
Hemingway: A Study of the Celebrity Author in Early 20th Century

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Abstract

The end of World War One brought with it new trends in films, photography and advertising that changed the way people interpreted information. The Roaring Twenties was not only about access to a more abundant supply of booze and freedom, it was also the age of literary changes and cultural revolutions. Revolution in journalism and changes in ownerships of publishing houses resulted in a different relationship being formed between the publishers and the authors. An after effect of this change was the change in dynamics of marketing which, in turn soon supported another trend, i.e. celebrity culture. Amidst all this, a young, zealous man was beginning to become part of this culture. He was none other than Ernest Hemingway. This article offers an insight into the celebrity status Hemingway enjoyed throughout his life. Using Gérard Genette's theory of *Paratexts*, this article explores how an author reached the status of a celebrity with the help of his editor and publishers.

Key Words

Hemingway, Celebrity Culture, author-editor relationship, Scribner's

“He was aped, optioned, circulated, adapted, praised, roasted, celebrated, mocked, filmed, honoured, scorned and quoted. In short, he was famous.”

- Leonard J. Leff, (*Hemingway and His Conspirators*, 196)

Beth Luey in her essay describes the history of the book in America using two words, ‘new’ and ‘more’ (2009, 368). No two words could describe in a better way what the 20th century brought for American culture and publishing. The small, family-run publishing houses were soon turning into big, commercial companies and the advent of one particular phenomenon - mass communication, had gripped the entire world. More than ever newspapers, magazines and periodicals were being published and publishing houses like other sectors of print and advertising had realised that this was one change which would have an impact like never before. During this phase American journalism was evolving and underwent a veritable revolution. “The number of magazines in circulation had increased from two hundred in 1860 to over one thousand eight hundred at the turn of the century (Raeburn 1984, 5). Emerging family run publishing houses like P.F. *Collier & Son* and *Charles Scribner’s Sons* expanded their businesses as well as started to own magazines like *Collier’s* and *Scribner’s* respectively.

Very soon this shift led to a distinct culture of ‘celebrities’. Multiplication of mass media and introduction of new age technology through films, motion pictures, photography and advertisements opened new portals for journalists and publishers to explore. Access to information and a shift in readers’ interests from impersonal to personal stories started this fashion of celebrity culture. It had been a long time since authors like Mark Twain and Charles Dickens were celebrated universally, something that could be compared to that of a literary culture, but the second decade of the 20th century introduced a new approach towards celebrity culture in America. Post-war literature became a distinguished mark in 20th century publishing and authors like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ezra Pound, and Ernest Hemingway soon started to enjoy this celebrity status because of the books they wrote and the image they formed in the minds of their readers.

But amongst all of them, Ernest Hemingway was the only one who enjoyed this status the most and for the longest time. He was featured in more than 50 magazines by the end of his lifetime and was at the same time amongst the top literary authors of his day. No contemporary author lived the life of a successful literary writer as well as public writer to the extent to which he did. By the end of the 1920s his readers consisted not only of those who had read his books but also of them who had started to take an interest in his larger than life personality. But the real question is: ‘how did Hemingway gain this celebrity status along with becoming a prolific literary writer?’

Before moving on to expand on Hemingway’s career timeline, it is crucial to understand what the process of producing a work of fiction and non-fiction involves. Robert Darnton in

his model of 'Communication Circuit' gives a detailed outline of the publishing process in which each individual element plays a crucial role. In his model, the key link is between the author and publisher where both use the external elements of publicity, promotion and marketing informed by current socio-economic trends to reach the audience, i.e., booksellers and readers. So the important question here is: once an author has begun to write a book, how well can he/she or the publisher, or both, work to make the story a success?

