corey), one of the criminals involved in the robbery, is killed by a dumdum bullet, which literally explodes inside him.

The revised script was finalized on April 3, 1946. Hellinger's first pick for director was Don Siegel. However, like Huston, Siegel could not escape his contract with Warner Bros. "Jack Warner, who hated Hellinger and loathed me, said an immediate, 'No,' and hung up," Siegel recalled in his autobiography (235). Robert Siodmak, who was under a long-term contract with Universal, was ultimately signed for the picture. Siodmak had begun his career at UFA, the



Berlin-based studio that had given birth to German Expressionism in the 1920s, before emigrating to Hollywood.

Hellinger solicited Siodmak's ideas for writing visual creativity into the script. Siodmak suggested ways to streamline some of the dialogue, which he thought contained too many humorous interjections. Siodmak recalled, "Hellinger was quite a reasonable producer, but with his journalistic training he always insisted on each scene ending with a telling remark, which in my opinion took a lot of the reality out of the film. So I always cut out the punchlines when he wasn't looking: it drove him wild for a bit, but finally he got the idea" (qtd. in Alpi 157).

Hellinger said,

Siodmak deserves special credit for his contributions to the screen treatment. Usually, when you hand a director a script, you are happy if he can bring out 85% of the potential dramatic values it contains. But when you give the script to a director like Siodmak, and he gives you back 125%—well, you've really got something there (qtd. in Lightman 437).

Hellinger drew up a budget of \$809,000, though this eventually grew to \$875,000 (Bishop 313). Still, the budget was tight. For the cast, Hellinger banked on the potential of lesser-known actors Burt Lancaster, Ava Gardner, and Edmond O'Brien.

Propelled by his success in the play *A Sound of Hunting* (1945), thirty-two-year-old Burt Lancaster moved to LA in January 1946 with only thirty dollars to his name (Karny 25). He was cast in Hal B. Wallis's *Desert Fury*, but it was not scheduled to begin shooting until later in the year. Seeking another role in the meantime, Lancaster convinced one of Wallis's employees, Marty Juroc, to send his *Desert Fury* screentest to Hellinger. The two arranged a meeting. Hellinger remembered,

This guy was big, really big. His hair was tousled—no tie—his suit looked as if it hadn't been pressed since C. Aubrey Smith was in short pants. But there was something about him. All the time I was talking to him, that smart guy was playing the dumb Swede for me. The Swede I had in mind was big, dumb, awkward, and fumbling. The day I met him, Lancaster was all four. When you got to know him, you realized he's anything but the last three (qtd. in Munn 26).

When Hellinger asked Lancaster what he thought about the script, Lancaster said, "Well, the first sixteen pages are Hemingway verbatim, and after that you have a rather interesting whodunnit film, but nothing comparable to Hemingway" (qtd. in Karney 27). Hellinger said, "Well, you're not really a dumb Swede after all" (qtd. in 27). Lancaster's athletic physique, built during his years as a circus acrobat, coupled with his service in the United States Army's Special Services Division, made him a fit match for the tough Hemingway hero required for the role.

As for the role of Kitty, Hellinger hoped to avoid the "blonde bombshell" cliché for the picture's femme fatale. On recommendation from producer Walter Wanger, Hellinger watched *Whistle Stop* (1946). He became convinced the young lead was attractive enough to cause a man to die for her. Ava Gardner, who had signed a seven-year contract with MGM in 1941, had yet to catch the public's attention. By 1946, she was more well-known for her short-lived marriage to Mickey Rooney than for her few bit roles.

Hellinger explained to Gardner that Kitty was a nice girl, "but linked up with the wrong people who supply her with the wrong cues in life" (qtd. in Server 121). The relationship between Kitty and Swede, "is one of frustration. They both know it is too bad they hadn't met before both of them were tangled up in their present situation. They might have married and had a full and happy life. As is, they are both destined for a short and unhappy one" (qtd. in Server

121-122). As Gardner's second marriage to bandleader Artie Shaw was quickly falling apart, she found many affinities in her character. "Siodmak encouraged Ava to tap into her emotional reserves in order to give Kitty life," write biographers Kendra Bean and Anthony Uzarowski. "Ava had never worked in this way before, and she suddenly became aware of all the anger, frustration, and insecurity she had bottled up for so long and that she was now able to channel into her character" (52).

Unlike Lancaster and Gardner, Edmond O'Brien, who plays Jim Riordan, was already an established actor when he signed with the picture. After Universal bought out the remainder of his contract with RKO so he could star in *The Amazing Mrs. Holliday* (1943), O'Brien left to serve in the US Army Air Force. Hellinger made an effort to hire returning military personnel: both Lancaster and O'Brien had served overseas during the war.

Shooting began on April 29, 1946, and finished in eight weeks. By all accounts, it was pleasant production. O'Brien remembered Siodmak was exceptionally skilled at motivating his inexperienced stars:

We were all new—Burt, Ava, and me; Siodmak and Hellinger gave us a feeling of being part of something important and a sense of what we could do with a scene that gave us extraordinary confidence. We all became fast friends. Siodmak would give each actor a key word: to me, 'inscrutable,' to Ava, 'smiling—but not smiling,' and so on. He taught us to convey emotion with the absolute minimum of facial expression (qtd. in Higham 63).

Publicist Bob Rains remembered: "Of all the movie sets I have been on, it was one of the most friendly. No prima donnas, no problems or arguments...Hellinger made sure everyone was happy. He was that kind of guy. If a studio guard showed him where to park his car, the next day

he sent the guard a big basket of liquor” (qtd. in Server 126). Hellinger endeavored to promote the careers of his fledgling stars, even hosting an “Ava Gardner Celebration Week” in Wilson, North Carolina. The celebration was capped by Gardner’s award for the *National Association of Chiropodists*’s “The Most Beautiful and Healthy Legs in America” (Server 127).

The film’s promotional campaign prominently featured Hemingway and Hellinger. Hellinger was often billed as “Broadway’s Master Storyteller” (qtd. in Spicer 143). One ad brochure’s headline even ran the film title third behind author and producer: “Sell Hemingway...Sell Hellinger...Sell The Killers” (qtd. in Bishop 316). A quiz accompanying the brochure asked, “What do Mark Hellinger and Ernest Hemingway, producer and author of *The Killers*, have in common? Answer: Both achieved fame as writers” (qtd. in Bishop 316). An eight-story tall poster covering two sides of a Broadway building read, “TENSE! TAUT! TERRIFIC! Told the untamed Hemingway way!” (Schwartz 31). The size of Hemingway’s name dwarfed both the title and the names of the stars. Advertisements also emphasized the film’s uncensored elements. One movie poster was accompanied by a red stamp reading, “Not suitable for general exhibition.” Of course, the film was approved by the MPPDA for public exhibition.

After preview screenings revealed the audience’s particular interest in Gardner, though, advertisements shifted focus to the female star: “Every kiss carved his name on another bullet” and “Some guys never find out...WOMEN can be KILLERS too” (qtd. in Server 129). The trailer also emphasized Gardner’s role: “Raw, rugged, ruthless drama of a man who gambled his luck-his love-his life for the treachery of a girl’s lips” and “No escape... from this kind of love. No retreat...from this kind of danger.”

This emphasis on advertising the film as “raw, rugged, [and] ruthless” fit with the film’s cinematographic style. During filming, Hellinger wanted scenes lit “exactly as they would be

seen in real life” (qtd. in Server 123). In practice, this translated to a minimalist, practical lighting system. Cinematographer Elwood Bredell recalled, “The Hemingway story was a perfect chance for me because I had always wanted to take a crack at a show where nothing had to be beautiful” (qtd. in 123). The actors received little makeup, and Gardner appeared barefaced. Bredell recalled, “All we did was rub a little Vaseline into her skin for a sheen effect” (qtd. in 123). Gardner’s complexion produced such a pure, natural white that Bredell ended up basing his whole lighting scheme around it, creating, “in many scenes an extreme form of contrast, the whitest whites, deepest blacks and eliminating as much as possible all gray halftones” (123). Bredell employed low-key lighting to cast dark shadows and deep pools of light on the characters, emphasizing their moral ambiguity. Siodmak had coached Bredell on the principles of atmospheric lighting on the sets of *Phantom Lady* (1944) and *Christmas Holiday* (1944), where they employed controlled lighting and dramatic camera angles to craft some of the bleakest film noir environments of the 1940s. Bredell remembered, “[Siodmak] could light a football field with a match” (qtd. in Hillier and Phillips 205).

