

280 QUOTATIONS



Ernest Hemingway

(1899-1961)

Ernest Hemingway is legendary worldwide as an heroic and adventurous writer best known for his short stories, for his collection *In Our Time* (1925) and for his major novels *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940)—all of which have been adapted by Hollywood. There are statues of Hemingway in three different countries, President John F. Kennedy quoted and honored him and he was awarded a Nobel Prize that cited his novella *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). Nevertheless, in America he was reduced to a cartoon stereotype Macho Man. He got demonized and scapegoated by the politically correct culture. Feminists were able to censor his last novel *The Garden of Eden* (1986) by publishing only a fragment with biased editing. Contrary to the propaganda, ironically, Hemingway is the most egalitarian writer in American history. And what Hemingway says on the subject of writing fiction carries more authority than anyone because he is the most popular literary writer of the 20th century and the most influential prose stylist in history.

ORDER OF TOPICS: youth, pain, escapes, WWI, wounds, disappointing first love, war, Paris, determinism and free will, Existentialism, Christianity, credo, grace under pressure, women, love, generosity, loyalty, politics, literary politics, Communism, revolution, America, American literature, Lincoln, Twain, John O'Hara, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, Ezra Pound, e.e. cummings, T.S. Eliot, Joyce, influences, Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, Wilder and Dos Passos, Faulkner, Dostoevsky, Turgenieff, Tolstoi, Chekov, Thomas Mann and Sinclair Lewis, aspiration, learning to write, creative continuity, rejection, economy, simplicity, purity, poetry, objective correlative, iceberg principle, similes, symbolism, examples of natural symbols, clarity, Realism, vicarious experience, Expressionism, convention, bullfight metaphor of aesthetics, good writing, advice to writers, live intensely, listen and observe, solitude, talent and discipline, revision, slang, dictionary, knowledge, shit detector, audience, popularity, Hollywood, movie adaptations of his works, *The Old Man and the Sea*, writers who teach, critics, Postmodernism, old age, declining health, summation, death, heaven, immortality, desecration:

YOUTH

In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die.

We thought we were superior people and other people that we looked down on and rightly mistrusted were rich.

I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it. Maybe if you found out how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about.

Nobody knows what's in him until he tries to pull it out. If there's nothing or very little, the shock can kill a man.

Nobody ever lives their life all the way up except bullfighters.

I went to war instead of college.

PAIN

When the hurt is bad enough, I cry.

No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader.

Happiness in intelligent people is the rarest thing I know.

I do not think that a man should make money out of his father shooting himself nor out of his mother who drove him to it.

ESCAPES

I drink to make other people more interesting.

I love sleep. My life has a tendency to fall apart when I'm awake, you know

FIRST WORLD WAR

There are events which are so great that if a writer has participated in them his obligation is to write truly rather than assume the presumption of altering them with invention.

The last war, during the years 1915, 1916, 1917, was the most colossal, murderous, mismanaged butchery that has ever taken place on earth.

There is a class that control a country that is stupid and does not realize anything and never can. That is why we have this war. Also they make money out of it.

WOUNDS

After being severely wounded two weeks before my nineteenth birthday I had a bad time until I figured out that nothing could happen to me that had not happened to all men before me.

Got hit with a *Minenwerfer* that had been lobbed in by an Austrian trench mortar. They would fill these *Minenwerfers* with the goddamnedest collection of crap you ever saw—nuts, bolts, screws, nails, spikes, metal scrap—and when they blew, you caught whatever you were in the way of. Three Italians with me had their legs blown off. I was lucky. The kneecap was down on my chin and the leg had caught all that metal but the kneecap was still attached. They say I was hit with a machine gun afterward and that's when the kneecap went, but I think the *Minenwerfer* did the whole job.

My pants looked like somebody had made current jelly in them and then punched holes to let the pulp out.

Simple wounds which do not break bone are of little account. They sometimes give confidence. Wounds which do extensive bone and nerve damage are not good for writers, nor anybody else.

DISAPPOINTING FIRST LOVE

The major did not marry her in the spring, or any other time. Luz never got an answer to the letter to Chicago about it. A short time after he contracted gonorrhoea from a sales girl in a loop department store while riding in a taxicab through Lincoln Park.

WAR

Wars are caused by undefended wealth.

In modern war...you will die like a dog for no good reason.

You never kill anyone you want to kill in a war.

But there will be no lasting peace, nor any possibility of a just peace, until all lands where the people are ruled, exploited and governed by any government whatsoever against their consent are given their freedom.

We know war is bad. Yet sometimes it is necessary to fight. But still war is bad and any man who says it is not is a liar. But it is very complicated and difficult to write about truly.

Once we have a war there is only one thing to do. It must be won. For defeat brings worse things than any that can ever happen in war.

I've seen a lot of patriots and they all died just like anybody else if it hurt bad enough and once they were dead their patriotism was only good for legends; it was bad for their prose and made them write bad poetry.

I thought about Tolstoi and about what a great advantage an experience of war was to a writer. It was one of the major subjects and certainly one of the hardest to write truly of and those writers who had not seen it were always very jealous and tried to make it seem unimportant, or abnormal, or a disease as a subject, while, really, it was just something quite irreplaceable that they had missed.

Well the reason you [Scott Fitzgerald] are so sore you missed the war is because war is the best subject of all. It groups the maximum of material and speeds up the action and brings out all sorts of stuff that normally you would have to wait a lifetime to get.

Stendhal had seen a war and Napoleon taught him to write.

In the war in Italy when I was a boy I had much fear. In Spain I had no fear after a couple of weeks and was very happy. Yet for me to not understand fear in others or deny its existence would be bad writing.

PARIS

The man who has begun to live more seriously within begins to live more simply without.

If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast.

Ezra [Pound] was right half the time, and when he was wrong, he was so wrong you were never in any doubt about it. Gertrude [Stein] was always right.

