

Biographical Studies of Ernest Hemingway in the 21st Century: New Trends and New Features

Siyu Chen

College of Literature and Journalism, Sichuan University, Chengdu, Sichuan, 610064, China
Corresponding author: Siyu Chen. Email: chensiyu0406@qq.com

ABSTRACT

The biographical criticism of Ernest Hemingway, as an indispensable part of Hemingway studies, has been playing a crucial role in injecting vigor and vitality with its vast number of biographical works, rich content and various forms. This paper focuses on the new Hemingway biographies published since the 21st century. By summarizing and selecting representative works, this paper discovers that biographical studies of Hemingway in the 21st century transform from comprehensiveness to specialization, from general biographies to thematic biographies. Besides, there are five new features: (1) extension of new research areas; (2) exploration of innovative and unique research perspectives; (3) application of diverse research approaches; (4) discoveries of new research materials; (5) the diversity of Hemingway's biographers.

Keywords: Ernest Hemingway, biographical criticism, 21st century, new trends, new features

1. INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway, as an American writer who enjoys worldwide fame, has exerted far-reaching influence on the American literature and even the world literature. Hemingway's literary works are widely spread throughout the world while his unique writing style has affected numerous writers and Hemingway aficionados, thus making Hemingway studies in academia vibrant and prosperous. Since the 1960s, biographical studies of Ernest Hemingway has been one of the paramount components of Hemingway studies. In 1969, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*, written by Carlos Baker, was published, which, until now, is still one of the most authoritative and representative biographies. Subsequently, Hemingway scholars and biographers such as Scott Donaldson, Jeffrey Meyers, Kenneth S. Lynn and Michael Reynolds etc. embarked on biographical studies of Ernest Hemingway and wrote many influential works, helping us have a more comprehensive and better understanding of Hemingway's legendary life and literary creation.

The 21st century has witnessed new developments and achievements in the field of biographical studies of Ernest Hemingway. Therefore, focusing on new monographs of Hemingway biographies published since the 21st century, it is of great importance to discover the new trends and summarize new features of biographical studies of Hemingway.

2. NEW TRENDS: FROM COMPREHENSIVENESS TO SPECIALIZATION

In the 20th century, most of the biographies of Hemingway concentrated on the comprehensiveness of his life experience, while in the 21st century, biographies have turned to become more specialized, focusing on a certain period of Hemingway's life, an important event, a visit to a certain place, friendship or romantic experience etc. Thematic biographies account for approximately half of the total number of Hemingway biographies, making the studies more in-depth and more specific.

In terms of a certain period of Hemingway's life, Steve Paul's *Hemingway at Eighteen: The Pivotal Year That Launched an American Legend* (2017) is the only biography that gives a detailed description of Hemingway's experience and writing in the crucial year of 1917 when he was 18 years old. On the one hand, Paul elaborates on the turning point of Hemingway's life, transforming from a high school graduate to be a cub reporter in the Kansas City Star before traveling to the Italy front to be a volunteer of the Red Cross during the World War I. On the other hand, Paul's work provides some valuable information, offering us a useful clue for exploring Hemingway's early writing style and literary themes. In the appendix of the biography, there are three articles newly discovered that have been identified as Hemingway's during his six months as a reporter for the Kansas City Star.

War + Ink: New Perspectives on Ernest Hemingway's Early Life and Writings, written by Steve Paul, Gail

Sinclair and Steven Trout in 2014, describes Hemingway's personal experiences between the ages of 18 and 30 (1917-1929). By combining the methods of historical studies, biographical studies, psychoanalysis and textual analysis, this book has made the following contributions: firstly, Hemingway's growth experience in Kansas City is reconstructed. Secondly, a historical milieu is provided for Hemingway's Italian adventure in 1918 and his writing in the 1920s. Thirdly, it deeply reflects on the question that whether Hemingway's novels and the genre of war literature are consistent with the reality. Finally, it reexamines the themes, events and locations of Hemingway's later writing career that are relevant to his early life [1].

With regard to the important places for Hemingway, nearly a quarter of the biographies focus on exploring Hemingway's experiences in various regions or countries around the world, what these places mean to him, and what inspirations these places bring to his literary creation. Such biographies record Hemingway's visits to Cuba, Spain, Italy, France, Africa, China, U.K., Bimini Islands, the Gulf Stream and Oak Park, Michigan, Key West, Yellowstone National Park in the United States etc.

