

ANALYSIS

THE STYLE OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY

(1899-1961)

“‘Giving style’ to one’s character—a great and rare art! It is exercised by those who see all the strengths and weaknesses of their own natures and then comprehend them in an artistic plan until everything appears as art and reason and even weakness delights the eye.”

Friedrich Nietzsche
Thus Spake Zarathustra (1883)
quoted by Philip Young
epigraph to *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration*
(Penn State 1952, 1966)

“I experienced a singular sensation on reading the first sentence of *A Farewell to Arms*. There are sensations you cannot describe. You may know what causes them but you cannot tell what portions of your mind they affect nor yet, possibly, what parts of your physical entity. I can only say that it was as if I had found at last again something shining after a long delving amongst dust. I daresay prospectors after gold or diamonds feel something like that. But theirs can hardly be so coldly clear an emotion, or one so impersonal. The three impeccable writers of English prose that I have come across in fifty years or so of reading in search of English prose have been Joseph Conrad, W. H. Hudson...and Ernest Hemingway.... Impeccable each after his kind!...With Hemingway it was just excitement. Like waiting at the side of a coppice, when foxhunting, for the hounds to break cover. One was going on a long chase in dry clear weather, one did not know in what direction or over what country....

Hemingway’s words strike you, each one, as if they were pebbles fetched fresh from a brook. They live and shine, each in its place. So one of his pages has the effect of a brook-bottom into which you look down through the flowing water. The words form a tessellation, each in order beside the other. It is a very great quality. It is indeed the supreme quality of the written art of the moment. It is a great part of what makes literature come into its own at such rare times as it achieves that feat....The aim—the achievement—of the great prose writer is to use words so that they shall seem new and alive because of their juxtaposition with other words. This is the gift Hemingway has supremely. Any sentence of his taken at random will hold your attention. And irresistibly.”

Ford Madox Ford
“Introduction to *A Farewell to Arms*” (1932)
Critical Writings of Ford Madox Ford
ed. Frank MacShane
(U Nebraska 1964) 127-28, 133

“They show a decided reluctance to employ any terms that might imply they are ‘taken in’ by ideal values. This is partly a postwar phenomenon, a phase of the ‘debunking’ fever which is so strong in modern literature throughout the world, but which has taken hardest of all in young America. There is a very pertinent passage in *A Farewell to Arms*...‘I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain’....Of course we must not make too much of the World War as an occasion for this cynical philosophy, which is at least as old as Byron...In any case we find in these new writers a notable reluctance to employ abstract nouns and adjectives of markedly ideal or rational connotation. Passing a certain judgment on life, these writers are disgusted with any terminology which seems to soft-soap the truth....Err on the side of understatement rather than overstatement....

There is one rather exceptional sentence with a relative clause. But in general that is a complication which he [Hemingway] eschews, as he eschews all other ways of modifying his predicate with subordinate clauses, conditional, concessive, temporal, etc. That, he seems to feel, would open the door to those sophistications, rational or sentimental, which do but serve to falsify the plain facts of experience. People do not think or feel in complex patterns, but in such simple units as these: ‘Good whiskey was very

pleasant. It was one of the pleasant parts of life'...And this is, in general, the secret of his effects. The movements and words and sensations are recorded; the emotions are left to be inferred. There can be no doubt that for many readers of sensitive taste he gets his effects. One reason is that he has a faculty for ranging the plainest words so as to give them the expressive accent of natural speech. This is particularly notable in his dialogue. On the surface the talk of his people is often trivial enough in matter and sentiment; but somehow he conjures up, by repetition of apparently insignificant remarks, a feeling of tension and emotional import which is both dramatic and satisfying.”

Joseph Warren Beach
The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique
(Appleton-Century-Crofts 1932) 532-33, 535-37

“There are no superfluous words, no visible rhetoric. But the style of *In Our Time* is not so simple as it looks. The blunt sentences are delicately varied in structure, with the cadences—like Mark Twain’s—of familiar speech not of conventional written prose. If Hemingway had learned about style and cadence from Gertrude Stein, he had none of her obscurity and he used none of her materials. If he had for a time studied Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway went quickly beyond him in precision and form. These naked stories in naked language were something new in English, and they were distinctly Hemingway’s.”

Carl Van Doren
The American Novel 1789-1939, 23rd edition
(Macmillan 1940-68) 340-41

“What he wanted, as he said later in *Death in the Afternoon*, was a prose more intensely precise than conventional prose, and hence capable of effects not yet achieved....He wanted not merely to tell ‘the truth about his own feelings at the moment when the exist’; he wanted to aim at that luminous and imaginative truth which a writer like Thoreau, on the strength of a muscular integrity and passion for nature very like his own, had created out of fidelity to the details of life as he saw them. What he wanted was that sense of grace, that ‘sequence of motion and fact’ held at unwavering pitch, that could convey, as nothing else could, the secret fluid symbolism in the facts.”

Alfred Kazin
On Native Grounds
(Doubleday/Anchor 1942) 257

“He had been a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*, he had served with the Italian Arditi and had been wounded—and here his early experiences seemed to fuse: the flat yet equivocal Western tones, as well as the ‘innocence’ of the provincial, were linked to that mode of ‘reporting’ which, heightened by some altogether personal process of artistry, was to alter the rhythms of our contemporary prose. Perhaps, too, no other contemporary writer brought his readers so many vivid and almost unbearable impressions of the human temperament under the pressures of war.”

Maxwell Geismar
Literary History of the United States, 3rd edition
(Macmillan 1946-63) 1300

“As a literary medium, the Midwestern style derives from Mark Twain, who is still the master of American prose, but it also owes a great deal to Gertrude Stein and Sherwood Anderson. Perhaps it owes more to Hemingway, whose novels made it so popular that it promised to become the accepted vehicle of American fiction. Soon the Midwestern style was affecting the popular speech from which it had developed, so that a whole generation of young Americans learned to talk like Hemingway’s heroes.”

