

HEMINGWAY AND GOYA: THE CONVERGENCE  
OF THREE ARTISTIC MOTIFS

by *6408*

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24 If I could draw I would make a picture of a table at the café during a feria with the banderilleros sitting before lunch reading the papers, a boot-black at work, a waiter hurrying somewhere and two returning picadors, one a big brown-faced, dark-browed man usually very cheerful and a great joker, the other a gray-haired, neat, hawknosed, trim-waisted little man, both of them looking the absolute embodiment of gloom and depression.

--Ernest Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon

Ernest Hemingway had a deep, abiding interest in painting. As he declared in Green Hills of Africa, hunting, fishing, "and writing, and reading, and seeing good pictures was all I cared about doing."<sup>1</sup> During his lifetime he revealed familiarity in his works with almost as many painters as writers. Painters who are mentioned with some frequency in his works include Cezanne, Utrillo, Rubens, El Greco, Velasquez, Klee, Tintoretto, Degas, Van Gogh, Gris, Miro, Titian, Botticelli, Bosch, Bruegel, Braque, Masson, Van Dyck, Renoir, Manet, Monet, Ganguin, Veronese, Mantegna, and Whistler. He also maintained friendship with several minor painters who included Waldo Pierce, Luis Quintanilla, Antonio Gattorno, Nina Hammett, Ethel Moorhead, and Henry Strater, who made two portraits of Hemingway in 1922 and 1923.

Hemingway was also a fairly persistent visitor to several important museums both in the States and abroad. These included the Chicago Art Institute, near his birth place in Oak Park, Illinois; the Metropolitan Museum in New York; the Luxembourg Museum in Paris; the Prado Museum in Madrid; and the Accademia di Belle Arti in Italy. When impressed with a particular painting, he would study the technique of the artist that provided the desired effect. A. E. Hotchner, who accompanied Hemingway on

several museum trips, describes in his controversial work, his own observations of Hemingway's approach to a painting:

When Ernest went to a museum, it was never to look at pictures in general but only at particular canvases. Sometimes he would go to look at one picture, and then leave. He would walk across an entire room of Titians, not looking at any except the one he wanted to see, and then he would stand in front of that picture, absorbed in it, looking at it for as long as his emotions demanded. On one occasion I was with him in the Accadèmia di Belle Arti when he stood in front of Veronese's "The Feast in the House of Levi," for twenty minutes.<sup>2</sup>

On the occasion of seeing Goya's famous portrait of the royal family of Charles IV, Hotchner records Hemingway's admiration for Goya's skill at hiding his feelings beneath the surface of his painting: "Is it not a masterpiece of loathing?" Ernest asked. "'Look how he has painted his spittle into every face. Can you imagine that he had such genius that he could fulfill this commission and please the King, who, because of his fatuousness, could not see how Goya had stamped him for all the world to see.'"<sup>3</sup> Hemingway apparently saw the portrait as an exemplification of his iceberg theory of art.<sup>4</sup>

Hemingway's knowledge of painters derived from a direct study of admired works as well as from a fairly substantial amount of reading.<sup>5</sup> His interest in modern painting, however, seems to have been directly stimulated by Gertrude Stein. In A Moveable Feast, Hemingway described Miss Stein's discussion of several modern paintings she owned.<sup>6</sup> Miss Stein, moreover, criticized some of the early stories Hemingway gave her in terms of painting analogies.<sup>7</sup> At this time during his first protracted stay in Paris, Hemingway also started going to the Luxembourg Museum to study Cezanne, Monet, Degas, and other Impressionists. Gertrude Stein may have

suggested these trips, although he later said the museum was a cheap place to go when you were hungry.

Cezanne, more than any of the other Impressionists in the Luxembourg Museum, drew Hemingway's attention and admiration. "'Cezanne is my painter after the early painters,'" he told Lillian Ross during a visit to the Metropolitan Museum in New York. At the same time, he mentioned specifically that he had learned to describe landscape by studying Cezanne's method.<sup>8</sup> This celebrated method of Cezanne, and of the Impressionists in general, involves working tiny patches of a dominant color into the whole canvas. Hemingway admired the craftsmanship by which Cezanne attempted to create mood and tone in his art by this seemingly simple method, one that David J. Schneider sees employed in Hemingway's second novel:

In A Farewell to Arms the dominant state of mind--the sense of death, defeat, failure, nothingness, emptiness--is conveyed chiefly by the image of rain (with all its tonal associates, mist, wet, damp, river, fog), by images and epithets of desolation (chiefly bare, thin, small, and fallen leaves), and by images and epithets of impurity and corruption (chiefly dust, mud, dirt, and disease). Hemingway's method of working with images is surprisingly uniform. I have already employed an analogy to music; another way of describing the method is to think of a painter [Cezanne] working tiny patches of a dominant color over his entire canvas.<sup>9</sup>

The method of Cezanne fits well into Hemingway's own developed technique of describing landscape in terms of key words and images that also provide the tone and mood he desired.

Another painter that Hemingway mentions frequently in his fiction is El Greco. El Greco's famous painting of the city of Toledo was one of Hemingway's favorite paintings. The painting hangs in the Metropolitan Museum where Hemingway had occasion to see it during his short trips to New York. On the day he left for post-World War II France, he visited the