In 2019, Andrew Feldman wrote *Ernesto, The Untold Story of Hemingway in Revolutionary Cuba*. Feldman is the first American scholar to be allowed to conduct residential studies in Hemingway's house in Cuba. Discovering some new information at the Hemingway Museum and research center in Havana, Feldman introduces Hemingway's life in Cuba, analyzes the great influence of Cuban writers on Hemingway's writing, especially the literary inspiration from Cojimar fishermen for his writing of *The Old Man and the Sea*. The biography also discusses Hemingway's friendship and his contacts with Cuban politicians and celebrities, including Fidel Castro, and his enthusiastic support for the Cuban revolution. Feldman's biographical study provides a new perspective for the interpretation of Hemingway since it places Hemingway and his literary works in the complex and changeable context of Cuban political, social and cultural background.

Hemingway in Italy, written by Richard Owen in 2017, introduces the whole experience of Hemingway's time in Italy, from his first injury in Italy in 1918 to his last visit to Italy in 1954. This biography not only provides the historical facts about Hemingway's life in Italy but also emphasizes the important influence of Italy, especially Venice, on Hemingway's writing. Owen claims that "Venice and the Veneto have always held a fatal fascination for writers, ...and now Ernest Hemingway" [2]. It is in Italy that Hemingway first met Agnes von Kurowsky and then Adriana Ivancich, which were unforgettable experiences for Hemingway, inspiring him to write *A Farewell to Arms* and *Across the River and Into*

the Trees. According to the biography, on July 2, 1961, the night before Hemingway ended his life, Mary and he "began singing a gondoliers' song as they were preparing to go to bed" [3], showing how important Venice is to Hemingway until the end of his life.

Kirk Curnutt and Gail Sinclair's *Key West Hemingway: A Reassessment* was published in 2009. As Curnutt and Sinclair put it, Key West has never been considered "a serious site of Hemingway study" [4]. It is traditionally believed that Hemingway's time in Key West is one of the least productive, and his works written during that time are generally ignored. However, Curnutt and Sinclair aim to reexamine Hemingway's life and writing in Key West, and reveal the complexities Key West bring to Hemingway's life and writing. Combining biographical studies with literary criticism, this biography focuses on Hemingway's other Florida short stories and essays that are widely overlooked, such as "After the Storm," "The Strange Country," as well as his *Esquire's* essays written from 1933 to 1936 during his stay in Key West. The greatest value of this research is reappraising the literary value of these works in order to change the traditional opinion.

Michael R. Federspiel's research focus is Hemingway's life in Michigan. In 2010, *Picturing Hemingway's Michigan* was published. Federspiel, as the president of the Michigan Hemingway Society, makes full use of his knowledge of the historical milieu and local culture of Michigan as well as his professional knowledge in the field of Hemingway studies, so he divides this biography into three categories: firstly, he gives an overview of the historical background and people's life in Northern Michigan from 1900 to 1920. Secondly, he shows the life of Hemingway's family in Michigan in the early 20th century, especially young Hemingway's experience went rowing, canoeing, fishing, hunting and camping in Walloon Lake. Finally, he traces the close links between this region with Hemingway's writing. Federspiel discusses Nick Adams stories that Hemingway created with this region set as its background, revealing that there are Michigan elements incorporated in many of Hemingway's works from his early writing of *A Farewell to Arms* and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" to his later works of *A Moveable Feast* and *True at First Light* etc., which proves Federspiel's argument that "Ernest Hemingway never really did leave north Michigan, he carried it with him and gifted it to the rest of the world" [5].

Apart from the above-mentioned categories, other thematic biographies include Hemingway's war experience, his friendship and his romantic experience. Some biographies focus on Hemingway's personal experiences during the World War I, the Spanish Civil War and World War II, discusses the influence of these experiences on his writing, and evaluates his works of war theme. Linda Wagner-Martin, the former president of the

Hemingway Society, wrote *Hemingway's Wars: Public and Private Battles* in 2017. From the perspective of wars, this biography explores Hemingway's adult life and writing. Firstly, it describes the intersection of Hemingway's life experiences and the major wars of the 20th century, and reveals Hemingway's physical and mental traumas caused by these public wars. Secondly, in addition to public battles, the biography explores Hemingway's private battles in his personal life, such as the physical injuries caused by car accidents and plane crashes, and the severe emotional trauma caused by his complex relationship with his mother and the rejection of his first love. Finally, it focuses on Hemingway's artistic response to these events, discussing Hemingway's experimental style, writing themes and narrative techniques so as to explore the essence of Hemingway's writing techniques. The core of this biography is to clarify the central role of wars in Hemingway's writing, and to reveal that it is because of various public and private battles Hemingway experienced in his life that has promoted the formation of Hemingway's art, providing a new understanding for the complexity of Hemingway's life and writing.