### **Analysis**

Hemingway’s short story takes place at dusk: “Outside it was getting dark. The streetlight came on outside the window” (78). The film begins in total darkness. The first shot opens with the camera positioned in the backseat of Al and Max’s car. The car’s headlights slice into the night, illuminating the twists and turns in the road and eventually a sign: “Brentwood, New Jersey.” The viewer is made into a passenger, taken along on a ride with two contract killers and made to witness a murder and its ensuing investigation.

In a shot closely modeled after Edward Hopper’s *Nighthawks*, the killers walk around a street corner and briefly investigate the Tri-State Station (the gas station where Swede works

under the alias “Pete Lunn”) before crossing the street to enter Henry’s diner through separate entrances. Only four arc lights illuminate the street set, where the killers’ faces are first introduced to the audience, emerging from the shadows to be profiled in harsh lamplight.

The lunchroom’s interior is narrow. A long counter runs the length of its boxcar-like dimensions. Practical lights placed along the walls cast long, ominous shadows on the ceiling. Siodmak angles the camera low enough so that the ceiling dominates the frame, creating a sense of claustrophobic doom. The same lights cast shadows from the killers’ hat brims down across their faces. The characters are often tightly framed, creating a sense of confinement and reflecting the killers’ invasion of and control over the diner.

After the killers leave the diner, a tracking shot follows Nick as he races to Swede’s boarding room. Phil Brown, who plays Nick Adams, remembered:

Siodmak always knew what he wanted and worked very quickly. There was no rehearsal before the actual shooting began. Siodmak’s interest was in staging and camera placement. He did not discuss motivation with the actors or give line readings. Everything went smoothly. The only difficulty I had was in trying to jump all those fences—it was shot in one take—and not break my neck (qtd. in *Server* 125).

The camera movement’s rushing energy is subverted when Nick is unable to stir Swede from his bed.

Hemingway’s story does not allow the reader to decide whether Swede is guilty or only a victim of circumstances. In doing so, it depicts a world where evil is latent and inescapable. The film changes Swede’s enigmatic line, “I got in wrong” (93), to one of confession, “I did something wrong, once.” In the film, Swede uses the alias “Pete Lunn,” suggesting he is guarded about his identity and hiding from his past. The rewrite is analogous to the changes made to the

character Rinaldi in Borzage's *A Farewell to Arms*, where Rinaldi is made into the villain responsible for Catherine's miscarriage. The changes made to Swede's character create the space for a villainous femme fatale in his past.

While the short story follows Nick returning to the diner, the film stays with Swede in his boarding room. After Nick leaves, Swede hears the killers' footsteps on the stairs. Swede sits up in bed. Suddenly, the door is thrown open, and the room's darkness is shattered by bright flashes from the killers' handguns. The sequence ends with a close-up of Swede's hand gradually losing grip on a bedpost as the last of his great strength leaves his body.

Following Swede's death, the sequences used to introduce the film's eleven flashbacks are uniform throughout. Riordan asks the subject a question, a reverse close-up shows the subject beginning to narrate, and then a dissolve and sound bridge transition the timeline from present to past and back to the present. The first three flashbacks follow reverse chronological order, echoing Swede's attitude of defeatism from the prologue. The rest of the flashbacks are scattered throughout the narrative without any clear order. However, as Riordan's investigation continues, the flashbacks are related by progressively more criminal characters. The investigation is a source of dramatic tension as Riordan's obsessive hunt becomes more and more dangerous the closer he gets to the truth.

Nick provides the film's first flashback. The flashback occurs in the morgue, where the characters are silhouetted against a glaringly white brick wall, conjuring a "butcher shop atmosphere" (Lightman 458). Gilles Menegaldo notes how Nick "starts his narrative in the dark, a rather explicit metaphor emphasizing the investigator's (and the spectator's) ignorance" (par. 12). The flashback takes place a week before Swede's murder when an ominous man—later revealed to be "Big Jim" Colfax—recognizes Swede at the gas station. One might expect to see

subjective shots revealing Nick's unique perspective, but the flashbacks are shot from an objective perspective. For example, there are close-ups of Swede cleaning the windshield of Colfax's car, a viewpoint Nick would not have been privy to from the back of the car. However, there are some hints of a subjective camera throughout the film. During Charleston's flashback, for instance, the lighting in the jail cell is soft, reflecting the fondness of Charleston's memory. The light flowing through the barred window is ethereal, appearing as through a stained glass window, and the clouds in the sky part with supernatural speed to reveal a star-strewn nightscape.

The flashbacks present the problem of incongruity between character knowledge and audience knowledge, an inevitable result of their being filmed rather than written. Though Nick can describe Colfax to Riordan—"kind of heavysset, had a mustache"—he cannot name him. Later, when Colfax appears in Charleston's flashback, the audience sees he is the same man. Because Charleston does not provide names, there is a discrepancy between what Riordan knows and what the audience knows. This aspect mirrors the short story's tension of limited information, where the narrator's objective observations fail to reveal the characters' motives or inner feelings. Gérard Genette writes, "external focalization [was] made popular in the 20s and 30s by Dashiell Hammett's novels in which the hero acts before us without our knowing his thoughts or feelings, and by certain short stories by Hemingway, such as 'The Killers' [...] in which discretion is pursued to the point of enigma" (qtd. in Collinge-Germain par. 5). The film's flashback structure recreates in the figure of the noir investigator the same suspense produced by the omissions of the strictly objective narrator in the short story. Riordan's job to uncover the truth by questioning, interpreting, and putting the pieces together closely resembles the reader's task to construct meaning by filling in the gaps (Collinge-Germain par. 18).



There is one flashback in the film that is not subject to the limitations of memory: the robbery sequence. The sequence is catalyzed by Mr. Kenyon's narration as he reads an account from an old newspaper. It was shot in one take, featuring eighteen camera stops and more than sixty focus changes (Lightman 458). The event takes place in a remote past alienated from the viewer by the lack of diegetic sound, which is replaced by Miklós Rózsa's score and Kenyon's newsreel style voiceover. This detachment is reinforced by the camera's omniscient perspective, looking down on the action from an imperious height.

Some of the earliest flashbacks are provided by two of Swede's close friends, Sam and Lilly Lubinsky. Their flashbacks reveal Swede's failed boxing career and subsequent descent into crime. When Jim Riordan meets Sam on a rooftop patio, where Sam is painting kitchen stools, a caged bird appears in the background, symbolizing both the safety and confinement of his middle-class normalcy. Though Sam's flashback is the third of the film, it is the earliest of the storyline, revealing the hand injury that ended Swede's prizefighting career. Swede is quickly painted as a pure Hemingway hero: stuck in a dated past when dignity and honor used to count for something. Even with his right hand busted, he submits himself to a pulping in the ring. The fact that he "stays the limit" is a point of pride.

After the match, Swede is told his fighting days are over. Sam offers Swede a job on the police force: "Twenty years and you've got a pension. And it's 2,200 a year to start." Swede is unwilling to accept what would amount to a pay cut after the winnings he made as a prizefighter: "Some months I made that much in one month." Swede walks off alone down an alleyway glowing with hazy light. While light usually offers enlightenment, here it signifies the unknown. The intense light produces a silhouette of Swede's frame, obscuring his features. The light

anticipates his willingness to remain blind to Kitty's duplicity. The alleyway represents Swede's point of no return and the sealing of his fate. "After that, I didn't see much of Ole," says Sam.

