El fin del mundo: Uncharted Territory of Ernest Hemingway’s Fiction

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I

The novella El fin del mundo (1957) by Leonardo Díaz has increasingly received critical attention since its rediscovery in the estate of James Baldwin in 1987. The book was published in Argentina as part of the pocketbook series Colección Piragua by the publishing houses Editorial Sudamericana and Emecé, and distributed in the United States, Latin America, and Europe in 1958 until the series was discontinued in the early 1960s.1 It was in Paris — in Sylvia Beach’s famous bookstore, Shakespeare and Company — that Baldwin first encountered the novella. This much is detailed in a footnote in Jacqueline Martin’s poignant 2004 biography of Baldwin, where she discloses the varied contents of Baldwin’s personal papers and books at the time of his death — the first academic reference to Díaz in over thirty

years. While Martin elaborates on many of the texts found in his library, she does not provide any additional information on *El fin del mundo*.

This is of no surprise, since very little information on the novella exists, and even its origin has long been a mystery. I am not the first to note that Leonardo Díaz is an elusive figure; after conducting extensive research in the records of Sudamericana and Emecé, critic Ren Ishikawa was unable to discover any details about Díaz, though he searched broadly for biographical profiles and written correspondence between him and his publishers. I believed my own inquiries into the archives to be equally fruitless, since all I was able to recover was a solitary file bearing Diaz’s name; in it was a typed draft of the novella — missing seventeen pages present in the version published in the Colección Piragua — and three hand-drawn maps of Argentina. Further inquiries into the public records in Argentina also proved fruitless, since I had only the writer’s name and the title of his work, but no date or place of birth with which to distinguish him from the thousands sharing his name.

It is likely that the great interest in the figure of Leonardo Díaz originates from the unfathomable absence of any discernible authorial presence, whether in the physical copy of the book or elsewhere. The edition of *El fin del mundo* published in the Colección Piragua — the only edition of the novel ever to have been published — has recorded on its back cover only the title and author of the work, followed by a short review of the novel composed by the pocketbook series’s editor-in-chief, Francisco Porrúa:

Mucho se pudiera decir de esta novela, hasta en más páginas de las que el librito tiene. Basta decir que esta obra habla por sí misma. En ella el autor ha dejado una huella muy grande

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en la imaginaria cultural de nuestro país. Es mi gran placer compartir esta obra con nuestros leyentes, ambos aquí y en todo el mundo.

[Much could be said of this novel, perhaps even in more pages than compose the text. It suffices to say that this novel speaks for itself. In it the author has left a deep impression on the cultural imaginary of our country. It is my great pleasure to share this work with our readers, both here and abroad.]⁴

In its six years of circulation, *El fin del mundo* was distributed internationally in thirty-two countries, selling especially well in Argentina and Chile and even in non-Spanish speaking nations like Brazil, France, and England—in spite of the fact that the novel has never been officially translated into any other language.⁵ Nevertheless, *El fin del mundo* was for the Colección Piragua a successful venture, and might have continued to sell well if the series had not been discontinued. Yet it was by no means considered the most important book of its generation; Feliciano Costa remarks that the “very fact that a novella could have been lost and rediscovered in the span of twenty years reflects well on neither the book nor on the memory of its reader.”⁶ A fair assessment of the novella’s popular reach, perhaps, but an altogether impoverished understanding of its critical reception. Indeed, the novella was not entertained as a text of literary importance until Jacqueline Martin cited it in her biography *The Knowledge the Mind and Heart Refuse: On the Life of James Baldwin* as one of the many books in the author’s possession at the time of his death. Scholars invested in unraveling the discrete influences on Baldwin’s writing at the time of the biography’s publication immediately remarked upon the little cited novella—a particularly

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⁴ All translations appearing here have been completed by the author of the article.


interesting inclusion because it was the only work in Baldwin’s personal library written in Spanish, a language Baldwin is not known to have spoken. It was the proximity to this American writer that formally introduced El fin del mundo to the academic, for no formal study of the novella had been conducted before 2004. But in the years since much work has been done: Edith Williams’s essays on temporality and love in Diaz’s text are revelatory and beautiful; and Matthew Duhamel’s upcoming book on the geography of the archipelago and the indigenous body in El fin del mundo will continue to enrich the body of scholarship on the novella.

