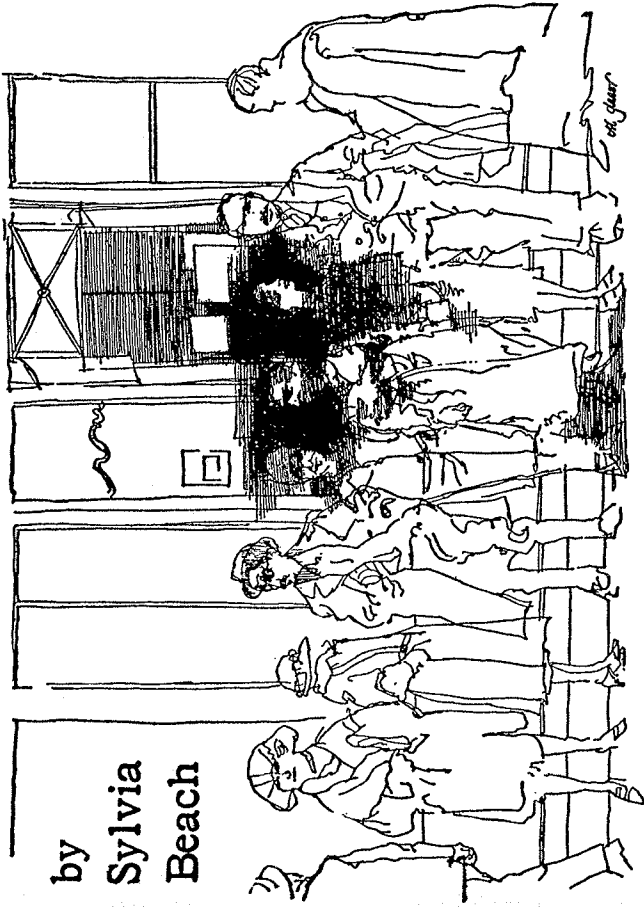


SHAKESPEARE AND COMPANY

by  
Sylvia  
Beach



New Edition

*Introduction by James Laughlin*

University of Nebraska Press Lincoln

*Ulysses*, human beings were more to me than works of art. But my role was that of a publisher, and I had to bring out this book *Ulysses*, and to run a bookshop, and it looked to me as if we might all be going bankrupt pretty soon.

One day, at the verge of disaster, Joyce appeared and, much excited over his news, announced that he had just heard from Miss Harriet Weaver, who was sending him a great deal of money, a sum, he said, that would provide him with an income for the rest of his life!

We both rejoiced over this miracle, he, because Miss Weaver's generosity had removed one of his worst problems, and I, for his sake, but also for my own. It was a tremendous relief to feel that I could now go ahead and publish *Ulysses*, and also that Shakespeare and Company was free of encumbrance, so to speak.

Miss Weaver—"Saint Harriet," Mrs. Jolas told me, was Lucia's name for her—had given Joyce enough for someone else to live on the rest of his life, but not Joyce. It wasn't long before he was again hard up, and Miss Weaver came again to his help. However, we had a moment of relief.



### My Best Customer

A customer we liked, one who gave us no trouble, was that young man you saw almost every morning over there in a corner at Shakespeare and Company, reading the magazines or Captain Marryat or some other book. This was Ernest Hemingway, who turned up in Paris, as I remember, late in 1921. My "best customer," he called himself, a title that no one disputed with him. Great was our esteem for a customer who was not only a regular visitor, but spent money on books, a trait very pleasing to the proprietor of a small book business.

However, he would have endeared himself to me just as much if he hadn't spent a penny in my establishment. I felt the warmest friendship for Ernest Hemingway from the day we met.

Sherwood Anderson, in Chicago, had given his "young friends Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Hemingway" a letter of introduction to me. I have it still, and it reads as follows:

I am writing this note to make you acquainted with my friend Ernest Hemingway, who with Mrs. Hemingway is going to Paris to live, and will ask him to drop it in the mails when he arrives there.

Mr. Hemingway is an American writer instinctively in touch with everything worth while going on here and I know you will find both Mr. and Mrs. Hemingway delightful people to know. . . .

But the Hemingways and I had known each other for some time before they remembered to produce Anderson's letter. Hemingway just walked in one day.

I looked up and saw a tall, dark young fellow with a small mustache, and heard him say, in a deep, deep voice, that he was Ernest Hemingway. I invited him to sit down, and, drawing him out, I learned that he was from Chicago originally. I also learned that he had spent two years in a military hospital, getting back the use of his leg. What had happened to his leg? Well, he told me apologetically, like a boy confessing he had been in a scrap, he had got wounded in the knee, fighting in Italy. Would I care to see it? Of course I would. So business at Shakespeare and Company was suspended while he removed his shoe and sock, and showed me the dreadful scars covering his leg and foot. The knee was the worst hurt, but the foot seemed to have been badly injured, too, from a burst of shrapnel, he said. In the hospital, they had thought he was done for; there was even some question of administering the last sacraments. But this was changed, with his feeble consent, to baptism—"just in case they were right."