Following Sam's flashback, Lilly enters the patio, bringing lemonade. Vivian Sobchack writes, "The lemonade comes from a coherent space and time that must stay forever off-screen here, behind a door, always out of visibility and beyond the reach of characters such as the double-crossed Swede, femme fatale Kitty Collins, and even Reardon [*sic*]" (138). Sylvia Harvey writes, "The strange and compelling absence of 'normal' family relations in [noir] registers the shifts in the place of women occupied in American society" (25). Though Lilly appears in Sam's flashback, this detail does not seem to have been related to Riordan, as Sam informs him, "Lilly knew Ole, too. The three of us were together a good part of the time."

Lilly used to be Swede's girlfriend. She was his "girl next door," readily available yet overlooked. Significantly, she offers Swede a home-cooked meal after his boxing match, but he declines. Sam tells Riordan, "She was always in love with him. And I was always in love with her. Worked out fine—for me, anyway." Sam, who accepts the terms of domestic life and honest work, seems quite happy. Lilly says, "I haven't been too unhappy myself," from her seat on Sam's lap. She wears a checkered housedress and an apron. Lilly's flashback follows, depicting a time Swede took her to a party populated by a number of shady characters with whom he "may be going into business." There Swede meets Kitty Collins, becoming so enamored with her that he fails to notice when Lilly ditches him mid-date: "I just got my things and went on home. I don't think Ole even missed me."

When Swede and Kitty are first introduced, Kitty is seated at a piano bench, wearing a stunning black satin gown. Its single strap starts at the center of the décolletage, crosses her left shoulder, and ends between her shoulder blades at the back. The censors warned, "Care will be

needed with this low-cut gown” (qtd. in Server 118). Kitty means trouble from the start and wastes no time snubbing Lilly. When Lilly proudly says she has attended all Swede’s boxing matches, Kitty says, “I could never bear to see a man I really cared for being hurt.” Shortly afterward, Kitty sings “The More I Know of Love.” While she sings, Swede watches her from behind. A pointedly phallic light fixture stands erect on the piano top.

Swede’s voyeurism recurs throughout the film. Laura Mulvey suggests men have two means of escape from the castration anxiety presented by the female body: “preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the concerns of the film noir); or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous” (21). Riordan represents the first and Swede the second. In his jail cell, Swede plays with a green handkerchief decorated with golden harps, a gift Kitty gave him. The harps recall how Kitty seduced Swede through her singing. Charleston evokes the reference when he tells Swede, “Stop listening to those golden harps, Swede. They could land you in a world of trouble.” Green is often associated with femme fatales because it connotes poison and duplicity, an association conjured by Kitty’s admission, “I poison everyone around me...”

Siodmak’s depictions of Kitty’s cat-like qualities closely resemble Hemingway’s own characterizations of women in his fiction. Candace Ursula Grissom writes, “Throughout his fiction, Hemingway often used cats to indicate a sense of vulnerable, yet fiercely independent, femininity in works such as ‘Cat in the Rain’ and *A Farewell to Arms*” (134). Aside from her name, the film depicts Kitty as a feline through her wanting to meet Riordan at the Green Cat

nightclub, where she orders a glass of warm milk and escapes Riordan's grasp through a bathroom window.

Similarly, Siodmak constructs Kitty's femme fatale-ness through the same iconography Hemingway uses to construct Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*. Jack Shadoian describes Kitty as a "modern Circe" (94) due to how she turns men into swine: she uses her seductive powers to lure Swede into a heist scheme and convince him to betray his associates. Brett is also referred to as "Circe" (149) in *The Sun Also Rises* due to how her aura of sexuality leads to the unraveling of the men around her.

Kitty and Brett are both unconventional characters for their time periods, a quality that is signified by their fashion. Kitty wears a trench coat when she meets Riordan. "It communicates something significant," writes Kimberly Truhler, "when the femme fatale adopts a look that's generally reserved for men. She's the one who's really in charge, at the center of a double cross, and determined to get away with it all" (ch. 18). Similarly, Brett takes on a masculine appearance. James Nagel finds that Brett's lack of feminine attire is the source of her "erotic power" (96). Jake Barnes, *The Sun Also Rises's* narrator, describes her in an early scene: "Brett was damned good-looking. She wore a slip-over jersey sweater and a tweed skirt, and her hair was brushed back like a boy's" (22). In *The Killers*, Kitty often wears a sweater and skirt. During the scene where the criminals plan the robbery, costume designer Vera West "shows just how sexy simple can be by dressing Ava in a sweater and skirt, shoes off, watching the group steely-eyed while seductively sprawled across a bed" (Truhler ch. 18). Even Kitty's black dress derives from an outfit Brett wears in *The Sun Also Rises*: "Brett wore a black, sleeveless evening dress...[Robert Cohn] could not stop looking at Brett" (151). Both women are unafraid to challenge societal expectations, and they refuse to conform to traditional gender roles. Finding

themselves excluded from a gendered economy, they must weaponize their sexuality to move through a male-dominated world.

In *The Killers*, Kitty is punished for having only appeared to drive the narrative. She is trapped in a domestic economy where a woman must obey her husband. At the end of the film, Sam and Riordan arrive at Colfax's mansion just as Colfax and "Dum-Dum" Clarke have a shootout. Clarke is killed immediately, and Colfax is fatally wounded. Kitty arrives home shortly afterward to find her husband dying. She begs him to swear to her innocence before he dies. Though Kitty has only gone along with Colfax's scheme, Riordan and Sam save most of their derision for her. "Don't ask a dying man to lie his soul into hell!" Sam yells. "Your would-be fall guy is dead," says Riordan.

Having recovered the stolen loot from Colfax and Kitty, Riordan returns the quarter of a million dollars to the insurance company. As a result of the return, the firm reduces the basic rate by a tenth of a percent for 1947, and Riordan is awarded only a weekend off for his hard work. Darkly ironic endings were characteristic of the noir genre because they subverted the audience's expectations for affirmative resolutions. The ending highlights the film's sense of moral ambiguity, where many of the characters, including Riordan, are driven by their own selfish desires and motivations. Riordan's obsessive quest to recover the stolen loot results in Colfax's death, who had started a new life as a respectable businessman, and the destruction of Kitty's life. The film casts doubt on the principles of justice and morality, suggesting that the heroism promoted during the war may not hold up to post-war realities.

### **Conclusion**

*The Killers* opened on August 28, 1946, at the Winter Garden in New York. It was a commercial success and grossed \$3 million (Vieira 125). It was also well received by critics,

with many praising its flashback structure. Philip K. Scheuer wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Everybody is double crossed but the audience in *The Killers*, a picture which could be called a model of cinematic storytelling” (qtd. in Vieira 141). *Life* claimed, “there is not a dull moment” (“Movie of the Week” 59). “Hollywood has so frequently botched a good story by extending it,” wrote the *New Yorker*, “that this one instance of preserving the quality of the original is most cheering” (McNulty 52).

*The Killers* is remembered for spawning the careers of its two stars. Gardner won the Look Award for the most promising newcomer of 1947. She also developed a strong friendship with Hemingway and would go on to star in two more of his adaptations: *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (1952) and *The Sun Also Rises* (1957). She said, “I always felt close to Papa's women” (qtd. in Dearborn 566). Lancaster went on to become Hollywood's first emergent male lead since World War II (Fishgall 52). He starred in noirs such as the Hellinger-produced *Brute Force* (1947) and the Siodmak-directed *Criss Cross* (1949). Hellinger intended to produce more Hemingway short stories but died from coronary thrombosis in 1947 at 44.

Gene D. Phillips quotes Mary Hemingway as saying, “The only film made from his work of which Ernest entirely approved was *The Killers*” (qtd. in 73-74). It is possible Hemingway was impressed by Siodmak and Bredell's chiaroscuro style, which, in obscuring the visual image, approximates his own philosophy of omission in writing. Hemingway might also have appreciated how the detective's quest to piece together clues resembles the reader's own responsibility to fill in the narrative blanks. Both Hemingway's story and the film suggest that by facing his fate with courage, Swede redeems the sins of his past and regains his knightly valor.