I nevertheless remain entranced by the figure of Leonardo Diaz, that elusive author of whom nothing is recorded in the archives of his only publishers. Over the course of several years I attempted to gain access to Baldwin’s copy of the novel, hoping to find within it some indication of the author’s origin, or at the very least the relationship between Baldwin and this obscure novella marked in the margin of the text. Aware that Baldwin found the novella in Shakespeare & Company, I wondered whether Baldwin’s relationship with Sylvia Beach had brought him into proximity with Diaz, as it did Scott Fitzgerald, Pablo Picasso, and James Joyce. But up until this point, I have been denied access to the novel, which remains along with the rest of Baldwin’s personal effects restricted by his estate. Ultimately, however, my search for the imponderable Leonardo Díaz took an unanticipated turn when, immersed in a project entirely unrelated to either Baldwin or El fin del mundo, I began to entertain the possibility that Leonardo Díaz has not been entirely lost.

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8 While in the process of writing her biography on Baldwin, Jacqueline Martin was similarly barred from accessing Baldwin’s personal library and was only able to reproduce a list of the books contained within it due to the generosity of an employee of the Baldwin estate who recorded the names of the texts and their authors so that they might be included in the biography. See Martin, The Knowledge the Mind and Heart Refuse, 506.
to history, but that he is merely remembered under a different name.

II

It is worth noting that in 1956, the year before the novella was published, Ernest Hemingway spent several months in Cabo Blanco, Peru, in order to film part of *The Old Man and the Sea*. Onboard his yacht, the *Miss Texas*, Hemingway and his wife Mary Welsh traveled up and down the Pacific coast, ultimately arriving at Tierra del Fuego in Argentina— the southernmost point of South America and the setting of *El fin del mundo*.9 I had not initially chosen to focus my project on the Hemingwayan presence in Peru and Argentina but was instead pursuing a broader analysis of Cabo Blanco in the 1950s: a small fishing village that in addition to gaining notoriety for its 1,000-pound black marlin was frequented by the likes of Marilyn Monroe, John Wayne, and Paul Newman but has in the decades since fallen into ruin.10 The manuscript for this project remains yet unfinished, not merely because of the extensive research required to complete a work so rich with different personalities but due in large part to my own particularized interest in Hemingway’s role in Latin America.

Much has been written — both by biographers and Hemingway himself — of the writer’s time spent abroad in Europe, Asia, and Africa. *The Sun Also Rises*, which has been called Hemingway’s most autobiographical novel, takes as its setting both France and Spain; and *A Farewell to Arms* fictionalizes Hemingway’s own experiences serving in the Italian campaigns of the first World War. Furthermore, Hemingway spent time in Hong Kong, China, and Burma when Martha Gellhorn — a gifted war correspondent and the writer’s third wife — was sent there on

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assignment for Collier’s magazine, and was later accompanied by his fourth wife Mary Welsh on safari through the Belgian Congo, Rwanda, and Kenya. Hemingway’s experiences while on safari provided him with the inspiration and material that filled the pages of his novel Green Hills of Africa and the short stories The Snows of Kilimanjaro and The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber. His works were deeply marked by his own experiences — the running of the bulls in Pamplona, battle in Europe during the Great War, and the hunting of big game in Africa. It appeared more than reasonable to me that a writer who so frequently transcribed his own experiences into fiction should have written something, anything, about his experiences in Peru and Argentina in the 1950s.

It was this hypothesis that drove me to seek out any texts written by Hemingway during the time spent in Peru, in Argentina and beyond, up to the time of his death in 1961. Michael Reynolds recounts in his biography of the writer that from February to June of 1955 — the year preceding his trip to Cabo Blanco — Hemingway was working prolifically on a second African novel that was promptly put on hold at the time his presence was required on the set of The Old Man and the Sea. It was not until the next summer that, having returned to Cuba, Hemingway reportedly began to write again, composing six short stories about his experiences in World War II “to resharpen his blunted pen” before continuing work on the African novel.11 Then in August of the same year, Hemingway took his wife Mary to New York City, where the couple saw nobody and were heard only by phone from Sylvia Beach,12 who was in town negotiating publishing terms for her memoirs.13 Nothing points to an additional text written by Hemingway during those months spent

11 Reynolds, Hemingway, 297.
12 Ibid., 298.
in Cabo Blanco except for one note scribbled by Mary Welsh to Peter Viertel — who adapted the screenplay for *The Old Man and the Sea* — requesting that a Spanish dictionary be brought to their accommodations in Peru, since “Papa” writing, can’t remember how to spell a word he heard today. Needs Spanish dictionary.” No other suggestion appears in either the letters of Mary Welsh, the person most often responsible for typing the novels and short stories handwritten by Hemingway or in Peter Viertel’s memoir *Dangerous Friends.* But this short scribbled note does indicate that Hemingway was writing something related to neither his time in Europe during the World Wars nor his time on safari in Africa.

