Journalism as Literature

A New Kind of War

News Dispatch by Ernest Hemingway

Meet the Author

Ernest Hemingway 1899–1961

Ernest Hemingway never considered his journalism as important as his fiction, but his journalism was admired anyway, particularly his war correspondence. Before he published his first stories and novels in the 1920s, he reported on European affairs for the Toronto Star. He covered the Greco-Turkish War of 1922, describing 20 miles of Greek refugees trudging through the rain. He also interviewed the fascist Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, calling him the “biggest bluff in Europe.”

Taking Sides in Spain  By the 1930s, Hemingway had become a famous literary figure. He returned to war reporting in 1937 after civil war broke out in Spain, the country that he loved. Hemingway is perhaps most identified with this conflict, in which the right-wing army of General Francisco Franco (the Nationalists) fought against supporters of the left-wing elected government of Spain (the Loyalists or Republicans). This war was widely seen as a struggle against fascism, or dictatorial government. Many world writers, including Hemingway, were sympathetic to the Loyalist side. These writers were greatly disheartened by Franco’s eventual victory in 1939.

Celebrity Journalist  Hemingway covered the war for the North American Newspaper Alliance (NANA), receiving the highest fee ever paid a war correspondent. His NANA dispatches have been called “a new style of reporting that told the public about every facet of the war, especially its effects on the common man, woman, and child.” One of these dispatches, “A New Kind of War,” is considered classic.

Writer or Fighter?  After World War II broke out, Hemingway once again became a war reporter, this time for Collier’s magazine. He memorably described the D-day landing at Normandy, the liberation of Paris, and the Allied movement into Germany in 1944. His command of a French guerrilla band and his storage of weapons in his hotel room led him to be investigated for violating the Geneva Convention, which forbids journalists to take up arms. He was cleared of misconduct and later awarded a Bronze Star for his service as a war correspondent. See also the biography on page 1008, which covers Hemingway’s entire career.
TEXT ANALYSIS: SUBJECTIVITY IN REPORTING

News reporters are trained to be objective, presenting facts without the intrusion of their own personal feelings or opinions. You will notice, however, that Hemingway does not strive for this ideal in his reporting on the Spanish Civil War. His writing is quite subjective, expressing his personal reactions to what he sees. He wants his readers to be in Madrid with him, experiencing exactly what he does. Toward this end he uses both the second-person point of view (“as you lie in bed, you hear the firing in the front line”) and the first-person point of view (“I did not believe a word of it”).

As you read, notice ways in which Hemingway reveals his purpose through personal feelings and opinions. Consider what his subjectivity offers that an objective news report could not.

Review: Dialogue

READING SKILL: ANALYZE DESCRIPTIVE DETAILS

Hemingway makes powerful use of descriptive details. Many of these are sensory details, which appeal to the senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Notice the visual details in the following passage. What can you conclude from them?

On the corner, twenty yards away, is a heap of rubble, smashed cement and thrown up dirt, a single dead man, his torn clothes dusty, and a great hole in the sidewalk from which the gas from a broken main is rising. . . .

Other descriptive details are not sensory, but they still convey important ideas. What might it mean, for example, that the large rooms at the front of Hemingway’s hotel only cost a dollar a day? As you read, jot down descriptive details about

- Madrid and the hotel
- Raven, the wounded soldier Hemingway meets
- Raven’s commander, Jock Cunningham

React to these details and make inferences from them.

What can we learn from WAR?

The Spanish Civil War did not have immediate consequences for most Americans, yet American newspapers thought it was important enough to cover. Consider our own times. Why do newspapers and broadcast networks send reporters to cover fighting in foreign countries? What do these reports usually show or tell an audience about war?

DISCUSS Think about war coverage you have read, seen on television, or heard on the radio. Working in a small group, list types of information you would expect to be included in such reporting—the number of people killed in an attack, for example. After completing your list, discuss insights about war that you have gained from journalists.

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
A New Kind of War

Ernest Hemingway

**BACKGROUND** Hemingway and other journalists covering the Spanish Civil War stayed at the Hotel Florida in Madrid, the Spanish capital, which was under siege by General Franco’s Nationalist forces. Franco was aided by the fascist governments of Italy and Nazi Germany, which sent troops and weapons. The Loyalist forces of the Spanish government were aided by the Soviet Union and volunteer International Brigades from across Europe and the United States. The soldiers that Hemingway profiles in this article were part of the International Brigades.

