

## I

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## Introduction: Hemingway and Fame

A full generation after his death Ernest Hemingway remains one of the most famous American writers. Even those who have never read a word he has written, in school or college or on their own, are aware of his presence in the world of celebrity – a rugged macho figure called Papa with a signature white beard. The outpouring of recognition and praise that followed his suicide on the morning of July 2, 1961, nearly obliterated the boundaries of space and time. Hemingway's passing was memorialized by the Kremlin and the White House, in the Vatican and the bullrings of Spain. "It is almost," the *Louisville Courier-Journal* editorialized, "as though the Twentieth Century itself has come to a sudden, violent, and premature end" (Raeburn 168). Manifestly, at the time of his death he had become to the general public something more – or less – than a writer of stories and novels. He had become a legendary figure, and seems fated to remain one. Critics and college professors lament this state of affairs. The spurious anecdotes and half-baked biographies and Key West contests for Hemingway look-alikes only serve to draw attention away from his work, they assert, so that the great unwashed public will not take him seriously. This is a danger, all right, the same danger that faced the other most celebrated of American writers, Mark Twain. Twain wore a white suit and a mustache, took his comedy act on the road, and otherwise made himself so conspicuous as to be widely thought of in his own time as a mere entertainer. Twain has survived his celebrity, as will Hemingway, and for the same reason: They wrote some wonderful books. But both writers have been admitted to the canon *despite* the off-putting aroma of publicity that surrounds them. So certain questions impose themselves. Why was Hemingway, like Twain, inclined to present himself – or some versions of himself – to public view? Knowing the risks, as he certainly did, why did he take the chance? Was there something in the water he drank or the air he breathed growing up in Oak Park, Illinois, which drove him to seek not only accomplishment but fame?

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Like most middle-class American boys at the turn of the century, young Ernest Hemingway was brought up on the tales of Horatio Alger, in which worthy, healthy-minded, and hard-working lads rapidly ascended the ladder of success. Atop that ladder lay riches and recognition, and in Alger's unvarying formulation the message was clear that these rewards were within the reach of every youth willing to apply himself. In these books written to edify and instruct American boys, success was the goal to strive for, and success was to be measured by rising above the station one was born into, or, to put it more baldly, by doing better than one's father. If your father was a butcher, you should own the meat market; if he sold shoes, you should manufacture them. The trouble was that this process of outdoing one's forebear, generation after generation, was simply impossible. Only in a society of consistently rising expectations, like that of nineteenth-century America, could it have taken hold as an ideal to be sought, and only in a society determined to cling to outmoded values could it have continued to exert its power in the following century. In France, for example, the fundamental dignity of remaining within one's native station found expression in derogatory terms for those who strained to rise to a higher position. Consider how powerfully parvenu and nouveau riche contrast with the American "self-made man" (Cawelti 2).

The usual standard of measuring success in America was, of course, the accumulation of money. But you had to *make* the money; it was not enough to inherit it or to have it descend from the skies. And others had to take notice – particularly in the other-directed society of the twentieth century, recognition was an essential ingredient in the stewpot of success. (No wonder that the culture descended to ostentatious displays of wealth, or in the parlance of Marx and Veblen, to commodity fetishism and conspicuous consumption.) For a writer or an artist, in fact, external recognition in quantity – fame, to give it a title – could take the place of money, or nearly so.<sup>1</sup> Hemingway's own case is interesting in this respect. As an apprentice writer in Paris, in the mid-1920s, he vigorously repudiated what he regarded as his friend F. Scott Fitzgerald's obsession with how much he was paid for his stories. Yet later in his life, he demanded compensation for his own magazine work that was at least slightly higher than anyone else got. His attitude toward money changed as his career wore on. But so did his attitude toward fame, and it was fame that drove him.

In his 1967 book *Making It*, Norman Podhoretz presented a confessional, and to many a shocking, disquisition on his own pursuit of recognition. From his first appearances with critical articles in *Commentary*, what Podhoretz wanted was "to see my name in print, to be praised, and above all

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to attract attention.” Many who have started out in journalism, like Hemingway, have felt much the same. Getting paid was important, but bylines were even better. When Podhoretz was asked by his Columbia mentor Lionel Trilling what kind of power he sought – money, fame, professional eminence, social position – he replied immediately that it was fame he was after: He wanted to be a famous critic, and he expected that everything else would flow from that. Any intelligent person could walk into a room and tell the generals from the lieutenants, and the lieutenants from the privates, Podhoretz wrote, and he wanted to be a general (Podhoretz 96, 146, 335). As Milton put it,

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise  
 (That last infirmity of Noble mind)  
 To scorn delights and live laborious dayes.

