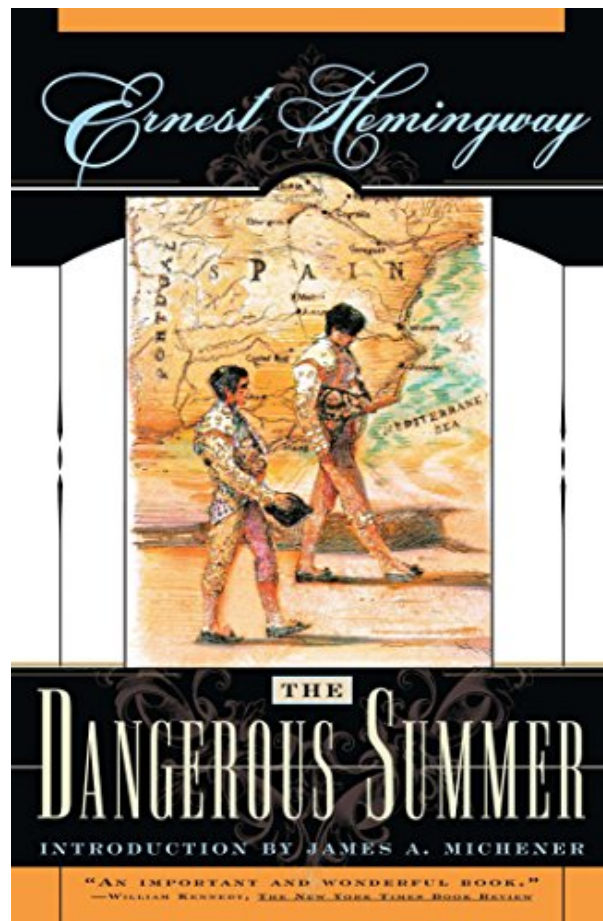
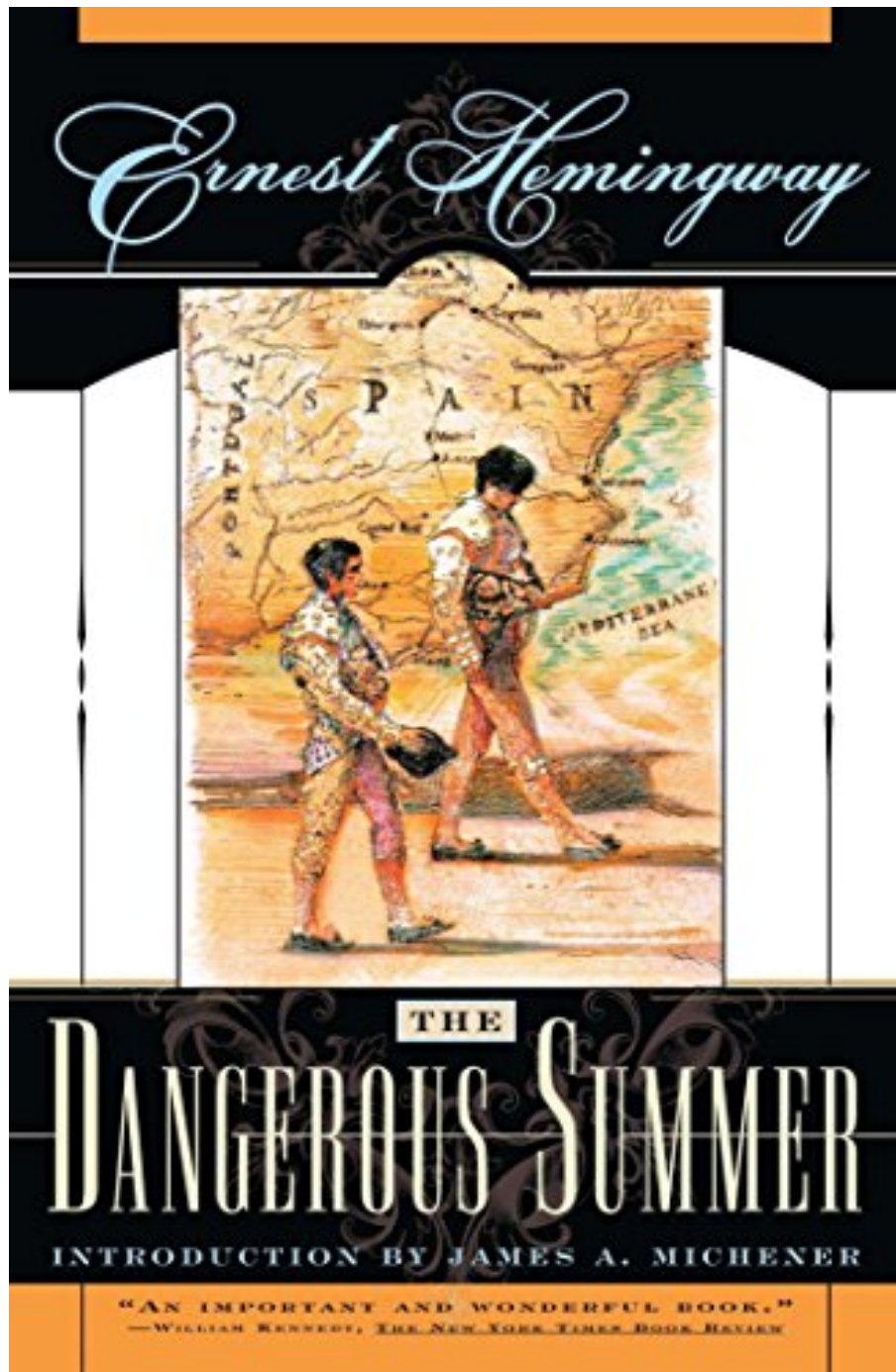