The better the writer the less they will speak about what they have written themselves.

There was no group feeling. We had respect for each other. I respected a lot of painters, some of my own age, others older—Gris, Picasso, Braque, Monet, who was still alive then—and a few writers: Joyce, Ezra, the good of Stein.

The hell with her [Gertrude Stein's] lost-generation talk and all the dirty, easy labels. When I got home and into the courtyard and upstairs and saw my wife and my son and his cat, F. Puss, all of them happy and a fire in the fireplace, I said to my wife, "You know, Gertrude *is* nice, anyway."

"Of course, Tatie." [Daddy]

"But she does talk a lot of rot sometimes."

DETERMINISM AND FREE WILL

Once in camp I put a log on the fire and it was full of ants. As it commenced to burn, the ants swarmed out and went first toward the center where the fire was; then turned back and ran toward the end. When there were enough on the end they fell off into the fire. Some got out, their bodies burnt and flattened, and went off not knowing where they were going. But most of them went toward the fire and then back toward the end and swarmed on the cool end and finally fell off into the fire. I remember thinking at the time that it was the end of the world and a splendid chance to be a messiah and lift the log off the fire and throw it out where the ants could get off onto the ground. But I did not do anything but throw a tin cup of water on the log, so that I would have the cup empty to put whiskey in before I added water to it. I think the cup of water on the burning log only steamed the ants.

EXISTENTIALISM

Fear of death increases in exact proportion to increase in wealth.

I think I have learned some things that have helped me write off fear as a personal problem.

What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada. Our nada who are in nada, nada be thy name they kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada... ["A Clean, Well-Lighted Place"]

It smelled of hospital. I sat on the chair and looked at the floor and prayed for Catherine.... Outside along the street were the refuse cans from the houses waiting for the collector. A dog was nosing at one of the cans.... "There isn't anything, dog," I said.

The real reason for not committing suicide is because you always know how swell life gets again after the hell is over.

CHRISTIANITY

Religion is the opium of the people. He believed that, that dyspeptic little joint-keeper.

There will always be people who say it does not exist because they cannot have it. But I tell you it is true and that you have it and that you are lucky even if you die tomorrow.

Pauline was a very religious Catholic and I wasn't a religious anything.

Suddenly I could no more make love than Jake Barnes.... There was a small church two blocks from us and I went there and said a short prayer. Then I went back to our room. Pauline was in bed, waiting. I undressed and got in bed and we made love like we invented it. We never had any trouble again. That's when I became a Catholic.

"Ay," he said aloud. There is no translation for this word and perhaps it is just a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands and into the wood.

Then he shouldered the mast and started to climb. [*The Old Man and the Sea*]

CREDO

A writer should be of as great probity and honesty 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.

GRACE UNDER PRESSURE

Courage is grace under pressure.

My mother [Grace] was a bitch and my father a suicide.

"I know, Mummy," he said. "I'll try and be a good boy for you." ["Soldier's Home"]

The bullfight is very moral to me.

"I'll never forget how sick it made me the first time I knew he [his father] was a...coward." [R. Jordan]

"I'm going to take the boat," Marjorie called to him. "You can walk back around the point."

Liz took off her coat and leaned over and covered him with it. She tucked it around him neatly and carefully. Then she walked across the dock and up the steep sandy road to go to bed.

He disliked bars and bodegas. A clean, well-lighted café was a very different thing.

I've known some very wonderful people who even though they were going directly to the grave...managed to put up a very fine performance en route.

Cowardice, as distinguished from panic, is almost always simply a lack of ability to suspend the functioning of the imagination.

"You know, I'd like to try another lion," Macomber said. "I'm really not afraid of them now."

"I'm going to die," she said; then waited and said, "I hate it."

I took her hand.

"Don't touch me," she said.

I let go of her hand. She smiled.

"Poor darling. You touch me all you want."

If people bring such courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at 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 that it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry.

The bull was on him as he jumped back and as he tripped on a cushion he felt the horn go into him, into his side. He grabbed the horn with his two hands and rode backward, holding tight onto the place. The bull tossed him... He got up coughing... Hernandez put his arm around him.

"Go on to the infirmary, man," he said. "Don't be a damn fool."

"Get away from me," Manuel said.

"I'd do anything for you."

"Would you please please please please please please please stop talking?"

Pedro Romero had the greatness. He loved bull-fighting, and I think he loved the bulls, and I think he loved Brett. Everything of which he could control the locality he did in front of her all that afternoon. Never once did he look up. He made it stronger that way, and he did it for himself, too, as well as for her.

Because he did not look up to ask if it please he did it all for himself inside, and it strengthened him, and yet he did it for her, too. But he did not do it for her at any loss to himself. He gained by it all through the afternoon.

“Oh, Jake,” Brett said, “we could have had such a damned good time together.”...
“Yes,” I said. “Isn’t it pretty to think so?”

The sharks did not hit him again until just before sunset.

WOMEN

Never go on trips with anyone you do not love.

We all take a beating every day, you know, one way or another.

The most complicated subject that I know, since I am a man, is a man’s life. I am sure that a woman’s life is most complicated if she has any ethics...and I have always considered that it was easy to be a man compared to being a woman who lives by as rigid standards as men live by.

“Is she a little crazy?” asked the thin one.

“Who?”

“That sister.”

“No, Mr. Frazer said. “She is a fine woman of great intelligence and sympathy.”

I ate some lunch and in the afternoon Miss Van Campen, the superintendent, came up to see me. She did not like me and I did not like her. She was small and neatly suspicious and too good for her position.

Spanish girls make wonderful wives. I’ve never had one so I know.