In the case of most literary fiction, the book requires more than just its story to sell or reach its target market and become a success. In the end it is the literary interpretation of the produced book that decides its reach. This can be well explained by citing the theory of "Paratexts" proposed by renowned French literary theorist, Gérard Genette. Genette in his book, *'Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation'*, explicates that a text is always accompanied by peripheral elements like illustrations, author's name, preface, etc which change how one looks at the text after becoming aware of these elements. "These accompanying productions, which vary in extent and appearance, constitute what I have called elsewhere the work's *paratext*." (Genette 1997, 1)

Genette describes paratext as an "undefined zone" between the inside and outside, calling it a "threshold". Genette in his theory of Paratexts explains that the secondary elements of the book ("peritext") and the outer elements related to the book, like reviews ("epitext") together comprise of the paratext. Therefore,

Paratext = peritext + epitext (Genette 1997, 5)

In evaluating the success of Ernest Hemingway and his fast-building celebrity as well as literary image, this theory can be profitably employed. And it is the relationship between communication, media and paratext that both the author and his publishers exploited. The years of 1920s were very crucial to the long lasting fame of Hemingway. It was in this decade that he met Maxwell Perkins, editor of *Charles Scribner's Sons*, a traditional American publishing house that was experimenting with the new techniques in publishing.

Author, Publisher and Paratext

Maxwell Perkins first joined *Charles Scribner's sons* in 1910 when he became part of the advertising department before moving on to the editorial department and becoming the chief editor in 1914 (Trogon 2007, 7). Perkins soon broke the traditional publishing conventions at the publishing house by looking for fresh talent. His first successful published work was *'This Side of Paradise'* written by F.Scott Fitzgerald. At this point in time both Fitzgerald and Hemingway were residing in the literary capital, Paris. It was Fitzgerald who first introduced both parties to each other and even though Perkins seemed interested in signing Hemingway, he couldn't do so because Hemingway at that time was already under contract with *Boni and Liveright*. But after the publication of his first book, *In Our Time*, Hemingway grew unhappy with them and soon Perkins got the opportunity to sign him. This

professional relationship between the two men would in turn have a huge impact on Hemingway's celebrity image. Perkins' previous involvement in advertising sector proved helpful as he used it as one of the most powerful tools in selling the brand of "Hemingway".

From an early stage, Perkins had begun to understand the marketing and commercial aspects of modern publishing. He realised that if a book was marketed well, it would sell no matter what the content. Therefore it was his awareness of the potential which advertising and publicity had, that made him understand the buzz that Hemingway's stories would create if he used those tools well. Even though '*Torrent Springs*' was the first book published by Scribner's sons, it was the promotional activities involved in getting '*The Sun Also Rises*' across to the audience which defined the publishing creation of the editor.

The Sun Also Rises and Hemingway's celebrity image

Charles Scribner's Sons like other traditional publishers were a little resistant about using modern forms of communication but Perkins, however, understood the importance of the new advancements in media. Because he had worked in Advertising before he became an editor, he used his experience in this sector to change the marketing techniques employed at *Charles Scribner's Sons*. Even before Hemingway, Perkins used these new methods on F.Scott Fitzgerald's book, '*This Side of Paradise*'. He wanted Fitzgerald to send any "publicity matter" like photographs that the author had, because he wanted to sell a book "that looked popular" (Leff 1997, xv). This example establishes the fact that even before Hemingway joined their firm, Perkins was already using modern advertising and publicity to sell an author and his book. Perkins began to work on promotional strategies for Hemingway's books at a very early stage, right from 1926. Apart from the usual advertisements, he "pursued other means of promoting his new author, the main way being the placement of Hemingway's work in American Magazines." (Trogon 2007, 32)