Malcolm Cowley
The Literary Situation
(Viking Compass 1947-66) 141-42

“There was a difference between reporting and literature, and he proceeded to discover just what that difference involved for him, in hard work and discipline. He learned that difference from Pound, and [Ford Madox] Ford, and Gertrude Stein. Pound blue-penciled his early work, struck out most of the adjectives and gave its latent clarity a chance to become explicit. With her advice, Miss Stein helped him to retain and

develop a simplicity of expression which had before her been largely an accident resulting from his freedom from academic influences. As [John Peale] Bishop puts it, 'Miss Stein had developed a literary medium; but she had no material, at least none that was available to that strangely infantile genius of hers.'...The 'aesthetic of simplicity' involves not merely a specious fidelity to Howells' commonplace truth but a basic struggle for absolute accuracy in making words correspond to experience. In this struggle the absence of intellectual interest, his scorn of men who 'make abstractions do for experience,' served him well. The problems of structure and style had all therefore to be related to discrete and irreducible fact."

Frederick J. Hoffman
The Modern Novel in America
(Regnery Gateway 1951) 99-100, 110-11

"The second sentence [*A Farewell to Arms*], which draws attention from the mountainous background to the bed of the river in the middle distance, produces a sense of clearness, dryness, whiteness, and sunniness which is to grow very subtly under the artist's hands until it merges with one of the novel's two dominant symbols, the mountain-image. The other major symbol is the plain. Throughout the sub-structure of the book it is opposed to the mountain-image. Down this plain the river flows. Across it, on the dusty road among the trees, pass the men-at-war, faceless and voiceless and unidentified against the background of the spreading plain."

Carlos Baker
Hemingway: The Writer as Artist
(Princeton 1952) 94-95

"All this—and everything else—is described in the sparest and most athletic style conceivable. Hemingway's ideal is a prose 'without tricks and without cheating,' and Joseph Warren Beach speaks suggestively of the 'self-denying ordinance' he has passed upon himself in his attempt to see how far he can go with 'a mere notation of objective facts.' The influence of Gertrude Stein and of Sherwood Anderson was important in helping him to find himself as a stylist, but he never followed Stein into unintelligibility. His writing is (characteristically) simple to the point of brutality, concrete, emphatic as the rain of bullets, largely monosyllabic and innocent of subordination, as rich in 'and's' as the English Bible."

Edward Wagenknecht
Cavalcade of the American Novel:
From the Birth of the Nation to the Middle of the Twentieth Century
(Holt 1952) 372

"There is no need to describe the style at any great length, so well is it known. It is for the most part a colloquial and, apparently, a nonliterary prose, characterized by a conscientious simplicity of diction and sentence structure. The words are chiefly short and common ones, and there is a severe and austere economy in their use. The typical sentence is a simple declarative sentence, or a couple of these joined by a conjunction; there is very little subordination of clauses. The rhythms are simple and direct, and the effect is of crispness, cleanness and clarity...

It is a style which normally keeps out of sight the intelligence behind it. The sequence in which events are described is strictly the sequence in which they occurred; no mind reorders or analyzes them. Perceptions come direct to the reader, unmixed with comment. Consequently the impression is of an intense and disciplined objectivity, a matter-of-fact offering of whatever details are chosen to build in the reader the response for which the author has provided only the stimulus. Since the subject matter is most often violence and pain, the result of this tensely unemotional, 'primitive' and 'objective' presentation of experience is frequently a characteristic effect of irony and understatement. The vision which selects the details is narrow, and sharply focused. A great deal is not seen at all, but what is looked at is caught brilliantly, and the images strike the eye as if it had never caught them before....

A style has its own content, the manner of prose its own meanings, and there have been two or three fairly incisive attempts to figure out what Hemingway's prose style adds up to, what it does and says. It has been shown, for instance, that the style itself is very suggestive of the dislocated and disunified world

which it reflects. Mark Schorer has argued that the bareness of the prose suggests the bareness of life, which is Hemingway's 'subject.' He also showed that the style was itself an expression of the novelist's stiff-lipped morality.

But the things that Hemingway's style most suggests are the very things that he was trying also to say directly and outright. His style is as eloquent of his content as the content itself; the style is a large part of the content. The strictly disciplined controls which he exerted over his hero and his 'bad nerves' are precise parallels to the strictly disciplined sentences he wrote. Understatement, abbreviated statement and lack of statement reflect without the slightest distortion the rigid restraint the man felt he must practice if he were to survive. The 'mindlessness' of the style is the result of the need to 'stop thinking,' and is the purest reflection of that need. The intense simplicity of the prose is a means by which the man said, Things must be *made* simple, or I am lost, in a way you'll never be. There is no rearrangement and reordering of the material because the mind operates no more than it has to. And all these things are communicated by the manner of the presentation.

The 'impersonal tone' speaks the need to escape personality. The 'objectivity' exists because subjectivity could mean that the brain could get to 'racing like a flywheel with the weight gone.' The 'directness' and 'immediacy' with which objects are seen convey the necessity for seeing for one's self, straight and anew, when so much of what others have said they saw seems false. The 'economy' of the prose masters the little it can control cleanly. The style is 'unemotional' and 'primitive' because it has to be, and it says so. It is 'tense' because that is the atmosphere in which the struggle for control takes place, and the tension expresses the fact. The prose gives an impression of 'bareness' because, as Schorer said, so much of life is barren for the hero. But that was not really Hemingway's 'subject.' His subject was violence and pain, and their effects, and recovery from the effects in the face of and partly through more of the same. The style which expresses this subject matter is itself perfectly expressive of these things, and of the message: life, which is the material, must be constantly forced under the most intense and rigorous control and held in the tightest of rein, for it is savage and can get out of hand....

This is of course a description of the style which made Hemingway famous—of his original and distinctive way of writing, the one by which he is still best known. It does not, however, accurately describe the style he had developed by 1940, say, when *For Whom the Bell Tolls* came out. In this novel, as in some of the work which he published later, there is still the same clean precision and freshness. It remained clear that this was Hemingway writing. But the prose, still very distinguished, called much less attention to itself. It is less terse, less austere, less behavioristic and impersonal, is more relaxed and orthodox. The sentences are longer and more graceful in their rhythms... Whatever style one might prefer—the earlier one was more striking and the later might be called more 'mature'—the earlier writing is of more interest and more importance, for it was this prose which established Hemingway's innovations and brilliance, and which had such an influence on other writers....