“It makes one feel rather good deciding not to be a bitch.... It’s sort of what we have instead of God.”
[Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*]

They are, he thought, the hardest in the world; the hardest, the cruelest, the most predatory and the most attractive and their men have softened or gone to pieces nervously as they have hardened. Or is it that they pick men they can handle? They can’t know that much at the age they marry, he thought. He was grateful that he had gone through his education on American women before now because this was a very attractive one.... They govern, of course, and to govern one has to be cruel sometimes. Still, I’ve seen enough of their damn terrorism. [Wilson the guide in “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”]

Because she had done the best she could for many years back and the way they were together now was no one person’s fault. [Margot Macomber]

Mrs. Macomber, in the car, had shot at the buffalo with the 6.5 Mannlicher [man-licker] as it seemed about to gore Macomber and had hit her husband about two inches up and a little to one side of the base of his skull.

Women are a nuisance on Safari.

LOVE

But did thee feel the earth move?

He held her feeling she was all of life there was and it was true.

Then too you are in love. Do not forget that is a religious feeling.

When you love you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve.

When I saw her I was in love with her. Everything turned over inside of me.

She loves me to be her girls, which I love to be. [of his wife Mary]

When she [wife Mary] is away, the Finca [villa] is as empty as the emptiest bottle she ever ordered removed and I live in a vacuum that is as lonely as a radio tube when the batteries are dead and there is no current to plug into.

There is no lonelier man in death, except the suicide, than that man who has lived many years with a good wife and then outlived her. If two people love each other there can be no happy end to it.

This was the price you paid for sleeping together. This was the end of the trap. This was what people got for loving each other.

The best writing is certainly when you are in love.

GENEROSITY

For what are we born if not to aid one another?

LOYALTY

He remembered the time he had hooked one of a pair of marlin. The male fish always let the female fish feed first and the hooked fish, the female, made a wild, panic-stricken, despairing fight that soon exhausted her, and all the time the male had stayed with her, crossing the line and circling with her on the surface. He had stayed so close that the old man was afraid he would cut the line with his tail which was sharp as a scythe and almost of that size and shape. When the old man had gaffed her and clubbed her, holding the rapier bill with its sandpaper edge and clubbing her across the top of her head until her colour turned to a colour almost like the backing of mirrors, and then, with the boy's aid, hoisted her aboard, the male fish had stayed by the side of the boat. Then, while the old man was clearing the lines and preparing the harpoon, the male fish jumped high into the air beside the boat to see where the female was and then went down deep, his lavender wings, that were his pectoral fins, spread wide and all his wide lavender stripes showing. He was beautiful, the old man remembered, and he had stayed.

POLITICS

A big lie is more plausible than truth.

What you wanted was the minimum of government, always less government.

There are many who do not know they are fascists but will find it out when the time comes.

LITERARY POLITICS

Let those who want to save the world if you can get to see it clear and as a whole.

Living in a world of literary politics where one wrong opinion often proves fatal, one writes carefully.

Intelligence is so damn rare and the people who have it often have such a bad time with it that they get bitter or propagandistic and then it's not much use.

I do not follow the fashions in politics, letters, religion etc. If the boys swing to the left in literature you may make a small bet the next swing will be to the right and some of the same yellow bastards will swing both ways. There is no left and right in writing. There is only good and bad writing.

COMMUNISM

Now they want you to swallow communism as though it were an elder Boys Y.M.C.A. conference or as though we were all patriots together. I'm no goddamned patriot nor will I swing to left or right. Would as soon machine gun left, right, or center any political bastards who do not work for a living—anybody who makes a living by politics or not working.

A man can be a Fascist or a Communist and if his outfit gets in he can get to be an ambassador or have a million copies of his books printed by the Government or any of the other rewards the boys dream about. Because the literary revolution boys are all ambitious....

That was probably why the Communists were always cracking down on Bohemianism. When you were drunk or when you committed adultery you recognized your own personal fallibility of that so mutable substitute for the apostles' creed, the party line.

REVOLUTION

Revolution is a catharsis; an ecstasy which can only be prolonged by tyranny.

It was all part of the fight against poverty that you never win except by not spending.

Hunger is good discipline and you learn from it.

Don't let them suck you in to start writing about the proletariat, if you don't come from the proletariat, just to please the recently politically enlightened critics. In a little while these critics will be something else. I've seen them be a lot of things and none of them was pretty.

AMERICA

Americans are always in America—no matter whether they call it Paris or Panama.

I'm patriotic and willing to die for this great and glorious nation. But I hate like the devil to live in it.

Will I be boiled in Congressional oil for being kind to poor Ezra [Pound]?

AMERICAN LITERATURE

We have had, in America, skillful writers. Poe is a skillful writer. It is skillful, marvelously constructed, and it is dead. We have had writers of rhetoric who had the good fortune to find a little, in a chronicle of another man and from voyaging, of how things, actual things, can be, whales for instance, and this knowledge is wrapped in the rhetoric like plums in a pudding. Occasionally it is there, alone, unwrapped in pudding, and it is good. This is Melville. But the people who praise it, praise it for the rhetoric which is not important. They put a mystery in which is not there...

There were others who wrote like exiled English colonials from an England of which they were never a part to a newer England that they were making. Very good men with the small, dried, and excellent wisdom of Unitarians; men of letters; Quakers with a sense of humor. Emerson, Hawthorne, Whittier, and Company...all these men were gentlemen, or wished to be. They were all very respectable. They did not use the words that people always have used in speech, the words that survive in language. Nor would you gather that they had bodies. They had minds, yes. Nice, dry, clean minds. The good writers are Henry James, Stephen Crane, and Mark Twain. That's not the order they're good in. There is no order for good writers.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

It wasn't by accident that the Gettysburg Address was so short. The laws of prose writing are as immutable as those of flight, mathematics, of physics.

MARK TWAIN

All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. If you read it you must stop where Nigger Jim is stolen by the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating. But it's the best book we've had. All American writing comes from that.

JOHN O'HARA

In the meantime...if you want to read a book by a man who knows exactly what he is writing about and has written it marvelously well, read *Appointment in Samara* by John O'Hara.... Let's take the money and start a bloody fund to send John O'Hara to Yale.