*Making It* caused something of an uproar in literary circles, not so much because its author wrote about his own ambitions but because he did so with such unabashed openness. As he observed, there was a nagging contradiction in the American ideal of success that did not present a problem to the Puritan poet. On the one hand, you had to get ahead; on the other hand, you were not supposed to try too hard to do so, and certainly not supposed to make a public disclosure of your “laborious dayes.” But Podhoretz tried hard and told all, and so offended those academic overseers who agreed with William James that “the exclusive worship of the bitch-goddess SUCCESS [was] our national disease,” who were inclined like his professors at Columbia to equate *successful* with *corrupt*, who felt that ambition had replaced lust as the “dirty little secret” festering in the American soul. Envy flourished in this environment, where excessive public recognition of someone else’s work was taken as evidence that he or she must have pandered after the bitch-goddess (Podhoretz xi–xvii, 61, 265). In such a climate it was imperative to keep a low profile. Win the election, but don’t let your campaigning show. Publish if you must, but don’t sell, and above all don’t advertise. Young John Cheever used to daydream about future rewards for his writing. Thank you very much, he would say, but no thank you: I couldn’t possibly accept.

This reticence about public renown may owe something to the paradox at the heart of the Protestant ethic. Capitalism demands that we struggle against each other in an often brutal contest of individual wills. But Christian morality dictates that we treat one another with compassion and generosity. Hence, many of those who achieve substantial gains are tormented by guilt – a malady relieved to some degree by the gospel of wealth’s rationale

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that we must first get in order to be able to give, that to be of service to others we must be financially capable of serving. Most writers, however – even most truly great writers – do not make enough money to be overly troubled by this particular contradiction. For them, the egalitarian strain in American culture exerts a powerful restraint against excessive acclaim. Our political heroes are those who manage to do great things while looking and acting very much like the rest of us: honest George, homely Abe, and rough-riding Teddy, to name three of the four iconic figures chiseled into Mount Rushmore. (Teddy Roosevelt, not incidentally, was *the* political figure most admired during Hemingway’s boyhood in Oak Park.) So, too, we tend to ask our artists to minimize rather than insist upon their difference from the common folk. Walt Whitman, who understood this anomaly, repeatedly proclaimed his involvement in humankind while at the same time trumpeting his individuality.

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
 And what I assume you shall assume,  
 For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

Whitman wrote as if to obliterate all distinctions among persons. “No other country,” Leo Braudy comments in his first-rate *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (1986), “so enforces the character-wrenching need to be assertive but polite, prideful but humble, unique but familiar, the great star and the kid next door” (11).

Over the centuries fame has had a significantly better press than money as a measurement of success. Fame harms no one else, the argument goes, while money is often acquired through ill treatment of others. In addition, money is a yardstick of materialism; fame, of accomplishment (Podhoretz 245). Yet it is also clear that fame in the twentieth century has had “a baroquely warping effect” on the lives of those engaged in its pursuit (Braudy 12). To a considerable degree, this debilitating effect is owing to the devaluation of fame by its exploitation in the mass media. Often, if not universally, famous people have shrunk into celebrities under the klieg lights of publicity. What they have achieved is forgotten, while their private lives undergo such intense scrutiny that finally only revelation of the most intimate details about them will satisfy their curious audience.

“Two centuries ago,” Daniel J. Boorstin lamented in his 1962 diatribe against the culture of celebrity, “when a great man appeared, people looked for God’s purpose in him; today we look for his press agent.” Fame and greatness were never precisely synonymous, he acknowledged, but with the proliferation of the mass media into every corner of modern life and the

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development of image makers, the distance between the hero (who had achieved something of importance) and the celebrity (whom Boorstin defined as “a person who is known for his well-knownness”) had widened enormously. “The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media,” he concluded, with the switch in tenses conveying his conviction that nowadays there were no heroes, only celebrities (Boorstin 45–61). Even those who began as genuine heroes were degraded into celebrities by the media’s relentless exploration of their private lives. A major case in point for Boorstin was Charles Lindbergh, the Lone Eagle who boldly and with professional skill flew solo across the Atlantic in 1927. Lindbergh’s act of individual courage and daring qualified him as an authentic hero. It also subjected his most private thoughts and actions to relentless public examination. The media left no corner of Lindy’s personal life unexposed, and finally this scrutiny had deadly consequences when the much-publicized first child of Lindy’s marriage to Anne Morrow was kidnapped and killed.

