

THE DEATH  
OF  
ERNEST HEMINGWAY

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by  
Roger Darnell

A.P. English  
Mrs. A. Wright  
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On July 2, 1961, an act of suicide took the life of one of the most respected novelists and men of the Twentieth Century. Ernest Hemingway was once described as having "courted death all his life." This, however, was a misinterpretation; more appropriately, he courted the knowledge of death in life. While experiencing the vast world in which he played, he often added to his store of knowledge. His writing therefore reflected the aspects of life he had come to understand. This paper is a study of Ernest Hemingway's views of death, and the way in which these views affected his decision to take his own life.

*This should  
not be used as a  
preface; rather,  
it should be  
your opening  
paragraph*

- paper lacks clearly defined thesis statement early in the paper
- Needs more development of transitions
- A fine, provocative paper, although it is short for assignment.
- Most interesting!

1st paragraph should begin 4 over the page.

Ernest Hemingway published his first story, "The Judgment of Manitou," at the age of sixteen. The story ends when a northwoodsman, caught in a bear trap, reaches for his rifle to commit suicide.<sup>1</sup> This early use of death as a literary tool shows that Hemingway developed his personal views of death very early in his life. These views seem to embrace the idea that death is as much a part of life as any other aspect. Also, the idea of suicide established itself as a recurring pattern in his early fiction and continued to pervade his work throughout his career.<sup>2</sup>

began developing?

When young Ernest ~~went away to~~ joined the war as an ambulance driver for the Red Cross in 1918, it became necessary for him to face death.<sup>3</sup> In so doing, he developed a concrete realization of death:

"Dying is a very simple thing. I've looked at death, and I really know. If I should have died, it would have been quite the easiest thing I ever did. . . . And how much better to die in the happy period of disillusioned youth than to have your body worn out and old and illusions shattered."<sup>4</sup>

Houseman's "20 an athlete dying young"

In considering death so early in life, Hemingway established an idea that was to stay with him for the rest of his life.

Upon coming home from the war, Hemingway began to enact the "ready, aim, . . ." segment of his life. He went to the Hemingway home in Northern Michigan in order to fish, read, and write in solitude. ~~In~~ <sup>During</sup> this constructive period, he had ample time to consider those experiences which ~~led~~ <sup>had</sup> led to his present state of knowledge, and thus to expound upon it. Yet the time was generally characterized by Hemingway as a "chronology of rejection," in which he "worked, wrote, and couldn't sell anything." The pessimistic memories he noted, however, ~~are~~ <sup>were</sup> overshadowed by the fact that the period served as a preparation for his life which produced an important element

ambiguous

of self-trust in his character that remained a factor in his unique ability of expression.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, Hemingway's career lay before him, and his many already established morals provided the foundation he was to build upon. The acceptance of death as shown at the age of sixteen, the rational view of it shown during the war, and the bitter-sweet time that allowed him the chance to understand himself, all began to manifest themselves within his work. Now, as specific works are admired for their expression of opinion, they will be treated as they deal with death in particular terms. The first analysis will be of Hemingway's use of death as a literary tool; <sup>colon</sup> the author's ability to administer death. Next, his frequent use of morbidity in describing the grotesque qualities of death will be discussed. Finally, the idea of suicide and its effects on his life will be viewed as well as possible from the available relevant information.

*vague*  
} *should be in one well-organized thesis.*

Hemingway once described the reasoning behind <sup>the</sup> his recurring use of death in his work:

"When a man is still in rebellion against death he has pleasure in taking to himself one of the God-like attributes, that of giving it."<sup>6</sup>

This rebellion entailed a constant wariness of death, ~~and~~ thus his application of death to a literary hero, such as to Catherine Barkley of A Farewell to Arms, allowed Hemingway the chance to view death from afar, yet still be able to control it. His use of death as a literary tool, therefore, is understandable. As he had no control of death in the war, the power to regulate it in his work and life was a new, fully realized freedom.

*not !!*

In Across the River and Into the Trees, Hemingway presents one

life-loving Colonel Cantwell with the reality of approaching death. As Cantwell attempts to overcome the inevitable triumph of death, he is only able to do so in a moral way <sup>Colon</sup> by satisfying himself with his <sup>NC</sup> current position of experience. He is forced to "roll his soldier's universe into a ball and squeeze it as rapidly as possible through the iron gates of life."<sup>7</sup>

Thus Hemingway's <sup>quest for (?)</sup> observent approach to the understanding of death can be seen through the eyes of Colonel Cantwell. By cutting a ~~man~~ <sup>character</sup> short of life at a point where he is not ready to die ~~in his fiction,~~ Hemingway solves the problem he would face were he personally confronted with death in a similar <sup>untimely</sup> situation. Hemingway merely learns by the mistakes of others whom he allows to express his own mentality. In this way, the literary tool of death enhances Hemingway's understanding and his defense system.

