

# Collecting Ernest Hemingway

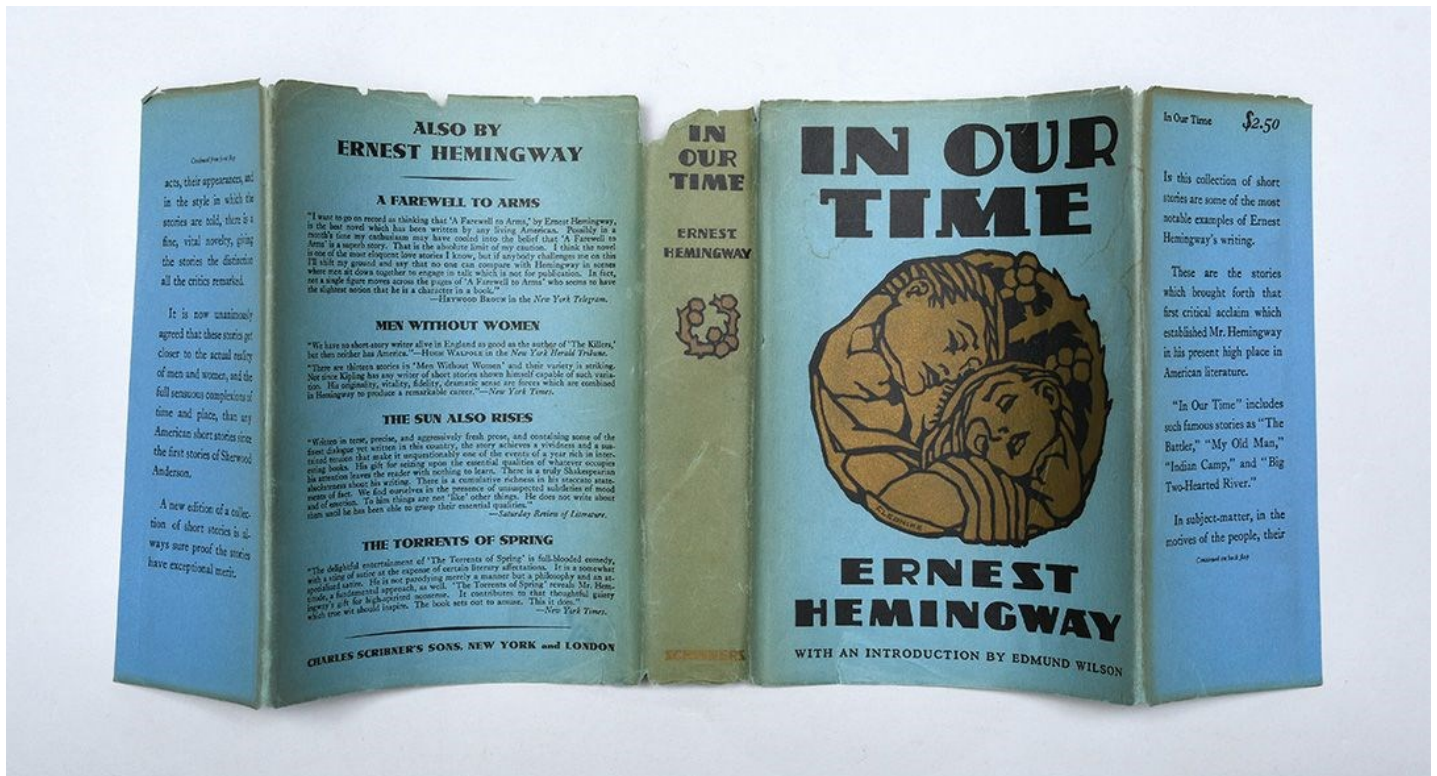
06 June 2023

## How to find rare copies by the literary legend

Alexander Larman

The American author and journalist Ernest Hemingway was one of those men who lived when days were longer. Over the course of the 61 years that he spent on the planet, he married four times, published seven novels and novellas – a further two came posthumously – and served as a foreign correspondent everywhere from the Spanish Civil War to the D-Day landings on the Normandy beaches, although he was thwarted from his intention of travelling in the first wave of the troops. He was also a committed, largely successful self-mythologiser, who claimed to have done everything from being the first American into Paris during WWII and to have liberated the Ritz in the process to countless feats of prowess, whether literary, social or sexual.