GERTRUDE STEIN

Gertrude and me are like brothers.

I like to have Gertrude [Stein] bawl me out because it keeps one[‘s] opinion of oneself down—way down—She liked the book very much she said—But what I wanted to hear about was what she didn't like and why—She thinks the parts that fail are where I remember visually rather than make up... Her *Making of Americans* is one of the very greatest books I've ever read.

Miss Stein wrote at some length and with considerable inaccuracy about her influence on my work. It was necessary for her to do this after she had learned to write dialogue from a book called *The Sun Also Rises*. I was very fond of her and thought it was splendid she had learned to write conversation.

DJUNA BARNES

“Djuna's story excellent [Djuna Barnes]. Much better than the Perlmutter girls that it is about. Why didn't she make Radiguet a writer in the story?... Still Djuna's is a hell of a good story.

EZRA POUND

Ezra [Pound] was the most generous writer I have ever known and the most disinterested.... His own writing, when he would hit it right, was so perfect, and he was so sincere in his mistakes and so enamored of his errors, and so kind to people that I always thought of him as a sort of saint. He was also irascible but so perhaps have been many saints....

He liked the works of his friends, which is beautiful as loyalty but can be disastrous as judgment.

E. E. CUMMINGS

E.E. Cummings' *Enormous Room* was the best book published last year that I read.

T. S. ELIOT

If I knew that by grinding Mr. Eliot into a fine dry powder and sprinkling that powder over Mr. Conrad's grave Mr. Conrad would shortly appear, looking very annoyed at the forced return, and commence writing I would leave for London early tomorrow morning with a sausage grinder.

JOYCE

Joyce was a very great writer and he would only explain what he was doing to jerks....the influence of his work was what changed everything, and made it possible for us to break away from the restrictions.

[Asked if his writing was ever influenced by what he was reading at the time] Not since Joyce was writing *Ulysses*. He was not a direct influence. But in those days when words we knew were barred to us, and we

had to fight for a single word, the influence of his work was what changed everything, and made it possible for us to break away from the restrictions.

I knew him [Joyce] from 1921 till his death. In Paris he was always surrounded by professional friends and sycophants. We'd have discussions which would get very heated and sooner or later Joyce would get in some really rough insults; he was a nice man but nasty as hell, and when he really had everything in an uproar, he would suddenly depart and expect me to handle the characters in his wake who were demanding satisfaction. Joyce was very proud and very rude—especially to jerks. He really enjoyed drinking, and those nights when I'd bring him home after a protracted drinking bout, his wife, Nora, would open the door and say, "Well, here comes James Joyce the author, drunk again with Ernest Hemingway."

INFLUENCES

I don't worship Joyce. I like him very much as a friend and think no one can write better, technically, I learned much from him, from Ezra, in conversation principally, from G. Stein... Learned nothing from old [Ford Madox] Ford except mistakes not to make that he had made.... Learned from Anderson but it didn't last long. I imitated Ring Lardner as a kid but didn't learn from him. Nothing to learn because he doesn't know anything. All he has is a good false ear and has been around.

FITZGERALD

He [F. Scott Fitzgerald] had told me at the Closerie des Lilas how he wrote what he thought were good stories, and which really were good stories for the *Post*, and then changed them for submission, knowing exactly how he must make the twists that made them into salable magazine stories. I had been shocked at this and I said I thought it was whoring.

But he [Fitzgerald] judged a paragraph by how much money it made him and ditched his juice into that channel because he got instant satisfaction.

[Fitzgerald's] talent was as natural as the pattern that was made by the dust on a butterfly's wings. At one time he understood it no more than the butterfly did and he did not know when it was brushed or marred. Later he became conscious of his damaged wings and of their construction and he learned to think and could not fly any more because the love of flight was gone and he could only remember when it had been effortless.

The rich were dull and they drank too much.... He remembered poor Julian [Fitzgerald] and his romantic awe of them and how he had started a story once that began, "The very rich are different from you and me." And how someone had said to Julian, "Yes, they have more money."

THOMAS WOLFE

I think Tom [Thomas Wolfe] was only truly good about his home town and there he *was wonderful and unsurpassable*. The other stuff is usually over-inflated journalese.

WILDER AND DOS PASSOS

Neither Wilder or Dos Passos are "good writers." Wilder is a very minor writer who knows his limitations and was over inflated in value by critics and as quickly deflated. Dos Passos is often an excellent writer and has been improving in every way with each book he writes. Both Dos and Wilder come from the same class and neither represents that class—Wilder represents the *Library*—Zola and Hugo were both lousy writers—but Hugo was a grand old man.... Flaubert is a great writer but he only wrote one book—*Bovary*—one ½ a great book *L'Education*, one damned lousy book *Bouvard et Pecuchet*. Stendhal was a great writer with one good book—*Le Rouge et le Noir*—some fine parts of *La Chartreuse de Parme* (wonderful) but much of it tripe and the rest junk.

FAULKNER

I'd no idea Faulkner was in that bad shape and very happy you are putting together the Portable of him. He has the most talent of anybody... How beautifully he can write... [to Malcolm Cowley]

[Faulkner has] the most talent of anybody but hard to depend on because he goes on writing after he is tired.... I would have been happy just to have managed him.

Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words? He thinks I don't know the ten-dollar words. I know them all right. But there are older and simpler and better words, and those are the ones I use.

[Letter to Faulkner]: You are a better writer than Fielding or any of those guys and you should just know it and keep on writing. You have things written that come back to me better than any of them and I am not dopey, really.... Why do you want to fight Dostoevsky in your first fight? Beat Turgenieff—which we both did soundly... Then nail your self DeMaupassant... Then try and take Stendhal.... You and I can both beat Flaubert who is our most respected, honored master.

