

## Garden Of Eden: A Review

by John Updike,  
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THE heirs of Ernest Hemingway and his widow and three sons are all listed on the copyright page – and the staff of Charles Scribner's Sons have produced yet another text out of the morass of unfinished manuscripts which bedeviled the writer's last fifteen years. *The Garden Of Eden* was begun, according to the Carlos Baker biography, 'in the early months of 1946,' and was 'an experimental compound of past and present, filled with astonishing ineptitudes and based in part upon memories of his marriages to Hadley and Pauline, with some excursions behind the scenes of his current life with Mary.' Within a year, 'more than a hundred pages of *The Garden Of Eden* were . . . in typescript, with nine hundred pages still in longhand.' Baker, not generally given to harsh criticism of his subject's oeuvre, blames this 'long and emptily hedonistic novel of young lovers' for contaminating with its fatuity and narcissism the published novel *Across the River and into the Trees* (1950). In the early fifties, a cut-down version of *The Garden Of Eden* reappeared as the first part of Hemingway's projected sea trilogy under the title *The Sea When Young*. In 1958, while working on the Paris sketches that would become *A Moveable Feast*, the author revised the recalcitrant novel down to forty-eight chapters and roughly two hundred thousand words; Baker still complains, 'It had none of the taut nervousness of Ernest's best fiction, and was so repetitious that it seemed interminable. The lamentable opus is last glimpsed as Castro is wresting Cuba from Batista, in late 1958: The situation . . . was a constant worry. [Hemingway, off in Idaho] tried to forget it by rewriting parts of the Paris sketchbook and revising three chapters of *The Garden Of Eden*.'

The propriety of publishing, as a commercial endeavor, what a dead writer declined to see into print is, of course, dubious. The previous forays into the Hemingway trove have unfortunately tended to heighten our appreciation not of his talent but of his psychopathology; even the charming and airy *A Moveable Feast*, the first and most finished of the posthumous publications (1964), had its ugly flashes of malice and ingenuous self-serving. *Islands In The Stream* (1970) was a thoroughly ugly book, brutal and messy and starring a painter-sailor whose humanity was almost entirely dissolved in bar-room jabber and Hollywood heroics. The letters (1981), too, which Hemingway had wisely tried to safeguard from the scavengers, provided insights more alarming than appealing into his bellicose, infantile, sexist, and ultimately paranoid nature. Among the published letters is one addressed to an early scavenger, Charles A. Fenton, saying, 'Writing that I do not wish to publish, you have no right to publish. I would no more do a thing like that to you than I would cheat a man at cards or rifle his desk or wastebasket or read his personal letters.' Such old-fashioned gentlemanly thunder rings hollow in a hustling era of professional desk-riflers. The second-wave Hemingway biographies

proliferate, whispering to us that Oak Park was not the forest primeval and that three weeks of distributing candy bars do not a warrior make; soon the old poser will have been stripped to his Freudian bones, much like Santiago's great dead marlin in *The Old Man and the Sea*.