Surely, this is a tenuous detail on which to base a theory that there has been for several decades now a Hemingway novella lost to time and the best scholars of the writer’s work. It certainly would not have been enough for me to pursue this project, if it had not been for a reference I then found in the archives of Sudamericana and Emecé to an untitled project by Ernest Hemingway to be published in the Colección Piragua in June of 1957. It would not have been absolutely unthinkable that a novel by a prominent American writer should be published through either of those houses. In 1950, Emecé published a translation of William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom* by Beatriz Florencia Nelson and another of his works, *Knight’s Gambit,* by Lucrecia Moreno de Sáenz in 1951 as part of the Colección Piragua. And indeed, Editorial Sudamericana would in 1966 and 1967, respectively, publish Julio Cortázar’s novel *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*) and Gabriel García Márquez’s *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*). Normally, exchanges concerning the publication of a novel — particularly one written by an American author who

14 “Papa” was the nickname affectionately given to Hemingway by many who knew him, not merely his wives and children.
just three years earlier had been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature—would have been well documented, almost certainly with legal involvement to ensure the protection of the writer and of the publishing houses. But within the archives of both Emecé and Editorial Sudamericana, Hemingway’s name appears but once, and only in the letter of a copyeditor named Moises Berrocal to a colleague named Xiomara Perez,\(^\text{18}\) which reads thus:

Mirá, Mara, estoy trabajando en esta novela del Americano que no se decide de donde es, si no español entonces africano o talvez [sic] cubano, pero ahora se cree argentino? Necesito el quinto capítulo de la novela porque si no lo termino ahora me cuelga el jefe, asique mandámelo [sic] ahora, eh? Todo hay que hacerlo más rápido para el Hemingway.\(^\text{19}\)

[Look, Mara, I’m working on this novel by the American who can't decide where he’s from, if he’s not Spanish then he’s African or maybe Cuban, but now he thinks himself Peruvian? I need the fifth chapter of the novel because if I don’t finish it soon the boss will kill me, so send it to me now, okay? We have to do everything faster for Hemingway.]

None of this evidence could in isolation convince me of the Hemingwayan authorship of El fin del mundo; but in considering the details systematically I am led to believe that this could in fact be the last novel written and published by Ernest Hemingway. Working under the assumption that Hemingway is the novella’s true author, I suggest that for the recent Nobel laureate, to write and publish under a *nom de plume* and in a language other than his native tongue was no caprice, but rather an attempt towards expression outside of the increasingly unman-

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18 After cross referencing all the employees at both Emecé and Sudamericana, I was only able to find one person whose name could have reasonably matched with the nickname, Mara, that appears in the text of the letter.

19 From the archives of Sudamericana and Emecé.
ageable demands on one of the American literary masters of the twentieth century.

III

In his Nobel lecture, Ernest Hemingway wrote that

For a true writer each book should be a new beginning where he tries again for something that is beyond attainment. He should always try for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed. Then sometimes, with great luck, he will succeed. [...] It is because we have had such great writers in the past that a writer is driven far out past where he can go, out to where no one can help him.  

Michael Reynolds suggests that the impetus for this speech was at least in part a response to a complaint made previously by William Faulkner that Hemingway “never took chances by attempting the impossible.”  

Faulkner, Reynolds goes on to say, was not alone in assuming that the simplicity of Hemingway’s novels and short stories reflected the effortlessness of their construction or that each text was merely a reiteration of the same themes without any perceivable evolution. This approach to his writing was a constant source of frustration for Hemingway, who continually endeavored to rework the genres within which he produced. The recognition afforded him by the Nobel Prize in Literature, furthermore, was for the writer a double-edged sword. Hans-Peter Rodenberg indicates that Hemingway “felt offended by the justification of the award, which spoke of a triumph of ‘a manly love of danger and adventure’ over his early ‘brutal, cynical and callous period.’” It appeared to him that acceptance of the award was essentially submission to a critical

21 Reynolds, Hemingway, 283.
22 Ibid., 283–84.
atmosphere that would devour him—one that expected that “each new book by him had to surpass the past ones.” Overwhelmed by the prospect of meeting public expectations with his next work, Hemingway began to work a fictitious diary about his second safari to Africa but did not complete it with the intention of immediate publication. Rather, he set the manuscript aside with instructions that it be published in 1998 (in all likelihood, posthumously) to mark his hundredth birthday. The fictional journal, he decided, would be titled *True at First Light: A Fictional Memoir.* This act of deferral, likely chosen for a number of reasons including Hemingway’s own anxieties about the diary’s reception, has for many of my contemporaries awoken and encouraged optimism in the belief that there is another Hemingway text, “[a]nother manuscript, a trunk, a letter, something [to] be found.” I believe that if there is one to be found, it is *El fin del mundo,* written under the name Leonardo Díaz and published clandestinely in South America.

