

Modern “Man of the Crowd”: Ernest Hemingway’s Post-War Wounded *Flâneur*

Critics from Walter Benjamin to Dana Brand to, most recently, Keith Tester, have traced the genealogy of the *flâneur* from its early incarnation as bourgeois “man about town” through its evolution as it developed alongside and became intertwined with—the detective, the journalist, and the nineteenth-century poet. I would like to add to this list of flâneur-like roles the post-World War I soldier and other twentieth-century observers wounded by their experiences of war. As I will argue in this presentation, the *flâneur* doesn’t disappear, as critics such as Janet Wolff contend, as the nineteenth century ends, but instead changes in the interwar period in ways that enable perambulating urban observers once confined to the boundaries of the cityscape whose vision was limited to visual appraisal of urban spectacles created by modern economic development and modern technology to become global observers of the spectacle rendered world event. Neither the experience, spectacle, nor economic consequences of war disintegrate the flâneur or the act of flânerie; instead, war interrupts and changes the possible identities of the flâneur and how spectacle is observed and recorded by the walking wounded, for the post-war flâneur walks through the world on damaged legs/feet, and has been damaged both bodily and psychologically by the war—by what he has seen and felt, both emotionally and physically, by war wounds suffered as a consequence of observing and participating in, to some capacity, the spectacle of the modern technologies of war. The post-war flâneur observes the destruction of cities, of urban space, villages—of civilization.

The evolutionary continuum of the flâneur that begins in the 18th century city, most notably in the journalistic satire of Addison and Steele in England, in Honore Balzac in France, and Edgar Allen Poe (perhaps even Nathaniel Parker Willis) in the U.S. (some critics situate the flâneur’s origins much earlier). The roots of the *flâneur* in the urban roles of the detective, the journalist, and the poet—come together in Hemingway whose life and work reflect all three, introducing both a new global spectator of and new models for reading the modern world. Hemingway’s writing appears at an interesting moment when the spectacle undergoes a transformation from localized defining facet of the modern city, to a much larger because more easily transmitted and reproduced transnational feature of the modern world. The twentieth-century *flâneur* becomes a perambulating, observing, appraising, and consuming figure not limited to the boundaries of the city, but extending to the modern spectacle of war that within and outside of urban boundaries. In roles as observer, documentarian, and reporter that span his initial participation as ambulance driver in Italy during World War I, living as an expatriate journalist writing dispatches for the *Toronto Star*, writing fiction in Paris during the 1920s, and participating as a foreign correspondent for *Collier’s* during World War II, as well as through the various fictional characters most directly influenced by his observations of the spectacle of war recorded in his novels. Hemingway’s spectatorial observations aren’t limited to the spectacle of modern warfare, but also include other theaters that won’t be discussed in this paper, such as bullfights, safari, and big game hunting. Hemingway offers insight into how we might theorize the existence of a modern incarnation of the journalist *flâneur*. His experiences as journalist, ambulance driver, war correspondent, and expatriate writer hone his critical eye, allowing him to experience the post-war vestiges of the practice of flânerie while living in Montparnasse. The two novels he penned in the aftermaths of World War I (*The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*) should be read together with his swansong novel (*Across the River and Through the Trees*) because they record various incarnations of the wounded post-war flâneur, but also—and perhaps more importantly—they demonstrate how both the flâneur and flânerie changed as a result of war.

When taken together, his novels chronicle the wounded war participant’s observation of technological spectacle—the theater of war (Frederick Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*), the wounded expatriate journalist soldier turned *flâneur*’s experience of the physical and psychological consequences of war (Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*), and the matured and ailing soldier-flâneur’s reflections upon the effects of two world wars upon modernity and identity (Colonel Richard Cantwell in *Across the River and Into the Trees*), made while engaging in flânerie in the seemingly pre-modern physically untouched by war city of Venice—

literally while walking, observing, thinking, evaluating, reflecting, in a city that would seem to return him (and the reader) to nineteenth-century conditions and spaces reminiscent of to nineteenth century *flânerie* we might find in a Henry James novel, through the protagonist remains a wounded, twentieth-century spectator. In retrospect, it is in *A Moveable Feast* that we see the best evidence of Hemingway's own development as a post-war *flâneur* figure.

This presentation will unfold by: a) briefly noting where Hemingway falls in a genealogy of the *flâneur* figure as it transforms into the post-war wounded flâneur, b) showing how Hemingway himself engaged in the practices characteristic of *flânerie*, and c) tracing the developmental trajectory of the post-war wounded *flâneur* in his life in *A Moveable feast*, and in his war novels *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *Across the River and Into the Trees*.