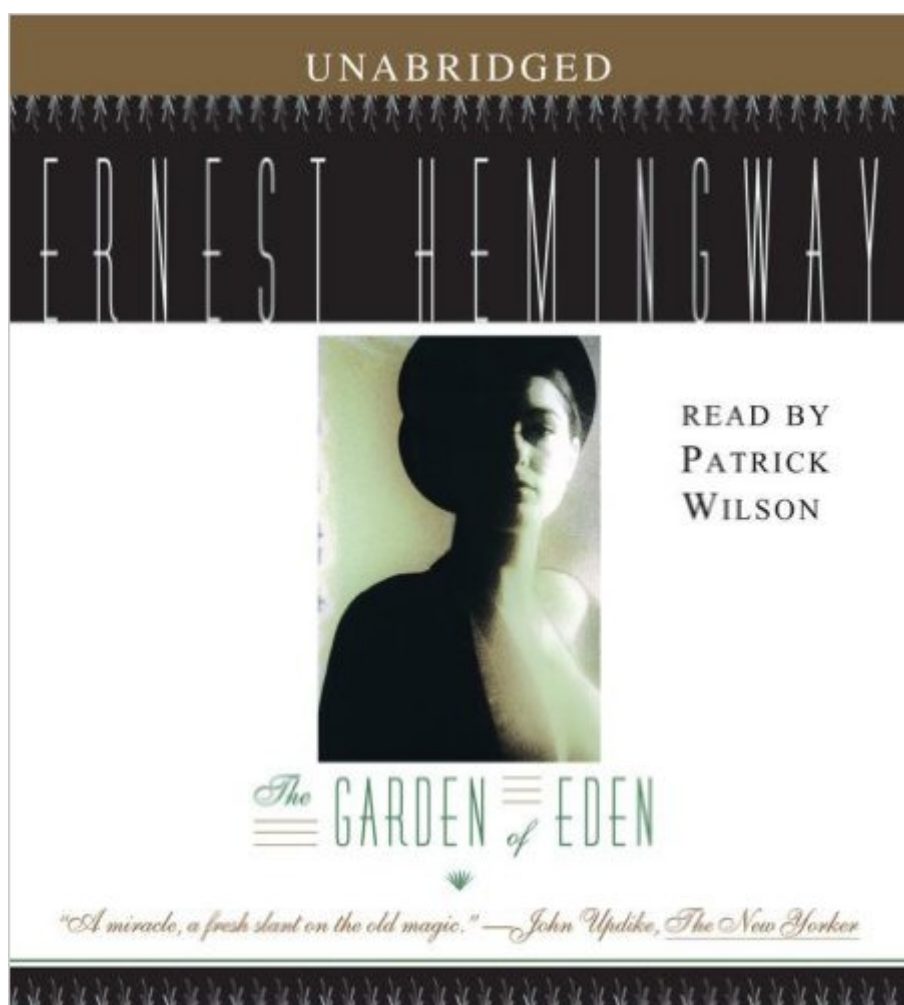


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The Garden Of Eden



Synopsis

A sensational bestseller when it appeared in 1986, *The Garden of Eden* is the uncompleted final novel of Ernest Hemingway, which he worked on intermittently from 1946 until his death in 1961. Set on the Côte d'Azur in the 1920s, it is the story of a young American writer, David Bourne, his glamorous wife, Catherine, and the dangerous, erotic game they play when they fall in love with the same woman.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I became a writer largely out of love and admiration for Ernest Hemingway. *Old Man and the Sea* is his best in my opinion, but this one is my favorite. So much of Hemingway's work is loosely autobiographical, so many protagonists modeled after himself. But in his earlier works, when he gets to the deepest parts of these men, he pulls back, or shies away with emotional distance or some other kind of evasion. There is no such evasion in *The Garden of Eden*. This book is his most vulnerable, tender and humbling portrait of so many of the central struggles of his life. It is difficult to separate Hemingway the man from Hemingway the writer and for that matter Hemingway the character in his own writing. He encouraged them to be confused in his own way during his life and was a major contributor to the blossoming of our current culture of celebrity obsession. So it's not invalid in my opinion to read his work as part of the greater story of his life and find meaning in it from that perspective. In this book, Hemingway finally takes on some of the painful issues of his life. There's a great deal of sexual intrigue in *The Garden of Eden*, specifically about gender and identity. David and Catherine, the two main characters, do some fascinating and disturbing play with

their genders and their relationship with each other as a man and a woman. A lot of people have theorized that one of the contributing factors to Hemingway's suicide had to do with his conflicted sexuality which he hid for most of his life. As a child he was raised as a girl until the age of four or five by his mother who had wanted a daughter. Aside from that, there was a history of cross dressing in his family, which also tragically played out in a subsequent generation with Hemingway's son Gregory AKA Gloria.

Hemingway, at his best, was a master of the short story form and a reasonably good, though not outstanding, novelist. At his death he left a number of unfinished manuscripts, material in various stages of development that he was working on and, in some cases, struggling with. Knowing this, I hesitated to pick this book up for a long time, not wanting to read the master's own discards and figuring he knew what was good enough for publication and what was not and that what he left, at his death, was manifestly not. Reading *ISLANDS IN THE STREAM* some years back, I felt confirmed in this belief for that was a clumsy and self-absorbed effort and I think he must have known that. Later, I had a similar experience when I tried *TRUE AT FIRST LIGHT*, the most recent posthumous addition to his opus. More recently, however, I was bored for lack of fresh reading material and so picked up *THE GARDEN OF EDEN* to read on a plane trip. Although this one was unfinished at his death and ends in such a fashion as to drive that sad point home, it is nevertheless outstanding Hemingway. Aside from a few lapses here and there and the usual Hemingway tendency toward an almost juvenile self-absorption, this one positively hums with the power of the old Hemingway prose. As sharp and subtle as his best short fiction and as fresh and dynamic as his best novel, *THE SUN ALSO RISES*, this book unfolds, in crisply vivid detail, the struggle of a youthful writer to hang onto his sense of self-worth and devotion to his work in the face of his passionate love for a difficult and spoiled woman. Yet it's plain why Hemingway may have agonized over this one and held it back from publication, for the man it reveals is not the public persona he cultivated for most of his life.

This is a very strange novel that I found oddly mesmerising. I also have to admit, that because the novel was published posthumously and appears to have been based on Hemmingway's most intimate personal experiences, I felt a little uncomfortable reading it - as if I were a voyeur. *Garden of Eden* is about the complex dysfunctional relationship that develops between a young married couple and a second woman, whom they both fall in love with. It is Catherine, the young bride, who manipulates the other two players in this strange romantic triangle. David, presumably Ernest's alter

ego in this novel, is portrayed as pathetically passive, unable to stand up to Catherine and her destructive obsessions and jealousies. The dynamics of this relationship are sophisticated, although much of the dialogue and routines of the threesome seem banal. The Garden of Eden is interesting also; in that it gives the reader some insight into Hemmingway's writing process. David a young writer has published two successful novels and is labouring on a collection of stories about his childhood in Africa. It is David's writing, and the fact that his lover is able to share the experience with him, that Catherine is most jealous of. Comparisons to *The Sun Also Rises* are inevitable. Catherine, like Brett in *The Sun Also Rises*, is the self-destructive heart of *Garden of Eden*. Both novels feature characters whose lives seem trite and empty, filled with the excess of drink and food. And both novels feature a young writer, struggling to find his literary voice while drawn to a narcissistic beauty.

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