With respect to Hemingway's friendship, Joseph Fruscione gives a specific but comprehensive description of the artistic relationship between Hemingway and William Faulkner. In *Faulkner and Hemingway: Biography of a Literary Rivalry* (2012), Fruscione summarizes the literary competition between the two writers decade by decade, aimed at examining the complex and controversial relationship between them over three decades from 1920s to 1950s. Intertextual studies are used to compare the literary works of the two writers, tracking the psychological influence, intertextual allusions and gender performance between the two over 30 years. It shows that, instead of pure competitive relationship, the two writers have mutual influence on each other. In other words, while competing with each other, they help to shape each other's works and art.

Hemingway's love stories have always drawn wide attention, so for biographers, Hemingway's romantic experiences cannot be missed. Scott Donaldson's *The Paris Husband: How It Really Was Between Ernest and Hadley Hemingway* (2018) introduces the story of Hemingway's first marriage to Hadley Richardson. It elaborates on the couple from their first meeting in Chicago in 1920, their falling in love, their early life in Paris to their eventual divorce. In rebuilding their relationship, Donaldson focuses on the big accident of the loss of Hemingway's manuscript by Hadley on September 3, 1922. Besides, this biography emphasizes the long-lasting impact this marriage had on Hemingway and his writing.

In the same year, Andrea Di Robilant published *Autumn in Venice: Ernest Hemingway and His Last Muse*, a detailed biography of Hemingway's last ten years. It introduces 49-year-old Hemingway's love for Venice, as well as his fascination with a 19-year-old Venetian girl, Adriana Ivancich. What is also discussed is Hemingway's obsession with writing, and the literary inspiration Adriana Ivancich gave him, inspiring him to write *Across the River and Into the Trees*.

3. NEW FEATURES OF BIOGRAPHICAL STUDIES OF HEMINGWAY

3.1. Extension of new research areas

In the 21st century, biographical studies of Hemingway has opened up new research fields. For the very first time, research areas have been expanded into some particular regions and countries that failed to explore before. Therefore, many little-known stories about Hemingway's life are revealed, some of his works that were ignored before are reexamined, and the influences of these regions and experiences on Hemingway are explored.

Hemingway's time spent in the Yellowstone High Country has been poorly studied, and few scholars have explored the significance of his experience there to his writing. In 2019, Chris Warren's *Ernest Hemingway in the Yellowstone High Country* is the first biography that introduces every visit Hemingway made to the Yellowstone High Country in the decades that followed after his first visit in 1928. Warren traces Hemingway's years in this region with his second wife Pauline and his friends Bill Horne and John Dos Passos. Apart from life experience, this biography emphasizes how this region has sustained influence on Hemingway's writing consciousness. On the one hand, Hemingway's experience here inspired his writing of "Wine of Wyoming," "The Gambler, The Nun, and the Radio," and "A Man of the World" etc. On the other hand, the links of his works from *Green Hills of Africa* to *True at First Light* show the lasting relationship between Hemingway and this region.

Hemingway on the China Front (2006), written by Peter Moreira, is the first biography devoted to Hemingway's journey to China. Firstly, it introduces the story of Hemingway's travels and his honeymoon with his third wife, Martha Gellhorn. Secondly, it places Hemingway's journey into the historical context, elaborating on Sino-American relations and U.S. policy toward China at the beginning of the WWII, and analyzing China's economic, political and military situation. Thirdly, for the first time, it explores Hemingway's motivation for traveling to China. From a historical perspective, Moreira discusses Hemingway's trip to China, analyzes the internal political environment in which the Roosevelt administration sent Hemingway to China, and concludes that Hemingway went to China not only as a war correspondent but also as

an official spy, collecting intelligence for the American government.

The first biography of Hemingway's life as a war correspondent in Britain is Dick Wise's *Ernest Hemingway in Wartime England* (2017). Wise searched for the unpublished documents in the U.S. and U.K. National Archives, conducted interviews with veterans, and found a diary written by a young officer who commanded Hemingway's landing craft. According to these, this biography describes the Invasion of Normandy in 1944 and the actions of the British and American armies, especially the Royal Air Force, and reveals Hemingway's experiences during the process in England.

So far, *Hemingway and Bimini* (2017) is the only biography of Hemingway's adventures on the Bimini Islands. Ashley Oliphant gives a description of Hemingway's game fishing on the Bimini Islands, his efforts and contributions for the establishment of the International Game Fish Association, and the inspiration for him to write *Islands in the Stream*.