Braudy draws lines of comparison between Lindbergh and Hemingway as midwestern lads, approximate contemporaries, and self-made men who achieved international fame through mastery of a professional craft. In Braudy’s judgment, fame has always given and taken away. “In part it celebrates uniqueness, and in part it requires that uniqueness be exemplary and reproducible” (Braudy 5). The reproduction can take shape as an article of clothing, like Davy Crockett’s coonskin cap, or a gesture, like Winston Churchill’s V for Victory, or a physical signature, like Hemingway’s beard – but every reproduced imprint tends to devalue the original edition. In another such exchange, we pursue fame as a means of escaping drab anonymity, but upon gaining that objective find ourselves trapped by the gaze others fix upon us.

This was precisely the case with Lindbergh, as Braudy points out. Initially eager for admiration, he later found it impossible to withdraw from public attention. He could conquer distance in flight, but could not outrace the gossip his fame engendered. Ernest Hemingway, Braudy suggests, “could almost be considered Lindbergh’s wiser older brother,” but only almost, for he was to emerge as “the prime case of someone fatally caught between his genius and its publicity.” Toward the end of his life, the image of Papa Hemingway outdoors, fishing or hunting or at war, had come to supplant that of the dedicated artist at his desk. In the consciousness of most people, he existed less as a great storyteller and prose stylist than as a rugged, no-nonsense type with a prodigious appetite for eating and drinking, brawling and defying death. The image – Papa with beard and shotgun, say – was so deeply imprinted that the person behind it disappeared into the shadows.

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Certain Indian tribes resist having their photographs taken, on the theory that some part of themselves will vanish with each snap of the shutter. From the middle of the twentieth century on, this policy has come to seem more sensible than superstitious (Braudy 22–27, 544–47).

In his book-length study of the subject, John Raeburn emphasizes two basic points about Hemingway's fame. First, Hemingway became the most public of all American writers. During his lifetime, both slick magazines appealing to the college-educated and pulp publications aimed at blue-collar workers kept their readers regularly informed about Hemingway, while syndicated newspaper columnists reported on his travels and opinions. Then, within eight years following his death, seven biographies appeared. Scanning through this outpouring of prose, much of it inaccurate and badly written, made it clear to Raeburn that it was Hemingway's *personality* that generated most of this interest. The media concentrated on him as a sportsman or warrior, not as a writer, for there wasn't much glamor in the drudgery of darkening paper with words. Raeburn's second and somewhat judgmental point is that what happened was Hemingway's own fault. "Far from being either the unwitting or the unwilling recipient of this personal attention as he liked to intimate he was, [he] was the architect of his public reputation." In good part, his advertisements for himself took the form of nonfiction, much of it written during the 1930s (Raeburn 2, 6–7). Even during his Paris years of the early 1920s, when he was very little known across the Atlantic, Hemingway radiated a kind of charisma that made people talk about him. But in that decade, he was far less openly engaged in the building of a reputation – and much more insistent upon devotion to his craft – than later in his career. One useful way of measuring this difference is to compare two profiles of him published in the *New Yorker*: Dorothy Parker's "The Artist's Reward" of November 30, 1929, and Lillian Ross's "How Do You Like It Now, Gentlemen?" of May 13, 1950.

Parker was obviously smitten with Hemingway, whom she had met through their mutual friends Gerald and Sara Murphy. Her profile, which ran to less than three pages in the *New Yorker*, presented an adoring portrait of the author who had just published his second novel, *A Farewell to Arms*. She raves both about Hemingway's person and about his achievement. "He certainly *is* attractive," Parker assures her female readers, ". . . even better than his photographs." Not only that, but to her mind he ranked as "far and away the first American artist" – at thirty years of age! A great many falsehoods had been circulated about Hemingway, she points out: "Probably of no other living man has so much tripe been penned and spoken."

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Parker humorously recounts some of the wild rumors about his toughness and athleticism, concluding with a passage reminiscent of Gatsby. “About all that remains to be said is that he is the Lost Dauphin, that he was shot as a German spy, and that he is actually a woman, masquerading in man’s clothes” (Parker 28).<sup>2</sup>

Having warned the reader about apocryphal tales, Parker proceeds to contribute a few of her own. In his youth, she writes, Hemingway left home to become a prizefighter. Then he served in the Italian army, where he suffered seven major wounds, acquired an aluminum kneecap, and “received medals.” Such reports are either inventions, like the one about boxing, or distortions, like the inflated account of his wartime service in a Red Cross ambulance unit. Parker did not have much to work with, for Hemingway was apparently loath to provide the facts of his life – “I can find out nothing about his education,” she sadly reports – and at the same time willing to encourage tales of his prowess in the ring or on the battlefield. She simply put down what he saw fit to tell her or others about himself, including the legend (in fact, Hemingway was never so poor as he claimed to be) that his art derived from “the kind of poverty you don’t believe – the kind of which actual hunger is the attendant.” Now, though, she reports, he does his writing “mostly in bed,” like a latter-day Proust (Parker 28–29).