An argument for this view of the implications and meaning of Hemingway's famous style is fortified by the fact that the style was developed and perfected in precisely the same period when Hemingway was grimly reorganizing his whole personality after the scattering of his forces in Italy. The fact that the two efforts came together chronologically has nothing to do with coincidence: they came together because they were inseparable aspects of one effort. The man learned to hold tight, not think and let in the little at a time that he could control.... When it got a little better, when Robert Jordan won a kind of mastery over his difficulties, then in corresponding fashion the writing is less rigidly controlled....

Hemingway was a marvelous unity of man and writer, and of matter and manner, who wrote as his hero must live. His attitudes, personality, preoccupations and subjects had complex origins, like those of other writers. But it is clear that in him all of these things traced more than anywhere else to a series of blows which began to take up in Michigan, and then took 'finally and for good' at Fossalta. It seems very strange, but his style—shaped into a new thing from the materials of so many other styles, and itself the source of so much that we read and hear—was, like a great deal else in Hemingway, a direct result of trauma. And this, finally, is the message the style has to give."

Philip Young
Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration

“The Kansas City *Star* was in 1917 one of the half-dozen great American newspapers...Innumerable smooth, professional storytellers served their apprenticeship under the stern discipline of William Rockhill Nelson, his lieutenants, and his professional heirs. Like the revered New York *World*, with which it was often compared, the *Star* infected its staff with a curiosity about mankind and a craftsmanlike regard for clear, provocative, good—as opposed to ‘fine’—writing....The *Star* included several rules which went far beyond the conventional instruction in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. These were the rules which made a *Star* training memorable.

The style sheet’s first paragraph—and it remains the initial paragraph in the current style book—might well stand as the First Commandment in the prose creed which is today synonymous with the surface characteristics of Hemingway’s work. Use short sentences. Use short paragraphs. Use vigorous English. Be positive, not negative....Never use old slang....Slang to be enjoyable must be fresh....Avoid the use of adjectives, especially such extravagant ones as *splendid*, *gorgeous*, *grand*, *magnificent*, etc....‘Those were the best rules I ever learned for the business of writing,’ Hemingway told a young newspaperman in 1940. ‘I’ve never forgotten them. No man with any talent, who feels and writes truly about the thing he is trying to say, can fail to write well if he abides by them.’”

Charles A. Fenton

The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway: The Early Years
(Viking/Compass 1958) 29-34

“From the beginning he bore one of the marks of a great author: his style was original and unmistakable. A single paragraph of his prose is easily identifiable; he prints upon each sentence the mark of his temperament and style. Hemingway at his best establishes a characteristic mood, a literary ambience which is entirely personal and inimitable, as much as his disciples may try to imitate it....

Like Joyce and Proust, Hemingway is a writer who uses the material of his own life to construct a transformed and artistically heightened fiction....His mind operates exclusively on the level of concrete image and is wary of dead abstraction. He is anxious to communicate to the reader ‘how it was,’ to recreate the exact physical sensations that he, or his heroes, felt under certain conditions. This is the most successful aspect of his technique. After reading Hemingway the reader is left with a strong impression of ‘how it was’ to shoot lions in Kenya, to take part in the retreat from Caporetto, or to live in Paris in the early nineteen-twenties. Hemingway derived his style from two sources: his early experience as a newspaper man and his encounter with Gertrude Stein and other avant-garde writers in Paris in the Twenties. As a journalist on the *Kansas City Star* he learned to write succinctly, to avoid superfluous adjectives and adverbs, and to pack the maximum content into the minimum space....

Hemingway has published in all five volumes of stories including a definitive volume, *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories* (1938), which includes all his shorter fiction published up to that time. This material may be roughly divided into three groups according to subject matter: (1) stories laid in American, including the Nick Adams fiction of the Michigan wilderness and the American stories of boxing and crime; (2) stories of Americans in Europe, including experiences of the First World War in the Italian army; and (3) African hunting stories....

In *For Whom the Bell Tolls* [1940] he returned to this [early] style to create the best book of his later period. It has been rightly remarked that this style has ruined more budding authors than any other influence since Sterne, but it is still true that when Hemingway utilizes it he achieves a distinctive, powerful, and entirely personal idiom. Actually the most typical Hemingway novels—*The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*—are written in two styles in alternation. First there is the highly condensed description and narration, written in the flowing chain of images suggestive of free verse; the opening page of *A Farewell to Arms* and the fishing scenes in *The Sun Also Rises* are typical. The second style is the terse dialogue, almost bare of comment and full of conversational blind alleys and *non sequiturs*, which Hemingway’s detractors find it so easy to parody. The dialogue style appears at its best in the conversations of the hero of *A Farewell to Arms* with his Italian comrades and in numerous short stories

of the type of 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber.' It is through the alternation of these two styles that Hemingway avoids the monotony which has been the downfall of his imitators."

Donald Heiney
Recent American Literature 4
(Barron's Educational Series 1958) 148-51, 162

[In 'The Killers'] "The short simple rhythms, the succession of coordinating clauses, and the general lack of subordination—all suggest a dislocated and ununified world. Hemingway was apparently trying to suggest in his style the direct experience—things as seen and felt, one after another, and not as the mind arranges and analyzes them. A style that involves subordination and complicated shadings of emphasis, a style that tends toward complex sentences with many qualifying clauses and phrases, implies an exercise of critical discrimination—the sifting of experience through the intellect. But Hemingway, apparently, was primarily concerned with giving the immediate impact of experience rather than with analyzing and evaluating it in detail. (We can notice, in this connection, that in his work he rarely indulges in any psychological analysis, and is rarely concerned with the detailed development of a character.)