The film's expanded plot conformed to the conventions of noir, a reflection of the postwar zeitgeist. Kitty betrays both Swede and Colfax during their prison terms, a stand-in for

the anxieties of men returning to their female partners after the war. At the same time, the film imitated Hemingway fiction and even modeled its femme fatale after Brett Ashley. The film also subverted noir tropes by providing a twist at the end, when it is revealed that Colfax is the ultimate villain.

*The Killers* was released the year French film critics gave noir its name, after an essay in which Nino Frank used the term to describe the films coming out of Hollywood at the time, which paired hardboiled, modernist literature with German émigré directors.

## THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

*The Old Man and the Sea* (1958) was the last film adaptation released in Hemingway's lifetime. Among the many crises that plagued the production was one involving alcohol. Early in the production, Hemingway and Spencer Tracy drunkenly destroyed a Havana bar and caused \$150,000 worth of damage—roughly \$1.5 million in 2023 dollars (Davidson 174). Initially, Jack Warner refused to pay, and Warner Bros. placed Ernest Borgnine on standby to replace Tracy. Borgnine remembered, "I don't blame Mr. Tracy. He was so bored with that picture, it went on, and on, and on. And Christ, he had to get something out of his system, ya know?" (qtd. in 175). Eventually, Warner paid, and the incident was kept quiet.

Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* was the last book published in his lifetime. It won him the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1953 and Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. Warner Bros.'s 1958 adaptation was the only Hollywood production in which Hemingway was personally involved. The book's length was ideally fitted to a feature film runtime: little needed to be cut, and nothing was added. Due to Hemingway's involvement, Warner Bros. ended up making expensive concessions to his vision of a documentary approach, particularly the commitment to location shooting in Cuba, which caused the production to go over budget.

Hemingway lived in Cuba for the last twenty years of his life. He purchased the Finca Vigía, a residence constructed in 1886 fifteen miles outside Havana. In 1940, he moved there with Martha Gellhorn, his third wife. After Hemingway and Gellhorn divorced in 1945, Hemingway stayed there with his fourth wife, Mary Welsh, until 1960, the year after Fidel Castro overthrew Fulgencio Batista's US-backed military dictatorship, which forced the Hemingways to relocate to Ketchum, Idaho.



Hemingway wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *Islands in the Stream*, *A Moveable Feast*, and *The Old Man and the Sea* at the Finca Vigía. During World War II, he used his boat, the *Pilar*, to hunt for German U-boats in Caribbean waters. The Cuban government provided him with communications equipment, submachine guns, and grenades. Biographer Mary V. Dearborn writes,

The *Pilar* would draw a sub as closely as possible, then open fire, at the same time lobbing grenades into the sub's conning tower and bombs into the forward hatch... [I]t was to be a noble enterprise that could possibly encompass fishing as a peripheral activity and would definitely mean that, as Martha would later point out acidly, the *Pilar* could tap an unlimited supply of hard-to-get, otherwise strictly rationed gasoline (430).

Of course, in the unlikely event that a submarine came within close range, the *Pilar* would be hopelessly outmatched.

A.E. Hotchner recalled a conversation he had with Hemingway about Cuba's appeal. Hemingway described the legality of cock fighting, the beauty of Cuban women, and the proximity of Gulf Stream fishing (8). Peter Viertel once wrote to Hemingway and asked where he would go if he had to leave Cuba. Hemingway replied that "he would probably choose to jump off the stern of the *Pilar* into eight hundred fathoms of still water. At the moment, he stated, that seemed like a preferable place" (242). Hemingway would commit suicide less than two years after leaving Cuba. His depression and health problems worsened, and he checked into the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota in November 1960 and April 1961, where he received multiple courses of electroshock treatments. On July 2, 1961, he took his own life.

Hemingway was a heavy drinker throughout his life, a habit encouraged by his ethos of masculine recklessness. He once wrote in a letter:

I have drunk since I was fifteen and few things have given me more pleasure. When you work hard all day with your head and know you must work again the next day what else can change your ideas and make them run on a different plane like whiskey? When you are cold and wet what else can warm you? Before an attack who can say anything that gives you the momentary well being that rum does? I would as soon not eat at night as not to have red wine and water (*Selected Letters* 420).

His drinking ultimately exacerbated his health conditions. Peter Viertel wrote, “He suffered from high blood pressure brought on by a nervous condition that he attempted to minimize by drinking. Alcohol was obviously responsible for the deterioration of his health” (90). Cuban friend Mayito Menocal observed, “Gradually alcohol began to dominate him more and more until he became controlled by it” (qtd. in Dearborn 568). His constant drunkenness caused a number of his concussions, including the incident in Paris when he mistook a ceiling skylight chain for the toilet’s flush chain. He brought the skylight down on his head, leaving a signature horseshoe-shaped scar on his left temple.

### **Background**

In March 1945, after returning from his war correspondence for *Collier’s*, Hemingway began a three-volume epic devoted to warfare by sea, land, and air. Only the first volume, divided in turn into three sections—“The Sea When Young,” “The Sea When Absent,” and “The Sea in Being”—was completed in his lifetime. The work was later published posthumously as *Islands in the Stream*. By 1947, he had completed “The Sea When Young,” and he set aside the project to write *Across the River and Into the Trees*, published in 1950. The book was largely dismissed by critics. One reviewer wrote, “...it is so egregiously bad as to render all comment on it positively embarrassing to anyone who esteems Hemingway as one of the more considerable

prose-artists of our time...” (Rahv). In 1951, intending to redeem his reputation, Hemingway returned to the epic and completed its second section, “The Sea When Absent,” and an additional coda called “The Sea Chase.” The coda shifted focus from the book’s main protagonist, Thomas Hudson, to an old Cuban fisherman named Santiago.

The story is about an old Cuban fisherman who has not caught a fish for eighty-four days. His fishing companion is a young boy named Manolin, whom he taught to fish. Manolin’s parents made him switch to a luckier boat, and now Santiago fishes alone. On the eighty-fifth day, Santiago catches a great marlin. He battles the marlin for two days and nights. On the third day, he kills the marlin, ties it to the side of the skiff, and begins to sail home. Despite Santiago’s efforts to defend his catch, sharks devour it completely before he reaches shore.

The origins of the Santiago story can be traced to an article Hemingway wrote for *Esquire* fifteen years earlier. It contained an anecdote related to him by his Cuban friend Carlos Gutiérrez about an old fisherman who hooked a great marlin and was pulled out to sea for two days:

When [the marlin] had come up, the old man had pulled the boat up on him and harpooned him. Lashed alongside the sharks had hit him and the old man had fought them out alone in the Gulf stream in a skiff, clubbing them, stabbing at them, lunging at them with an oar until he was exhausted and the sharks had eaten all that they could hold (“On the Blue Water”).

Hemingway wrote code at the Finca Vigía in Cuba in just eight weeks (Williams 31). Leland Hayward, Hemingway’s agent and friend of twenty years, persuaded him to publish it separately instead of saving it as the coda to the longer book. It was published under the title *The Old Man and the Sea* as a 20-page insert in *Life*’s September 1, 1952, issue, accompanied by eighteen

two-tone illustrations by Noel Douglas Sickles based on photographs taken by Alfred Eisenstaedt. *Life* sold five million copies in two days. Two weeks later, Scribner's published it in book form in a 50,000 print run.

Following the book's popular and critical success, Hayward planned a dramatic reading tour. He hoped to convince a famous Hollywood actor to perform. "Of all Hollywood people," Hayward wrote, "the one that comes closest to me in quality in personality and voice, in personal dignity and ability, is Spencer Tracy" (qtd. in Curtis 644). Tracy was interested in the tour but wondered about the possibility of a motion picture: "Why can't we do this lecture idea, and after that do it as a motion picture?" (qtd. in Curtis 644). When Hayward expressed concerns about preserving the story's realism on screen, Tracy proposed: "Let's make the picture absolutely as simply and honestly as we can—make it actually in Cuba—make it silent—and I will commentate the whole motion picture" (qtd. in Curtis 644-645). While a dramatic reading might have served as a valuable test run for the story's dramatic possibilities, Tracy was ultimately too busy shooting *The Actress* and unable to commit to the tour.