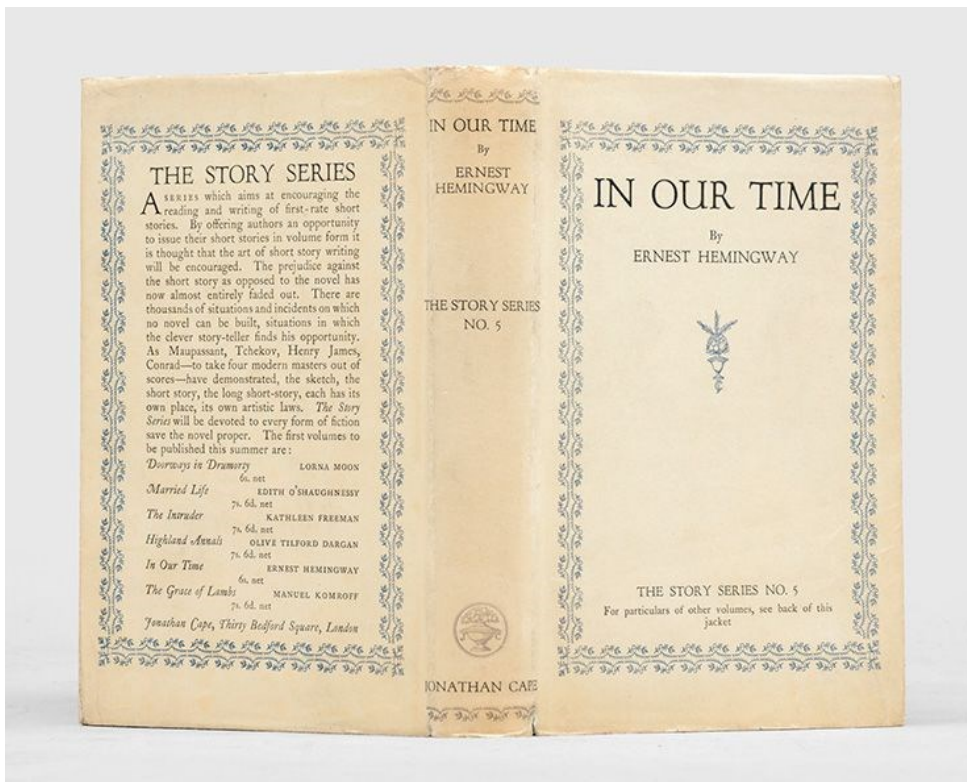
He's undeniably one of the most fascinating figures of the twentieth century, and so it's little surprise that his books are eagerly sought-after and collected. As Pom Harrington, the owner of the estimable Peter Harrington bookshop, tells me, "Hemingway is unusual as an author as he is widely read and valued by both academics and readers of fiction alike. His famously straightforward style of writing has much to do with the democratic appeal of his work, in addition to the universality of the themes he writes about and his persona that transcended his role as a writer. He was an icon to many, and not just as a literary figure." This translates into an enormous universality, although, as Harrington says, "He is undoubtedly a legend, even if some of his legendary status has a whiff of infamy."



HEMINGWAY, Ernest.  
In Our Time.  
With an introduction by Edmund Wilson.  
Peter Harrington London