His very style, then, seems to imply that the use of the intellect, with its careful discriminations, may blur the rendering of experience and may falsify it; and thus this style, in connection with the character of marginal sensibility, may be taken as implying distrust of the intellect in solving man's basic problems. Despite the application of intellect to the problems of the world, he seems to be saying, the world is still a disorderly and brutal mess. And it is hard to find any sure scale of values. Therefore, it is well to remember the demands of fundamental situations—those involving sex, love, danger, and death, in which the instinctive life is foremost—because they are frequently glossed over or falsified by social conventions or sterile intellectuality. It is well to remember the simple virtues of courage, honesty, fidelity, discipline."

Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren
Understanding Fiction
(Prentice-Hall 1959, 1979) 201

"His style is one of the most self-conscious, original, and personal styles ever invented, based on a proper respect for words such as a man might develop from the habit of sending cablegrams from battlefields at a high price per word. It is hard to describe an effect of simplicity originating in the silences and suppressions of a man of such deep feeling."

Sean O'Faolain
"A Clean, Well-Lighted Place"
Short Stories: A Study in Pleasure
(Little, Brown 1961)

"Many of the qualities of Hemingway's early prose style—among them, the short sentences, the sparse use of adjectives, the clarity of statement—were developed through his writing for the *Star* during the seven months of his employment....His style was to develop into something tighter, more concentrated, and more lucid than Anderson's and would achieve a character quite its own, but in diction and in rhythm it looks back to Anderson. Interestingly enough, both men thought of Mark Twain as the great model."

Mark Schorer
Major Writers of America II
(Harcourt 1962) 675-76

"The style characteristically is simple, even to the point of monotony. The characteristic sentence is simple, or compound; and if compound, there is no implied subtlety in the coordination of the clauses. The paragraph structure is, characteristically, based on simple sequence. There is an obvious relation between this style and the characters and situations with which the author is concerned—a relation of dramatic decorum. (There are, on the other hand, examples, especially in the novels, of other, more fluent, lyrical effects, but even here this fluency is founded on the conjunction *and*; it is a rhythmical and not a logical fluency....The short, simple rhythms, the succession of coordinate clauses, the general lack of subordination,—all suggest a dislocated and ununified world. The figures who live in this world live a sort

of hand-to-mouth existence perceptually, and conceptually they hardly live at all. Subordination implies some exercise of discrimination—the sifting of reality through the intellect. But in Hemingway we see a Romantic anti-intellectualism.”

Robert Penn Warren, Introduction
A Farewell to Arms
Three Novels of Ernest Hemingway
(Scribner's 1962) xxviii-xxix

“It is not surprising that Hemingway's verse, published by *Poetry* in 1923, is recognizably imagistic in character—and perhaps his later heroics are foreshadowed by the subject of one of those poems, Theodore Roosevelt....With the exception of Jake's confessions, that is to say, *The Sun Also Rises*, all of Hemingway's novels are written in the *style indirect libre*—indirect discourse which more or less closely follows the consciousness of a central character. An increasing tendency for the author to intrude, commenting in his own person, is one of the weaknesses of *Across the River*....He derives his strength from a power to visualize episodes through the eyes of those most directly involved...

The ultimate article of his credo, which he shares with Malraux and Sartre, is the good fight for the lost cause. And the ultimate protagonist is Jesus in “Today is Friday,” whose crucifixion is treated like an athletic feat, and whose capacity for taking punishment rouses a fellow feeling in the Roman soldiers. The stoic or masochistic determination to take it bring us back from Hemingway to his medium, which—although it eschews the passive voice—is essentially a receiving instrument, especially sensitized for recording a series of violent shocks. The paradox of toughness and sensitivity is resolved, and the qualities and defects of his writing are reconciled, if we merely remember that he was—and still is—a poet....

The ironic contrast—romantic preconception exploded by contact with harsh reality—is basic with Hemingway, as it has been with all novelists who have written effectively about war. The realism of his generation reacted, not only against Wilsonian idealism, but against Wilsonian rhetoric. Hence the famous paragraph from the Caporetto episode describing Frederic Henry's embarrassment before such abstract words as ‘glory’ and ‘honor,’ which seem to him obscene beside the concrete names of places and numbers of roads....Since words have become inflated and devalued, Hemingway is willing to recognize no values save those which can be immediately felt and directly pointed out....There is something in common between this attitude and the familiar British habit of understatement....

The disparity between rhetoric and experience, which became so evident during the First World War, prompted the Twenties to repudiate the genteel stylistic tradition and to accept the American vernacular as our norm of literary discourse....The powers of connotation, the possibilities of oblique suggestion and semantic association, are actually grasped by Hemingway as well as any writer of our time...His purgation of language has aptly been compared, by Robert Penn Warren, to the revival of diction that Wordsworth accomplished with *Lyrical Ballads*....

And among Hemingway's elder contemporaries, Ring Lardner was a kind of ventriloquist, who made devastating use of the vernacular to satirize the vulgarity and stupidity of his dummies. It remained for Hemingway—along with Anderson—to identify himself wholly with the lives he wrote about, not so much entering into them as allowing them to take possession of him, and accepting—along with their sensibilities and perceptions—the limitations of their point of view and the limits of their range of expression....The effectiveness of Hemingway's method depends very largely upon his keen ear for speech. His conversations are vivid, often dramatic, although he comes to depend too heavily upon them and to scant the other obligations of the novelist....Consider his restricted choice of adjectives, and the heavy load of subjective implication carried by such uncertain monosyllables as ‘fine’ and ‘nice’...

In short, he is communicating excitement; and if this communication is received, it establishes a uniquely personal relationship...Hemingway manages to sustain his reputation for concreteness by an exploring eye for the incidental detail....When he offers this general view of a restaurant—‘It was full of smoke and drinking and singing’—he is an Impressionist if not an abstractionist. Thence to Expressionism is an easy step: ‘...the room whirled’....Hemingway puts his emphasis on nouns because, among parts of speech, they come closest to things. Stringing them along by means of conjunctions, he approximates the

actual flow of experience....His timeliness expresses itself in continuous forms of the verb and in his fondness for all kinds of participial constructions. These, compounded and multiplied, create an ambience of overwhelming activity....As in the movies, the illusion of movement is produced by repeating the same shot with further modification every time. Whenever a new clause takes more than one step ahead, a subsequent clause repeats it in order to catch up. Repetition, as in 'Up in Michigan,' brings the advancing narrative back to an initial point of reference....