2. Advertising for Hemingway's Books

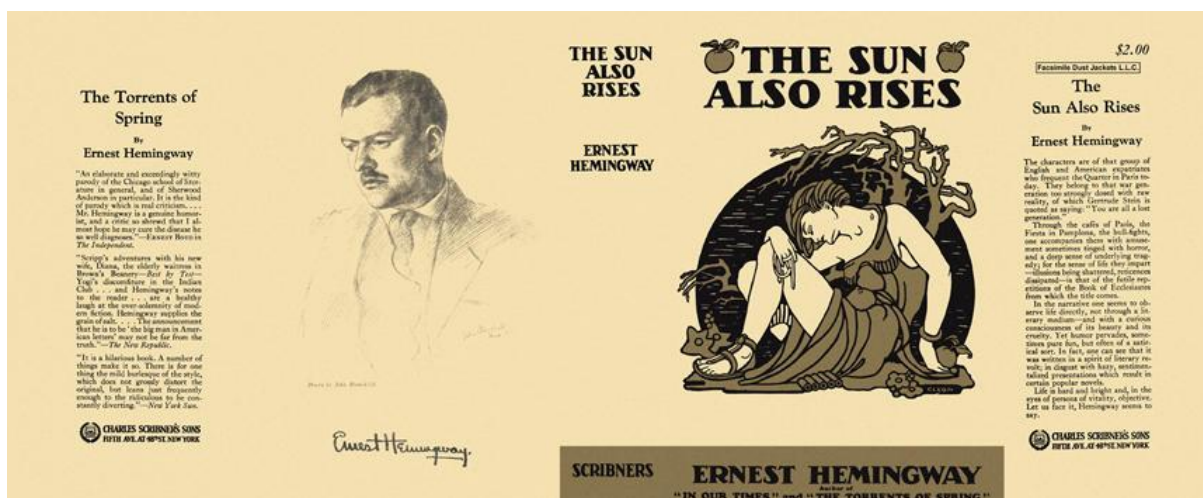
Book	Budget	Ads		
		Purchased	First Ad	Last Ad
TS	\$796.54	35	13 March 1926	Oct 1926
SAR	\$6,557.93	179	Sept. 1926	1 Dec. 1927
MWW	\$4,599.70	153	Oct. 1927	Dec. 1928
FTA	\$20,578.17	325	Sept 1929	Dec. 1930
IOT	\$1,564.71	48	20 Sept. 1930	17 Jan. 1931
DLA	\$8,581.14	178	11 June 1932	Feb. 1933
WTN	\$2,442.16	90	20 May 1933	March 1934
GHA	\$4,796.03	76	8 June 1935	Jan. 1936
THHN	\$9,325.74	83	Sept. 1937	12 June 1938
First 49	\$3,630.79	54	4 June 1938	July 1939
FWTBT	\$43,567.09	504	15 June 1940	3 Dec. 1941
ARIT	\$20,000	unknown	unknown	unknown
OMATS	\$21,551.88	unknown	19 July 1952	27 Jan. 1953

(Source: Trogon 2007, Appendix 2)

Perkins was not the only one to be aware of the new promotional trends that were emerging. Having previously worked as a journalist for *The Toronto Star*, Hemingway also knew that if he wanted to garner publicity he had to use different methods. One example was his accepting, *The Sun's* offer to publish his short story "The Undeclared" in their literary column. Hemingway knew that by publishing his short story before the big release of *The Sun Also Rises*, it would automatically create a buzz amongst the media and target readership. Scribner's published the first ad for *The Sun Also Rises* in their catalogue on September 1926 (see Table 1.1) and kept advertising for the book until 1 December 1927. It was the publisher's extensive use of the book's epitext that helped the book in reaching its audience. Warrace Meyer, then ad campaign manager for the publishing house, placed three ads for the book in *Publisher's Weekly* and by the end of the year there were 75 advertisements in book trade journals and magazines (Trogon 2007, 46).

Furthermore, *The Sun Also Rises* is the first book, in which Maxwell Perkin's personal contribution as an editor and his creativity in using the book's peritext that resulted in a highly successful print run of 5090 copies (Leff 1997, 118). But the most striking promotional strategy used by Perkins to sell the book was its dust jacket (see image 1.1). Among its peritextual elements, the back cover included an illustrated drawing of Hemingway by John Blomshield along with three quotes from reviews of *Torrent Springs* and a facsimile of Hemingway's signature (Trogon 2007, 45).