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Most helpful customer reviews

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## Bullfighting through the eyes of Hemingway

By Linda Linguvic

Considered literary non-fiction, this is the account of the 1959 season of bullfighting in Spain and the intense competition between two competing matadors for the glory of that season. It is his last major work at age 60; he killed himself the following year.

In an

introduction by James Mitchner, it is explained that this piece was commissioned by Life Magazine. The assignment was for Hemmingway to revisit the bullfights he had written about in his classic novel "Death in the Afternoon" published in 1940. Hemingway was supposed to write 10,000 words for the article. Instead, he submitted 120,000 words. It was edited down to 70,000 words and ran in three installments.

This book I read, however, was only about 45,000 words and focuses specifically on the particular contests between two competing matadors who happened to be brothers in law. Hemingway had a personal relationship with both of them and brings the reader to the dinners and the parties as well as to the infirmary after a goring, the painful healing process in Spanish hospitals that do not administer painkillers, the long rides on bad roads between bullfights and the dirt and heat and fatigue and glory.

I have not read much of

Hemingway and knew nothing at all about bullfighting when I started reading. Yet, by the end of the book a portrait of the author emerges as well as an understanding of the history, tradition choreographed performance of skill that occurs in the bull ring. Somehow, I was able to move beyond my personal feelings about the slaughter of the bull, and get into the mindset of Hemingway and the people of Spain, where bullfighting is a national passion.

It has to do with courage.

And it has to do with facing death.

Hemmingway said it all it better than I ever could:

"This was Antonio's regular appointment with death that we had to face every day. Any man can face death but to be committed to bring it as close as possible while performing certain classic movements and do this again and again and again and then deal it out yourself with a sword to an animal weighing half a ton which you love is more complicated than facing death."

