



1

because I wanted to write about Paris but did not know exactly where to focus, I went to the library at the Centre Georges Pompidou to read Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*

I opened the book and found out that it was written only as the result of a totally unexpected event

after a short trip to Spain, in 1957, Hemingway passed through Paris and stayed at the Hotel Ritz

much to his surprise, the baggage clerk handed him two suitcases he had forgotten in the hotel thirty years before

could this be true? he must have wondered, surely moved by that restitution which was proof of the Parisians' love

in the suitcases were the notebooks where, between 1921 and 1926, he had jotted down the facts of his daily life, of the years when he would go hungry in Paris in order to write

could he possibly receive the notebooks under such extraordinary circumstances and then put them away in a drawer?

no, receiving the notes that had been safeguarded for three decades was like a command: take them and write about the city where you honed your craft as a writer

and Hemingway began to write about his Paris, which was also the Paris of Joyce, Pound, and Fitzgerald, writers to whom literature was not a media function but was sacred, for whom literature was existence itself

I had only to read a few pages of *A Moveable Feast* to come across a decisive passage: “Do not worry. You have always written before and you will continue. All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know.”

I wrote *Paris Has No End* and realized that I should focus on the Paris of a person wandering about the city, who, thanks to that wandering, can be surprised by her

this was the Paris that, in the Twenties, attracted Hemingway and it was she that, in the Fifties, led Henry Miller to sing of the city of “grays indispensable to the creation of a full and harmonious existence,” as he says in *Quiet Days in Clichy*, a book that merely for its comparison of New York and Paris would justify itself: “Broadway is fast, dizzying, dazzling, and nowhere to sit down. Montmartre is sluggish, lazy, indifferent, somewhat shabby and seedy-looking, not glamorous so much as seductive, not scintillating but glowing with a smoldering flame.”

the Paris of surprise or illumination is what makes the city’s gray a color that allows one to see all the other colors, transports one to an unknown country or to

the country of one's childhood, and justifies the creator's exile

she alone leads the exile to say that his banishment is voluntary and that, although a foreigner, he is a privileged one

or even to say, as in Hemingway's case, that hunger was good discipline because it made him see Cézanne's canvases as never before and understand exactly how he had painted them

having given up journalism, the author of *The Old Man and the Sea* had to be content, in the Twenties, with a single meal per day, and he even learned to avoid the streets where there was a bakery, vegetable market, or restaurant where he might yield to temptation

but what did stomach cramps matter when hunger enlightened him? when he wandered about a city that "was always worth it and you received return for whatever you brought to it," as Hemingway says at the very end of *A Moveable Feast*

chapter justly entitled *Paris Has No End*

2

Hemingway's Paris was the Paris of one who let himself be possessed by the city

he forgot himself, contemplating the Seine and the life of the fishermen on the river, watching the blossoming of spring after a night of warm wind or looking at the many galleries

like a tramp, he wandered along the quays, through the gardens, along the streets; but, unlike him, he was doing so to write

the tramp has no trade; the creator, if he is to exercise his own, must know how to lose himself

the creator's trade implies wandering, which is not the same as being a vagabond; it also requires innocence, but not that of the child, for it is a hard-won innocence: it is that of the adult who sees the world with the eyes of a child

Hemingway's Paris was both the Paris of the wanderer and the Paris of the person who reclaims his innocence so he may observe her

he allowed himself to be enlightened by strolling, but he also went in search of the enlightenment that the city can produce through its many works of art

in *A Moveable Feast* he recounts that every afternoon he would make his way through the lanes of the Jardin du Luxembourg to see the Impressionists in the museum, and there Cézanne's paintings taught him that it was not enough to write simple and true sentences to attain in his work the dimension he sought

Paris, because of the presence of art, by being the past and future memory of the act that makes the work exist, favors the artist's work

she favors it also by the fact of other artists having been there and, in a certain way, being there still

it seems as if Hemingway may appear at any moment in a café on the Place Saint-Michel and sit down to write on a paper tablet, first ordering a plain coffee with milk, and later, when the text has begun to write itself, a Saint James rum from Martinique, one, two, three glasses, and have the young woman across from him, waiting for someone, enter the story and say gleefully to himself: "I've seen you, beauty, and you belong to me now, whoever you are waiting for and if I never see you again."