Likewise, *A Sea of Change: Ernest Hemingway and the Gulf Stream, A Contextual Biography* (2008) is the first biography that explores the complex relationships between Hemingway and the Gulf Stream. Mark P. Ott, in chronological order, introduces Hemingway's time in the Gulf Stream, and discusses the influences that this experience on his writing: firstly, his experience in the Gulf Stream provides source materials for his fictions and nonfictions. Secondly, by comparing his works in the 1930s with those in the 1950s, it is expounded that Hemingway's experience in this region has changed his philosophical views and writing style, and shifted his writing theory and writing practice from the Parisian art world in the 1920s to the realism in the 1950s.

3.2. Exploration of innovative and unique research perspectives

There are some novel and unique research perspectives in the biographical studies of Hemingway in the 21st century, such as focusing on Hemingway's medical history, the guns he used and collected, his identity as a spy and the animals he raised etc., disclosing the little-known sides of Hemingway.

Hemingway's Cats: An Illustrated Biography, for example, was written by Carlene Brennen in 2006. This biography focuses on the animals in different periods of Hemingway's life and showcases the significance of the animals to him, illustrated with a large number of unpublished black-and-white photographs about Hemingway and his cats. Brennen not only shows the important role of animals in the development and cultivation of Hemingway's emotion and personality, but also highlights a gentle and soft Hemingway, a more sympathetic and sensitive Hemingway that is a far cry from his masculine image that the public knows who is an alcoholic, obsessed with big-game hunting and bullfighting. As Brennen points out, during her research,

she "discovered a kinder, gentler men known only to family and close friends, quite different from the macho character he himself helped to create- a man part fact, part fiction" [6].

3.3. Application of diverse research approaches

In the 21st century, the research methods have extended from the traditional biographical studies to the combination of biographical research, psychoanalysis, historical studies, the studies of cultural history, gender studies and neuropsychiatric research and so on.

Hemingway's Brain (2017) is a cross-disciplinary attempt, combining biographical studies with neuropsychiatric research. Andrew Farah, as a Neuropsychiatrist, gives the first forensic psychiatric examination of Hemingway. Based on a comprehensive study of Hemingway's biography and medical history, using the latest insights into the lasting effects of concussion and traumatic brain injury, Farah draws new conclusions about Hemingway's disease through neuroscience. He corrects the medical misdiagnosis of Hemingway, reveals the scientific causes of Hemingway's death, and dispels myths among the public. By examining the genetic influence, traumatic brain injury, neural and psychological stress, this biography provides a complete and accurate psychiatric diagnosis of Hemingway, which causes us to rethink Hemingway's life and writing in his later years.

Ernest Hemingway: A Biography (2017) is the first biography written by a female. Mary V. Dearborn argues that "there has not yet been a biography written by a woman...I find that I am interested in different aspects of Hemingway's life from the ones that drew his previous (male) biographers" [7]. Therefore, as the first female biographer, Dearborn's biography focuses on gender studies, attempting to explore the important relationships that influenced Hemingway in his family life and in his writing. In particular, Dearborn discusses the relationship between Hemingway's mother Grace and her student Ruth Arnold in order to shed light on Hemingway's complex relationship with her mother. Besides, she details Hemingway's second marriage with Pauline and fourth with Mary, illustrating the influences of these two women on Hemingway's life and writing.

The Man Who Wasn't There: A Life of Ernest Hemingway (2019) is a revisionist biography. Richard Bradford reveals the narcissism and conceit behind Hemingway's public image as a writer, and showcases the close links between the peculiarity of Hemingway's work and the unpredictable bizarre features of his personality. This biography proposes two arguments: firstly, Hemingway's inclination to tell lies had been ingrained since adolescence, and his unbridled lying turned him into a person obsessed with big-game hunting, wars, bullfighting and alcoholism. Secondly, Hemingway's delusions and fantasy directly affect his writing. For Hemingway, the line between life and writing is hard to draw, this is because he could not distinguish between reality and fantasy. "His fiction was a natural extension of his life and

his life involved a considerable amount of make-believe” [8]. Therefore, it seems reasonable to say that Hemingway’s novels are “perversely autobiographical,” a mixture of lies and self-delusion [9].

3.4. Discoveries of new research materials

Traditionally, searching for and referring to documents and historical materials are the basic ways for biographical studies. However, the rapid development of technology and transportation in the 21st century makes it possible for an increasing number of researchers and scholars to conduct their studies by fieldwork and interviews. Biographers themselves visit Cuba, Africa, Europe and other countries and regions around the world related to Hemingway, interview local people and local scholars who know Hemingway, and excavate plenty of valuable new materials.