**NANA Dispatch · APRIL 14, 1937**

MADRID—The window of the hotel is open and, as you lie in bed, you hear the firing in the front line seventeen blocks away. There is a rifle fire all night long. The rifles go tacrong, capong, craang, tacrong, and then a machine gun opens up. It has a bigger calibre and is much louder, rong, cararong, rong, rong. Then there is the incoming boom of a trench mortar shell and a burst of machine gun fire. You lie and listen to it and it is a great thing to be in bed with your feet stretched out gradually warming the cold foot of the bed and not out there in University City or Carabanchel. A man is singing hard-voiced in the street below and three drunks are arguing when you fall asleep.

In the morning, before your call comes from the desk, the roaring burst of a high explosive shell wakes you and you go to the window and look out to see a man, his head down, his coat collar up, sprinting desperately across the paved

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1. University City or Carabanchel (kär’-ə-bän-chel’): scenes of bloody battles in or on the outskirts of Madrid.
square. There is the acrid smell of high explosive you hoped you’d never smell again, and, in a bathrobe and bedroom slippers, you hurry down the marble stairs and almost into a middle-aged woman, wounded in the abdomen, who is being helped into the hotel entrance by two men in blue workmen’s smocks. She has her two hands crossed below her big, old-style Spanish bosom and from between her fingers the blood is spurting in a thin stream. On the corner, twenty yards away, is a heap of rubble, smashed cement and thrown up dirt, a single dead man, his torn clothes dusty, and a great hole in the sidewalk from which the gas from a broken main is rising, looking like a heat mirage in the cold morning air.

“How many dead?” you ask a policeman.

“Only one,” he says. “It went through the sidewalk and burst below. If it would have burst on the solid stone of the road there might have been fifty.”

A policeman covers the top of the trunk, from which the head is missing; they send for someone to repair the gas main and you go in to breakfast. A charwoman, her eyes red, is scrubbing the blood off the marble floor of the corridor. The dead man wasn’t you nor anyone you know and everyone is very hungry in the morning after a cold night and a long day the day before up at the Guadalajara front.

“Did you see him?” asked someone else at breakfast.

“Sure,” you say.

“That’s where we pass a dozen times a day. Right on that corner.” Someone makes a joke about missing teeth and someone else says not to make that joke. And everyone has the feeling that characterizes war. It wasn’t me, see? It wasn’t me.

The Italian dead up on the Guadalajara front weren’t you, although Italian dead, because of where you had spent your boyhood, always seemed, still, like our dead. No. You went to the front early in the morning in a miserable little car with a more miserable little chauffeur who suffered visibly the closer he came to the fighting. But at night, sometimes late, without lights, with the big trucks roaring past, you came on back to sleep in a bed with sheets in a good hotel, paying a dollar a day for the best rooms on the front. The smaller rooms in the back, on the side away from the shelling, were considerably more expensive. After the shell that lit on the sidewalk in front of the hotel you got a beautiful double corner room on that side, twice the size of the one you had had, for less than a dollar. It wasn’t me they killed. See? No. Not me. It wasn’t me anymore.

Then, in a hospital given by the American Friends of Spanish Democracy, located out behind the Morata front along the road to Valencia, they said, “Raven wants to see you.”

“Do I know him?”

“I don’t think so,” they said, “but he wants to see you.”

2. charwoman: a woman employed to clean houses or offices.
3. Guadalajara: a city in Spain to the northeast of Madrid, strategically important because of its nearness to the capital. Battle had raged there through most of March 1937, with the Loyalists finally winning.
4. Italian dead . . . our dead: Italian forces fought on the side of the Nationalists; however, Hemingway had spent a long time in an Italian hospital as a young man during World War I.
5. Morata . . . Valencia: Morata de Tejuña, a small town southeast of Madrid, was heavily damaged at this time. Valencia is on the eastern coast of Spain, about 240 miles southeast of Madrid.
“Where is he?”
“Upstairs.”
In the room upstairs they are giving a blood transfusion to a man with a very gray face who lay on a cot with his arm out, looking away from the gurgling bottle and moaning in a very impersonal way. He moaned mechanically and at regular intervals and it did not seem to be him that made the sound. His lips did not move.
“Where’s Raven?” I asked.
“I’m here,” said Raven.
The voice came from a high mound covered by a shoddy gray blanket. There were two arms crossed on the top of the mound and at one end there was something that had been a face, but now was a yellow scabby area with a wide bandage cross where the eyes had been.
“Who is it?” asked Raven. He didn’t have lips, but he talked pretty well without them and with a pleasant voice.
“Hemingway,” I said. “I came up to see how you were doing.”
“My face was pretty bad,” he said. “It got sort of burned from the grenade, but it’s peeled a couple of times and it’s doing better.”
“It looks swell,” I said. “It’s doing fine.”
I wasn’t looking at it when I spoke.
“How are things in America?” he asked. “What do they think of us over there?”
“Sentiment’s changed a lot,” I said. “They’re beginning to realize the government is going to win this war.”