Hemingway keeps his writing on a linear plane. He holds the purity of his line by moving in one direction, ignoring sidetracks and avoiding structural complications. By presenting a succession of images, each of which has its brief moment when it commands the reader's undivided attention, he achieves his special vividness and fluidity. For what he lacks in structure he makes up in sequence, carefully ordering visual impressions as he sets them down and ironically juxtaposing the various items on his lists and inventories....

If psychological theories could be proved by works of fiction, Hemingway would lend his authority to the long contested formula of William James, which equates emotion with bodily sensations....Some [critics] have accused Hemingway of aggressive anti-intellectualism: I am thinking particularly of Aldous Huxley. But Huxley's own work is so pure an example of all that Hemingway has recoiled from, so intellectual in the airiest sense, and so unsupported by felt experience, that the argument has played into Hemingway's hands. We have seen enough of the latter to know that he doesn't really hate books—himself having written a dozen, several of which are and will remain, the best of their kind.

As for his refusal to behave like a man of letters, he reminds us of Hotspur, who professes to be a laconic Philistine and turns out—with no little grandiloquence—to be the most poetic character in Shakespeare's play....He has been attempting to restore some decent degree of correspondence between words and things; and the task of verification is a heavy one, which throws the individual back on his personal resources of awareness. That he has succeeded within limits, and with considerable strain, is less important than that he has succeeded, that a few more aspects of life have been captured for literature."

Harry Levin

"Observations on the Style of Ernest Hemingway"

Contexts of Criticism (Harvard 1957)

reprinted in *Hemingway: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert P. Weeks
(Prentice-Hall Twentieth Century Views 1962) 73-85

"The condition of life is pain; and the joys of the most innocent surface are somehow tied to its stifling pangs. The resolution of this dissonance in art made the beauty of Hemingway's stories. He had in the process tuned a marvelous prose. Out of the colloquial American speech, with its simple declarative sentences and its strings of Nordic monosyllables, he got effects of the utmost subtlety. F. M. Ford has found the perfect simile for the impression produced by this writing: 'Hemingway's words strike you, each one, as if they were pebbles fetched fresh from a brook'...[see Ford above]. Hemingway has mastered his method of economy in apparent casualness and relevance in apparent indirection, and has turned its sense of what happens and the way in which it happens into something as hard and clear as a crystal but as disturbing as a great lyric."

Edmund Wilson

"Hemingway: Gauge of Morale"

The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature
(Oxford 1965) 175, 178

"[Hemingway's prose is] motivated by a comic contempt of standard English in its aspect of respectability, gentility, polite euphemism, though it never forgets it in its aspect of biblical plainness and repetition."

Daniel Fuchs

"Ernest Hemingway, Literary Critic"

American Literature
(January 1965)

“Hemingway...was painfully conscious of his style. He said that when he was young he wrote like Kipling, whom he admired, but that later on he knew he ‘had to break the language down and start new.’ In doing so, he developed a very distinct style, marked by the following: a simple sentence structure with a striking lack of subordinate elements; the piling-up of statement after statement, joined, if at all, with the conjunction ‘and’; the free use of concrete details, a vivid re-creation of the sense world; but few comparisons, few figures of speech, and those usually of the simplest sort; a heavy dependence upon dialogue, an excellent transcript of colloquial rhythms.

Hemingway’s style, widely imitated by writers of the hard-boiled school of fiction, effectively reflected the attitude toward life that one associates with him, the attitude of a spectator who looks and depicts but refuses to comment. ‘The Killers’ is typical Hemingway of the early period, its style devoid of ornament—simple, spare, elemental. In the opening the sentence structure is so primitive that it sounds like a first-grade reader....This is about as direct and elemental as expression can be. It is as though Hemingway were saying, ‘I’m giving it to you as straight and direct as I can. This is it.’”

Ralph Singleton
The Art of Prose Fiction
(World 1967) 16

“Hemingway’s imitators capture only his tense sentence rhythms, simple diction, and generally lean expression. What they miss is the rigor that unites style with vision and mood....From Ring Lardner he learned—as early as high school—how to affect a flippant, ironic prose that barely concealed real indignation. Sherwood Anderson’s loosely episodic structure and free-flowing vernacular speech rhythms influenced him too, especially in early pieces like ‘My Old Man.’ But Anderson’s carelessness with words and his bent toward sentimentality were intolerable to an aspiring stylist whose apprentice years as a journalist had already taught him the need for greater rigor. Ezra Pound’s advocacy of simplicity, precision, concreteness, and freshness in language was not lost on him either, and he acknowledged Pound as ‘the man who taught me to distrust adjectives’... Gertrude Stein was a better teacher, who, Hemingway wrote, ‘discovered many truths about rhythms and the uses of words in repetition that were valid and valuable’.... Fakers, Hemingway insists, are bad writers and ‘all bad writers are in love with the epic’...

Pressing hard, one upon the other, Hemingway’s conjunction-bound simple sentences declare flux and crisis. The static luxury of reflective or introspective discourse would seem as intolerable extravagance when reality demands mobility....It is a conspicuously American style, stressing naturalness of language, syntax that fragments rather than unifies his predominantly simple sentences, and a persistent use of repetition to force the parts into a coherent whole...extraordinarily akin to the mechanics of poetry....The staccato rhythm increases consciousness of tension, as does the nervous narrative eye darting about. Thinking is minimal...The constants in Hemingway’s style function, then, to express a vision of experience and also to control his hero’s emotional response (as well as his own) to that experience. If, as critics have observed, Hemingway’s prose is lyric rather than dramatic, it is a reticent, not a confessional lyricism. Even when he narrates from the perspective of the first person, we are privy to what the hero sees and does, rarely to a direct statement of what he feels....