This decision to use a drawing instead of a photograph as a publicity decision was taken by the editor, Maxwell Perkins. He reasoned that by doing so he was opening up the possibility for the drawing to be republished in newspapers and magazines which would mean the book will gain more publicity. Stories of the book being a *roman à clef* along with the aforementioned advertisements created a buzz that soon merged with the reader's need to know everything about the author.



(Source: Charles Scribner's Sons, (1926) first printing (USA) Item # 4564, facsimiledustjackets.com)

This book is an example of how a publisher was already using the paratextual elements of a book extensively to endorse the author and market his book. This also provides evidence that Genette's theory (which was not formulated until a much later decade) already existed in the early years of 20th century. The numerical figures in Table 1.1 illustrate not only the increase in the budget over the years used by *Scribner's* for placing advertisements but also the frequency of the ads placed for all his books. If we consider these numbers, they stand as proof of how the publishers played a crucial role in selling Hemingway "the author" and his celebrity status by running advertisements for periods as long as a year. In case of *The Sun Also Rises* they purchased as many as 179 ads and ran them for more than a year. This displays the extent of the publisher's dependence on advertising as a marketing tool. Even though in later years, Hemingway's other books like *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* kept amplifying the celebrity status of Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* remains the clearest example of the connection that exists between communication, celebrity culture and Genette's theory of paratext because it was the first time that Hemingway was being portrayed as a star in order to achieve a larger status of a celebrity. Over the years, Hemingway's appearance in numerous magazines like *Life*, *Esquire*, and *Time* only served to confirm the primacy of paratextual elements in the interpretation of a published text. Most significantly, the number of reviews that continued to be published in various publications only added to the Hemingway brand. Another Hemingway novel that created a similar buzz was *A Farewell to Arms* which many speculated was an autobiographical tale of Hemingway's time in Italy during the First World War.

Perkins ordered a print run of 31,050 for this book after looking at the growing success of Hemingway's existing books (Leff 1997, 118). Reviews like "here is a genius" in *Chicago Tribune*, "more of romantic idyll than a 'war book'" (*Survey*), while *New York Times Book Review* describing it as a "Romeo and Juliet" Romance "poetic, idyllic, tragic" were taken as a positive signs by Perkins who believed that these reviewers were both "writers" and "talkers" and that their input could surely help to market of the book." (Leff 1997, 52,118)

These strategies confirm the theory of Claire Squires in *Marketing Literature* where she puts forward the theory that marketing is promotion in the name of the brand and not the publisher, but what she forgets to indicate is that it is the publisher who uses paratexts in endorsing the literary work, something Genette indicates in his book. Another important trend that is evident in the stages of the publication of *The Sun Also Rises* is how advertising and publicity were already such integral parts of publishing industry. Juliet Gardiner in "What is an Author" (2000, 63-76) describes the promotional activity of *The Information* as the biggest shift in late 20th century publishing, if that is the case then I would consider Hemingway and Maxwell Perkin's joint efforts to be the most salient example of the shift towards advertising in the 1920s and 1930s in order to promote Hemingway's status as a celebrity.

Hemingway: A brand of his own

In the mid-1950s, *Look* magazine challenged its readers to identify a selection of celebrities from anonymous photographs. The 26 celebrities chosen were either politicians or business personalities with only one exception- Ernest Hemingway, “whose trademark was a curly white beard” (Raeburn, 1984).

Ernest Hemingway was amongst a small number of his contemporaries to become a celebrity as well as public writer. He was a man who believed that good achievements were followed by reputation and fame on its own and his own reputation is surely secure given his Nobel Prize for Literature (1954) and a Pulitzer Book Award (1953) along with a wide readership during his life that extended to magazines like *Life*, *Esquire*, *Time* and *Newsweek*. By the end of his career he had been featured in the *Time's* magazine almost 27 times and had remained famous amongst an audience which consisted more of admirers than readers. So what drew them to him?