It would not have been impossible for Hemingway to compose an entire novella in Spanish. In a letter to Arthur Mizener composed in June of 1950, Hemingway explained that he can “speak and read French but not write it; nor Italian, nor German. But can write Spanish. English sometimes too, maybe.” And in another letter to Adriana Ivancich written in the same month, he explains that

> Here in the house, we talk Spanish always. Mary corrects my grammar altho [sic] she had never heard of the language until 1945 and cannot follow it if it gets fast, or rough, or takes her out of her depth. It is the roughest language that there is and we can say anything in front of her because she knows

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24 Ibid., 182.
nothing of the dirty part or old gallows language. But if she
does understand she will correct the grammar.27

René Villarreal, an employee of Hemingway’s for fifteen years
at the Finca in Cuba, has confirmed in interviews that “Papa
spoke primarily in Spanish to the Finca staff” and had new-
papers brought in daily from Havana in both Spanish and Eng-
lish so that he could stay informed via The New York Times and
the Cuban editorial El País.28 But even before moving to Cuba
in 1946, Hemingway was already deeply immersed in the lan-
guage, having visited Spain frequently in the preceding years.
Many scholars have noted how the Spanish spoken by Hem-
ingway influenced or even infiltrated his novel For Whom the
Bell Tolls. Edward Fenimore argues that the although this novel
was written in English, there is throughout “the tacit assump-
tion that it is Spanish.”29 Milton Azevedo, furthermore, observes
that “Hemingway manipulates English and Spanish syntax and
vocabulary to convey the impression that the characters are
speaking Spanish”30 and even includes phrases in the text that
continually reemphasize the language in which communication
between the characters is occurring: the narrator remarks at one
point in the novel that Anselmo “spoke rapidly and furiously in
a dialect that Robert Jordan could just follow. It was like reading
Quevedo. Anselmo was speaking old Castilian”; and elsewhere
in the text, “it sounded wonderful in Spanish.”31 Additionally,

27 Ibid., 704.
28 René Villarreal and Raúl Villarreal, Hemingway’s Cuban Son: Reflections on
the Writer by His Longtime Majordomo (Kent: Kent State University Press,
2009), 55.
29 Edward Fenimore, “English and Spanish in For Whom the Bell Tolls,” in Er-
nest Hemingway: The Man and His Work, ed. John K.M. McCaffery (Cleve-
30 Milton M. Azevedo “Shadows of a Literary Dialect: For Whom the Bell
Tolls in Five Romance Languages,” The Hemingway Review 20, no. 1 (2000):
31 Ernest Hemingway, For Whom the Bell Tolls (London: Arrow Books, 2004),
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32 Ibid., 96.
Hemingway incorporated Spanish words and phrases throughout the novel, relying heavily on context to communicate meaning wherever it would otherwise have remained unclear—or even, as is the case with many of the expletives incorporated into the text, neglecting to translate them into English.\textsuperscript{33} But perhaps the greatest argument for the Hemingwayan authorship of \textit{El fin del mundo} proceeds from a reading of the novel, in which one may see the style of the author typified. In \textit{El fin del mundo} one notes comparably simple syntax as well as an “intense awareness of the world of the senses” most frequently explored in the detailed depictions of the body and the physical world it resides in.\textsuperscript{34} This is especially important given the specificity of the location where the novel is set in light of Hemingway’s own experiences in Peru and Argentina. The title \textit{El fin del mundo}, which might be translated \textit{At World’s End} or \textit{The End of the World}, refers to Tierra del Fuego, the Land of Fire—the archipelago at the southernmost extreme of the American continent. Its name originates with the fires built by the indigenous Selk’nam people upon the arrival of the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan in 1520. But, as journalist Laura Mallonee has explained, it is “better known for spectacular scenery and ceaseless wind” that blows without respite and even changes the shape of growing trees into unusual shapes.\textsuperscript{35} Tierra del Fuego is considered one of the best locations in the world for fishing trout and salmon and remains one of the most impressive geographical sites in the world, boasting peat bogs, lenga forests, and snowy mountain ranges. Ultimately, the appellation of this land as “the end of the world” serves as a beautifully posed metaphor for the conflict between Santiago and his wife Felicitas as they find themselves on holiday in the archipelago, attempting to restore the love that has slowly dissolved from their marriage.