Members of the International Brigades near Madrid in late 1936
“Do you think so?”
“Sure,” I said.
“I’m awfully glad,” he said. “You know, I wouldn’t mind any of this if I could just watch what was going on. I don’t mind the pain, you know. It never seemed important really. But I was always awfully interested in things and I really wouldn’t mind the pain at all if I could just sort of follow things intelligently. I could even be some use. You know, I didn’t mind the war at all. I did all right in the war. I got hit once before and I was back and rejoined the battalion in two weeks. I couldn’t stand to be away. Then I got this.”

He had put his hand in mine. It was not a worker’s hand. There were no callouses and the nails on the long, spatulate fingers were smooth and rounded.
“How did you get it?” I asked.
“Well, there were some troops that were routed and we went over to sort of reform them and we did and then we had quite a fight with the fascists and we beat them. It was quite a bad fight, you know, but we beat them and then someone threw this grenade at me.”

Holding his hand and hearing him tell it, I did not believe a word of it. What was left of him did not sound like the wreckage of a soldier somehow. I did not know how he had been wounded, but the story did not sound right. It was the sort of way everyone would like to have been wounded. But I wanted him to think I believed it.

“Where did you come from?” I asked.
“From Pittsburgh. I went to the University there.”
“What did you do before you joined up here?”
“I was a social worker,” he said. Then I knew it couldn’t be true and I wondered how he had really been so frightfully wounded and I didn’t care. In the war that I had known, men often lied about the manner of their wounding. Not at first; but later. I’d lied a little myself in my time. Especially late in the evening. But I was glad he thought I believed it, and we talked about books, he wanted to be a writer, and I told him about what happened north of Guadalajara and promised to bring some things from Madrid next time we got out that way. I hoped maybe I could get a radio.

“They tell me Dos Passos and Sinclair Lewis are coming over, too,” he said.
“Yes,” I said. “And when they come I’ll bring them up to see you.”
“Gee, that will be great,” he said. “You don’t know what that will mean to me.”
“I’ll bring them,” I said.
“Will they be here pretty soon?”
“Just as soon as they come I’ll bring them.”
“Good boy, Ernest,” he said. “You don’t mind if I call you Ernest, do you?”
The voice came very clear and gentle from that face that looked like some hill that had been fought over in muddy weather and then baked in the sun.
“Hell, no,” I said. “Please. Listen, old-timer, you’re going to be fine. You’ll be a lot of good, you know. You can talk on the radio.”

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6. spatulate (spăt’ə-lat): having a broad, rounded end.
“Maybe,” he said. “You’ll be back?”
“Sure,” I said. “Absolutely.”

“Goodbye, Ernest,” he said.
“Goodbye,” I told him.

Downstairs they told me he’d lost both eyes as well as his face and was also badly wounded all through the legs and in the feet.

“He’s lost some toes, too,” the doctor said, “but he doesn’t know that.”
“I wonder if he’ll ever know it.”
“Oh, sure he will,” the doctor said. “He’s going to get well.”
And it still isn’t you that gets hit but it is your countryman now. Your countryman from Pennsylvania, where once we fought at Gettysburg.

Then, walking along the road, with his left arm in an airplane splint, walking with the gamecock walk of the professional British soldier that neither ten years of militant party work nor the projecting metal wings of the splint could destroy, I met Raven’s commanding officer, Jock Cunningham, who had three fresh rifle wounds through his upper left arm (I looked at them, one was septic8) and another rifle bullet under his shoulder blade that had entered his left chest, passed through, and lodged there. He told me, in military terms, the history of the attempt to rally retiring troops on his battalion’s right flank, of his bombing raid down a trench which was held at one end by the fascists and at the other end by the government troops, of the taking of this trench and, with six men and a Lewis gun,9 cutting off a group of some eighty fascists from their own lines, and of the final desperate defense of their impossible position his six men put up until the government troops came up and, attacking, straightened out the line again. He told it clearly, completely convincingly, and with a strong Glasgow10 accent. He had deep, piercing eyes sheltered like an eagle’s, and, hearing him talk, you could tell the sort of soldier he was. For what he had done he would have had a V.C.11 in the last war. In this war there are no decorations. Wounds are the only decorations and they do not award wound stripes.

