

## The Moveable Feast

*E.Hemingway*

August 3-4, 2007

It is a thin book. A Penguin edition. Not for sale in the U.S. or Canada. Must have bought it in England, and a long time ago at that, as the cover is marked with 3'6 which can only mean 3 shillings and 6 pence. Thus I must have bought it on my first trip back in 1966. I have read it though, probably in the mid-seventies. I still remember a few things as I reread it some thirty years later, although there are many things, most in fact, which have not stuck. This is what is expected.

It is a memoir. A slight sketch of a memoir written some thirty years after the events it chronicles. Hemingway is in Paris. He is young, he is newly married, and he has a young son. He is poor but he is happy. Life in Paris is cheap, necessities can be had for almost nothing, and with some economy one is able to indulge in the luxuries of trips, going down to Spain, or better still spending winters skiing and working in Austria. In fact in the 'Voralberg' at Schruns. When I read it the first time around that name did not stick, this the second time it did. Schruns rings a bell, and it does not take much of an effort to identify why. On a railpass in the summer of 1982 I headed straight down to Austria to do some hiking. More or less by chance I ended up at Schruns. Climbed from a camping site at 800 meters up to some Alpine huts at 2400. Four hours with a heavy pack. The next day I climbed down and went to Munich. For Hemingway Schruns is snow. A cheap but splendid hotel, and hiking up slopes in order to charge down. At that time broken spinal chords were very rare, and no one could afford to break a leg. There were no lifts, so the effort to climb resulted in legs strong enough to manage going down. Avalanches were a threat of course, but he learned to avoid them. If it is one thing Hemingway is good at, it is to suggest a place. Not quite as accomplished as Frisch in my opinion, but almost, when he is at his best. The technique is the impressionistic touch, allowing the reader to fill out the gaps. The written page is not a photograph, words cannot do pixel by pixel, but has to work at the level one or two above. But Schruns is clearly marginal to the story, the center is Paris.

Paris means cafés. Hemingway visits many of them, but he has his favourite, where he can be alone with his writing. He has a coffee, or a glass of wine, or an appetizer, and writes and writes. Writing does not come easy to him on the average, but there are ups as well as downs. One thing I remember very clearly from my first reading, namely his habit of always breaking up work when he knew how it would continue. In this way when resumed, he would waste no time getting started. The advice impressed me very much at the time, I thought it was very simple and hence very clever, and I wondered whether it could be applied to mathematics. Hemingway has quit his work as a journalist and a reporter, trying to get his stories written and sold, in other words to live entirely on his wits. He makes no compromises and professes shock at the confession of Fitzgerald, that the latter always twists his stories a little, just in order to have them sold to the Saturday Evening Post and similar outlets. Such whoring is bound to destroy a writer, Hemingway

warns. He himself takes his writing very seriously, to write a single paragraph can take him an morning. To write an entire novel seems very much out of bounds.

Eating is very important. When you do not eat you starve. Hemingway does not starve, but he goes hungry a lot. He has learned to walk routes devoid of restaurants and bakeries, in order to spare himself the painful temptations. So when he gets to eat he remembers very well what he eats, as well as what he drinks. Wine is always very good as well as affordable. He drinks at all times of the day, if he feels like it. But he does not let his drinking get in way of his writing. Not like Fitzgerald, whose wife eggs him on all the time to drink, as she wants to have a gay time, and is jealous of his work. Fitzgerald had written beautifully, and after having just met him and read his 'The Great Gatsby', Hemingway decides that this guy, no matter how badly he behaves, he must be a friend to. Admittedly Fitzgerald has many friends, but that should not prevent Hemingway to enlist as yet another one.

Yes, Hemingway meets the famous of the day. Fitzgerald, if only two years his senior, is already established and successful, and Hemingway cannot at first but look up to him, looking for useful advice. Fitzgerald though is a hypochondriac and practically inept. Never before has the author known a grown up man miss a train, but as he finally meets up with him in Lypn to pick up his manhandled Renault, he will learn many more things. The car has been repaired after its engine having been abused on oil and water. The top is sown off, which makes riding in the rain impossible. As they labour to Paris, they need to stop and seek shelter repeatedly. As they make an overnight stop, Fitzgerald is convinced he is going to die out of congestion of the lungs, a disease indigenous to Europe. Hemingway has to procure a thermometer and pretend to take his temperature. Then they go down for dinner, interrupted by Fitzgeralds long phone call to his wife, later he has to be carried off to bed, collapsing as usual only after a most modest intake of alcohol. Fitzgerald could not spell nor punctuate properly. His letters were written as if by an illiterate. But when he told a story, none of that showed, and his stories were wonderful, and he was so articulate.

His wife was to be his undoing. She never allowed him to be sober and work. They tried different locations, but wherever, he was tormented by jealousy, and she even worse by his work. She also hit him where it hurts most to an insecure male. Famous is the story of how Hemingway sends him to the Louvre to inspect the classical statues and be reassured. Fitzgerald refuses to be, doubt when having gained a secure foothold, does not easily let go.

Other notables flit through, if more peripherally in his view of vision. Ezra Pound is always such a gentle helpful friend, and Gertrude Stein, until she get offended, a most maternal presence. Books he can borrow at Sylvia Beach, because he cannot afford to by them himself. She is always very generous with credits as well. Joyce he glimpses in a restaurant eating with his family. It is a restaurant too expensive for Hemingway to set his foot inside. Later on they get acquainted, but thirty years later, Hemingway finds almost nothing to say about the encounters. Of Wyndham Lewis, a friend of Pound, he meets once, and finds him very nasty. Ford Maddox Ford is in many ways physically disgusting and can only be tolerated when sharing a table outside. He later riddles him with a long manuscript by Stein, a rambling unprofessional outpouring which will overextend the

run of the magazin in which it appears serially. And the painter Pascin dining with two models,sisters in fact. One he has already banged up during the course of the day and he invites Hemingway to do the same. The latter inspects the two, decides that one is nicely built, but of fake depravity. But of course he is happily married at the time, and the temptation tepid enough to be easily ignored. Pascin though, whose very blue paintings in which the colors flow together, are rather easy to visually recall, is a very easy-going and personable character., having a good time with his models. This does not prevent him from committing suicide at the end.

His memoir is filled with the street names of Paris. He walked around a lot, and was still young and fit, taking pleasure in an incline. At one period he played the horses, and succesfully too, but it took too much to stay atop and he sensibly quit. Briefly he was fascinated by bicycle races, but to write well about such things, you need to write in French, which supplies all the terminology. The years go by and he is poor and happy in the way you can only be when you are young and can bank on a great future. But happiness is not for ever, its beauty, especially in retrospect, lies in its briefness. He would succeed, and with success would come fame and recognition, and such acts as a sweet target on the rich. And he would be pampered, and each day a 'fiesta', and there would come a woman in his life, a woman making best friendswith his wife, with the view of getting hold of her husband. The flesh is weak,. and temptation hard to resist. And once innocence is spoiled, the gateway to all depravity, there is no going back. To know what relaly happened, and what happened to follow, one needs, I guess, to consult a standard biography. Monogamy, however blissful to the two engaged, is boring to the outsider, and hence also to the spouse, who has been made, if only temporarily, to stay out of the charmed circle.

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