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Last Hurrah for Papa

By Diego Izurieta

Fortunately I had read Death in the Afternoon before absorbing this last encore. By the end, I was attached at the soul to both matadors, (Cain and Abel!?). I wish I could read the other 50,000 words edited from this work. Papa described everything that was behind the fragile curtain of honor, bravado, showmanship, and the pageantry of bullfighting. Like many musicians or athletes of our time, we cannot observe from behind the scenes all the work, travel and lack of sleep that these people go through, therefore we cannot fully

appreciate the bullfighters of the "Lost Generation". I recommend this book to anyone who wants to experience this true American literary icon and Spanish culture and History. It is interesting to see the way Spain has changed over the years. This book is full of magic and it describes the drive and mild competitiveness that all men and women should have inside in order to succeed in today's harsh world. The introduction of James A. Michener is beautifully written by someone who knew Spain. The terms are helpful to any who is not familiar with basic bullfighting. This is one of Papa's most under-appreciated least-recognized works, but that's ok with me.

19 of 21 people found the following review helpful.

Don't ever go to a bullfight without reading this book first

By A Customer

I should have read this chronicle of bullfighting before my college semester spent in Madrid. I did not read it and instead, I sat in the bleachers of the arena completely disgusted, wishing for the first time in my life that I was at an American football game instead. I was so ignorant that I almost felt tempted to run down and let the pathetic black creature loose, like some rebel animal rights person in a research lab. Back then, I did not understand the history, tradition, glory and sentimentality that belongs to bullfighting. I was ignorant and should not have gone to the bullfight without reading this chronicle by Hemingway first. Now, I some day plan to return and to watch another bullfight. I know now I will see a completely different sport; and not really a sport but a performance. I once thought bullfighting was a battle between man and beast. After reading *The Dangerous Summer* I know it is a choreographed performance of skill, wisdom, experience and bravery. I urge anyone who plans to go to a bullfight, to read this first. Do not judge this Spanish tradition until you first understand what it is about.

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"This wasn't teasing. This was a thrust at the jugular."

"Hemingway probably told them to go to hell."

"Maybe, but he was deeply hurt. And Life is painfully aware that the attacks cast a shadow over whatever he publishes next." The man paused to study the battlefield in front of our dugout, then came to the point: "We have one hell of a bundle -- money, prestige -- riding on this one-shot issue."

"Why come to see me?"

"We want to present the story in the best possible light."

"What can I do? I don't know Hemingway."

"Do you respect him?"

"He's one of my idols."

"That's what the editors hoped." He looked me in the eye, then said: "They want you to read the galleys...make up your own mind...no pressure from us. And if you like what you see, give us a statement we can use in nationwide publicity."

"To what purpose?"

"To kill any lingering reminders of those savage reviews. Knock in the head suspicions that the old man might be through."

"Tell me the truth. Have you asked other writers better known than me? Have they refused?"

"I really don't know. But I do know the editors think that your approach to war and the role of men makes you eligible. Also, they think readers will listen."

"Is Hemingway in on this?"

"He would be mortified if he knew we thought he needed help. He'll know about it when he sees the copy."

The decision was easy and automatic. I assured the emissary that I would read the manuscript, praying that it would be good, and if it was I would not hesitate to say so boldly. Because a writer just getting into his career as I then was rarely has an opportunity to pay tribute to one of the masters.

"Guard this with your life," the emissary said. "This is the only copy outside New York. And if you decide to make a statement, get it to us in a hurry." Placing the rather frail parcel in my hands, he nodded, warned me not to leave it where others might spy, and left to catch the Tokyo plane.

The next hours were magic. In a poorly lighted corner of a Marine hut in a remote corner of the South Korea mountains I tore open the package and began reading that inspired account of an old fisherman battling with his great fish and striving to fight off the sharks which were determined to steal it from him. From Hemingway's opening words through the quiet climaxes to the organlike coda I was enthralled, but I was so bedazzled by the pyrotechnics that I did not trust myself to write my report immediately after finishing.