<sup>continuing</sup> In ~~advancing~~ his education of death, Hemingway developed a use of morbidity in his work which presented a realistic approach to death in a new aspect. In such an approach, respect is not common to the dead. Rather, the dead are seen as they are: lifeless bodies capable of being molested, abused, or otherwise manipulated. <sup>for instance,</sup>  
<sup>not!</sup> In "An Alpine Idyll," an Austrian peasant stashes his frozen wife in the woodshed and hangs a lantern from her ever-expanding jaw all winter while he cuts wood. In The Fifth Column, the protagonist, Philip Rawlings, speaks of propping a corpse in a chair and sticking a lighted cigarette in its mouth. In The Green Hills of Africa Hemingway narrates the "comic" death of a hyena,

". . .that, hit too far back while running, would circle madly, snapping and tearing at himself until he pulled his own intestines out, and then stood there, jerking them out and eating them with relish." <sup>fact note ?</sup>

This free use of morbidity expresses a knowledge of death which displays Hemingway's opinion of death as something to<sup>be</sup> aware of and not feared or shied away from.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Hemingway's understanding of death allows him to be confident in describing <sup>its</sup> those grizzly aspects of it. Since he had no fear of death, he could speak or write of any form of death he chose. The product of this literary freedom was often shocking, powerful, and full of Hemingway's own opinions and morals.<sup>9</sup>

Hemingway was most aware of the freedom he held in literature when he came into contact with the fascists of Spain, who held, among other selfish laws, to a practice of rigid censorship.<sup>10</sup> Writing in his natural, straight-forward style, Hemingway defied the fascists. <sup>? style?</sup> This could not have made him happier, for he often sought ways to overcome his opposition, and this way was obvious and effective. *NC*

Thus, the morbid trait <sup>IN</sup> of Hemingway's work has a dual purpose: to express the ease with which he was able to deal with death (even death that was shocking to most people), and to show his intentional spite toward a group that did not allow the freedom Hemingway represented. <sup>admired? relished?</sup> His spiteful treatment of the fascists reflects his spiteful treatment of another opponent: death.<sup>11</sup>

In 1923, towards the end of his "chronology of rejection," Hemingway was noted for his view of suicide:

"He understood now why men could bring themselves to commit suicide: it was simply because of so great a pile-up of things to be done that they could not see their way clear of the tangle."<sup>12</sup>

This view stated his acceptance of suicide as an escape from "truly intolerable" conditions during the war.<sup>13</sup> As Hemingway was advancing in years, his thoughts of taking his own life became apparent. What

more could be expected, though, from a man who had openly accepted suicide as a means of achieving death, <sup>than</sup> "the one thing man may be sure of in life"?<sup>14</sup>

Hemingway most often personified death as a whore--either "a beautiful harlot who could put one to sleep" and therefore must be cagily avoided, or "the oldest whore in Havana," whom he knew very well and <sup>with whom he</sup> would be glad to have a drink with, ~~but not to go upstairs~~ <sup>yet not be willing to accompany</sup> with.<sup>15</sup> In viewing Hemingway's relationship with death as one with a whore, it may be understood how he was eventually coaxed to ascend the staircase.

} avoid prep. at end of sentence

He came to habituate the "old bar" the whore frequented. This old bar was a mental state of depression that became a part of his character towards the end. His times away from the bar had been <sup>vague</sup> hard on him; he had "unfortunately," so he said, survived two plane crashes, his war injuries, and other physical limitations, yet there seemed to be no end to the suffering he was experiencing.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>not</sup> The whore was there. He knew what her job was and had come to accept it long ago. In his state of enduring depression, he saw himself as one in need of something, perhaps, even the services of a harlot who offered nothing more than the loss of his pride.

<sup>however</sup> The pride endured, and Hemingway went to the Mayo Brother's Clinic in Minnesota for treatment of his depressive spells and hypertension. <sup>After</sup> A trial visit home proved the need for further treatment, and he was sent back. Finally, after two months of further examination, he was released.<sup>17</sup> The treatments, however, did not at-

tack the problem, nor would they have been successful had the treatments attempted to. Hemingway was ready to die. He felt nothing

} opinion

compelling him to go on living. The one thing that had not effectively kept him from suicide, the fact that his suicide would provide a negative example for his children, eventually became less important to him.<sup>18</sup>

He was up before the rest of the inhabitants of his home in Ketchum, Idaho, that morning of July 2, 1961.<sup>19</sup> He saw this morning as his chance to slip away with the whore, so that she would be able to execute her practice in full.

*no 41* "In a moment of total emptiness, a moment of something more than despair, a moment of agonizing, inescapable, endless weariness of spirit," Ernest Hemingway tripped both barrels of his favorite shotgun, which was aimed just above his eyebrows.<sup>20</sup> The job was done, and the whore went back to her seat at the bar where everyone could find her.

The life-long quest for knowledge of the aspect of death thus finally ended in experience. Hemingway knew very early in his life that he was eventually going to die, and when he finally did, he took with him a comfort that he had attained in knowing death as it really is. He stripped death down to a mere concept: that of losing life, becoming deceased. Hence, Hemingway didn't court death all his life, he merely courted it for five minutes before he achieved it, and thus went to rest, comfortably.

*vague*

*this page is awesome!*

*✓*



FOOTNOTES

*good footnotes*

<sup>1</sup>Scott Donaldson, By Force of Will (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 285.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Charles A. Fenton, The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Young, 1954), p. 61.

<sup>4</sup>Carlos Baker, Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 72.

<sup>5</sup>Fenton, The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway, p. 72.

<sup>6</sup>Carlos Baker, Hemingway: The Writer as Artist (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 153.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 267-268.

<sup>8</sup>Donaldson, By Force of Will, pp. 284-286.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>10</sup>Webster's New College Dictionary (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam, Co., 1956), p. 300.

<sup>11</sup>Carlos Baker, Hemingway and His Critics (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), p. 167.

<sup>12</sup>Baker, Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story, p. 119.

<sup>13</sup>Donaldson, By Force of Will, p. 283.

<sup>14</sup>Baker, Hemingway: The Writer as Artist, p. 153.

<sup>15</sup>Donaldson, By Force of Will, p. 284.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>17</sup>Baker, Hemingway: The Writer as Artist, p. 348.

<sup>18</sup>Donaldson, By Force of Will, p. 290.

<sup>19</sup>Mary Welsh Hemingway, How It Was (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1976), p. 502.

<sup>20</sup>Jose Luis Castillo-Puche, Hemingway in Spain (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974), p. 59.

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