Hilary Hemingway and Carlene Brennen focus on Hemingway’s years in Cuba. In *Hemingway in Cuba* (2003), besides Hemingway’s life experience and writing, they reveal the important role Hemingway studies has played in Cuba and development status of Hemingway studies in Cuba. More specifically, the biography introduces the daily operation, management and development of the Hemingway Museum, and the ongoing Hemingway research projects in Cuba, including exploring the relationship between Hemingway’s literary works and Afro-Cuban artifacts, Hemingway’s interest in the religion and culture of Africa and Cuba, studies on the fishing log of Hemingway’s “Pilar”, studies on the books Hemingway collected in his Finca Vigía, especially the research on the annotations Hemingway made in those books. The biography also details the restoration of valuable artifacts and documents in the Hemingway Museum.

Another new discovery is *Writer, Sailor, Soldier: Spy: Ernest Hemingway’s Secret Adventures, 1935-1961* (2017). Nicholas Reynolds is a former CIA agent and history librarian. With his intelligence background, Reynolds excavates the FBI and national archives for unpublished Hemingway files. This biography exposes Hemingway’s espionage and intelligence assignments in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as Hemingway’s secret relationship with the Soviet Union.

3.5. The diversity of Hemingway’s biographers

In the 21st century, in addition to Hemingway scholars, professional biographers, Hemingway’s families and friends, Hemingway biographers show a diversified background and identity, including a professional physician (Neuropsychiatrist), a historian, Hemingway’s majordomo of his Finca Vigía in Cuba, the daughter of Hemingway’s friend Marge etc. The diversity of Hemingway’s biographers means that they can provide different documents and materials to fill in the gaps of Hemingway studies, tell Hemingway’s stories from different perspectives, place different emphases on

Hemingway’s life and writing, which, as a consequence, enrich the image of Hemingway.

The biographies written by Hemingway’s families and friends have been published since 20th century. From a perspective of Hemingway’s families and friends, this kind of biographies is a memoir, recalling their stories with Hemingway, such as Valerie Hemingway’s *Running with the Bulls: My Years with the Hemingways* (2004), John Hemingway’s *Strange: A Family Memoir* (2007) and A. E. Hotchner’s *Hemingway in Love: His Own Story* (2015).

In 2009, René Villarreal and Raúl Villarreal wrote *Hemingway’s Cuban Son: Reflections on the Writer by His Longtime Majordomo*. René Villarreal was appointed by Hemingway himself as the majordomo of his Finca Vigía in Cuba in 1946. Villarreal was in charge of Finca Vigía while taking care of Hemingway and his wife Mary. This biography, written by Hemingway’s majordomo, further complements the information regarding Hemingway’s years in Cuba, not only showing Hemingway’s life in Finca Vigía but also revealing the stories between Hemingway and Fidel Castro. Particularly, it is René Villarreal who witnessed Fidel Castro’s two visits to Finca Vigía when Hemingway was leaving Cuba and after Hemingway’s death.

Pip-Pip to Hemingway in Something from Marge (2010) is written by Georgianna Main, the daughter of Marge. Marge, whose full name was Lucy Marjorie Bump, met Hemingway in the summer of 1915 in Michigan, and their friendship continued throughout Hemingway’s life. In Hemingway’s short stories “The End of Something” and “The Three-Day Blow”, Marge is the model of the stories’ characters. Before Marge died in 1987, she had recalled her friendship with Hemingway to her daughter. Based on this, Georgianna Main collected Marge’s letters with Hemingway, their photographs and some documents, and finally wrote this biography to illustrate the real stories between Marge and Hemingway. This biography provides the first-hand materials of Hemingway’s early life in Michigan, and more importantly, clarifies the misunderstanding and conjecture about Marge in the previous Hemingway biographies.

4. CONCLUSION

Biographical studies of Ernest Hemingway is of paramount importance, because, on the one hand, it lays a solid foundation for Hemingway studies in academia, providing rich first-hand materials and stimulating new perspectives for Hemingway scholars and researchers; on the other hand, Hemingway biographies are the best references for Hemingway aficionados since biographies are the most straightforward and direct way for them to get access to Hemingway, to know Hemingway’s life and writing from different lenses. Based on the above analysis, biographical criticism of Hemingway in the 21st century has constantly explored new materials, expanded new areas and applied new methods, aimed at displaying a comprehensive image of Hemingway with in-depth studies and diverse analysis. Ernest Hemingway and his oeuvre

have always been the focus of literary criticism, so the prosperity of biographical criticism is beneficial for the further development of Hemingway studies.

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