DOSTOEVSKY

I've been wondering about Dostoevsky. How can a man write so badly, so unbelievably badly, and make you feel so deeply?... In Dostoevsky there were things believable and not to be believed, but some so true they changed you as you read them.

TURGENIEFF

Turgenieff to me is the greatest writer there ever was. Didn't write the greatest books, but he was the greatest writer.... *War and Peace* is the best book I know but imagine what a book it would have been if Turgenieff had written it. Chekov wrote about 6 good stories. But he was an amateur writer. Tolstoi was a prophet. Maupassant was a professional writer, Balzac was a professional writer. Turgenieff was an artist.

TOLSTOI

When you have more time read another book called *War and Peace* by Tolstoi and see how you will have to skip the big Political Thought passages, that he undoubtedly thought were the best things in the book when he wrote it, because they are no longer either true or important, if they ever were more than topical, and see how true and lasting and important the people and the action are. Do not let them deceive you about what a book should be because of what is in the fashion now.

I love *War and Peace* for the wonderful, penetrating and true descriptions of war and of people but I have never believed in the great Count's thinking.

I'm not going to get into the ring with Tolstoi.

CHEKOV

I had been told Katherine Mansfield was a good short-story writer, even a great short-story writer, but trying to read her after Chekov was like hearing the carefully artificial tales of a young old-maid compared to those of an articulate and knowing physician who was a good and simple writer. Mansfield was like near-beer. It was better to drink water. But Chekov was not water except for the clarity. There were some stories that seemed to be only journalism. But there were wonderful ones too.

THOMAS MANN AND SINCLAIR LEWIS

Buddenbrooks is a pretty damned good book. If he were a great writer it would be swell....it makes you have even less respect, if you ever had any, for people getting stirred up over *Main Street*, *Babbitt* and all

the books your boy friend Mencken [H.L. Mencken] has gotten excited about just because they happen to deal with the much abused Am. Scene.

ASPIRATION

Then I wanted to do it better than anyone has ever done it which makes it into an obsession.

I love to write. But it has never gotten any easier to do and you can't expect it to if you keep trying for something better than you can do.

Writing is something that you can never do as well as it can be done. It is a perpetual challenge and it is more difficult than anything else that I have ever done—so I do it. And it makes me happy when I do it well.

I am trying to make, before I get through, a picture of the whole world—or as much of it as I have seen. Boiling it down always, rather than spreading it thin.

I used to try to write better than certain dead writers of whose value I was certain. For a long time now I have tried simply to write the best I can. Sometimes I have good luck and write better than I can.

LEARNING TO WRITE

It often took me a full morning of work to write a paragraph.

It was really more fun than anything. That was why you did it.

I was trying to learn to write, commencing with the simplest things.

Whatever success I have had has been through writing what I know about.

All my life I've looked at words as though I were seeing them for the first time.

Writing and travel broaden your ass if not your mind and I like to write standing up.

If he wrote it he could get rid of it. He had gotten rid of many things by writing them.

My aim is to put down on paper what I see and what I feel in the best and simplest way.

I write one page of masterpiece to ninety one pages of shit. I try to put the shit in the wastebasket.

On the *Star* you were forced to learn to write a simple declarative sentence. This is useful to anyone. Newspaper work will not harm a young writer and could help him if he gets out of it in time.

It is all very well for you to write simply and the simpler the better. But do not start to think so damned simply. Know how complicated it is and then state it simply.

Since I had started to break down all my writing and get rid of all facility and try to make instead of describe, writing had been wonderful to do.

Everybody my age had written a novel and I was still having a difficult time writing a paragraph.

After writing a story I was always empty and both sad and happy, as though I had made love.

I work *all* the time.

CREATIVE CONTINUITY

I learned never to empty the well of my writing, but always to stop when there was still something there in the deep part of the well, and let it refill at night from the springs that fed it.

Always stop while you are going good and don't think about it or worry about it until you start to write the next day. That way your subconscious will work on it all the time. But if you think about it consciously or worry about it you will kill it and your brain will be tired before you start.

The best way is to read it all every day from the start, correcting as you go along, then go on from where you stopped the day before. When it gets so long that you can't do this every day read back two or three chapters each day; then each week read it all from the start. That's how you make it all of one piece.

When I am working on a book or story I write every morning as soon after first light as possible. There is no one to disturb you and it is cool or cold and you come to your work and warm up as you write. You read what you have written and, as you always stop when you know what is going to happen next, you go on from there. You write until you come to a place where you still have your juice and know what will happen next and you stop and try to live through until the next day you hit it again.

The hardest part about writing a novel is finishing it.

REJECTION

Every day the rejected manuscripts would come back through the slot in the door of that bare room where I lived over the Montmartre sawmill. They'd fall through the slot onto the wood floor, and clipped to them was that most savage of all reprimands—the printed rejection slip. The rejection slip is very hard to take on an empty stomach and there were times when I'd sit at that old wooden table and read one of those cold clips that had been attached to a story I had loved and worked on very hard and believed in, and I couldn't help crying.

ECONOMY

First I have tried to eliminate everything unnecessary to conveying experience to the reader 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.

I can write like Tolstoi and make the book seem larger, wiser, and all the rest of it. But then I remember that was what I always skipped in Tolstoi.... I don't write like God. It is only because you never do it, though, that the critics think you can't do it.

I figure it is better to write about what you can write about and try and make it come off than have epoch making canvasses etc.—and you figure what age the novelists had that wrote the really great novels.

SIMPLICITY

If I started to write elaborately, or like someone introducing or presenting something, I found that I could cut that scrollwork or ornament out and throw it away and start with the first true simple declarative sentence I had written.

[Ezra Pound] taught me to distrust adjectives as I would later learn to distrust certain people.

PURITY

No matter how good a phrase or a simile he may have if he puts it in where it is not absolutely necessary and irreplaceable he is spoiling his work for egotism. Prose is architecture, not interior decoration, and the Baroque is over.