The answer is very simple: Hemingway himself. From the very start of his career, Hemingway's works showed a keen awareness of the importance of public reputation. His early 'personal letters' in *The Transatlantic Review*, were an indication of how Hemingway used *self-advertisement* as a “tool” to reach a mass audience. His 'exotic' everyday letters about “How to Catch a Trout” or “How to Stalk a Lion”, appealed to readers not just as reading material, but also created in them a wish to live that very life. These were the early indications of the 'celebrity' status that Hemingway would soon acquire. Hemingway from an early stage knew what his work of fiction could do.

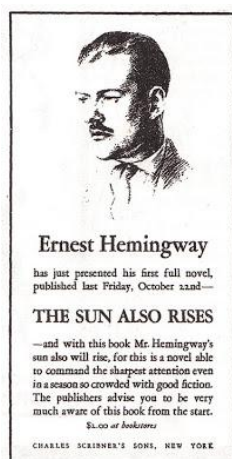
In a letter to Horace Liveright he explained, “My book will be praised by Highbrows and can be read by Lowbrows” (Trogon 2007, 45). This statement confirms the deep understanding Hemingway had of his readers, something which was very important in order to secure a good public reputation. Hemingway always wrote in a style that transported the readers to the world as though they, themselves were living through those moments.

Robert Trogon in his book, *The Lousy Racket* writes “Hemingway's prose when successful makes the reader think that he has experienced what is depicted”. His influence was becoming so strong that by the time *The Sun Also Rises* was released, people were certain that it was a *roman à clef*, and wanted to be Jakes Barnes, Hemingway's hero. People “learned it by heart and deserting their families and running away from college, immediately took ship to Paris to be disciples of the new faith.” (Barrett, 1997) Hemingway used his non-fiction stories like “*Death in the Afternoon*” and “*Green Hills of Africa*” as a preview of his life which in turn was another method of self-promotion. These stories only intrigued people to read his fictional novels. This is an unusual display of how epitext can encourage readers to get to the text. Genette's theory of *Paratextuality* and *Architextuality* was in use long before the advent of the theory.

Conclusion

By the end, Hemingway had acquired multiple public personas as was the war-returned hero, the Parisian expatriate, a hunter from Africa, a war correspondent who, in spite of being a public figure, cared more about reporting stories and not to mention his status as a Nobel Prize winner. Hemingway always hung around with gossip columnists, giving interviews and featuring in magazines. Hemingway and his publisher's methods break the strict theory of Bourdieu's 'fields of production' where he theorises that if a literary field is increased then the commercial field doesn't exist and if the later does exist, the former diminished.

This was so because Hemingway's books brought high sales as well as being amongst the top sellers they were also critical successes. But it was Scribner's unusual publishing and promotional strategies under the guidance of Maxwell Perkins and through Hemingway's own desire to build-up a good public reputation that made him the celebrity figure that he became. What can't be overlooked in all of this is the contribution of mass media and communication. Hemingway not only featured in magazines and newspapers, but he was also selling movie rights as early as the 1930s which was quite unusual for an author of that decade. Hemingway's celebrity status was not only a result of his personality but also due to the shrewd decisions made by Perkins. One can only wonder if Hemingway would have enjoyed the same status if he were still being published by *Boni and Liveright*. Robert W. Tragdon in his book *'The Lousy Racket'* writes that "*Scribner's Sons* did what *Boni and Liveright* did not: help Hemingway successfully launch his career as a professional author in America." It was Perkin's experience backed by *Charles Scribner's Sons* which helped him to develop the image of an author as a celebrity with Hemingway gaining a highly celebrated status all through his life.



Early ad for *The Sun Also Rises*. "The publishers advise you to be aware of the book from the start."

(Sources: www.tumblr.com, Scribner Books)

But one cannot ignore the image Hemingway himself portrayed in front of his readers and the critics which not only made his books more believable and readable but also made the audience crave for more details on his life. This personal link between his novels, short stories and his real life blurred the lines of fiction and non-fiction for his audience, leaving them with a craving that could only be fulfilled by knowing more about the author. This interrelationship between the publishers, author and the reader was what helped to make 'Ernest Hemingway' into a brand.

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