Meanwhile, Hayward discussed the motion picture idea with Hemingway. He even suggested that Hemingway could serve as a script supervisor and technical advisor for the film. At this point, Hemingway had twenty years of experience with Hollywood screen adaptations and believed that while it was an easy way to make money, the films often had little artistic value. He received \$150,000 for the rights to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, which in 1941 was the highest price an author had commanded for a novel (Jividen 82). He received \$75,000 for *The Macomber Affair* (based on the short story "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber") and another \$75,000 for *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (84). In 1946, Twentieth Century Fox offered \$300,000 for the rights to his new work in progress, *The Garden of Eden*, but he declined due to

difficulties with the writing (Frasier 139). Each time, Hemingway's participation in the adaptation ended with selling the rights. Though reluctant to become creatively involved in the project, the prospect of a faithful adaptation must have appeared attractive. Hemingway told Hayward he wanted it shot entirely on location, putting "local people on a local ocean with a local boat" (qtd. in Philips 139). It was the kind of realism he had seen in *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), and he wanted Vittorio De Sica to direct.

*The Bicycle Thief* is one of the exemplary films of Italian neorealism, a film movement that tried to capture the harsh realities of postwar Italian life. The films rejected the romantic, escapist plots and glossy production values that characterized large studio productions and instead focused on simple stories based on the hardships of everyday people. In *The Bicycle Thief*, a poor father and his son search hopelessly for a stolen bicycle in post-World War II Rome. De Sica cast nonprofessional actors and shot on location using only natural light. Hemingway's book resembled De Sica's film in many ways, including a simple plot, impoverished characters, and an ending where the protagonist is defeated.

In January 1953, Hayward flew to California to meet with Tracy. Hayward learned a miscommunication had occurred among Tracy, Hemingway, and himself. Tracy had thought he would be performing Santiago and the narrator while Hayward and Hemingway planned to use a real Cuban fisherman for Santiago and Tracy's voice for narration. To reassure Hemingway, who worried a Hollywood star would defeat the film's documentary approach, Hayward wrote:

I can only tell you that he looks great—is as enthusiastic as a human being can be about doing anything—and is one of the biggest and most important stars in the motion picture business. He understands all the hardship he may have to undergo to make it—has no star-like ideas or theories—and in my own mind I feel he would probably be very

believable as the Old Man—providing we could make him lean and hungry looking (qtd. in Curtis 645).

Despite the book's great success and Tracy's attachment to the project, Hayward had difficulty finding a studio to produce the film.

In the early 1950s, Hollywood was in a state of flux. The 1948 Paramount Decision had ended the studios' vertical integration of production and exhibition. Without the cushion of a large, integrated corporate structure, film production had become a less stable enterprise. Every project was a risk for both the studio to produce and the exhibitor to screen. To make matters worse, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) refused to grant television licenses to studios indicted for anti-trust violations in the 1948 decision. The FCC doubted studios were "qualified to operate a broadcast station in the public interest" (United States Federal Communications Commission 433). With a limited ability to expand into television, studios tried to attract audiences by investing in advanced film technology. After television adopted the 4:3 aspect ratio, Hollywood was incentivized to expand its screen size. The year 1952 saw the introduction of Cinerama, the first widescreen optical process, where three synchronized projectors displayed films on a curved screen, producing a 3:1 aspect ratio. Alongside Cinerama came developments such as stereophonic sound, multi-directional audio perspective, and 3D, innovations that added an element of spectacle to film spectatorship. With the industry restructuring, studios were reluctant to invest in productions carrying financial risk.

In April 1953, Tracy flew to Cuba to meet Hemingway. During Tracy's flight, a typewriter fell from the overhead storage onto his shin. Upon arrival, he recorded in his datebook: "Rough to Havana, Ernest Hem worth it" (qtd. in Curtis 645). Hemingway liked Tracy right away, admiring how he did not let the pain of his injury bother him. He was also impressed

with Tracy's determination to quit drinking. Hemingway reported to Hayward: "Had a very good and practical time with Spencer. We understand each other and get along fine. I feel like I'd known him about 150 years" (qtd. in Curtis 646).

Finally, in the spring of 1955, Warner Bros. negotiated a contract to finance and distribute the film (Edwards 300). Warner Bros. postponed filming for two years to allow Tracy to complete his contract with MGM. Though Hemingway worried the production was turning into a big-budget commercial star vehicle for Tracy, he gifted Hayward a shotgun from his collection as a token of their continuing friendship.

Hemingway suggested signing Peter Viertel as the screenwriter. Previously, Viertel had written *Decision Before Dawn* (1951), *The African Queen* (1951), and the script that would become *The Sun Also Rises* (1957). In June 1955, Viertel visited Hemingway in Cuba, where he was submitted to a kind of Method training for writers. Hemingway booked a room above a bar in Cojimar where Viertel spent a sleepless, airless, and mosquito-infested night. Hemingway then took Viertel fishing. During one expedition, he convinced Viertel to climb aboard the *Pilar's* skiff, whereupon Hemingway cut the towing rope and sped off, abandoning Viertel for several hours on the open sea.

Viertel broke the hundred-page novella down into individual scenes. The result was thirty pages too long, so he judiciously eliminated some of the book's material. Viertel proposed cutting a number of the sea-time sequences, especially those extrinsic to the action, such as Santiago describing the principles of proper fishing technique. Hemingway resisted all cuts, arguing that Santiago's ruminations were thematically significant because he must be shown to be totally knowledgeable in his trade. Viertel even struggled to convince Hemingway to cut a

visual of Santiago relieving himself outside his shack, which he argued could not be shown tastefully onscreen.

Viertel also proposed some ideas for additional material. He imagined opening with Santiago seeking employment in Havana. To expand the cast, Viertel proposed adding two scenes with Manolin's parents. Hemingway vetoed the ideas, arguing that monotony was necessary for the book's realistic style. The additional scenes and characters would not work because they were not in the original book. Hemingway's view won out in the end. Other than a few minor shots—of some village boys asking Manolin to play baseball, for example—no new material was added to the script that was not originally in the book. Unlike *A Farewell to Arms*, which reduced Hemingway's depictions of World War I, and *The Killers*, which added noir characters, *The Old Man and the Sea* was a much more faithful adaptation.

While work on the screenplay progressed slowly, the production was still without a director. Warner Bros. wanted to sign an established Hollywood director, disqualifying Vittorio De Sica. Viertel suggested Fred Zinnemann, who had directed the docu-fiction *Redes* (1936). In documenting the struggles of a poor Mexican fishing village to overcome political and economic exploitation, the film anticipates the formalist aspects of Italian neorealism by shooting on location, featuring a nonprofessional cast, and eschewing voice-over narration. Zinnemann had worked with Tracy previously on *The Seventh Cross* (1944), and he was in high demand in Hollywood after the success of *High Noon* (1952).

To Hemingway, it appeared Zinnemann was as close to De Sica as he was going to get. J. E. Smyth writes, "Zinnemann's documentaries and feature films...explored the transformative power and political impact of cinema that blended history, fiction, and documentary with the lives of non-professional actors and Hollywood stars" (16). Zinnemann was well known not only



for filming on location but also for reproducing a newsreel-like quality in his cinematography. Of *High Noon*, he recalled:

For the visual concept, the cameraman, Floyd Crosby, and I started with the idea that we wanted to show a film set in 1880 that would look like a newsreel, if there had been newsreels and cameras in those days. So we deliberately set out to recreate that. I wanted to have a newsreel quality to give the thing a reality. No filters. This is also why I didn't want to do it in colour (qtd. in Wilshire).