POETRY

The secret is that it is poetry written into prose and it is the hardest of all things to do.

OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE

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.

ICEBERG PRINCIPLE

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.

The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know they only makes hollow places in his writing.

The story was about coming back from the war but there was no mention of the war in it.

This was omitted on my new theory that you could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood.

I guess I left as much out of "The Killers" as any story I ever wrote. Left out the whole city of Chicago. But come to think of it, I guess the story that tops them all for leave-out was "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." I left everything out of that one.... May be my favorite story.

I sometimes think my style is suggestive rather than direct. The reader must often use his imagination or lose the most subtle part of my thought.

I'm trying to do it so it will make it without you knowing it, and so the more you read it, the more there will be.

SIMILES

There are only certain words which are valid and similes (bring me my dictionary) are like defective ammunition (the lowest thing I can think of at this time).

SYMBOLISM

All the symbolism that people say is shit. What goes beyond is what you see beyond when you know.

No good book has ever been written that has in it symbols arrived at beforehand and stuck in.... I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things.

I suppose there are symbols since critics keep finding them. If you do not mind I dislike talking about them and being questioned about them. It is hard enough to write books and stories without being asked to explain them as well.

You can be sure that there is much more there than will be read at any first reading and having made this it is not the writer's province to explain it or to run guided tours through the more difficult country of his work.

EXAMPLES OF NATURAL SYMBOLISM

An airplane passed over head on its course to Miami and he watched its shadow scaring up the schools of flying fish.

Kilimanjaro is a snow-covered mountain 19,710 feet high, and it is said to be the highest mountain in Africa. Its western summit is called by the Masai “Ngaje Ngai,” the House of God. Close to the western summit there is the dried and frozen carcass of a leopard. No one has explained what the leopard was seeking at that altitude. [a goat actually]

CLARITY

I try always to do the thing by three cushion shots rather than by words or direct statement. But maybe we must have the direct statement too.

REALISM

All good books have one thing in common—they are truer than if they had really happened.

I believe when you are writing stories about actual people, not the best thing to do, you should make them those people in everything except telephone addresses.

Keep them people, people, people, and don't let them get to be symbols. Remember the race is older than the economic system.

When writing a novel a writer should create living people; people not characters. A *character* is a caricature. If a writer can make people live there may be no great characters in his book, but it is possible that his book will remain as a whole; as an entity; as a novel.

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through...now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it... There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity.... Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.

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. So that when you have read something by me you actually experience the thing. You can't do this without putting in the bad and the ugly as well as what is beautiful. Because if it is all beautiful you can't believe in it. Things aren't that way. It is only by showing both sides—3 dimensions and if possible 4 that you can write the way I want to.

“Oh, Jake,” Brett said, “we could have had such a damned good time together”
“Yes,” I said. “Isn't it pretty to think so.”

Madame, all stories, if continued far enough, end in death, and he is no true-story teller who would keep that from you.

VICARIOUS EXPERIENCE

When you first start writing stories in the first person if the stories are made so real that people believe them the people reading them nearly always think the stories really happened to you. That is natural because while you were making them up you had to make them happen to the person who was telling them. If you do this successfully enough you make the person who is reading them believe that the things happened to him too. If you can do this you are beginning to get what you are trying for which is to make the story so real beyond any reality that it will become a part of the reader's experience and a part of his memory. There must be things that he did not notice when he read the story or the novel which without his knowing it, enter into his memory and experience so that they are a part of his life. This is not easy to do.

Find what gave you the emotion; what the action was that gave you the excitement. Then write it down making it clear so the reader will see it too and have the same feeling that you had.

EXPRESSIONISM

I went to Spain...where I'm trying to do the country like Cézanne and having a hell of a time and sometimes getting it a little bit.... What I've been doing is trying to do country so you don't remember the words after you read it but actually have the Country. It is hard because to do it you have to see the country all complete all the time you write and not just have a romantic feeling about it.

Some days it went so well that you could make the country so that you could walk into it through the timber to come out into the clearing and work up onto the high ground and see the hills beyond the arm of the lake. He wanted to write like Cézanne painted. Cézanne started with all the tricks. Then he broke the whole thing down and built the real thing. It was hell to do. He was the greatest. The greatest for always. It wasn't a cult. He, Nick, wanted to write about country so it would be there like Cézanne had done it in painting. You had to do it from inside yourself.... He felt almost holy about it.

I learned to understand Cézanne much better and to see truly how he made landscapes when I was hungry. I used to wonder if he were hungry too when he painted; but I thought possibly it was only that he had forgotten to eat. It was one of those unsound but illuminating thoughts you have when you have been sleepless or hungry. Later I thought Cézanne was probably hungry in a different way.

CONVENTION

My attitude toward punctuation is that it ought to be as conventional as *possible*. The game of golf would lose a good deal if croquet mallets and billiard cues were allowed on the putting green. You ought to be able to show that you can do it a good deal better than anyone else with the regular tools before you have a license to bring in your own improvements.

BULLFIGHT METAPHOR OF AESTHETICS

She saw how close Romero always worked to the bull [connotes the slang sense], and I pointed out to her the tricks other bull-fighters used to make it look as though they were working closely. She saw why she liked Romero's cape-work and why she did not like the others. Romero never made any contortions, always it was straight and pure and natural in line. The others twisted themselves like corkscrews, their elbows raised, and leaned against the flanks of the bull after the horns had passed, to give a faked look of danger. Afterward, all that was faked turned bad and gave an unpleasant feeling. Romero's bull-fighting gave real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line in his movements and always quietly and calmly let the horns pass him close each time.... Romero had the old thing, the holding of his purity of line through the maximum of exposure, while he dominated the bull...

GOOD WRITING

Good writing is true writing. If a man is making a story up it will be true in proportion to the amount of knowledge of life that he has and how conscientious he is; so that when he makes something up it is as it would truly be.