However: Hemingway, after a semi-eclipse in the sixties, when his fascination with violence and war seemed desperately unworthy, now stands as a classic as surely as Hawthorne, and twenty-five years after his death his bearish claims to privacy are perhaps superseded by the claims his literary personality makes upon our interest. There is every reason – its hackneyed title, Baker's scorn, the forty years of murky fiddling that have passed since its conception – to distrust *The Garden Of Eden*; yet the book, as finally presented, is something of a miracle, a fresh slant on the old magic, and falls just short of the satisfaction that a fully intended and achieved work gives us. The miracle, it should be added, does not seem to be Hemingway's alone but is shared with workers unnamed in the prefatory note, which blandly admits to 'some cuts in the manuscript and some routine copy-editing corrections. Some cuts. 'Some Chink,' as Harry Morgan says to himself of the mysterious Chinese gentleman in *To Have And Have Not*. When last heard of, *The Garden Of Eden*, according to Carlos Baker, consisted of over two hundred thousand words of lack-lustre dialogue and eerie trivia. It is no secret; indeed, it has been widely reported, that last summer a certain Tom Jenks, a thirty-five-year-old editor newly hired by Scribner's, was presented with over three thousand pages of *Garden Of Eden* manuscripts (all three versions that Hemingway had struggled with, enough to fill two shopping bags) and was invited to find a publishable book in all that verbiage. He succeeded. In the trim published text of sixty-five thousand words, a daily repetition of actions remains (wake, write, drink, lunch, siesta, drink, eat, make love, sleep), but the dialogue never covers exactly the same ground and the plot advances by steady, subliminal increments, as situations in real life do. The basic tensions of the slender, three-cornered action are skillfully sustained. The psychological deterioration of the heroine, Catherine Bourne, the professional preoccupations of the hero, the young writer David Bourne, and the growing involvement of the other woman, Marita, are kept in the fore, interwoven with but never smothered by Hemingway's betranced descriptions of the weather, the meals, the landscape, the chronic recreations. A chastening, almost mechanically rhythmic order has been imposed, and though an edition with a scholarly conscience would have provided some clues to the mammoth amounts of manuscript that were discarded, this remnant does give the reader a text wherein he, unlike the author in his travails long ago, never feels lost. Endearingly, many of Hemingway's eccentricities have been defended from copy editors: the commas omitted by ear rather than by sense ('driving the machine up the short hill feeling the lack of training in his thighs'); the commas tossed into a run of six adjectives (a 'good light, dry, cheerful unknown white wine'); the stubbornly awkward word order ('the girl put the one she was reading down'); the English as spoken ('Feel it how smooth'); the idiosyncratic spellings ('god damned,' 'pyjama tops,' 'self conscious'); and a sentence containing no fewer than eleven 'and's.

The Garden Of Eden adds to the canon not merely another volume but a new reading of Hemingway's sensibility. Except in some of the short stories and that strange novel *To Have And Have Not*, he avoided describing the life that most men and women mostly lead, domestic life. The Garden Of Eden confronts sexual intimacy, marriage, and human androgyny with a wary but searching tenderness that amounts, for a man so wrapped up in masculine values and public gestures, to courage. What stymied him, while he was still in his mid-forties, from completing and publishing the novel must be idly conjectured. One possibility is that the material embarrassed as well as possessed him, and another is that he knew he was in over his head. His head was not quite right; his behavior in the Second World War had been strange, and in his work methods he was developing (and had just barely rescued *For Whom the Bell Tolls* from) the Papaesque logorrhea, the fatal dependency upon free-form spillage and some eventual editor, of which *The Dangerous Summer* was to be the disastrous climax – Life's request in 1959 for ten thousand words producing a dizzying twelve times that amount. Perhaps, in *The Garden Of Eden*, he pulled back from the snake pit of male-female interplay and sought to reconstitute the old impervious, macho Hemingway persona, whom women attend as *houris* attend the blessed immortals in the Islamic paradise. This is the plot solution the Scribner's editors have used – perhaps the only one available to them in the uncontrolled manuscript – and it is a feeble one, compared with the dark soft power of the opening sections.

