



# Paris as a Sanctuary: American Literary Exodus During Prohibition in Hemingway's "A Moveable Feast"

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the migration of American writers to Paris during the Prohibition era, as depicted in Ernest Hemingway's "A Moveable Feast". The study delves into "A Farewell to Arms" and other literary and historical sources to examine the reasons behind this movement and its impact on American literature. The analysis reveals that this period significantly influenced literary themes and styles, with Hemingway's works embodying the cultural and artistic transformations of the time.

**Keywords:** literature, American culture, prohibition in the United States

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## 1. Introduction

The Prohibition era (1920-1933) in the United States, marked by cultural and social repression, catalyzed a significant movement of American writers to Paris. This paper investigates this phenomenon, particularly through the lens of Ernest Hemingway's experiences as portrayed in "A Moveable Feast" and "A Farewell to Arms".

## 2. The Prohibition Era and Its Impact on American Culture

The Prohibition era in the United States, initiated by the 18th Amendment in 1920 and culminating with its repeal in 1933, marked a significant shift in the nation's cultural and social landscape. This period, known for its nationwide ban on the sale, production, and transportation of alcohol, had profound and far-reaching effects beyond its intended scope of improving public morals and health.

**Societal Impact:** Prohibition radically altered the American social scene. While it aimed to curb alcohol consumption and reduce related societal issues, it paradoxically led to an increase in illegal alcohol production and consumption, giving rise to speakeasies and a surge in organized crime (Behr, 1996). This unintended consequence created a widespread disillusionment with the government's ability to regulate personal behavior, fostering a sense of rebellion against societal norms.

**Cultural Repression and Censorship:** For the literary and artistic community, Prohibition represented an era of increased censorship and moral policing. The restrictive atmosphere stifled creative expression, as artists and writers found themselves constrained by the conservative values that dominated the era (Drowne & Huber, 2004). This repressive environment was particularly challenging for writers, who struggled to voice their perspectives on contemporary issues without facing backlash or censorship.

**Influence on Writers and Artists:** Many American writers and artists perceived Prohibition as an infringement on individual freedoms and a direct attack on the cultural avant-garde. The era's restrictions fueled a sense of discontent and alienation among these creatives, leading them to seek environments where they could express themselves freely (Wagner-Martin, 2007). This cultural suffocation was a significant factor driving the exodus of American writers, including Ernest Hemingway, to more liberal locales like Paris.

**Paris as a Cultural Refuge:** In contrast to the U.S., Paris in the 1920s was a haven for artistic experimentation and expression. The city's liberal atmosphere, coupled with its rich literary and artistic heritage, made it an attractive destination for those disillusioned by the Prohibition's constraints (Jackson, 2005). Paris offered not just physical distance from the repressive American climate, but also intellectual and creative freedom, which was instrumental in shaping the works of the expatriate writers, later known as the Lost Generation.

**The Emergence of the Lost Generation:** This term, coined by Gertrude Stein, came to define the group of American writers who settled in Paris during this time. Their works often reflected the themes of disillusionment, cynicism, and a search for meaning in a post-war world, heavily influenced by their experiences both in America during the Prohibition and in Paris (Stein, 1933).

### 3. The Attraction of Paris for American Writers

During the 1920s, Paris stood in stark contrast to the Prohibition-ridden United States. The city, with its liberal cultural atmosphere and rich artistic heritage, became a beacon for American writers seeking creative freedom and intellectual stimulation.

**Cultural Freedom:** Unlike the restrictive and morally conservative environment of the U.S. during Prohibition, Paris offered a sense of cultural freedom that was highly attractive to writers. The French capital was renowned for its open-mindedness and tolerance of new ideas and lifestyles, making it an ideal environment for artistic experimentation (Cowley, 1996).

**Artistic and Literary Hub:** Paris was at the forefront of modernist movements in art and literature. The city was home to a vibrant community of artists, writers, and intellectuals, including figures like James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ezra Pound. This melting pot of creativity provided American writers with unparalleled opportunities for collaboration and exchange of ideas (Fitch, 1985).

**Escape from Censorship:** The liberal atmosphere of Paris provided a haven from the censorship and moral policing prevalent in the U.S. Writers could explore themes and styles that might have been deemed controversial or unacceptable in America, allowing for greater artistic expression and innovation in their work (Wagner-Martin, 2007).

**Impact of the World War I:** The aftermath of World War I also played a crucial role in drawing American writers to Paris. Many young writers were deeply affected by the war and disillusioned with traditional values. Paris, with its bohemian lifestyle and legacy of artistic rebellion, offered a place where they could process their experiences and express their disillusionment (Higonnet, 2001).