Hemingway needed a style compatible with the ‘code.’ Reticence is the hallmark of that style, but a reticence so artful it nearly shouts through silence a testimony of inward torment. When there is neither tension nor torment, just the joy of companionship and nature, for example, the sentences open and expand to reflect wonder and delight. Thus, as Jake Barnes and Bill Gorton journey by bus to their fishing site.... Though he suppresses whatever need not be stated, Hemingway’s style is not evasive. He strips away whatever obscures the object that evokes feeling. No euphemisms gloss the harsh, violent facts of reality. Nor, at his best, does he embellish them with rhetorical flourishes or elaborate abstractions. By telling without comment and telling in the vernacular, Hemingway avoids direct statement about emotion without obscuring the intensity of the emotion. Like Robert Frost, who considered himself a synecdochist. Hemingway also believed, as he wrote in *Death in the Afternoon*, that ‘any part you make will represent the whole if it’s made truly.’

His adjectives and adverbs, for example, are sparse and relatively unspecific. What delights is usually *fine, swell, lovely, very nice, or very good*; what appalls may be *rotten or damned awful*. That they are trite in no way renders them impersonal or ineffectual. Even when trite, the vernacular may suggest deeply felt emotion without wholly revealing all that is felt. For similar reasons, Hemingway curbs the force and diversity of his verbs. Variants of to be serve as his dominant form, usually introduced by an expletive: 'there is,' 'there were.' Frequently gerunds replace the anticipated verbs: 'The crowd shouted all the time...keeping up whistling and yelling,' as if to rein the emotive surge of 'shouted, whistled, and yelled.' It is the noun, as Harry Levin points out, that Hemingway emphasizes because nouns 'come closest to things. Stringing them along by means of conjunctions, he approximates the actual flow of experience.' As Hemingway's heroes select experience to order chaos, so Hemingway selects his sentence rhythms and parts of speech to mirror reality and, so far as possible, to control its impact upon the spirit...

And those who lie in Hemingway's fiction, whether to themselves or to others, often adopt the mannerisms of traditional literary speech. Contrast, for example, the plausible but imperfect concern of the lover in 'Hills Like White Elephants' with the simple, though bitter, honesty of the young woman about to have an abortion....At his best his devices never usurp attention but help to sharpen the focus upon a lyrical, emotional awareness of experience....

Hemingway does not use symbols like a 'symbolist.' Rather than artificially impose intellectual significance from without, he allows his meaning to emerge from within. Hemingway never practiced, as Bern Oldsey writes, 'the symbolic or mythic overlay. His images and symbols are organic, interior, naturalistic, almost always they come out of the fictional context'....'No good book has ever been written that has in it symbols arrived at beforehand and stuck in,' Hemingway told a friend. Though Hemingway avoided sticking symbols in, he knew...how to draw them out and shape them to serve the emotions rather than the mind. His allusive titles, for example (*The Sun Also Rises, A Farewell to Arms, For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and the like—drawn from biblical and literary sources), are not merely symbolic clues to transparent meaning. They function, rather, as ironic comments on complex reality, their multiple overtones most effective when heard together with all the harmonies and dissonances that sound throughout the entire work."

Arthur Waldhorn
A Reader's Guide to Ernest Hemingway
(Farrar, Straus 1972) 30-39

"He studied the curious language known as cabelese, in which every word had to do the work of six or seven. At three dollars a word he would put a message something like this on the wires: KEMAL INSWARDS UNBURNED SMYRNA GUILTY GREEKS. The translation appearing in the Hearst papers would be: 'Mustapha Kemal in an exclusive interview with the correspondent of the International News Service [KEMAL INSWARDS] denied vehemently that the Turkish forces had any part in the burning of Smyrna [UNBURNED SMYRNA]. The city, Kemal stated, was fired by incendiaries in the troops of the Greek rear guard before the first Turkish patrols entered the city [GUILTY GREEKS].' Cabelese was an exercise in omitting everything that can be taken for granted. It contributed to Hemingway's literary method, just as the newspaper assignments contributed to his subject matter....

I have known many apprentice writers, but not one other who was willing, at twenty-three, to put aside everything he thought he had learned and start again with the simplest things...Hemingway studied writing in Paris as if he were studying geometry without a textbook and inventing theorems as he went along. He accepted the postulate that the function of any literary work is to evoke some particular emotion from the reader; but how could that best be done? Most writers were content to describe an emotion as it was felt by themselves or their heroes, in hope that the reader would be moved by it, but this was a method that made him the mere auditor of someone else's fear or longing or rage. Hemingway wanted to make his readers feel the emotion directly—not as if they were being told about it, but as if they were taking part in it. The best way to produce this effect, he decided as a first theorem, was to set down exactly, in their proper sequence, the sights, sounds, touches, tastes, and smells that had evoked an emotion he remembered feeling. Then, without auctorial comments and without ever saying that he or his hero had been frightened, sad, or angry, he could make the reader feel the emotion for himself....

I think the effects on sympathetic and attentive readers, at first a minority, were close to those he planned to produce. Other readers blamed Hemingway, insensitively, for being tough and insensitive. But the attentive ones were moved, though they seldom knew why, and they felt they were seeing events for themselves instead of just hearing about them. They felt that the exaggeratedly simple and awkward-looking style made everything seem authentic; and they also felt that the 'chapters' [vignettes in *In Our Time*] had an impact not in proportion to their size, as if part of it depended on words that went unspoken. Written without tricks—except the great ones of understatement and omission—those very brief works proved to be news that stayed news [reference to Ezra Pound's definition of literature]. They have exerted a permanent influence even on writers who turned against Hemingway, and they brought about something like a revolution in American prose fiction.

