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INTRODUCTION

Hemingway in the New Millennium

Suzanne del Gizzo and Kirk Curnutt

A recent headline in the *Dallas News* book-review section makes an eye-catching case for reading a new literary biography:

> Ernest Hemingway:
> Writer, Adventurer, Jerk –
> And Still Fascinating[1]

Oddly enough, the "J" word does not appear in the actual review, suggesting some anonymous copy editor in the land of big oil may harbor animosity against the author of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). But the assumption that Ernest Hemingway is an intriguing figure despite – or perhaps because of – his reputation for gladiatorial truculence is hardly limited to this particular attention-grabber. It is a commonplace throughout popular culture, as a simple Google search will attest. "Love him or hate him," reads the lede of a representative Internet article, "Ernest Hemingway was a genius in his craft. But that doesn't change the fact that, at times, he was an assh*le." The title of the link – which carries a viewer to this penetrating bit of cyber-journalism, published on a website specializing in "listicles" (infotainment articles written in the form of numbered or bulleted lists) – is "11 Times Ernest Hemingway Was a Huge Jerk."[2]

We need not look solely to flippant headlines or "clickbait" for this opinion; it is a mainstay of "serious" discourse, too. Another review of the same biography assessed by the *Dallas News* attributes the cultural fixation with Hemingway to his polarities: he "suffered, experiencing pain almost in the same measure that he experienced pleasure. He was a blessed man – he was a poor soul. He was a brilliant writer – he was a fool. He was magnetically attractive – he was a jerk."[3] A discussion of another recent book, on the backstory of *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), describes the writer as "brilliant and vicious, arrogant and ambitious, an obsequious charmer and a jerk of the highest order."[4] Still elsewhere, a legendary science-fiction

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writer expresses mixed feelings toward the icon during a podcast. "You don't want to be a jerk," says Joe Haldeman of *The Forever War* (1974) fame, offering up-and-coming writers career advice. "Hemingway was a jerk. I mean he was really a great jerk. He was a good writer and he did all sorts of things that I would never have the courage to do, but I don't think I'd enjoy being in the same room with him. He's not my kind of person."[5] Haldeman, it should be added, is the author of the clever (and fun) 1990 novel *The Hemingway Hoax* and has been a regular attendee at Hemingway Society meetings for nearly forty years.

Yet not everyone thinks Hemingway is "not [their] kind of person." In a beautiful 2002 tribute, Linda Patterson Miller celebrates her readerly "love affair with the father of modern American prose." Toying with erotic language, she describes how both she and a scholarly generation of female peers feel nary a shiver of shame at devoting their careers to a figure stereotyped as a feminist bane. Rather, she and her cohort take deep pleasure in "collectively celebrat[ing] his 'muscular' prose that allows for a seductive rendering of life's emotional truths."[6] Noting how men and women alike who knew the author were drawn to his "animal magnetism," Miller describes how she sometimes finds herself gazing at the photo she hangs on her office wall, an image of the writer as a young man in Paris "where it all began":

> [He] looks handsome, wise, his hair parted slightly off center. How did he ever come to know what he knew, I wonder, as I look into his eyes that stare into the room, into me? His presence fills the room. Soon, one of my students comes for her conference clutching her composition [assignment] and sitting down nervously. When she looks up, she stops midsentence. "Wow! Who is that?" she asks, looking at Hemingway, who now seems to smile knowingly. "That's Ernest Hemingway," I say. "He's really something, isn't he?" For the rest of the afternoon, as more students file in and out, Hemingway stays with me. I cannot shake him. (15)

Such unabashedly romantic panegyrics to writers and their work have become something of a genre over the past twenty years – and men do write them tastefully, too, about the women writers they passionately admire, as William Deresiewicz's *A Jane Austen Education: How Six Novels Taught Me about Love, Friendship, and the Things that Really Matter* (2011) demonstrates. But the tributes from women scholars to Hemingway have proved important for reminding those not in the know that, first, not all of his fans are sexagenarian men who look "like stage-three Hemingways with white beards and safari jackets straining over their bellies," as *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd cites biographer

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Gioia Diliberto describing the audience that showed up to book signings in 1992 when she published her life of the first Mrs. Hemingway, Hadley Richardson.[7]

More importantly, these encomia, whether by women or men, remind us of qualities Hemingway exuded that are often overshadowed by the brasher personality traits that get him labeled a "jerk." Valerie Hemingway, who worked as the writer's personal secretary in 1959–1960 and later married his youngest son, Gregory, has spent much of the past two decades arguing that the writer's heightened capacity to maximize experience and wring enjoyment from life was the source of his overpowering charm. Both in her memoir *Running with the Bulls: My Life with the Hemingways* (2004) and in countless presentations, interviews, and courses she teaches, she emphasizes the convivial over the contentious and competitive, celebrating the sway of his gusto and his ability to turn any excursion into an irresistible adventure. "I've never met someone who not only enjoyed life but who understood," she typically testifies. "Being with him was a heightening of the senses. It was only after he [died] that I realized how extraordinary my experience had been."[8]