**Affordable Living and Bohemian Lifestyle:** The cost of living in Paris during this time was relatively low, especially compared to major American cities. This affordability, coupled with the city's famous café culture and bohemian lifestyle, was particularly appealing to young, aspiring writers who were often struggling financially (Baldwin, 2004).

**Creative Inspiration:** The beauty and history of Paris itself served as a source of inspiration. The city's architecture, its streets lined with history, the Seine River, and the vibrant cultural life all provided a rich tapestry of experiences that fueled the creativity of these writers (Modiano, 2014).

### 4. Hemingway's Experience in "A Moveable Feast"

"A Moveable Feast" provides a vivid account of Hemingway's life in Paris. This section will analyze how Hemingway's experiences in Paris, as recounted in the book, reflect the broader trends and sentiments of American writers during this era.

### 5. Influence of Paris on "A Farewell to Arms"

Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms" is replete with themes and motifs influenced by his time in Paris. This section will critically analyze these elements, drawing direct connections to his experiences as detailed in "A Moveable Feast".

### 6. Enduring Influence on American Literature

The influx of American writers to Paris during the Prohibition era significantly altered the trajectory of American literature. This period witnessed the rise of the 'Lost Generation,' a term popularized by Gertrude Stein to describe the disillusioned American writers who congregated in Paris during this time. The Lost Generation, including Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and others, produced works that profoundly diverged from the pre-war literary norms, reflecting their disillusionment with the societal values and the devastation wrought by World War I.

**Shift in Literary Themes and Styles:** The experiences of these writers in Paris led to a marked shift in literary themes and styles. Their works often exhibited a sense of disillusionment, a questioning of traditional values, and a deep introspection about the human condition. The narrative style became more straightforward and sparse, as exemplified in Hemingway's own writing, which was heavily influenced by his experiences and the mentorship he received in Paris (Reynolds, 1989).

**Influence on Subsequent Generations:** The impact of the Lost Generation extended beyond their immediate era. These writers influenced subsequent generations of authors, both in America and internationally. Their experimental styles, themes of existential angst, and the exploration of the human psyche became hallmarks of modernist literature, leaving an indelible mark on the literary landscape (Moreland, 2000).

**Cultural and Societal Reflections:** Furthermore, the works of the Lost Generation mirrored the broader societal shifts occurring during the early 20th century. They captured the essence of a world transitioning from the rigid structures of the Victorian era to the more fluid and uncertain landscape of the modern age. This reflection was not only limited to literary works but also extended to other forms of artistic expression, further highlighting the significance of this era in shaping modern culture (Spilka, 1970).

Paris as a Catalyst for Change: The city of Paris itself played a crucial role as a catalyst for these transformations. Its liberal atmosphere, rich cultural heritage, and status as an artistic and literary hub provided the perfect setting for these writers to explore new ideas and express their creativity freely. The city's influence is evident in the themes and styles that emerged from the works of these expatriate writers, marking a definitive shift in the evolution of American literature (Cowley, 1996).

## 7. Conclusion

As the Prohibition era (1920-1933) intensified cultural and social repression in the United States, a significant number of American writers, including Ernest Hemingway, embarked on a journey to Paris. This move was not just a pursuit of personal freedom, but it also heralded a major transformation in American literature. Hemingway's "A Moveable Feast" and "A Farewell to Arms" not only chronicle his personal experiences in Paris but also reflect the broader journey of the "Lost Generation" in their search for cultural freedom and innovation. Paris in the 1920s provided an unparalleled crucible of creativity, offering these writers the liberty to find and express their voices, shaping a literary style and themes that would have a profound impact.

In this unique historical context, the works of Hemingway and his contemporaries began to question traditional values, offering deep introspection into the human condition, and adopted a more direct and succinct narrative style, laying the groundwork for the evolution of modernist literature. These works represented not just personal experiences and sentiments but also mirrored the broader societal transitions of the early 20th century. Paris, as a center of art and literature, acted as a catalyst for this transformation, providing a space for the Lost Generation to freely express and innovate. Its influence extended beyond their individual works, deeply impacting the cultural and literary landscape of both America and the world.

Through exploring the experiences and works of Hemingway and his peers during their time in Paris, we gain not only a deeper understanding of the literary pieces of this period but also an insightful view into the cultural and social dynamics of the era. Their experiences and creations are more than just individual historical narratives; they are an integral chapter in the broader history of American literature.

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