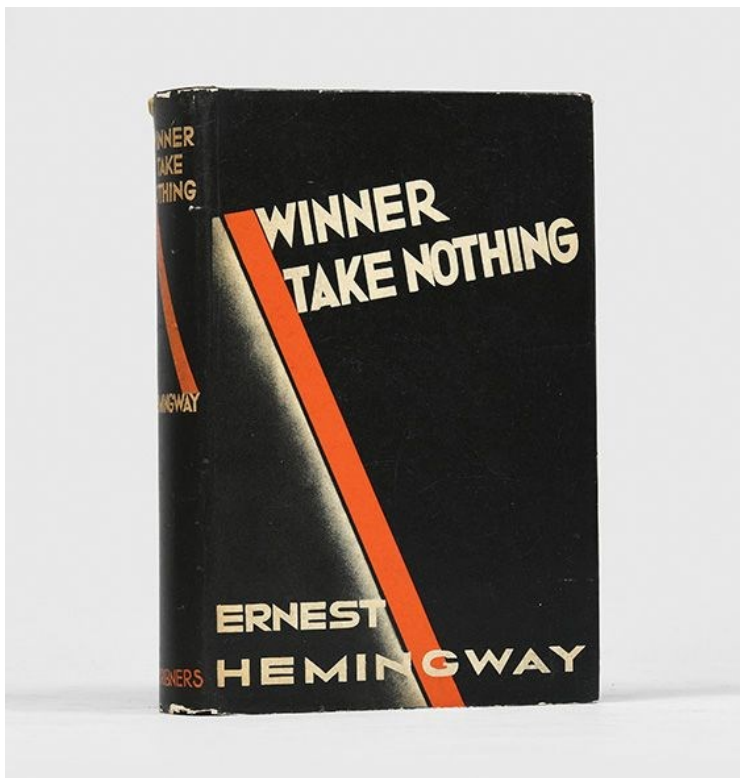
Harrington's career dealing in Hemingway featured a spectacular early purchase. "I remember buying at auction on behalf of a customer a presentation copy of *The Old Man and The Sea* for \$164,800 in 2004. It was inscribed by the author to Spencer Tracy who played the old Cuban fisherman in the 1958 film adaptation of the book. This copy was inscribed and given to Tracy over an Easter weekend when the actor and the producer Leland Hayward went to Havana for preliminary discussions with Hemingway about the making of the film"

Yet he has subsequently handled an even rarer copy of the book: perhaps Hemingway's most famous and beloved title, something that can be described as the 'Holy Grail' of the author's work. "I sold one of the 15 extremely rare pre-publication copies of *The Old Man and The Sea*, one of only three such inscribed copies known to exist. It was signed "yours always Ernest Hemingway" and had an additional letter inscription of Charles Sweeny, a long-time friend of Hemingway's, re-presenting the copy on his behalf: "To Betty from Ernest Hemingway by way of Charles Sweeny with love".



HEMINGWAY, Ernest.  
*In Our Time*. Stories.  
 Peter Harrington London

Should one be in the market to buy a Hemingway item of spectacular rarity today, Harrington can – unsurprisingly enough – assist. “We are currently offering a very rare first printing of *Voyage to Victory*, Hemingway’s account of ‘a battle for a Normandy beachhead’ in 1944 for £60,000. It is certainly one of the rarest items anyone could add to any Hemingway collection.” As Harrington says, “Although Hemingway did not appreciate his journalistic pieces placed alongside his fiction and famously said ‘if you have made your living as a newspaperman, learning your trade, writing against deadlines, writing to make stuff timely rather than permanent, no one has any right to dig this stuff up and use it against the stuff you have written to write the best you can’, his reportorial work clearly was a great influence on his fiction, with episodes and sometimes language being used in later novels and stories. As he notes in the prologue: ‘Real war is never like paper war, nor do accounts of it read much like the way it looks. But if you want to know how it was in an LCV(P) on D-Day when we took Fox Green beach and Easy Red beach on the sixth of June, 1944, then this is as near as I can come to it.’ ”



HEMINGWAY, Ernest.  
*Winner Take Nothing*.  
 FIRST EDITION, IN THE FIRST ISSUE JACKET  
 Peter Harrington London

Inevitably, signed presentation copies of Hemingway’s work remain sought-after; Harrington notes that costs of these would be a comparatively trifling few thousand for a signed reprint of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* to around £300,000 for a book of great personal significance, such as a copy of the novel that he inscribed to his third wife Martha Gellhorn

("we narrowly missed buying it at auction.") And Harrington singles out his key early novel *The Sun Also Rises* as hugely collectable too, on the grounds that "a fine presentation copy of [the book] in its original dust jacket was the first of Hemingway's novels to achieve wide acclaim."

Inevitably, given his rambunctious and robust lifestyle and writing, Hemingway is today a controversial as well as beloved figure, and I wonder if he is in danger of being censored, cancelled or otherwise muzzled by the outraged forces of political correctness and decency. Harrington disagrees, however. "Hemingway is extensively read and studied; he is part of the canon of 20th century writers whose works I believe will remain truly timeless. In terms of American authors, he is up there in the top three with Fitzgerald and Faulkner. His creations will live on no matter what people think of the man." And should you wish to buy one of these creations in impeccable condition, inscribed by Hemingway himself, Harrington is your man for them.