No subject is terrible if the story is true, if the prose is clean and honest, and if it affirms courage and grace under pressure.

The hardest thing in the world to do is to write straight honest prose to human beings. First you have to know the subject; then you have to know how to write. Both take a lifetime to learn.

You know that fiction, prose rather, is possibly the roughest trade of all writing.... You have to take what is not palpable and make it completely palpable and also have it seem normal and so that it can become a part of the experience of the person who reads it.

All good books are alike in that they are truer than if they had really happened and after you are finished reading one you will feel that all that happened to you and afterwards it all belongs to you; the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse and sorrow, the people and the places and how the weather was.

In truly good writing no matter how many times you read it you do not know how it is done. That is because there is a mystery in all great writing and that mystery does not dissect out. It continues and it is always valid. Each time you re-read you see or learn something new.

It's enough for you to do it once for a few men to remember you. But if you do it year after year, then many people remember you and they tell it to their children, and their children and grandchildren remember and, if it concerns books, they can read them. And if it's good enough, it will last as long as there are human beings.

ADVICE TO WRITERS

Write hard and clear about what hurts.

Show the readers everything, tell them nothing.

As a writer you should not judge. You should understand.

Experience is communicated by small details intimately observed.

The more he learns from experience the more truly he can imagine.

[What is the best early training for a writer?] An unhappy childhood.

There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed.

It's harder to write in the third person but the advantage is you move around better.

Live the full life of the mind, exhilarated by new ideas, intoxicated by the Romance of the unusual.

Dostoevsky was made by being sent to Siberia. Writers are forged in injustice as a sword is forged.

A writer without a sense of justice and of injustice would be better off editing the year book of a school for exceptional children than writing novels.

There is no rule on how to write. Sometimes it comes easily and perfectly, sometimes it's like drilling rock and then blasting it out with charges.

LIVE INTENSELY

The most solid advice for a writer is this, I think: Try to learn to breathe deeply, really to taste food when you eat, and when you sleep really to sleep. Try as much as possible to be wholly alive with all your might, and when you laugh, laugh like hell. And when you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You will be dead soon enough.

LISTEN AND OBSERVE

When people talk listen completely. Don't be thinking what you're going to say. Most people never listen. Nor do they observe. You should be able to go into a room and when you come out know everything that you saw there and not only that. If that room gave you any feeling you should know exactly what it was that gave you that feeling. Try that for practice.

SOLITUDE

Writers should work alone. They should see each other only after their work is done, and not too often then. Otherwise they become like writers in New York. All angleworms in a bottle, trying to derive

knowledge and nourishment from their own contact and from the bottle. Sometimes the bottle is shaped art, sometimes economics, sometimes economic-religion. But once they are in the bottle they stay there. They are lonesome outside of the bottle. They do not want to be lonesome. They are afraid to be alone in their beliefs.

TALENT AND DISCIPLINE

First, there must be talent, much talent. Talent such as Kipling had. Then there must be discipline. The discipline of Flaubert. Then there must be the conception of what it can be and an absolute conscience as unchanging as the standard meter in Paris, to prevent faking. Then the writer must be intelligent and disinterested and above all he must survive. Try to get all these in one person and have him come through all the influences that press on a writer. The hardest thing, because time is so short, is for him to survive and get his work done.

REVISION

I rewrote the ending to *Farewell to Arms*, the last page of it, thirty-nine times before I was satisfied.

SLANG

Try and write straight English; never using slang except in dialogue and then only when unavoidable. Because all slang goes sour in a short time. I only use swear words, for example, that have lasted at least a thousand years for fear of getting stuff that will be simply timely and then go sour.

DICTIONARY

Actually if a writer needs a dictionary he should not write. He should have read the dictionary at least three times from beginning to end and then have loaned it to someone who needs it.

KNOWLEDGE

A good writer should know as near everything as possible. Naturally he will not. A great enough writer seems to be born with knowledge. But he really is not; he has only been born with the ability to learn in a quicker ratio to the passage of time than other men and without conscious application, and with an intelligence to accept or reject what is already presented as knowledge. There are some things which cannot be learned quickly and time, which is all we have, must be paid heavily for their acquiring. They are the very simplest things and because it takes a man's life to know them the little new that each man gets from life is very costly and the only heritage he has to leave. Every novel which is truly written contributes to the total knowledge which is there at the disposal of the next writer who comes, but the next writer must pay, always, a certain nominal percentage in experience to be able to understand and assimilate what is available as his birthright and what he must, in turn, take his departure from.

SHIT DETECTOR

The most essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shockproof, shit detector. This is the writer's radar and all great writers have had it.

AUDIENCE

You must be prepared to work always without applause.

Certainly, books should be judged by those who read them—not explained by the writer.

I believe that basically you write for two people; yourself to try to make it absolutely perfect; or if not that then wonderful. Then you write for who you love whether she can read or write or not and whether she is alive or dead.

POPULARITY

The one thing that I will not do is repeat myself on anything so the new ones are rarely as popular—people always want a story like the last one.

If you become popular it is always because of the worst aspects of your work.

Publicity, admiration, adulation, or simply being fashionable are all worthless.

About posterity: I only think about writing truly. Posterity can take care of itself.

HOLLYWOOD

Let me tell you about writing for films. You finish your book. Now, you know where the California state line is? Well, drive to it, take your manuscript and pitch it across. First, let them toss the money over. Then you throw it over, pick up the money and get the hell out of there.

MOVIE ADAPTATIONS OF HIS WORKS

Any picture in which Errol Flynn is the best actor is its own worst enemy. [*The Sun Also Rises*]

You write a book like that that you're fond of over the years, then you see that happen to it, it's like pissing in your father's beer. [*A Farewell to Arms*, starring Rock Hudson]

The hyena, although a splendid actor in the motion pictures and the best performer in a film we always refer to as *The Snows of Zanuck*. [Producer Darryl F. Zanuck falsified and sentimentalized "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" in his adaptation starring Gregory Peck.]