Zinnemann's directing philosophy bears similarities to the documentary genre of "direct cinema," which was beginning to come into vogue at this time. Direct cinema utilized the new technologies of lightweight, portable film equipment and hand-held cameras to capture reality more directly. In reducing filmmaking to its bare essentials, direct cinema rebuked the increasingly elaborate and special-effects heavy productions coming out of Hollywood at the time. By applying direct cinema's formal elements to his fictive projects, Zinnemann approximated documentary's claims of realism and authenticity. The approach possesses many affinities to Hemingway's approach to writing, which employs the spare, straightforward prose of journalism in service of the fictionalization of his lived experiences.

In October 1955, Warner Bros. confirmed Zinnemann as director and scheduled filming to begin in April 1956. Zinnemann's *High Noon* collaborator, James Wong Howe, was brought on as cinematographer. Fourteen cameramen came to Cuba to film the marlin sequences. Warner Bros. gave Hemingway the captaincy of three film units. Several crew members used hand-held newsreel cameras on board the *Pilar*, while two other units operated motor launches mounted with heavier equipment. The three units patrolled four small fishing boats operated by two fishermen each. On the first day, they caught two marlins weighing approximately 400 pounds,

but Hemingway insisted only a 1,000-pound fish would do. After two fruitless weeks, Howard scrapped the operation until the following spring.

In March 1956, the entire cast and crew assembled in Cuba. Shooting commenced on May 4. The schedule progressed slowly, as the tropical heat made for poor working conditions. Hemingway disliked Felipe Pazos, the boy cast to play Manolin, because he was the son of a wealthy economist and not the son of a fisherman. Hemingway described him as “a cross between a tadpole and Anita Loos” (qtd. in Curtis 712). Hemingway had also become disenchanted with Tracy, who now seemed “very fat for a fisherman” (qtd. in Curtis 712). Tracy’s appearance was far from the “thin and gaunt” (1) Santiago described in the book. Zinnemann was also angered by Tracy’s weight and became enraged when he found Tracy eating ice cream straight from the quart container (Laurence 31). Faced with expensive delays, Zinnemann decided to leave the production in June 1956. “Shooting most of the movie in the studio tank seemed to be the only way out...Suddenly the story seemed pointless. It made little sense to proceed with a robot pretending to be a fish in a studio tank pretending to be the Gulf Stream with an actor pretending to be a fisherman” (qtd. in Curtis 713-714).

John Sturges replaced Zinnemann. Sturges had started his career in the B-movie circuit, building a reputation for character-based dramas. He had directed Tracy in *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955), for which he was nominated for Best Direction. “They went to Cuba and went right on their ass,” said Sturges. “They spent three times as much not making the picture as I spent making it. Disaster. So they closed it out, and came to me” (qtd. in Lovell 128). Sturges was uninterested in Hemingway and Zinnemann’s vision of a documentary approach:

The fact that the story takes place in the Gulf Stream off Cuba doesn’t mean that that’s the right place to shoot it. It isn’t. The Gulf Stream goes at 12 miles an hour and it’s

rough. They took a very realistic approach to the film...The plans they had to get the shark, the plans to get the fish, got all scrambled up and 50 sets of people came up with 50 sets of solutions and the first thing they knew was that they'd spent \$3,000,000. Why I took it on I'll never really know. I knew Tracy well. The idea intrigued me, to play it as an exercise in imagination and emotion. A theatrical approach. Now if anyone objected to that, the hell with them—they weren't going to like the film. This approach I found interesting and I felt I could profit by the mistakes they'd already made (qtd. in Curtis 730).

Sturges and Hayward recalled the production to Hollywood, where a 750,000-gallon football-field-sized tank was constructed for shots of the boat (Swindell 238). Of the delays, Tracy said in 1957, "This picture is becoming my life's work. By now there isn't a chance to make back all the money we will spend, so we're just concentrating on making it worthwhile" (qtd. in Monaco 653).

Hemingway was given captaincy of a second camera expedition to Capo Blanco, Peru, where 1,000-pound marlin were common. "It was steady punishing work each day," Hemingway remembered, "and it was fun, too, because the people were nice and it was a strange new sea to learn" (qtd. in Laurence 32). He caught three marlin, including one weighing 920 pounds, but the footage was of too poor quality to use in the film. After four expensive weeks, Hayward canceled the expedition. For Hemingway, it was an irredeemable betrayal, and he never spoke to Hayward again—except on one occasion, when visiting New York, to request Hayward send back the shotgun he had given him before the production began.

For Hayward, canceling the expedition was a necessary financial concession. The estimated production cost was swelling to six million dollars, more than three times the allotted

budget. Hayward bought the reel of Alfred Glassell's world-record-breaking catch of a 14-foot-7-inch, 1,560-pound female black marlin off the coast of Cabo Blanco, Peru. The credits at the end of the film include a disclaimer: "Some of the marlin film used in this picture was of the world's record catch by Alfred C. Glassell, Jr. at the Cabo Blanco Fishing Club in Peru. Mr. Glassell acted as special advisor for these sequences."

With the cancellation of location shooting, new studio technologies were employed to recreate Cuban waters. *The Old Man and the Sea* was one of the first films to use Arthur Widmer's bluescreen compositing technology, which placed actors on a soundstage with a pre-filmed backdrop (American Film Institute, "The Old Man and the Sea"). The backdrop can be observed during sequences where the color of the tank water and that of the projected ocean background are different. It is also apparent that the tank's shallow waves are artificially produced, and the rocking of the boat is performed by a mechanical apparatus. Sturges later admitted of the production, "Technically, it was the sloppiest picture I ever made" (qtd. in Phillips 146). However, the tank was economical compared to location shooting: "All the shooting on the studio lot—about 80 percent of the picture—cost only about \$900,000" (Laurence 35).

From the start, Hemingway imagined the production effort according to his particular brand of masculinity. Hemingway spoke of the filming in terms of a "fight." In a letter to his lawyer, Alfred Rice, Hemingway wrote, "We are in a big fight from now on in and can make a terrific killing if we make a great picture. But there won't be any great picture nor nothing unless Tracy and I carry the ball most of the time. He knows it and I know it. Everybody is going to have to work like hell and we are going to have to do the miracle stuff" (qtd. in Curtis 646). However, due to budgetary constraints, Hollywood was unable to achieve the realism and

authenticity Hemingway had envisioned at the outset of the project. Still, Hemingway viewed the loss of authenticity as cowardice.

Warner Bros. marketed the picture to non-literary audiences as a thriller, printing slogans such as “Man against killer monsters of the raging seas!” and “The most dramatic man-against-monster battle ever shown!” For literary audiences, Warner Bros. used the book’s Pulitzer and Nobel prizes to its advantage during its publicity campaign. One press release read:

The distinguished Warnercolor film is viewed as making a contribution to motion pictures equal to that made to world literature by Hemingway's deeply moving story...Hemingway's story...brought him the Nobel and Pulitzer Prizes and new world acclaim as an artist of remarkable compassion and insight into the human heart. The Warner Bros. film faithfully and beautifully transfers these elements to the screen (qtd. in Laurence 36).

The theatrical trailer stressed the film’s faithfulness to the book. It shows a tome with the “WB” logo on the cover. As it is opened, lushly illustrated pages declare:

A Motion Picture that Explores *New Horizons* in Entertainment! From the Finest Work by one of the Greatest Writers of our Times! Ernest Hemingway’s “The Old Man and the Sea.” Which won for Mr. Hemingway the Pulitzer Prize and THE NOBEL PRIZE for its “*Powerful style-forming mastery...*” Translated in 41 Languages to circle the world with its Greatness! [...] Filmed on Location in Cuba, Peru, Panama, Nassau, and Hawaii.

Of course, evident to those who read the book, the only place filmed “on location” was Cuba, which accounted for but a few shots.

### Analysis

The film's most stylistically prominent feature is its narration. Conventionally, film narration takes on an omniscient, third-person perspective or a limited, first-person perspective. Film narration in *The Old Man and the Sea* is complex because Tracy voices the omniscient, third-person narrator and plays the main character. It becomes even more complicated when the narrator occasionally performs dialogue that has no direct referent in the filmic image. An example is when the narrator describes an interaction between Santiago and Manolin, which is not shown onscreen. In one of these instances, the narrator says,

“Can I offer you a beer on the terrace,” the boy asked.