Paris is also Hemingway and his contemporaries in the city that he immortalized in his book: Ezra Pound, who lived in an atelier "as poor as Gertrude Stein's studio was rich," friend of painters, sculptors, and writers; Joyce, who, already nearly blind, would stroll along the Boulevard Saint-Germain after going to the cinema to hear the actors; Fitzgerald, sipping champagne at the Deux Magots and heaping praise on Hemingway, who was so disconcerted that he preferred not to listen, instead just drinking and looking at the blond, curly hair of the author of *The Great Gatsby*, at his "delicate long-lipped Irish mouth"

Paris is the works and the artists who pored over them to create others; she is a light emanating from the monument, from the sculpture, from the canvas, and from the written word, but also from the gaze of those who gaze upon them

a past that accommodates dreams and relativizes the present when it is dark and does not correspond to the image that brought the artist to take root in the city

Paris has not ended, despite the lack of an ambience today such as Hemingway's or like that of the surrealists, in which relationships were woven based on the work and not on the market

Paris can still be a voluntary exile equivalent to a homeland

the Parisian homeland, which has no government and takes no notice of borders, receives anyone who is willing to wander through her; her arms are open, like Châtelet's gilded victory, an angel with exuberant breasts and thighs who, holding a laurel crown in each hand, extends its arms fervently toward the Seine

Paris calls no one but lets it be thought that she does; she has ever allowed herself to be sung

she is a *grande dame* who cannot live without the song and the troubadour

dame and fountain, she is an illusion without which the West would not exist, and it is surely for this reason that, Hitler's orders notwithstanding, it was not blown up by the Germans

3

Paris is a place of exile that can also be a homeland, because she is, and yet is not, a metropolis

she both offers what other great cities have of enchantment and affords through her neighborhoods an experience similar to a small town, thus allowing escape from the depressing metropolitan condition

in the neighborhood or in the *quartier* thrives the commitment to the promise, and to simplify the lives of others; the baker may sell bread on credit, or the pharmacist a tranquilizer without a prescription, as long as the person promises to bring it as soon as possible

faithfulness to the merchant is rewarded by confidence in the customer, who is thus judged by his word; he is known, or not known, as a man of his word

the merchant whose attention is most contested is the butcher—many Parisians speak of him using the possessive: *mon boucher*

the butcher, in turn, is especially attentive, for it is the customer who confers the

uniqueness necessary for him to be recognized as a good professional and for his training to be appreciated

what would France be without the science of meat-cutting? without, for example, the *tournedos*, sliced from the fillet of beef and wrapped in a fine strip of fat that also serves to oil the pan; without the *entrecôte*, which is cut from between the ribs and the butcher shows one how to prepare *au poivre*—with finely ground peppercorns—or *à la bordelaise*—with red Bordeaux wine sauce

the neighborhood is inconceivable without the explanations that the butcher gives and all the dishes that he makes one dream of

for example, *bœuf bourguignon*—the toughest meat is converted into the most tender by slow cooking in Burgundy wine

Paris is not Paris without the display case that the butcher prepares every day, arranging the meat by cut and color, or rather, by hue

at the far left of the case, in the upper part, the red meat, beef; in the middle, lamb, which is pink; below, sausages, in which white alternates with shades of red

in the center left, from top to bottom, everything is veal; the space is entirely rosé

in the center right are the rabbits, the chickens, and the turkey legs, which by their color serve to separate the chickens from the quail and ducks, aligned at the far right of the case with a lovely red tag on the breast

true, this treasure, unlike the sausage shop's or the bakery's, is not accessible to just anyone; it implies a certain knowledge of cooking and the butcher's explanations

it is a treasure that at first may inhibit, but it can also be the link between two individuals, fated to be only customer and vendor, who from conversation to conversation find in the end that they share an unexpected complicity

it is a singular kind of complicity, which belongs only to the neighborhood and is unique to its residents and workers, to those who walk to the same bakery to buy their bread, have coffee at the same bistro, frequent the same newsstand, buy meat from the same butcher, go to the same doctor, take their children to study in the same school and to play in the same park

the neighborhood is the small homeland of those who lament in unison the absence of a good merchant or the loss of some service provided by the city; of those who, once occupied with babies in their arms, ask upon meeting again decades later, ask how are the children; of those who, so to speak, share the same nostalgia

4

loneliness in Paris weighs less heavily on one than in other cities

whether because the street offers some surprise—a sculpture that had gone unnoticed, a door, a tower seen from a new angle—or because of the surprising beauty of the landscape, which makes it nonsense to feel sorry for oneself

the impact of the landscape on the individual is one of Hemingway's themes:

“With the fishermen and the life on the river, the beautiful barges with their own life on board, the tugboats with their smokestacks that fold back to pass under the bridges, pulling a tow of barges, the great elms on the stone banks of the river, the plane trees and in some places the poplars, I could never be lonely along the river.”

Hemingway was taken by the landscape, and, moved by what he saw, became transformed into the narrator of the book he would write years later and that he was creating

on the tree-lined banks of the Seine, he went from the real to the fictional

it was with his Paris that he drugged himself, the sudden illumination that made him forgetful and rendered impossible the bitter experience of loneliness

because she was a drug for Hemingway, Paris was a moveable feast; she is a vice to the writer, who must wander to move a step away from reality, enter deeper into his imaginary landscape and, lest he be alone, go where other writers have been before

looking at the Seine, I see green-colored waters and am taken back to childhood, I imagine the cane mill and the man grinding, hear the sound of the stalk snapping and the juice spurting, smell the perfume of the juice and taste its sweetness

passing by Notre Dame, it is *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* that comes to me, and it is Victor Hugo, who lived nearby and in order to write the book locked himself in his house as in a prison

how can one not see, then, looking at the cathedral churchyard, the gypsy from the novel, Esmeralda with black hair and flaming eyes, as crafty as a wasp, dancing with her arms forming an arch above her head?

how can one not think of the hunchback of Notre Dame, Quasimodo, who hurled himself upon the bell, mounting it like a horse and, suspended over the abyss, let himself be carried from side to side?