Parker’s description of Hemingway’s personality is more accurate where she can rely on her own powers of observation. She comments on his abundant energy and “a capacity for enjoyment so vast . . . that he can take you to a bicycle-race, and make it raise your hair.” She acknowledges his extraordinary sensitivity to criticism, supplying a few examples of the wrong-headed commentary that had greeted his early work. She detects beneath his manly exterior “an immense, ill-advised, and indiscriminate tenderness.” And in calling particular attention to his bravery and unwillingness to compromise, she prints for the first time his definition of “guts” as “grace under pressure” – a phrase that became a famous ingredient of his legend. Throughout Parker insists on Hemingway’s integrity as a dedicated and hard-working writer. “He works like hell, and through it,” she observed. He rewrote the ending of *A Farewell to Arms* seventy times, she cites as evidence, and in fact more than thirty variant endings have been unearthed among his working drafts. The Hemingway who emerges from her pastiche of half-truths, inaccuracies, and admiring descriptions is well on his way to becoming a public figure, someone “people want to hear things about.” But her 1929 profile never loses sight of the fact that it is his art that makes him worth writing about (Parker 30–31).

With Lillian Ross’s far longer and very different piece twenty-one years

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later, the situation had changed drastically: Now Hemingway has become a star who commands center stage throughout. Unlike Parker, who occasionally delivered witty asides, Ross keeps herself at a distance throughout and lets her protagonist perform. Her intention, as she outlined it in her 1964 collection *Reporting*, was “to describe as precisely as possible how Hemingway, who had the nerve to be like nobody else on earth, looked and sounded when he was in action, talking, between work periods – to give a picture of the man as he was, in his uniqueness and with his vitality and his enormous spirit of fun intact” (Ross 189). The trouble was that in her account he looked and sounded boorish to others and egocentric about himself. She liked Hemingway enormously, Ross maintained, yet for many readers her profile remains the most damaging document about him ever published.

Part of the problem may have been that she caught the author off guard, during a two-day trip to New York immediately after completing the manuscript of *Across the River and into the Trees*. With that major project behind him (and it had been ten years between novels), Hemingway was very much on holiday and understandably proud of the new book he was bringing along for delivery to his publisher. Ross met the author and his wife Mary at the airport, where he was maintaining a bearish grip on his seatmate during the flight from Cuba, a wiry little fellow who had been coerced into reading the manuscript en route. “He read book all way up on plane,” Hemingway said in an Indian patois stripped of articles. “He liked book, I think.” “Whew!” said the seatmate (Ross 195).

Whew! pretty well describes the frenetic activities of the next two days, which included visits to Abercrombie and Fitch and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, meetings with Marlene Dietrich, Charles Scribner, and son Patrick, and an enormous amount of drinking. Readers of Hemingway’s books are sometimes incredulous about the quantities of liquor his characters consume, but on the basis of Ross’s profile can feel sure that his fiction does not exaggerate from the life. Liberated from the grind of finishing his book and subject to what he calls “the irresponsibility that comes in after the terrible responsibility of writing,” Hemingway commences his drinking immediately with double bourbons at the airport cocktail lounge. At his hotel room in town, two champagne buckets are pressed into use to keep the wine cold for consumption at all hours, including early morning. During his tour of the Metropolitan, he takes long pulls from a silver flask. It’s as daunting as Bill Gorton’s drinking in Paris, or Jake Barnes’s in Madrid in *The Sun Also Rises*.