In his other novels, Hemingway seems to me hobbled by his need to have a hero in the obsolete sense, a central male figure who always acts right and looks good, even when, as in the cases of Harry Morgan and Jake Barnes, the cruel world has externally mutilated him. David Bourne, as initially presented, is an oddity, an inwardly vulnerable Hemingway hero, mated with a woman who, very upsettingly in this narrow stoic universe, wants: 'I'm how you want but I'm how I want, too, and it isn't as though it wasn't for us both. Catherine is David's three weeks' bride of twenty-one; like Eve, she has long hair and is generally naked. They are honeymooning at Le Grau-du-Roi, a Mediterranean town on a canal that runs to the sea; they bicycle and swim and eat and drink, everything they consume and do described with that liturgical gravity which Hemingway invented. 'It had been wonderful and they had been truly happy and he had not known that you could love anyone so much that you cared about nothing else and other things seemed inexistent. . . . Now when they had made love they would eat and drink and make love again. It was a very simple world and he had never been truly happy in any other.' She begins her wanting by wanting a haircut; she has her luxurious long dark hair cut short as a boy's. David is taken aback yet has no choice but to acquiesce. Also, she wants to get a very dark tan. 'Why do you want to be so dark?' he asks. Her excited answer is 'I don't know. Why do you want anything. Right now it's the thing that I want most. That we don't have I mean. Doesn't it make you excited to have me getting so dark?' 'Uh-huh,' he answers. 'I love it.' She wants the two of them to travel through Europe for months and months on her money; she does not much want, it develops, David to read his clippings or to work dutifully on his stories. To dramatize her tan she gets her short hair dyed as pale as ivory, and to dramatize their marriage she seduces

David into also dying his hair and parading about Cannes with her. Penetrating more deeply into his feminine side, she does unspeakable ‘devil things’ in bed that actualize the sex change she wants, whereby she becomes a boy called Peter and he a girl called Catherine. ‘You’re my wonderful Catherine,’ Catherine tells David. ‘You’re my beautiful lovely Catherine. You were so good to change. Oh thank you, Catherine, so much. Please understand. Please know and understand. I’m going to make love to you forever.’

It is possibly a pity that Hemingway’s own inhibitions, if not those of the changing postwar times, prevented him from telling us exactly what is going on here. Whatever they are, the ‘devil things’ lead David to call his wife ‘Devil,’ and poison their Eden even before Catherine decides, in her rampage of wanting, to introduce another, bisexual woman, Marita, into their honeymoon household. When it comes to having men turned into women, or being overrun with them, Hemingway is a moralist of the old school; quaint words like ‘sin’ and ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and ‘remorse’ and ‘perversion’ come into earnest play. Evil is, evidently, feminine in gender: David reflects on his father, ‘He treated evil like an old entrusted friend . . . and evil, when she poked him, never knew she’d scored.’ Having feminized David in bed, Catherine now seeks to unman him as a writer. ‘Why should I shut up. Just because you wrote this morning. Do you think I married you because you’re a writer. You and your clippings.’ It gets worse: she scornfully tells Marita, ‘He writes in these ridiculous child’s notebooks and he doesn’t throw anything away. He just crosses things out and writes along the sides of the pages. The whole business is a fraud really. He makes mistakes in spelling and grammar, too.’

‘Poor David. What women do to you,’ commiserates Marita, who as Catherine’s feminine perversity blooms into madness turns increasingly sympathetic and heterosexual. Having begun as a hardened, though attractively blushing, lesbian, she rather incredibly becomes a perfect man’s woman, who adores David’s writing and his lovemaking and wants only what he wants – that is, escape from women into the salubrious companionship of other men: ‘I want you to have men friends and friends from the war and to shoot with and to play cards at the club.’

Though *The Garden Of Eden*, like the other Hemingway remnants, has its psychopathological aspect, the pathology is caught up into a successful artistic design. Hemingway’s heartfelt sense of women as the root of evil enforces and energizes the allegory. Catherine’s transformation from sexually docile Eve into caustic and destructive bitch, makes her the most interesting of his heroines; unlike the martyred Catherine Barkley of *A Farewell To Arms*, she does things instead of having them done to her, the perpetrator and not the victim of ‘a dirty trick’. Her advancing derangement, with its abrupt backslidings into affection and docility, produces some of Hemingway’s sharpest pages of dialogue; like Bellow’s feral females, she becomes vivid and glittering in antagonism. And Hemingway’s pristine prose furnishes a natural innocence to fall from. What is his style if not Edenic, an early-morning style wherein things still have the dew of their naming on them?

