

Hemingway: The Short Story Writer

Stephen Cooper

THE COMPLETE SHORT STORIES OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY, The Finca Vigia Edition. Foreword by John, Patrick, and Gregory Hemingway. Publisher's Preface by Charles Scribner, Jr. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987. 651 pp. \$22.95.

The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway, The Finca Vigia Edition, fills a real need for a new collected edition of Hemingway's stories. Previously, the most complete collection was *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, which was based on the 1938 volume, *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories*. This volume did not include the five substantial stories of the Spanish Civil War that Hemingway published in various magazines in the late 1930s nor the four stories he published during the 1950s. The new edition, named after Hemingway's Cuban residence, includes these previously uncollected stories along with a number of previously unpublished stories taken from manuscript.

Reading through this collection reminds us that perhaps Hemingway's greatest work was in his short stories. Today there is sometimes a tendency to dismiss Hemingway as a simple realist or as a journalistic writer who lacked the complexity of his contemporary Faulkner or his friend Joyce. In fact, he was seen as a revolutionary stylist in his own day—a man who wrote cryptic, difficult stories in a deceptively simple style. A fresh look at the stories of his first collection, *In Our Time* (1925; pp. 63-181 in the Finca Vigia Edition), shows this volume to have much in common with Joyce's *Dubliners*—a simple surface, an eye for detail, a mania for accuracy, an ear for dialogue, and an interest in epiphanic moments. Although he sometimes slipped below this level of excellence over the next decades, the first forty-nine stories include some of the finest and most influential short fiction written in the first half of this century.

The newly collected stories in this volume are another matter. They are often interesting and well-written, but rarely do these stories reach the level of his best earlier fiction. Among the more interesting stories

now collected here are his stories of the Spanish Civil War. Although known as a staunch supporter of the Spanish Loyalists, he was not writing mere propaganda in these stories. "The Denunciation" deals with the divided loyalties of a civil war. The narrator sees a man in a bar behind Loyalist lines whom he knows to be a fascist. Before the war the narrator had been friends with this man, and he is now torn between military duty and personal friendship. In another story, "The Butterfly and the Tank," Hemingway addresses the difficult issue of telling the truth in wartime under the pressure of partisanship. "Under the Ridge" honestly faces up to the issues raised by foreign and especially Soviet intervention in Spain's war and deals with the often harsh methods adopted to enforce discipline in a "people's" army.

For the most part, the new stories in this edition are not equal to Hemingway's best work. For example, the World War II story, "Black Ass at the Cross Roads," lacks the subtlety or suggestiveness of his classic war stories from the First World War, and it is not even up to his slightly lower standards of the Spanish Civil War stories. Instead of the clear focus and heightened sensibility of his earlier war stories, this story is filled with irrelevant details and a pervasive numbness. In the later stories in this volume, there are many flashes of the old Hemingway brilliance, but they are rarely sustained. This fact highlights the irony of calling this volume the Finca Vigia Edition. The Finca was Hemingway's home in Cuba for roughly the last two decades of his life. Since most of the new material in this volume dates from this period of Hemingway's life, I presume his sons and his publisher thought it would be appropriate to name this "definitive" collection after his beloved home. The irony is that this volume shows that the Finca Vigia era was a period of declining quality and output in his work. His best stories pre-date his move to the Finca.

The title was not the only unhappy choice made in the editing of this volume. The book is divided into three sections. Part I, "The First Forty-nine," contains the stories from the previous collected edition in the order in which they have been reprinted since 1938. Part II contains stories published in books and magazines subsequent to "The First Forty-nine." The last part contains previously unpublished fiction. Although there is a surface logic to this ordering, it creates some problems, particularly for a student or first-time reader of Hemingway. This order jumbles the chronology of Hemingway's career. The first four stories in the book were written in the mid and late 1930s, after the next forty-five stories that follow them. Thus, "Old Man at the Bridge" is fourth in the collection, separated by over 350 pages from the other stories of the Spanish Civil War. In terms of

both subject matter and time of composition, these stories belong together.

Because Hemingway approved the order for "The First Forty-nine" in 1938, the publisher seems to feel this order must be preserved. But "The First Forty-nine" is not a unified collection as is *In Our Time*. The 1938 edition reprinted the texts of Hemingway's first three collections as they were first published. The play *The Fifth Column* and five new stories were added at the front of the collection, the positioning of the new material being mainly a marketing decision. It is not unusual for a writer to put his new work at the beginning of a collection that includes his previous work. The marketing logic of 1938, however, does not hold for today. New readers would be better served by a collection that reflects the shape of Hemingway's career. They would also be better served by a collection that labels *In Our Time* (1925), *Men Without Women* (1927), and *Winner Take Nothing* (1933). Even though these collections are reprinted exactly as they were originally published, they are not labeled in the table of contents or in the text. This identification is particularly important for *In Our Time*, which was clearly intended to be a unified work and is often studied as such.

In addition to the problems of order in this volume, there are questions about the selection of material. Included in the section of stories published subsequent to "The First Forty-nine" are "One Trip Across" and "The Tradesman's Return," both published before "The First Forty-nine" and both incorporated with few changes in the novel *To Have and Have Not* (1937). Also included is another story from a novel—"An African Story" from *The Garden of Eden* (1986). Besides the stories from manuscript published here, there are fragments of abandoned novels published as stories, including a long fragment entitled "The Strange Country" which had been edited out of the posthumously published *Islands in the Stream* (1970). These previously unpublished fragments have an interest for Hemingway scholars and some intrinsic merit, but they do not seem to qualify as short stories. Also, although the book is called *The Complete Stories*, it does not include all the stories and fragments from Scribner's own *The Nick Adams Stories* (1972), nor does it include the five early stories published in Peter Griffin's account of Hemingway's early years, *Along With Youth* (1985). The point is not that all this material should have been included, but that the principles governing what material was included and what was excluded are not clear, and neither the foreword by Hemingway's sons John, Patrick, and Gregory, nor the publisher's preface by Charles Scribner, Jr. explains the editorial guidelines that were used.

The result of this questionable editing is a volume that is less satisfying than it could have been. Because of the new material it contains and because it is the most extensive collection of Hemingway's short stories we have, *The Complete Short Stories* is a welcome addition, but more thoughtful editing could have made it even better. ■