“Why not?” the old man said. “Between fishermen.”

Santiago and Manolin are shown onscreen setting their fishing equipment down outside the terrace. However, their lips do not move. The narrator performs both characters' lines. This style of narration is called “narratage,” where the narrator explains and sometimes supplants the diegetic action on the screen, giving the illusion that the story is merely an elaboration of their own words.

Tracy's narration often expounds on the image shown on screen, creating a redundancy between spoken and visual information. The narrator says,

In the old man's shack, there was a bed, a table, some chairs and a place to cook with charcoal. On the brown walls, there was a picture in color of the sacred heart of Jesus and another of the Virgin of Cobre. These were relics of his wife. Once there had been a tinted photograph of his wife on the wall, but he had taken it down because it made him too lonely to see it.

The camera shows a shelf on the wall holding the described pictures. The narrator performs the literary function of explicating the film image's merely visual depictions. In the same scene, Santiago offers Manolin dinner from his pot of yellow rice and fish. Manolin declines and offers to take the cast net out with him. The narrator reveals the conversation's irony when he says, "There was no cast net. The boy remembered when they had sold it. But they went through this fiction every day. There was no pot of yellow rice and fish, and the boy knew this." Shortly afterward, Santiago falls asleep, and the narrator describes his dream. Despite the narrator's objectivity, the dream takes on subjective elements in the cinematography, indicated in the film by a wavy dissolve from Santiago sleeping in his cot to blurry, black-haloed shots of lions playing on the beach.

In the film adaptation of *A Farewell to Arms* (1932), the screenwriters altered Hemingway's dialogue to make it more accessible to film viewers. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, the actors deliver the lines from the book as they were written, recreating Hemingway's idiosyncrasies, such as the absence of contractions and severely simplified ideation—for example, "I have yesterday's newspaper. I will read the baseball." Hemingway's dialogue is written in the style of poetic realism, and it does not translate well to the dramatic context. The result of the film's close faithfulness to the book's dialogue is a loss of realism because the words do not sound believable when spoken by the actors.

As in the book, the film's sea sequence is broken by a flashback sequence of the time when Santiago "played the hand game with a Negro from Cienfuegos who was the strongest man on the docks." The frame cuts from a close-up of Santiago on the boat to a medium shot of his opponent in the tavern. The narrator again provides a sound bridge from present to past: "He and the Negro had gone one day and night..." The sequence ends with a cut from a medium shot of

Santiago in the tavern to a close-up of Santiago on the boat. His unfocused gaze indicates he has shared in the reverie along with the viewer.

Santiago often talks to himself throughout the film, serving as a diegetic narrator. This element is disclaimed by the non-diegetic narrator when Santiago first sets out to sea: “He did not remember when he’d first started to talk aloud when he was by himself...If the others heard me, *he thought*, they would think I am crazy. But since I am not crazy, I do not care.” In the film, the narrator says the line, establishing him as the voice of Santiago’s thoughts. In the book, it reads, “If the others heard me talking out loud they would think that I am crazy, *he said aloud*” (31; emphasis added). The film narrator often discloses Santiago’s interior monologue with short disclaimers of perspective, just as a literary narrator would: “*He thought*, ‘The birds have a harder life than we do, except for robber birds and the heavy, strong ones.’”

Sometimes, the narrator’s third-person narration transitions smoothly into Santiago’s first-person narration. During a shot of the sun setting over the sea, the narrator says,

It was cold after the sun went down, and the old man’s sweat dried cold on his back and his arms and his old legs. “He didn’t come up when the sun set,” he thought.

The narration provides a sound bridge over a dissolve to a wide shot of Santiago in his boat.

“Maybe he will come up with the moon. If he does not do that, maybe he will come up with the sunrise,” the voice continues, but now Santiago’s lips are moving, and the viewer realizes Santiago is speaking the line diegetically.

The device of the unseen narrator ultimately defeats the film’s attempt at realism. Direct cinema, *cinéma vérité*, and Italian Neorealism all forgo non-diegetic sound to immerse the viewer in the reality of the diegetic frame. Voiceover involves the disassociation of the narrator’s voice from the visual reality presented on screen. To the viewer, non-diegetic narration appears



to be a kind of trick, attempting to authoritatively account for events that are unspecified in the filmic world. The result is a film that is less spontaneous, less realistic, and more mediated. A film adaptation must prioritize its own requirements instead of overly relying on other media. Descriptions in literature tend to be more effective at holding the reader's attention for a longer period, as opposed to simply presenting the same images on the screen.

In “Realism in ‘La Grande Illusion,’” Jean Renoir describes a metaphor of an actor playing a fisherman. In his dedication to realism, the actor trains in fishing technique, obtains worn clothes from a real fisherman, develops a suntan, forgoes makeup, and performs on location. Despite his attempt to submerge himself in the part, however, the realism of his surroundings emphasizes “his own lack of reality” (159). In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Tracy is very obviously white and not Cuban, his weight problem does not make sense with his poverty, and he does not bother to adapt his accent to the part.

Despite Hemingway’s resistance to expanding the book’s material for the screenplay, the film briefly reveals an added dimension to Manolin’s character. The shot of Manolin’s friends playing baseball implies that his devotion to Santiago might be to the detriment of his social life. Manolin declines the invitation to play baseball with the village boys because he is running to buy dinner for Santiago. The next shot at the terrace reveals a young girl around Manolin’s age, assumedly the daughter of the owner of the terrace, Martin (Harry Bellaver). Manolin ignores her. He is too busy defending Santiago to Martin: “He’s not too old. You’ll see.” The girl appears in only one other shot when tourists—including Mary Hemingway, in a cameo appearance—notice the spine of the great marlin floating against the shore below the terrace. Instead of talking to the girl, Martin is tending to a battered Santiago in his shack. By the film's end, Santiago’s accomplishment has validated Manolin’s devotion.

Hemingway articulated his ire toward the production in a line from *Islands in the Stream*: “After the war, I'm going to be in Hollywood and be a technical adviser on how to be a horse's ass at sea...I've been studying it now for over a year to train me for my career” (335). He briefly described his involvement in the picture in the posthumously published nonfiction bullfighting book *The Dangerous Summer*:

From the end of June in 1954 until August 1956 we were in Cuba working. I was in bad shape with a back that had been broken in plane crashes in Africa and I was trying to get well again. Nobody was sure how the back would turn out until we had to test it off Cabo Blanco, Peru, fishing for a very big marlin for the film of *The Old Man and the Sea*. It stood up all right and when our work on that picture was finished for better or for worse we spent the month of August in New York (56).

In private correspondence, he was especially critical. “I bitterly regret ever having participated in the film in any way,” he wrote to his editor, Wallace Meyer. “But it seemed best for all of us that an attempt be made to make a decent picture of the book. Will never have anything to do with motion pictures again” (qtd. in Stamant 132). Tracy also regretted his involvement: “If I'd known what trouble it was going to be, I'd never have agreed to it. This is for the birds” (qtd. in Deschner 55). He later said the role of Santiago was the toughest part he ever played (Curtis 725). He had staked his reputation on the project, as it had initially been slated to be his first picture as a freelance actor after he had let his contract with MGM expire. Tracy began drinking again during the production, leading to further difficulties on set. “Tracy was given to quicksilver twists of temperament that alcohol only served to exacerbate” (Curtis 698). Tracy often clashed with those involved in the production, especially during the period of production delays in Cuba. The incident of destroying a Havana bar occurred during Zinnemann's initial attempt at location

shooting in Cuba. Hemingway said of Tracy, “[He] can make money playing fat men now, or he can always get by in those toad-and-grasshopper films with Miss Hepburn, but he is a complete and terrible liability to the picture” (qtd. in Curtis 732). Zinnemann remembered of Tracy’s presence on the set, “He seemed malevolent and hostile. The crew hated him and he hated them back. Day after day, there was the sense that no progress was being made on the picture” (qtd. in Curtis 713). As a result of the stresses of the production, Tracy’s close-cropped hair, which had been dyed white at the start of the production, had turned naturally white by the end of the shoot (Stafford).