In the most memorable passages of Ross’s portrait, Hemingway compares his own writing to that of great figures from the past, employing metaphors



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from the world of sport. A novelist is like a starting pitcher with no relievers in the bullpen, he remarks. "Novelist has to go the full nine, even if it kills him." During his Paris years, he said, he had perfected his pitching skills by reading such French masters as "Mr. Flaubert, who always threw them perfectly straight, hard, high, and inside . . . Mr. Baudelaire, that I learned my knuckle ball from, and Mr. Rimbaud, who never threw a fast ball in his life." Then, in a burst of braggadocio, Hemingway used boxing, not baseball, to lay claim to his place in the company of the great. "I started out very quiet and I beat Mr. Turgenev. Then I trained hard and I beat Mr. de Maupassant. I've fought two draws with Mr. Stendhal, and I think I had an edge in the last one. But nobody's going to get me in any ring with Mr. Tolstoy unless I'm crazy or I keep getting better." On two other occasions, he goes out of his way to denigrate a more recently deceased rival, F. Scott Fitzgerald, for his lack of knowledge of prizefighting and football. And when he signs a contract for Charles Scribner's Sons, he declares himself ready to fight any present-day competition. "Never ran as no genius, but I'll defend the title again against all the good young new ones" (Ross 196, 202, 208–9, 212).

The Hemingway Lillian Ross tracked around New York in 1949 was very different from the one Dorothy Parker had met in Europe twenty years earlier. Parker judged him "the first American artist" in the earlier profile, while in Ross's report it is Hemingway who announces his preeminence. Instead of insisting on the dignity of the calling, as he had in 1929, the now-bearded Papa called the roll of the great, placing himself at the forefront. The admirable, dedicated, and hard-working young man who, Parker tells us, was reluctant to talk about his past, had apparently deteriorated into something of a buffoon, whose talk and actions smacked of grandiosity. He was indeed on holiday at the time, and probably poking fun at himself as well as everyone else, but it is hard to detect self-parody in the absence of any guiding commentary to that effect from Ross, who maintained a posture of strict objectivity throughout. In giving only the facts, she may have done her subject a real disservice. Certainly the piece reads as if he is just as serious when proclaiming himself victorious over Flaubert and Stendhal as when instructing his son Patrick about paintings in the Metropolitan.

What seems clear is that Hemingway was determined to distance himself from the conventional image of the aesthete as an effete and asexual creature, just as he had done, fictionally, with the early story "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot." He was no innocent victim of the press; he knew precisely why Ross was at his elbow and what kind of reporting she did (a few years earlier, she had written a profile of his friend Sidney Franklin, the bullfighter from

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Brooklyn, for which he was an interviewee). In his youth, as an aspiring writer in Chicago, he had railed against other would-be artists who talked endlessly of “art, art, art.” To take the curse of dilettantism off his own remarks on the topic for Ross, he couched them in the jargon of the sports pages. If possible, Hemingway wanted it both ways – he wanted to be recognized for his fiction and at the same time to be regarded as a rugged, manly fellow. So he emerged from the second *New Yorker* profile not merely as “one of the roughs” (like Whitman) but as the roughest of all, a man who wrestled bears, spoke pidgin English, and by the way also wrote some of the most enduring stories and novels of his time.

The sensitive tough guy has become a cliché in films – John Garfield made a career out of it – and Hemingway was cast in that part at least as early as 1933, when a William Steig cartoon in *Vanity Fair* depicted him with a rose in his hairy, tattooed fist. It was the fist and not the rose that he chose to emphasize in his public appearances and comments. Significantly, in Malcolm Cowley’s “A Portrait of Mr. Papa” for *Life* magazine the year before Ross’s *New Yorker* profile, Hemingway asked for one important change in the original copy. Cowley had written that in high school Hemingway “was a literary boy, not a sports boy.” This was accurate enough, but Hemingway wanted the passage cut, and so it was (Raeburn 132). He understood and accepted his public role, but it involved at least two dangers: first, that he would, like many actors, become so stereotyped in the public mind as to be uncastable in other roles; second, that he would become so integrated into the part as to give up any distinct identity. In Ross’s 1950 article, Hemingway appears to be falling victim to both dangers.

As Braudy accurately observes, Hemingway “seemed to carry the burden of early success fairly well” (543). He had the good fortune not to be overwhelmed by popular or critical attention at the beginning of his career. In 1924 he wrote to Ezra Pound from Spain about the recognition accorded young bullfighters, the “ovations, Alcoholism, being pointed out on the street, general respect and the other things Literary guys have to wait until they are 89 years old to get” (SL 119). He did not have to wait that long. His expatriate pamphlets *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923) and *in our time* (1924) caught the canny eye of Edmund Wilson, whose joint review in the *Dial* Hemingway praised for being “cool and clear minded and decent and impersonal and sympathetic” and above all concentrated on the work itself. “Christ how I hate this terrible personal stuff,” he added (SL 129). Not until he was thirty and the best-selling and controversial *A Farewell to Arms* came out to a mingled chorus of praise and outrage for its straightfor-