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Response to *A Moveable Feast*

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A Love Letter to Paris

A Moveable Feast is Ernest Hemingway's memoir about living in Paris in the 1920s. He was a budding writer and newly married to Hadley, his first wife. Paris has always been a city defined by artistic expression, but it was particularly bustling after World War I for writers, painters, and musicians. Hemingway and his wife lived a minimal life by materialistic standards, but they made up for it in experiences and the company they kept. One could view *A Moveable Feast* as a record of one of the most pivotal points in an American writer's life, but the lasting impression I felt was that the memoir was a love letter to Paris, the most romantic city in the world.

The memoir unfolds chronologically, but it's more of a mishmash of anecdotes, little stories of people Hemingway encounters throughout his time in Paris – including a slew of famous writers, editors, and painters of that era, such as F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein. In the backdrop of these friendships, however, is a tantalizing picture of Paris – endless hours spent in cafes, long nights walking along the Seine, bottles of wine and baguettes shared in Montmartre... It was easy to picture all of these things because I've been to Paris and walked on those same cobblestone streets. (I've even been to Shakespeare & Company, the famous bookstore owned by Sylvia Beach. She encouraged Hemingway to publish his first book.) So, while reading about his personal entanglements, navigating the first years of marriage, and dealing with jealousy over other people's good

writing, it was easy to get lost in the romantic side of the City of Light. Like the saying goes, Paris is always a good idea.

It's important to note that *A Moveable Feast* was published in 1964 after Hemingway took his own life in 1961, though he had been working on the memoir prior to his death. When his personal notes and journals were recovered from a hotel in Paris in the 1950s, he was delighted to re-read his work and pull together a narrative that depicted his life in the 1920s. At 50-something years old, it must have been mind-blowing to read his own point of view from thirty years prior. Perhaps that allowed Hemingway to look at his failed first marriage, the birth of his first child, and the start of his writing career with a critical eye. Hemingway had long been haunted by feelings of inadequacy, but by the time he revisited his personal journals from a magical time, I wonder if he realized how incredible his life had been and how important his writing would become to American Literature. Lost Generation writers were known for their disillusionment, so who's to say Hemingway would've been introspective at all.

I loved *A Moveable Feast*, not just for its engaging storytelling or its quick-pass across Europe. (I could've done without bullfights in Spain though.) There is something about Ernest Hemingway that intrigues me, and it occurs to me now that I must be drawn to tragic stories. He was a man who had everything going for him – incredible talent, dashing good looks, never a lack of friends or companions, and the ability to up-and-go anywhere in the world. On paper, he had everything required for a good life, and yet, he was haunted by his own mind. It's hard to understand, particularly after reading *A Moveable Feast*, why someone like him would struggle to find happiness. It just goes to show that no one's life is as charmed as you might think. As a memoir, *A Moveable Feast* is one of the best I've ever read, but readers should be careful not to take lessons from a man who could never be content with the simplest parts of life.