So Hemingway was baptized. Baptized or not—and I am going to say this whether Hemingway shoots me or not—I have always felt that he was a deeply religious man. Hemingway was a great pal of Joyce's, and Joyce remarked to me one day that he thought it was a mistake, Hemingway's thinking himself such a tough fellow and McAlmon trying to pass himself off as the sensitive type. It was the other way round, he thought. So Joyce found you out, Hemingway!

Hemingway confided to me that before he was out of high school, when he was still "a boy in short pants," his father had died suddenly and in tragic circumstances, leaving him a gun as a sole legacy. He found himself the head of a family, his mother and brothers and sister dependent on him. He had to leave school and begin making a living. He earned his first money in a boxing match, but, from what I gathered, didn't

linger in this career. He spoke rather bitterly of his boyhood.

He didn't tell me much about his life after he left school. He earned his living at various jobs, including newspaper work, I believe, then went over to Canada and enlisted in the armed forces. He was so young he had to fake his age to be accepted.

Hemingway was a widely educated young man, who knew many countries and several languages; and he had learned it all at first hand, not in universities. He seemed to me to have gone a great deal farther and faster than any of the young writers I knew. In spite of a certain boyishness, he was exceptionally wise and self-reliant. In Paris, Hemingway had a job as sports correspondent for the *Toronto Star*. No doubt he was already trying his hand at writing fiction.

He brought his young wife, Hadley, to see me. She was an attractive, delightfully jolly person. Of course I took them both around to see Adrienne Monnier. Hemingway's knowledge of French was remarkable, and he managed somehow to find time to read all the French publications as well as ours.

Hemingway's job as sports correspondent took him to all the events in that line, and his linguistic attainments included argot. This world of sports was one into which Hemingway's bookshop pals Adrienne and Sylvia had never penetrated, but we were ready to be enlightened, and Hemingway to enlighten us.

Our studies began with boxing. One evening our educators, Hemingway and Hadley, stopped by for us and we all set off by métro to the mountainous region of Ménilmontant, inhabited by workers, sportsmen, and a certain number of toughs. At the Pelleport station we climbed the steep stairs, Hadley, who was expecting Bumby (John Hadley Hemingway), puffing slightly and assisted by her husband. Hemingway led us to the ring, a tiny one that you had to go through a sort of backyard to reach, and we found seats on narrow benches without backs.

The fights and our instruction began. When, in the preliminary matches, the boys swung their arms around and bled so profusely that we were afraid they were going to bleed to death, Hemingway reassured us; it was only slugging and nose-bleed, he said. We learned some of the rules of the game. We were informed, too, that those rather bleary characters strolling in and out, hardly seeming to give the fighters a glance, but discussing something now and again among themselves, were managers who dropped in at rings to look for new and promising material.

By the time the big event came on, our professor was too busy watching the punches to be depended on for any more hints, and his pupils had to do without him.

This last fight led to another—in which the spectators participated. Opinion was divided on the referee's decision; everybody got up on the benches and jumped down on each other—a real Western. What with the socking, the kicking, the yelling, and the surging back and forth, I was afraid we would be "Hemmed" in, and that Hadley would be injured in the melee. Calls for "*Le fic! le fic!*" were heard, but evidently not by the cop whose attendance at all French places of amusement, whether it's the Comédie-Française or a boxing ring in Ménilmontant, is obligatory. We heard Hemingway's voice above the din exclaiming with disapproval: "*Et naturellement le fic est dans la pissottière!*"

Next, Adrienne and I took up cycling under Hemingway's tuition and influence; not that we did any cycling ourselves, but we attended with our professor the "Six-Jours," that six-day merry-go-round at the Vél d'Hiv, easily the most popular event in the Paris season. Fans went and lived there for the duration, watching more and more listlessly the little monkey-men, hunched over on their bikes, slowly circling the ring or suddenly sprinting, night and day, in an atmosphere of smoke and dust and theatrical stars, and amid the blare of loud-speakers. We did our best to follow what the professor was saying to us, but rarely could we distinguish words above the

din. Unfortunately, Adrienne and I could spare only one night for this sport, engrossing though we found it. But what wouldn't have been engrossing in Hemingway's company?