### **Conclusion**

Critical reviews of the film were mixed. Tracy was nominated for Best Actor but ultimately lost to David Niven for his performance in *Separate Tables*. “I was nominated for Old Man and the Sea,” Tracy said, “which grossed fifteen dollars, seven of which they found in the aisle” (qtd. in Curtis 786). Originally budgeted for two million dollars, the production costs ran upward of five million and never made it back at the box office. “No sex, no love affair, no excitement,” one producer explained (qtd. in Laurence 23). A reviewer observed,

To photograph these grand abstractions requires a lens more sensitive than any the Warner studio seems to have discovered in its locker. Most of the time all the spectator sees is Spencer Tracy sitting in a rowboat and mumbling to himself, and all he hears is Hemingway's own narrative prosing along the sound track (“Cinema: Two with Tracy”).

The film eventually found its audience in the high school English classroom, where teachers screened it to students reading the book due to its close faithfulness. Warner Bros. distributed copies to schools, accompanied by a study guide. The National Education Association endorsed the pamphlet and described the film as “one of the finest motion pictures ever made” (qtd. in

Laurence 36). Eventually, many would end up seeing the film outside the theater on classroom projectors and television reruns.

It is perhaps fitting that the last adaptation produced in Hemingway's lifetime was the most faithful. Unfortunately, his involvement in the final script approval ensured its critical and commercial failure. With the previous adaptations, he had been content to take the money and run. With *The Old Man and the Sea*, while he hoped the noncreative nature of his role would keep him "honest and straight" (qtd. in Laurence 16), he still regretted ever getting involved. As he wrote to Gary Cooper, who was considering a production of *Across the River and into the Trees*: "Coops the picture business is not for me and no matter how much dough we could make how would we spend it if we were dead from dealing with the characters we would have to deal with" (qtd. in Stamant 131). The observation was darkly insightful. Hemingway would never do business with the picture business again. He died just three years after it was released.

## CONCLUSION

The films discussed in this paper are prestige pictures. Often adapted from literary sources, they comprise a small portion of a studio's output but take up a disproportionate share of its total production budget. Prestige pictures represent pre-sold commodities—stories with proven quality and audience appeal. For studios, Hemingway's works possessed an aura of preeminent respectability. Some of the industry's top producers, writers, and directors tried to capture that quality on screen, including Frank Borzage, David O. Selznick, Robert Siodmak, Darryl F. Zanuck, Howard Hawks, Michael Curtiz, William Faulkner, John Huston, Jerry Wald, and Henry King. In addition, some of the industry's top stars took on the parts of Hemingway's heroes, including Gregory Peck, Joan Bennett, John Garfield, Gary Cooper, Susan Hayward, Ava Gardner, Errol Flynn, Rock Hudson, Lauren Bacall, Humphrey Bogart, and Ingrid Bergman. Many of the people involved in the adaptations were motivated by their attraction toward Hemingway and his work. Gary Cooper "moved heaven and earth to play Frederic" in *A Farewell to Arms* (Dumont 177). Burt Lancaster professed to be a "Hemingway aficionado" who had "read everything he'd ever written" (qtd. in Clinch 15). John Huston once said in an interview, "I was very influenced by [Hemingway's] writing and by his thinking...His values, his reassessment of the things that make life go" (qtd. in Meyers 2). Leland Hayward and Peter Viertel were Hemingway's close friends before they worked on *The Old Man and the Sea*.

In adapting Hemingway's works to the screen, filmmakers had to reconcile literary modes with the demands of cinematic narrative. To reproduce Frederic's first-person limited perspective in *A Farewell to Arms*, Frank Borzage directed a sequence of tracking shots from Frederic's point of view. In *The Killers*, Robert Siodmak translated the story's tone of predetermined fate through a nonlinear flashback narrative, where the main character's death

occurs at the beginning of the film. John Sturges used the device of an unseen narrator to preserve the structure and rhythm of *The Old Man and the Sea*'s prose. The films altered not only the stories' characters and plots but also their ideologies. To increase the spectacle of cinema spectatorship, studios often augmented the original material to sensationalize action, sex, and violence. For example, advance publicity for Universal's *The Killers* (1964) read, "Ronald Reagan, in a fit of violence learns that Angie Dickinson is two-timing him, slaps her viciously in Ernest Hemingway's 'The Killers,' [...] he takes real joy in slapping around his girlfriend..." (qtd. in Laurence 245-246). Those who read the short story recognized the advertisement as a crass marketing gimmick. Hemingway's story contained only latent violence and no female characters. However, many who had not read it associated Hemingway's name with misogynist brutality. Hemingway's male heroes often represent critiques of masculinity rather than direct embodiments of it. Frank M. Laurence writes,

It is partly because Hemingway is so often represented in the mass media that the word machismo is now often associated with him. From the books it would be as likely that he would be remembered for his dutiful romanticism, for his idealism, or even his cynicism and despair (246).

Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* is a eunuch. Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms* is not a soldier but an ambulance driver who feels "[ridiculous] carrying a pistol" (30). Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* possesses a spiritual connection to nature, which allows him to transcend his role as a guerilla soldier. Jordan lies prone on the ground in the first and last sentences of the novel: "He lay flat on the brown, pine-needled floor of the forest...He could feel his heart beating against the pine needle floor of the forest" (5, 444). By focusing on the action and adventure elements of Hemingway's fiction, the Hollywood adaptations often ignored the

more nuanced themes of vulnerability, emotional detachment, and disillusionment present in the books. Unfortunately, this resulted in a simplified public perception of his work.

However, the Hollywood adaptations discussed in this thesis were released more than a half century ago. There have not been any Hemingway adaptations produced by a major Hollywood studio in the twenty-first century so far. The last major studio adaptation was the Paramount-produced *Islands in the Stream* (1977). In 2008, John Irvin directed an international co-production of *The Garden of Eden*. An international co-production of *Across the River and into the Trees*, directed by Paula Ortiz, premiered at the Sun Valley Film Festival on March 30, 2022. However, as of May 2023, it is publicly unavailable.

In the last fifty years, the film industry has amplified Hemingway's mythos by focusing on the author as a character. His life is dramatized in *Hemingway* (1988), *The Legendary Life of Ernest Hemingway* (1989), *In Love and War* (1996), *Midnight in Paris* (2011), *Hemingway & Gellhorn* (2012), *Papa Hemingway in Cuba* (2015), and *Genius* (2016). He is also the focus of a number of documentaries, including *Ernest Hemingway: Wrestling with Life* (1998), *Ernest Hemingway: Rivers to the Sea* (2005), *Hemingway Unknown* (2012), and *Hemingway* (2021). These interpretations point to the durable relevance of a larger-than-life figure, a Midwesterner, World War I hero, expatriate artist, alcoholic, war correspondent, womanizer, Pulitzer and Nobel winner, NKVD spy, big-game hunter, U-boat hunter, sailor, boxer, deep-sea fisher, gun collector, polydactyl cat collector, plane crash survivor, and suicide. Since his death, his homes have been converted into museums and tourist attractions—complete with gift shops, soda machines, and senior admission discounts—and his estate has branded his name to market products from rum to fishing equipment to coasters on [www.ernesthemingwaycollection.com](http://www.ernesthemingwaycollection.com) and

www.papasplar.com. The sheer number and variety of commodifications attest to society's consumption not just of commercial products but also of celebrities themselves.

As a producer of popular media, Hollywood is particularly sensitive to cultural codes, and productions necessarily reflect ongoing societal preoccupations (Kaplan 22). The three adaptations discussed in this thesis demonstrate that the values expressed in Hemingway's fiction found relevance across three decades of American history. At the same time, the adaptations critiqued Hemingway's ideologies and, in doing so, reshaped his popular image. In its capacity for myth making, Hollywood made Hemingway just as recognizable as any star.



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