“Raven was in the same show,” he said. “I didn’t know he’d been hit. Ay, he’s a good mon. He got his after I got mine. The fascists we’d cut off were very good troops. They never fired a useless shot when we were in that bad spot. They waited in the dark there until they had us located and then opened with volley fire. That’s how I got four in the same place.”

We talked for a while and he told me many things. They were all important, but nothing was as important as what Jay Raven, the social worker from Pittsburgh with no military training, had told me was true. This is a strange new kind of war where you learn just as much as you are able to believe.

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8. septic: infected with bacteria.
11. V.C.: the Victoria Cross, an award for valor “in the face of the enemy,” given by Great Britain.
Comprehension

1. Recall What happens in front of Hemingway’s hotel before breakfast?
2. Recall Who is Raven, and what are his injuries?
3. Clarify What is the truth about how Raven was wounded?

Text Analysis

4. Analyze Descriptive Details Look back at the descriptive details you noted and circle the ones you found most vivid or affecting. What do you infer from any of these details that Hemingway doesn’t tell you outright?

5. Analyze Subjectivity in Reporting Hemingway’s article differs greatly from an objective news report. How does each of the following highly personal passages contribute to the writer’s tone and purpose?
   - his recurrent thought “It wasn’t me” (lines 35 and 46)
   - his reaction to the sight of Raven and to the story Raven tells (lines 61–106)
   - his description of Jock Cunningham (lines 129–146)
   - his belief about the most important thing he was told (lines 152–155)

6. Examine Dialogue A written news report often contains quotations from sources, but rarely does it contain dialogue between two people. Why might Hemingway have chosen to include dialogue in his dispatch?

7. Interpret Title What makes this conflict “a new kind of war”? Note what seems to surprise Hemingway about it.

8. Synthesize Themes The Spanish Civil War ended more than 65 years ago. What value is there in reading Hemingway’s article today? What insights about war does it provide?

9. Compare Texts What similarities in style and theme do you see in “A New Kind of War” and “In Another Country,” the Hemingway short story on page 1010?

Text Criticism

10. Critical Interpretations When the New York University journalism department compiled its list of the 100 best works of 20th-century American journalism, Hemingway’s Spanish Civil War reporting was ranked 33rd. Do you agree that it should be esteemed so highly? Support your answer.

What can we learn from WAR?

Hemingway was skeptical of Raven’s story when he first heard it. Do you think he changed his mind after hearing the story told by Jock Cunningham? How do you determine the truth when you watch a news report about war? Explain.
Language

◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Choose Effective Point of View

Review the Grammar and Style note on page 1098. At the beginning of his dispatch, Hemingway uses the second-person pronoun you to report his own experiences, where you would normally expect him to write in the first person. This has the effect of placing the reader (“you”) at the point of the action. It also temporarily removes the narrator himself, creating a sense of detachment.

After the shell that lit on the sidewalk in front of the hotel you got a beautiful double corner room on that side, twice the size of the one you had had, for less than a dollar. (lines 43–45)

Hemingway does periodically revert to the first person, as in the continuation of the preceding passage:

It wasn’t me they killed. See? No. Not me. It wasn’t me anymore. (lines 45–46)

With this shifting point of view, Hemingway seems to step in and out of the narrative. The resulting detachment allows the reader to encounter the experience of war without added comment or sentiment.

PRACTICE Rewrite the following passage, inserting either first- or second-person pronouns to change the sense of immediacy or detachment.

Hundreds of runners and spectators gather in Jonquil Park at dawn on Mother’s Day. The air is crisp and the grass damp. The predominant color in the crowd is pink: pink ribbons, pink caps, pink shirts. Many people wear signs reading “In memory of . . .” There is an electric air of expectancy until the horn blasts. The runners are off!

READING-WRITING CONNECTION

Expand your understanding of “A New Kind of War” by responding to this prompt. Then, use the revising tips to improve your report.

WRITING PROMPT WRITE A SUBJECTIVE REPORT In his Spanish Civil War dispatches, Hemingway was able to report events in such a way that readers felt they were right there with him. Go to a newsworthy event or recall one that you attended—a concert, a charity race, or a memorial service, for example. Write a one-page report that makes your readers seem to experience your thoughts and sensations during the event. Include dialogue, as Hemingway does, if it seems appropriate.

REVISING TIPS

• Clearly identify the event and its participants.
• Include sensory details to describe the setting.
• Include personal reactions, and use an effective point of view.