[His vignettes in *In Our Time*] bear a resemblance to some of the 'epiphanies' that Joyce recorded in manuscripts not published till after his death. Indeed, most of them *are* epiphanies in the Joycean sense that each is 'a sudden spiritual manifestation whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself.' It was Hemingway's method, though, to present the vulgar background and to let the manifestation be inferred....He wrote no more 'chapters' after his return from Toronto. Instead he went on to the second stage in his program, which consisted in writing stories. He began by applying the method developed in his vignettes, but this time, besides presenting a scene, he included some of the events leading up to it, in strict chronological sequence. He also included dialogue, for which he had a naturally fine ear. But simple chronology, or narrative sequence, was the principal element that distinguished the stories from the 'chapters' [vignettes], and Hemingway displayed an extraordinary talent for putting first things first, second things second, and for stopping short of what other writers would regard as the climax in order to let the reader go on for himself. That explains the power of suggestion of an early story like 'Cat in the Rain,' for instance: the climax is on the next page after the end....

He had...an unusually rich subconscious and a stock of subject matter, both giving him an advantage over his teachers. Ezra Pound had only two closely related subjects at the time, art and the life of art. Gertrude Stein's principal subject was herself. Hemingway's subject was also himself, or his inner world, but that self had a passion for acquiring knowledge and for rushing forward to meet external challenges, so that his inner world already included a broad and highly colored segment of the outer world. He was a very complicated young man at twenty-six, with painful memories to exorcise...and with something close to a genius for simplification. There were some readers—only a few at a time, for he had not been printed in American magazines (except *Poetry*)—who felt that his stories were completely new in American fiction....

Time and again his 'luck,' as he called that inner resource [the unconscious], had enabled him to produce apparently simple works that have an amazing resonance, appealing, as they do to subconscious feelings in others. Time and again he had descended to a level of emotion, call it prelogical or prehistoric, at which natural objects are symbols without ceasing to be solidly real; at which homely actions acquire a ritual value and events are presented in a fashion that makes them archetypes of human experience."

Malcolm Cowley
A Second Flowering: Works and Days of the Lost Generation
(1973; Penguin 1980) 49, 62, 66-67, 222

"In obscurity and poverty, alloying the direct voice of his journalism with the exalted resolves of the Mandarin expatriates, he stubbornly forged a style that became, for a generation and more of stoic, hedonistic, 'lost' men, a life style. The style seemed to some (but not to Pound, or Fitzgerald, or Wilson) naïve; there were always New York critics who found Hemingway simply stupid. Yet the letters show a remarkable range of reading, classics and contemporaries both...he did make his way, through sheer quickness of ear, in French, Italian, Spanish, and German. As Malcolm Cowley has attested, 'he learned almost anything with amazing speed'....He cared about ever facet of his craft, however small....The blunt yet somehow urgent and luminous style was there from the start, and can be detected even in the letters written at the age of nine...Words for Hemingway were elemental and chaste, spurning any secondary life of wordplay. In the over four hundred thousand words of these letters, there is rarely a simile...

Occasionally, but not often in the correspondence, a word picture leaps up as sharp as the italicized paragraphs between the stories of *In Our Time*.”

John Updike
Hugging the Shore: Essays and Criticism
(Random House/Vintage 1984) 173, 163

“Hemingway’s tight minimalist style, which is displayed in its purest form in *The Sun Also Rises*, is the precise verbal expression of the view of life that dominates and finally evaluates the action of the novel. If Hemingway believed, as he clearly did, that if the right, carefully selected experiences are chosen and only the proper emotions expressed, the result will be an absolutely authentic fictional world containing nothing that will ever ring false, then the language, chosen with equal care, so authentically simple and basic, is the perfect fastidious statement of the morally fastidious world it is designed to create. The vacant spaces between and behind the words, the strongly sensed presence of things omitted, become expressive of all the alternatives and elaborations, all the excesses and equivocations of language, that have been scrupulously rejected in the style’s formation.

The emphasis given to the individual words and phrases that seem so much larger than they are just because they have escaped rejection makes it appear that a verbal artifact is being constructed or salvaged, word by word, from a junk heap of redundancy and imprecision....Such a method, composed as it is of a minimum of simple words that seem to have been squeezed onto the page against a great compulsion to be silent, creates the impression that those words—if only because there are so few of them—are sacramental.”

John W. Aldridge
“Afterthoughts on the Twenties and *The Sun Also Rises*”
New Essays on The Sun Also Rises
(Cambridge U 1987) 125-26

“The vignette [“We were in a garden at Mons,” *In Our Time*]...reveals language under extreme pressure, and does so in ways that should revise the stereotypes of Hemingway’s work. Hemingway is rightly seen as the master of the simple declarative sentence, pursuing ‘what really happened in action’ in a direct, hard-boiled style so that writing reproduces the action or even in all of its completeness. Hemingway himself fostered this theory about his writing, though even for him the presentation of action was clearly twofold: an action was to be represented as truly as possible, but the totality of actions within a story was to be incomplete, for the author must select out of a continuum the smallest number of precise details in order for the reader, when viewing the ensemble, to intuit the entire narrative. Hemingway later said that his style was fashioned on the ‘principle of the iceberg,’ for ‘seven eighths of it [is] under water for every part that shows.’

But his early experimental work, as this vignette shows, is still more complex. We may indeed guess at more than the vignette actually says—from his use of words like ‘awfully’ and ‘potted’ we guess the narrator is British; he is older than and probably the superior of young Buckley; he may be exercising incredible self-control in the face of unspeakable horror. But the vignette does not present an event, in the sense of a clearly defined action or sequence of actions, and its style is characterized more by narrative discontinuities than by the controlled, graceful, action-driven prose for which Hemingway is famous. In his early work in particular, Hemingway stood ready to sacrifice the logic of traditional narrative and rhetorical modes in order to present the incoherence and incompleteness of action.”

Thomas Strychacz
“*In Our Time, Out of Season*”
The Cambridge Companion to Hemingway
(Cambridge U 1996) 59-60

“The most persistent misconception of Hemingway’s style is that it was attained through a process of deletion. From Carlos Baker on, most critics have assumed that Hemingway ‘always wrote slowly and revised carefully, cutting, editing, substituting, and experimenting with syntax to see what a sentence could most economically carry, and then throwing out all that could be spared’ (*Writer as Artist* 71-72). A natural assumption, yet it is founded on a metaphor from physical exercise: Any lean and frugal style must once

have been fat and prodigal, and has now achieved its trim economy through the exercise of deletion. But the manuscripts demonstrate that Hemingway's sentences more often began life as scrawny little things, and then grew to their proper size through a process of accretion....Consider a crucial scene in 'Big Two-Hearted River,' when Nick Adams stands on the bridge at Seney and first sees the trout in the stream below...This first thin draft reads like hurried notes for a later sketch."