A much more exciting event awaited us. I had had the impression for some time that Hemingway was working hard on some stories. He told me one day he had finished one, and asked if Adrienne and I would care to hear it. Eagerly we attended this event, one that concerned us deeply, for she and I were something like those bleary persons hanging around Pelleport Ring on the lookout for talent. Maybe we didn't know much about boxing, but when it came to writing—that was another thing. Imagine our joy over this first bout of Ernest Hemingway's!

So Hemingway read us one of the stories from *In Our Time*. We were impressed by his originality, his very personal style, his skillful workmanship, his tidiness, his storyteller's gift and sense of the dramatic, his power to create—well, I could go on, but as Adrienne summed him up: "Hemingway has the true writer's temperament" ("*le tempérament authentique d'écrivain*").

Of course, today Hemingway is the acknowledged daddy of modern fiction. You can't open a novel or a short story in France, or in England or Germany or Italy or anywhere else, without noticing that Hemingway has passed that way. He has landed in schoolbooks, which is more fun for the children than they have as a rule and very lucky for them!

Though the question who has influenced such and such a writer has never bothered me, and the adult writer doesn't stay awake at night to wonder who has influenced him, I do think Hemingway readers should know who taught him to write: it was Ernest Hemingway. And, like all authentic writers, he knew that to make it "good," as he called it, you had to work.

Adrienne Monnier was Hemingway's first French fan, and she was the first to publish a story of his in French. "The Undeafened" came out in her magazine, *Le Navire d'Argent*, and it attracted a great deal of attention among its readers.

Hem. ad  
w/ter

Hemingway's readers were usually won over by a first contact. I remember Jonathan Cape's enthusiasm over his first Hemingway. Mr. Cape, Colonel Lawrence's and Joyce's publisher in England, asked me, on one of his visits to Paris, what American he should publish. "Here, read Hemingway!" I said—and that is how Mr. Cape became Hemingway's English publisher.

Hemingway was serious and competent in whatever he did, even when he went in for the care of an infant. After a brief visit to Canada, Hadley and Hemingway came back bringing another "best customer," John Hadley Hemingway. Dropping in one morning and seeing him giving the baby his bath, I was amazed at his deft handling of Bumby. Hemingway *père* was justly proud, and asked me if I didn't think he had a future as a nursemaid.

Bumby was frequenting Shakespeare and Company before he could walk. Holding his son carefully, though sometimes upside down, Hemingway went on reading the latest periodicals, which required some technique, I must say. As for Bumby, anything was all right as long as he was with his adored Papa. His first steps were to what he called "Sylvia Beach's." I can see them, father and son, coming along hand in hand up the street. Bumby, hoisted on a high stool, observed his old man gravely, never showing any impatience, waiting to be lifted from his high perch at last; it must have seemed a long wait sometimes. Then I would watch the two of them as they set off, not for home, since they had to keep out of Hadley's way till the housekeeping was done, but to the bistro around the corner; there, seated at a table, their drinks before them—Bumby's was a grenadine—they went over all the questions of the day.

Everybody at that time had been in Spain, and varied were the impressions. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas had found it very amusing. Others had gone to a bullfight, been shocked, and come away before the end. The bullfight had been written up from the moral and the sexual point of view, and as a

bright-colored sport, picturesque and all that. The Spanish themselves usually found anything foreigners said about *los toros* bewildering and, besides, technically unsound.

Hemingway, unlike the others, set out to learn and to write about the bulls in his usual serious, competent manner. So we have, in *Death in the Afternoon*, a complete treatise on bullfighting, one that my Spanish friends, the most difficult to please, have acknowledged as excellent. And some of Hemingway's finest writing is in this book.

Good writers are so rare that if I were a critic, I would only try to point out what I think makes them reliable and enjoyable. For how can anyone explain the mystery of creation?

Hemingway can take any amount of criticism—from himself; he is his own severest critic, but, like all his fellow-writers, he is hypersensitive to the criticism of others. It's true that some critics are terribly expert in sticking the sharp penpoint into the victim and are delighted when he squirms. Wyndham Lewis succeeded in making Joyce squirm. And his article on Hemingway entitled "The Dumb Ox," which the subject of it picked up in my bookshop, I regret to say, roused him to such anger that he punched the heads off three dozen tulips, a birthday gift. As a result, the vase upset its contents over the books, after which Hemingway sat down at my desk and wrote a check payable to Sylvia Beach for a sum that covered the damage twice over.

As a bookseller and librarian, I paid more attention to titles perhaps than others who simply rush past the threshold of a book without ringing the bell. I think Hemingway's titles should be awarded first prize in any contest. Each of them is a poem, and their mysterious power over readers contributes to Hemingway's success. His titles have a life of their own, and they have enriched the American vocabulary.