

Review of *To Have And Have Not*

by Charles Poore, *New York Times*, Oct 15, 1937

THE strange case of Ernest Hemingway is reopened this morning with the publication of 'To Have and Have Not', his first novel since 'A Farewell to Arms.' It is a turbulent, searching story of Key West and Havana in these strange years of grace. There is as much violent action as you will find in a historical novel — and far, far better writing. The characters kill one another as freely as though they were directed by statesmen of civilized nations. It seems probable that this new book — stronger than 'The Sun Also Rises', not as good as 'A Farewell to Arms' — will do more to renew the uproar than to close the case. The open season for rousing Whither Hemingway? essays is decidedly here again.

'To Have And Have Not' is, in a way, the reverse of Scott Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby' medal. The outlaw is no longer romanticized, the wallowing in luxury is looked at from the other side, the thin gold glamour is gone with the boom. And there is — whether by chance or plan, I don't know — an older analogy. You remember that a long time ago a buccaneer called Sir Henry Morgan sailed and slew and looted his way through those same Gulf Stream waters. For his ruggedness he was knighted by his king. The principal character in 'To Have And Have Not', tough and proud and sure of himself, is called Harry Morgan. No one is ever going to knight him in this world.

Harry Morgan tried to make a living lawfully and lost, tried to make a living unlawfully and lost, learned by dying that he could not win as a buccaneer. He had a wife, Marie (as true as Catherine Barkley, as tough as Harry himself), and three daughters to take care of, and a boat to run when he could find any profitable use for it. Times were terrible. Most men around him were on relief. But Harry Morgan, not content to let things happen to him and take them on the chin, was always planning ways out, refusing to give in.

You see, this is going to be a very moral tale. Harry Morgan was trying to earn a living honestly, in the book's beginning, by carrying a sportsman called Johnson out to the fishing waters. He had just refused a chance to smuggle three Cubans over to the United States at a thousand dollars a throw. The Cubans die in gun battle with another faction. Some of the variety in Hemingway's new book is pretty well illustrated, by the way, in the description of that fight ('He hit one tire, because I saw dust blowing in a spurt on the street as the air came out'), and the totally different account of the fishing trip that follows it, and Harry's soliloquy a good deal later, when he thinks how easy it would be to let things slide and do nothing instead of going out and facing the final music.

This novel, like all Hemingway's novels, has the disjointedness of an expanded short story. Yet all the episodes — and those that pulverize the futitarian idlers are, it seems to your reviewer, too long — have a bearing on Harry Morgan's fate.

The turning point comes when Harry Morgan sees the money he has honestly earned take wing with the sportsman Johnson, who has cheated him out of it. He has precisely 40 cents left; his wife and children are on the other side of the water; he turns in doomed desperation to the first way of making money he can find. That is an offer from the villainous Mr. Sing to pretend to smuggle Chinamen. The idea is to take the Chinamen who put up the money out into the Gulf and let them die, while Harry — and Mr. Sing — split the profit. Instead, Harry Morgan decides to get the money, rid the world of Mr. Sing and land the furious but unharmed Chinamen safely back to Cuba.

He's a buccaneer now. His attitude is summed up in his remark: 'I don't know who made the laws but I know there ain't no law that you got to go hungry.' He tries running liquor again, as he had in the days when [an] American didn't think the Constitution was too sacred to defy for the sake of a highball. He loses an arm at that — the scene in the open boat with the wounded Negro is another you won't forget — tries more and more desperate schemes, and so, in this story of crime and punishment, loses everything.

It may be as well to warn your Aunt Prudence that a good deal of the talk here is no more refined than it was in Hemingway's 'Fifty Grand', when that story turned up on Page 1 of *The Atlantic Monthly* to the horror and delight of Back Bay. He still has an uncommon knack of making men talk as men do talk.

At one end of the gallery is Hayzooz, who, asked when he was married, says: 'Lasta month. Montha for last. Whas a matta you no come?' At the other is the pomposity who went out of his way to get Harry Morgan's boat confiscated and who says: 'For your information, I'm one of three most important men in the United States today.' It is MacWalsay, a bumbler mixed up in several unpleasant lives, who asks: 'Why must all the operations in life be performed without an anesthetic?' And Mrs. Tracy, tragic, ducked and wailing, who can only sob: 'My plate. Losht my plate.' Yachtsmen, Cubans, poor people of Key West and hopeless veterans off on a spree, all have their say.

It would probably strike you as conservative to remark that twenty times as much is written about Hemingway as by him, that ten books appear bearing traces of his influence for every one that bears his name. Easy as it is to parody him, to imitate him is usually more profitable. Like an inventor without a patent, he has lived to see other men make more money out of the way of writing he developed. But no one else can use it with his integrity, force and precision.

Style and subject are one. He has not produced any three-generations-of-Americans novels, nor, so far as I know, any historical romances in which Napoleon wins the Civil War and marries Queen Victoria — for the simple reason, apparently, that they're not suited to his way of writing. Yet can you think of any author who has been given more suggestions on ways he could change his style, his subject matter and his point of view? How, in the face of so much advice, he continues to write only about what

he knows, only as he sees it, only when he wants to, is one of the mysteries of the age. It is all a part of the strange case of Ernest Hemingway.