Victor Hugo compared Quasimodo to a caricature—large-headed, hunchbacked, with thighs like bellows and monstrous hands—but made the monster, through his devotion to Esmeralda, win the reader's sympathy and thus made him immortal

Notre Dame is inconceivable without the hunchback and also without Gargantua, who from atop one of its towers greeted the Parisians by urinating on them,

occasioning both their insults and their response through laughter—“*par ris*”—
whereupon the city named Lutèce came to be called Paris, according to
Rabelais’s clownish etymology

in every stone the church reveals, as Victor Hugo says, the fantasy of the worker
disciplined by the artist’s genius, and this is why it has the power to make both
the man of the Renaissance and modern man dream

Paris is the setting for writers and the characters born from them, just as Rio de
Janeiro is that of samba composers and the characters that emerge each year
during Carnival

in Rio, there is music in the air; Paris is a literary city, and every writer is in a
way a Parisian, as well as being Parrhisien in his relationship to the word, for
parrhisia in Greek means freedom of speech

to have such freedom, writers exile themselves in Paris, where it is not necessary
to correspond to any ideal and all experiences are clandestine by definition,
because the family member or acquaintance who would judge them does not live
in Paris

in any case, the writer lives in clandestineness because of his trade—isn’t he
embarking for imaginary countries known to him alone?

like a madman, he roams, but unlike the madman he passes through the same
spot to come to a place entirely new; in other words, the writer wanders in order
not to repeat himself

5

if only for Manet's painting *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, Paris is an obligatory stop for any artist

the painting is perhaps the best example of what it means to be modern by being eternal

the naked woman looking at the spectator catches his gaze by surprise and reveals the voyeurism that every onlooker wishes to conceal

the work is scandalous because of this catching in the act, because of the gaze of the naked woman that, besides turning the spectator into an object, exposes him as a voyeur

Manet is eternally modern because no one has gone, goes, or ever will go to an exhibition to be seen by someone in a painting, and thus be obligated to look at himself, to confront his own desire

it is not by chance that Hemingway would always go to see his canvases; he wanted to learn to be as daring as the painter, who extolled above all the

originality of the artist

invited to teach other painters, Manet replied: “I cannot have students. What would I transmit to them? Nothing, or very little, which can be summarized in two words: the first is that black does not exist; the second is not to do anything that you’ve seen in the works of others.”¹

with this answer, Manet affirmed that the artist must know the art of his predecessors so as not to repeat it, to find a new way

but in addition he taught that the artist can find his path only by himself, or, in other words, there is no way to learn from others and no way to teach them; his craft neither gives him nor makes of him an instructor

precisely because he did not consider himself an instructor, Manet could serve as example and therefore he attracted around him totally independent painters, diverse among themselves—the future Impressionists—and also received several writers in his atelier

they all went, not to do the same thing as he, but to do something else with the same boldness

Paris can teach the artist à la Manet, that is, by inciting him to look at works of art

to learn his trade, the artist need only settle in the city

this is because she incites, and he in turn is self-taught, educating himself by deciphering the way others proceeded and comparing it to his own

he deciphers and compares until he becomes totally spontaneous because of

knowing and accepting his own means, which is his art; until he succeeds in acting in it like someone strolling through a thoroughly familiar city in which, without fear of getting lost, he can casually go down one street or another, always certain of arriving

the artist becomes spontaneous, if not free, when the form to which he was fated becomes the one he favors

then he is independent of the opinion of others, though still subject to their pressures

in *A Moveable Feast* Hemingway makes a lovely testimony of that independence

he remembers how, when writing “Out of Season,” he had left the end of the story unfinished, because of a theory of his that omission can give more strength to the narrative and the author can omit any part of a story so long as it is deliberate

later he recalls that he was perfectly aware that no one would understand his new way of writing, but he believed that readers would finally come to understand, and that he only needed time and confidence

Hemingway knew it was necessary to insist; otherwise, art would disappear—the new would have no way to emerge

because it is a land of exile, a place where the artist lives free from pressures, Paris favors resistance

because it is the place where various artists dared say *no* to the immediate enticements of success, Paris is a privileged city in the history of art, which is also made of courage

¹Darragon, E. "Manet, quel scandale," *Naissance de l'Impressionisme*. Télérama, Hors Série, 1994.