The big love scene between Coops and Ingrid and he didn't take off his coat. That's one hell of a way for a guy to make love, with his coat on—in a sleeping bag. [*For Whom the Bell Tolls*]

Spencer Tracy looked like a fat, very rich actor playing a fisherman. [*The Old Man and the Sea*]

The Old Man and the Sea (1952)

This is the prose that I have been working for all my life that should read easily and simply and seem short and yet have all the dimensions of the visible world and the world of a man's spirit. It is as good prose as I can write as of now.

WRITERS WHO TEACH

A writer who can both write and teach should be able to do both. Many competent writers have proved it could be done. I could not do it, I know, and I admire those who have been able to. I would think though that the academic life could put a period to outside experience which might possibly limit growth of knowledge of the world.

CRITICS

You know lots of criticism is written by characters who are very academic...all these guys have theories and try to fit you into the theory... Carlos Baker really baffles me. Do you suppose he can con himself into thinking I would put a symbol into anything on purpose. It's hard enough just to make a paragraph.... You know I was thinking about actual sharks when I wrote the book and had nothing to do with the theory that they represented critics. I don't know who thought that up... I never went to college. If any sonofabitch could write he wouldn't have to teach writing in college.

You know the professors in their thin, erudite volumes describe my unhappy childhood which supposedly motivated all my literary drives. Christ, I never had an unhappy day I can remember!

Professor Carlos Back-up and Professor Charles Fender and Professor Philip Youngerdunger, wearing the serious silks of Princeton and Yale and N.Y.U., feed my collected works into their Symbol Searcher, which is a cross between a Geiger counter and a pinball machine, or maybe they use their economy-sized death-wish indicators, which can also turn up complexes...

God knows people who are paid to have attitudes toward things, professional critics, make me sick; camp following eunuchs of literature.... They're all virtuous and sterile. And how well meaning and high minded. But they're all camp followers.

Critics...have a habit of hanging attributes on you themselves—and then when they find you're not that way accusing you of sailing under false colors.

All the critics who could not make their reputations by discovering you are hoping to make them by predicting hopefully your approaching impotence, failure and general drying up of natural juices. Not a one will wish you luck or hope that you will keep on writing unless you have political affiliations in which case these will rally around...

The professor at the boxing gymnasium wore mustaches and was very precise and jerky and went all to pieces if you started after him.

The bastards don't want you to joke because it disturbs their categories.

If you say nothing it is difficult for someone to get it wrong.

POSTMODERNISM

Easy writing makes hard reading.

Eschew the monumental. Shun the Epic.

All you have to do is to get a phony style and you can write any amount of words.

If a man writes clearly enough any one can see if he fakes. If he mystifies to avoid a straight statement, which is very different from breaking the so-called rules of syntax or grammar to make an effect which can be obtained in no other way, the writer takes a longer time to be known as a fake and other writers who are afflicted by the same necessity will praise him in their own defense. True mysticism should not be confused with incompetence in writing which seeks to mystify where there is no mystery but is really only the necessity to fake to cover lack of knowledge or the inability to state clearly.

For a writer to put his own intellectual musings, which he might sell for a low price as essays, into the mouths of artificially constructed characters which are more remunerative when issued as people in a novel is good economics, perhaps, but does not make literature.

I wouldn't kid Our Lord if he was on the cross. But I would attempt to joke with him if I ran into him chasing the money changers out of the temple.

OLD AGE

No, that is the fallacy: the wisdom of old men. They do not grow wise. They grow careful.

I think we should never be too pessimistic about what we know we have done well because we should have some reward and the only reward is that which is within ourselves.

[Asked if he had a psychoanalyst]: Sure I have. Portable Corona number three. That's been my analyst. I'll tell you, even though I am not a believer in the Analysis, I spend a hell of a lot of time killing animals

and fish so I won't kill myself. When a man is in rebellion against death, as I am in rebellion against death, he gets pleasure out of taking to himself one of the godlike attributes, that of giving it.

DECLINING HEALTH

What the hell. What does a man care about? Staying healthy. Working good. Eating and drinking with his friends. Enjoying himself in bed. I haven't any of them. Do you understand, goddamn it? None of them.

It is good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters, in the end.

A man can be destroyed but not defeated.

SUMMATION

The great thing is to last and get your work done and see and hear and learn and understand; and write when there is something that you know; and not before; and not too damned much after. Let those who want to save the world if you can get to see it clear and as a whole. Then any part you make will represent the whole if it's made truly. [synecdoche]

DEATH

Death is like an old whore in a bar. I'll buy her a drink but I won't go upstairs with her.

The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for and I hate very much to leave it.

So this was how you died, in whispers that you did not hear.

HEAVEN

I once told Scott that my idea of heaven was a big bull ring where I had two permanent *barrera* seats, with a rushing trout stream outside that could be fished by me and my pals. It's still my idea of heaven.

IMMORTALITY

Kilimanjaro is a snow-covered mountain 19,710 feet high, and it is said to be the highest mountain in Africa. Its western summit is called the Masai "Ngaje Ngai," the House of God. Close to the western summit there is the dried and frozen carcass of a leopard. No one has explained what the leopard was seeking at that altitude.

That is what the artist must do. On canvas or on printed page he must capture the thing so truly that its magnification will endure. That is the difference between journalism and literature. There is very little literature. Much less than we think.

From things that have happened and from things as they exist and from all things that you know and all those you cannot know, you make something through your invention that is not a representation but a whole new thing truer than anything true and alive, and you make it alive, and if you make it well enough you give it immortality.

DESECRATION

It is damned hard on Scott to publish something unfinished any way you look at it but I suppose the worms won't mind.

I know nothing worse for a writer than for his early writing which has been re-written and altered to be published without his permission as his own.

Some of these quotations are excerpted from
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