*The waiter brought them glasses of manzanilla from the lowland near  
Cádiz called the Marismas with thin slices of jamón serrano, a smoky,*

*hard cured ham from pigs that fed on acorns, and bright red spicy salchichón, another even spicier dark sausage from a town called Vich and anchovies and garlic olives.*

*In the Buen Retiro in the morning it was as fresh as though it was a forest. It was green and the trunks of the trees were dark and the distances were all new. . . . when he had finished for the day he shut up the room and went out and found the two girls playing chess at a table in the garden. They both looked fresh and young and as attractive as the wind-washed morning sky.*

This same style of simple large elements, with its curious surging undercurrent – ‘the sinister part only showed as the light feathering of a smooth swell on a calm day marking the reef beneath’ – also serves to evoke the tidal mystery of matedness, the strangeness of sharing our sleep:

*In the night he woke and heard the wind high and wild and turned and pulled the sheet over his shoulder and shut his eyes again. He felt her breathing and shut his eyes again. He felt her breathing softly, and regularly and then he went back to sleep.*

Hemingway’s own innocence, even into his fourth marriage, enabled him to reach back from his workroom in Cuba, through all the battles and bottles and injuries and interviews, into his youth on another continent and make mythic material out of his discovery that sex could be complicated. He is able, he who so thoroughly hid behind assertiveness and expertise, to express sexual ambivalence, to touch upon the feminine within himself, the seducibility from which only his writing (for a time) was safe, and to conjure up, if only to exorcise, the independent will within women, of which he doubtless had more experience than his typical heroes let him express. The mannered, scarcely articulate exchanges of Maria (like Catherine, a name echoed in *The Garden Of Eden*) and Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and Dorothy Hollis’s masturbatory monologue in *To Have and Have Not* come to mind as Hemingway’s nearest previous approaches, in a novel, to sexual realism. Lesbianism, or at least a male view of a woman deserting him for lesbianism, was the subject of the short story *The Sea Change*, which takes place in one of the sparsely occupied cafés, with its typical angelic bartender, that dot the tasteful hedonist paradise of Hemingway’s Europe. The story’s nameless heroine, like Catherine Bourne, is well-tanned, with pale and short-cut hair; like the Bournes, she and ‘Phil’ are ‘a handsome young couple’ being destroyed by a devilish tug of desire, of wanting, within the woman, whose exterior is impeccable: ‘He was looking at her, at the way her mouth went and the curve of her cheek bones, at her eyes and at the way her hair grew on her forehead and at the edge of her ear and at her neck.’ The story is intense

and strange and one wonders if the woman really existed in Hemingway's life. Asked about it, he explained, according to Baker, 'that the prototypes of his people were a couple he had once overheard in the Bar Basque in St. Jean-de-Luz'.

But the woman has returned in *The Garden Of Eden*, with her tan and her so fascinating hair. The short story dates from 1931, and in the summer of 1929, in Spain, to celebrate her thirty-fourth birthday, Hemingway's second wife, Pauline, Baker tells us in a footnote, 'had her hair dyed blond as a gesture of sexual independence and a surprise for EH . . . Much is made of this gesture in EH's later unpublished novel, *The Garden Of Eden*.' It was in the summer of 1926 that Hemingway lived, more or less, with two women: his first wife, Hadley, and the hotly pursuing Pauline, who had befriended Hadley. In *A Moveable Feast* he tells it thus:

*Before these rich had come we [he and Hadley and their son, Bumby] had already been infiltrated by another rich using the oldest trick there is. It is that an unmarried young woman becomes the temporary best friend of another young woman who is married, goes to live with the husband and wife and then unknowingly, innocently and unrelentingly sets out to marry the husband. When the husband is a writer and doing difficult work so that he is occupied much of the time and is not a good companion or partner to his wife for a big part of the day, the arrangement has advantages until you know how it works out. The husband has two attractive girls around when he has finished work. One is new and strange and if he has bad luck he gets to love them both.*