Paul Smith

"1924: Hemingway's Luggage and the Miraculous Year"

The Cambridge Companion to Ernest Hemingway, ed. Scott Donaldson
(Cambridge U 1996) 45

"Parodies and imitations of Hemingway's style are typically limited to the simplicity of the gangster dialogue in his story 'The Killers.' Short declarations, simple diction, repetition, compound sentences with minimal internal punctuation--such features constitute what came to be understood and fixed in the public mind as 'the Hemingway style,' which influenced the hardboiled detective story, popular drama, film and television scripts, especially dialogue by mass media writers such as Jack Webb and Paddy Chayefsky. In fact, however, during the course of his career, Hemingway's style is not fixed, but changing and diverse.

Characteristics of his writing in early stories such as 'The Killers' became so influential that 'the Hemingway style' was defined less by his actual writing as a whole than by reductive imitation throughout the mass culture. Both the style and the man appeared to be simple and imitable, yet both were easily parodied because they were distinctive. Hemingway became so popular that his most influential style is the parody version of his actual writing, which reinforces the Hemingway stereotype of boyish simplicity. The apparent simplicity of his writing and the popular stereotype have encouraged subjective readers to project their own meanings into his stories.

The way the popular culture assimilated a parody of a stereotype rather than the actual Hemingway is evident in the fashion of Minimalism in creative writing programs and literary magazines. Many have seen Minimalism exemplified by Hemingway because they have a popular conception of 'the Hemingway style.' The actual Hemingway was economical through understatement he called the 'iceberg principle.' Meanings are not stated, but suggested, as exemplified in 'Big Two-Hearted River' and 'Hills Like White Elephants.' Selective *under*-statement creates a tension between the literal and the figurative meanings of words, generating implications that deepen meaning. In contrast, Minimalism is a surface concern with little or no figurative meaning, no submerged iceberg of implications. At his best, Hemingway evokes the maximum of meanings with a minimum of words. His ability has made him a teacher to many who have acknowledged his influence, including writers as diverse as Ralph Ellison, Tim O'Brien, Thomas McGuane, Pam Houston, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

For over seventy years Hemingway's short stories have been models of the art. His *In Our Time* (1925) with the counterpoint structure of alternating stories and intense single paragraphs remains a prototype of the unified short story collection. As creative writing became part of the popular culture, however, increasing numbers of aspiring writers found Hemingway too challenging. Raymond Carver is easier to imitate. Minimalism, an oversimplification of Carver's style, became the fashion. Minimalism can be compared to reductive parodies of Hemingway's style, but not to the actual style of his complex stories, such as 'Soldier's Home,' 'Big Two-Hearted River' and 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place.' Oversimplifying the style and oversimplifying the man mutually reinforced each other, while attaching Hemingway to Minimalism served his detractors as a tool to devalue his writing....

The aversion to Hemingway common in American universities is provoked by the macho stereotype, by his looks, and by his subject matter, though he wrote more about women's issues than is generally known. It is true that his prose style, for all its diversity, is consistently masculine in the sense that he uses little subordination in his sentences. The rhythms are powerful, and the rarely varied subject/verb/predicate syntax contributes to an authoritative tone. Although his style expresses a strong masculinity, there is also a psychological wholeness evident in his fiction, a balance of masculine and feminine as conveyed in 'Cat in the Rain.' He expresses femininity through his themes, through his male characters individuating into the feminine, through his values of the heart, and through the subtlety, refinement and grace of his art."

Michael Hollister
"Hemingwarp"
Palo Alto Review
(Spring 2000) 22-23, 26-27

HEMINGWAY'S PRINCIPLES OF FICTION WRITING

What Hemingway probably acquired from Gertrude Stein were: (1) orientation to the current trends of international Modernism in all the arts; (2) inspiration to innovate; (3) techniques of repetition; (4) some prose rhythms; (5) avoidance of subordination; (6) avoidance of punctuation especially in compound sentences; and (7) confidence that he could write in a "modern" way. Many feminists have had a visceral reaction against Hemingway not only because of their false stereotype of him but also due to the masculinity of his characteristic style: linear action, authoritative tone, powerful rhythms, infrequent subordination and a sustained assertive syntax of subject-verb-predicate. Ironically, the model and mentor of Hemingway's masculine style was Gertrude Stein. However, they also were opposites in their primary aesthetics: she abstract, he concrete; she Expressionist, he Realistic, and so on.

In his own words, some from *The Paris Review* interview:

"I was trying to learn to write, commencing with the simplest things....My aim is to put down on paper what I see and what I feel in the best and simplest way....Prose is architecture, not interior decoration.... First I have tried to eliminate everything unnecessary to conveying experience to the reader [Neoclassicism] so that after he or she has read something it will become a part of his or her experience and seem actually to have happened....[Realism] Whatever success I have had has been through writing what I know about....I was trying to write then and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel, was to put down what really happened in action: what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced...the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion [objective correlative]....You see I'm trying in all my stories to get the feeling of the actual life across—not to just depict life—or criticize it—but to actually make it alive....Experience is communicated by small details intimately observed....Show the readers everything, tell them nothing...."

If it is any use to know it, I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show....You could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen your story and make people feel something more than they understood....I am trying to make, before I get through, a picture of the whole world—or as much of it as I have seen. [Modernist holistic realism] Boiling it down always, rather than spreading it thin....The secret is that it is poetry written into prose and it is the hardest of all things to do....A writer should be of as great probity as a priest of God. He is either honest or not, as a woman is either chaste or not, and after one piece of dishonest writing he is never the same again."

Michael Hollister (2014)