\textsuperscript{35} Laura Mallonee, “Journey to Tierra del Fuego, the End of the Modern World,” \textit{Wired}, April 12, 2017.
Because Hemingway’s habit of working his life into his fiction has been well documented, it is perhaps quite a pedestrian undertaking to attempt to demonstrate the manner in which the relationship between Santiago and Felicitas mirrors that of Hemingway and Mary, particularly during their time at sea in Peru and Argentina. But at that point Hemingway and his wife were in fact very disconnected; in a note to her husband, Mary pleaded with him, asking if it “[h]as ever occurred to you how lonely a woman of yours can get. Wake up alone, breakfast alone, garden alone, swim alone, sup alone… It may be too much to expect that any of this will cause you to change your mind in thinking of you versus The Other,” signing the message “M. who feels her life slipping away in a welter of chaos.”

And indeed, Felicitas does find herself an isolated figure, especially with regards to her marriage; her husband — a successful businessman and entrepreneur — has drifted from Felicitas, frequently engaging in flirtations with younger women and avoiding physical intimacy with his wife. In one particularly moving scene, Felicitas stands alone outside the house in which they are staying as she waits for her husband to return:

El sol iba bajando, y ya quedaría sola. Tuviera de compañía solamente el viento que soplaba sin parar, y a la distancia la luna solitaria como ella. Las estrellas salían una por una y todavía ella permanecía afuera, esperando. Sentada en la rama de un árbol bifurcado veía el horizonte vacío.

[The sun was setting, and she would soon remain alone. She would have for company only the wind that blew without ending, and at a distance the moon, lonely like her. The stars came out one by one and still she stayed outside, waiting. Sitting on the branch of a bifurcated tree she watched the empty horizon.]

36 Quoted in Reynolds, Hemingway, 294.
Speaking about Hemingway’s novels, Robert Penn Warren has suggested that the “beauty of the physical world is a background for the human predicament, and the very relishing of the beauty is merely a kind of desperate and momentary compensation possible in the midst of the predicament.” This scene in *El fin del mundo* achieves exactly that: Felicitas finds herself alone, the world as she knows it crumbling before her as her husband seeks to ease his own solitude with another woman. It is a painful moment for the reader, who knows what Felicitas does not and must nevertheless wait in vigil with her in the moonlight.

There are many such moments in *El fin del mundo* that, if cited, could testify to the Hemingwayan authorship of the novella. But to conclude it is perhaps more efficacious to consider why Hemingway, a Nobel laureate and celebrity of international renown, would choose to write a work such as this under a different name to be published quietly in South America. I believe that the key is in his Nobel address, in which he emphasizes that each new book should be for its writer a “new beginning where he tries again for something that is beyond attainment.” To write a novella in Spanish would certainly have challenged Hemingway’s intellectual and creative abilities; that he might have been able to compose a text as beautiful and moving as *El fin del mundo* in a language other than his native tongue would be a testament not only to his genius, but also to his diligence and perseverance. If so, then why publish the novella under a different name as part of a pocketbook series in South America when it could have been published in any major publishing house? By 1957, the year of the novella’s publication, Hemingway had long been overwhelmed by the viciousness of fellow writers and literary critics, and yet he did not want to stop writing. Michael Reynolds reports that when he was asked if he would ever run out of ideas for fiction, Hemingway replied, “I don’t see how I can quit.” It would appear that until the very end of his life, fiction remained essential to his existence, but in order to continue

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39 Quoted in Reynolds, *Hemingway*, 287.
expanding his artistic boundaries without the weight of critical reception, another means of publication would be necessary. How indeed Hemingway would have arranged the details with Editorial Sudamericana and Emecé — especially with regards to the confidentiality of his identity — I cannot say. But although I will not be able to say this with absolute certainty until I can hold James Baldwin’s copy of *El fin del mundo* in my own hands, I suspect that the famous bookstore owner Sylvia Beach might have had a hand in the process, facilitating the publication and even carrying the series at Shakespeare and Company, where a young Baldwin would have picked it up and taken it home.
Bibliography