I knew that Hemingway was a necromancer who adopted every superior Balzacian trick in the book, each technical device that Flaubert and Tolstoy and Dickens had found useful, so that quite often his work seemed better than it really was. I loved his writing, but he had proved in *Across the River and Into the Trees* that he could be banal, and I did not want to go out on a limb if he had done so again.

But as I sat alone in that corner, the galleys pushed far from me as if I wished to be shed of their sorcery, it became overwhelmingly clear that I had been in the presence of a masterpiece. No other word would do. *The Old Man and the Sea* was one of those incandescent miracles that gifted writers can sometimes produce. (I would learn that Hemingway had dashed it off in complete form in eight weeks without any rewriting.) And as I reflected on its perfection of form and style I found myself comparing it with those other gemlike novellas that had meant so much to me: Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*, Joseph Conrad's *Youth*, Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*, and Faulkner's *The Bear*.

When I had properly positioned Hemingway's tale among its peers I hid the galleys beneath my bedroll and walked out into the Korean night, agitated by this close contact with great writing, and as I picked my way across the difficult terrain I made up my mind that regardless of what critics sager than I had said about Hemingway's previous fumbles, I would have to flaunt my opinion that *The Old Man* was a masterpiece, and to hell with caution.

I am embarrassed to state that I have no record of what I actually reported. My judgment appeared in full-page ads across the country, and I think I said something about how happy writers like me were that the champ had regained the title. No one reading my words could doubt that here was a book worth immediate reading.

At any rate, *Life* used my statement enthusiastically and paid me, but what I didn't know was that while their Tokyo agent was handing me my top-secret copy of the galleys -- "the only set outside New York" -- *Life* was distributing another six hundred sets to opinionmakers across the United States and Europe, each one top secret and unique. When the issue containing Hemingway's novella appeared during the first week of September 1952, it was already an international sensation. One of the cleverest promotions ever orchestrated had resulted in immediate sales of 5,318,650 copies of the magazine, the swift rise of the book version to head the best-seller list, and a Nobel Prize.

Hemingway had won back the championship with a stupendous ninth-round knockout.

The success of this daring publishing venture had a surprising aftermath. *Life* was so pleased with its coup



that the editors decided to try their luck a second time, and when they cast about for some writer who might do another compact one-shot, they remembered the man who had stuck his neck out when they needed a launching statement for their Hemingway.

Another emissary, this time from New York with lots of corporate braid, came to see me, in Tokyo I believe, with a dazzling proposal: "We had such an unprecedented success with *The Old Man* that we'd like to go back to the well again. And we think you're the man to do it."

"There aren't many Hemingways around."

"On your own level you might do it. You understand men in action. You have any stories in the back of your mind?"

I have always tried to answer such questions forthrightly. I love writing. I love the swirl and swing of words as they tangle with human emotions. Of course I had a dozen ideas, most of them worthless when inspected closely, but a couple of them seemed to have real staying power.

"I've been doing some combat flying over Korea..."

"At your age?"

"And a lot of patrol work on the ground. I see certain big outlines."

"Like what?"

"Like it's perilous for a democracy to engage in war without declaring war. Like it's morally wrong to send young men into action while old men stay home and earn a bundle without any war taxes or deprivations. And it is especially wrong to call a few men arbitrarily into action while allowing others just as eligible to stay home free."

"Would your story be beating those drums?"

"I don't beat drums."

"Write it. I think we might have something."

Driven by a fire I had rarely known, and excited by the prospect of following in the shoes of Ernest Hemingway, I put aside all other work. On 6 July 1953 *Life* offered its second complete-in-one-issue novella, *The Bridges at Toko-ri*. This was less than a year after the great success of *The Old Man* and, as before, the editors protected themselves by asking another writer to authenticate the legitimacy of their offering. This time they chose Herman Wouk to say good things, and although I cannot remember what I said about Hemingway, I recall quite clearly what Wouk said about me: "His eyes have seen the glory." That became the sales pitch this time, but a friend of mine writing a r...

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