In Carlos Baker's description of the weeks the ménage à trois spent living in two rented rooms at the Hotel de la Pinode in Juan-les-Pins, the routine is much like that in *The Garden Of Eden*:

*Each morning they spent on the beach, swimming and taking the sun. After lunch in the garden and a long siesta, they took long bicycle rides along the Golfe de Juan, returning at evening yardarm time for cocktails. . . . At the hotel there were three of everything: breakfast trays, bicycles, bathing suits drying on the line . . .*

Pauline was smaller and darker than Hadley, as Marita is relative to Catherine; and Hemingway lays on Catherine a malevolent version of the famous incident in which Hadley, with the best of wifely intentions, lost a suitcase of his early manuscripts. In the memoir version of the triangle composed toward the end of Hemingway's life, the wife is blameless and the mistress 'innocently' tricky and unrelenting; in *The Garden Of Eden*, the wife is bad and the mistress good – i.e. an acolyte to the writer and his writing. All thirteen years of Hemingway's marriage to Pauline (and most of his briefer marriage to Martha Gellhorn) were behind him when he sat down in 1946 to write a version of that traumatic period, twenty years earlier, when, as *The Sun Also Rises* set the seal on his celebrity, he was seduced away from his first wife. Hemingway, only twenty-seven at the time, felt with his desertion a remorse and grief nothing personal would give him again,

and he remembered it as a fall, the end of an idyll he and Hadley had created in Austria and Spain and Paris. Pauline, then, provides the evil that undermines his 'Eden'; her ghost is both Eve and serpent, and she contributes elements to both Catherine (her bleached hair and her Catholicism, which is lightly mentioned at the outset) and Marita (her petiteness and her money; Marita's nickname is Heiress, though Catherine, too, is tainted with independent wealth). The slow disenchantment of a longish marriage, plus Hemingway's constant battle, which extended through the boozy Key West years, to combine the labor of writing with what he once called his 'fiesta concept of life', is compressed into a fictional honeymoon – as well as much else both imagined and recalled. In one regard, Hemingway's actual situation in 1926 is conspicuously falsified: Catherine is a mere twenty-one and Marita no older, whereas Hadley and Pauline were both in their thirties – older than he by eight and four years, respectively. A liking for older women is not part of David Bourne's weakness as he lets himself be led into the 'devil things' – into the possibility that male and female are less than absolute conditions.

An uncharacteristic ambivalence is also expressed about hunting. Drawing upon the African safaris whose carnage is so matter-of-factly extolled in *The Green Hills Of Africa* (1935), Hemingway shows David Bourne writing about an elephant hunt he experienced as a child with his father. The fictional episodes, which come to occupy a place at the outset of each hagridden day and chapter, develop a momentum and interest of their own. The boy and his dog Kibo spot the old elephant, with his fabulously big tusks, by moonlight, and this starts his father, a hunter, and his African sidekick Juma on the trail. As the days of tracking go by, the tired child comes to love the doomed elephant and to dislike his father and Juma: 'They would kill me and they would kill Kibo, too, if we had ivory.' The description of the shooting of the elephant is horrendous and moving and also a fall, in its way, from innocence. 'Fuck elephant hunting,' the boy tells his father, and thinks, 'He will never trust me again. That's good. I don't want him to because I'll never ever tell him or anybody anything again never anything again. Never ever never.' The splicing and counterpoint of the African story-within-a-story are managed quite brilliantly, and one doesn't know how much to credit Mr. Jenks; at any rate, some of the pages in *The Garden Of Eden*, as the elephant lumbers toward death and Catherine dips in and out of madness and David speaks his good-byes in his heart, are among Hemingway's best, and the whole rounded fragment leaves us with a better feeling about the author's humanity and essential sanity – complicated, as sanity must be – than anything else published since his death.