Hemingway's appeal crosses all kinds of lines. Senator John McCain and President Barack Obama both cited *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) as a favorite book, despite their differences on the 2008 presidential campaign trail. When McCain succumbed to brain cancer in August 2018, his significance for American civic life was interpreted, strikingly, as much through his deep investment in Hemingway's values as through the seven years of torture that the former fighter pilot endured as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* provided eulogists, including Obama, a means of dramatizing service and sacrifice. "Honor. It is to some ears an outdated word," begins a McCain obituary on the public-affairs website *Politico*. "Like his favorite author Ernest Hemingway, McCain embodies an older America where the concept of honor was concrete – where both physical courage and moral courage were the qualities admired above all others."[9] Miller, meanwhile, concludes her essay quoting the late Honoria Murphy Donnelly, daughter of Gerald and Sara Murphy, remembering the warmth of the man who visited her younger brother as he battled tuberculosis in an Adirondack sanitarium: "Hemingway was the most gentle and loveliest man I have ever known. When he came to see Patrick as he lay dying, Hemingway wept openly. It was the first time I had ever seen a grown man cry" (22). Tears and tenderness, it may not need saying, are emotions rarely associated with jerks.

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As these examples demonstrate, Ernest Hemingway incites extreme reactions sixty years after his suicide. The contradictory nature of these responses suggests that, for all the ink spilt analyzing him, we cannot quite get a bead on him. He remains elusive in a way that few authors do, despite the prodigious parodies and caricatures that, on the surface, can render him cartoonishly simple. Among other American literary giants, Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Sylvia Plath, and Jack Kerouac may remain as equally omnipresent in the popular culture, but the interest they attract is not concerned with judging what type of person – "assh*le" or arresting, infectious bon vivant – they were.

Perhaps best illustrating the point is how Hemingway is narratologically framed in the near constant stream of movies, novels, and plays that have portrayed him throughout the past two decades. In Paula McLain's novels *The Paris Wife* (2011) and *Love and Ruin* (2018), wives one and three (Hadley Richardson and Martha Gellhorn) respectively gain confidence in their own senses of self by coming to grips with various Hemingway betrayals and emerging from his immense shadow. In Erika Robuck's *Hemingway's Girl* (2012), a fictional protagonist, a maid working in Hemingway's Key West house in 1935 on the eve of the deadly Labor Day hurricane, discovers her moral sensibility through a dangerous infatuation with the author. In Bob Yari's film *Papa Hemingway in Cuba* (2015), a young journalist travels to Havana to learn hard lessons at the feet of the aging master, while in Michael Grandage's *Genius* (2016), a frazzled Maxwell Perkins races to the Gulf of Mexico to consult a sage, thirtysomething Hemingway on his less stable peers, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Thomas Wolfe – a cameo appearance that lasts all of three minutes, a veritable eye of calm in a literary tornado. Then there is the most popular depiction of Hemingway since 2000, Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* (2011), in which an aspiring author in contemporary times travels back to the 1920s to drink up mock aphorisms from his hero in nocturnal cafes. ("I believe that love that is true and real creates a respite from death," Allen's Hemingway intones. "All cowardice comes from not loving or not loving well, which is the same thing" – an affectionate parody of the writer's metrical cadences and stentorian repetitions that elicited both chuckles and cheers from moviegoers.[10])

Only in rare cases in these depictions is Hemingway the narrative consciousness. Examples include Joyce Carol Oates's short story "Papa at Ketchum, 1961," the final entry in her *Wild Nights! Stories about the Last Days of Poe, Dickinson, Twain, James, and Hemingway* (2008), which imagines famous writers at the moment they give up the ghost, or the

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many Off Broadway and regional-theater one-man shows in which stage veterans such as Stacy Keach, Laurence Luckinbill, or Brian Gordon Sinclair inhabit Hemingway in his grizzled twilight, usually culminating in his suicide.[11] Yet more commonly, as with McLain or Allen, he is the object of the narrative gaze. The observer-narrator attempting to understand his actions serves as a stand-in for us, the audience, trying to pin down his personality and figure out who he really was and what made him tick. It is almost as if Hemingway has become so iconic that we can no longer identify with him or even daydream that we could ever be so captivating to others. Instead, we can only picture ourselves as satellites in his orbit and in the end come to some understanding less about him than about the reasons we are drawn to his aura.

For those of us who study literary history and aesthetics, the fixation with Hemingway's larger-than-life personality and epic biography can be frustrating for a basic reason: rarely does it lead to a deeper appreciation, much less a better understanding, of his writing. Indeed, his iconicity frequently distracts both from the artistry of his novels, short stories, and nonfiction and from the cultural context that inspired them. One sign of this frustration is how common it has become, both in the popular press and in academic studies of tourism, to speculate, sometimes rather snidely, that the majority of travelers chasing Hemingway's ghost in Paris, Pamplona, Havana, or any of the other locales associated with him have little substantive familiarity with his books. Nor does the labor force servicing these tours, commentaries add. In a book taking a self-proclaimed skeptic's view of author houses open to the public, Anne Trubek records how docents at the Hemingway Home and Museum in Key West are trained: "The guides are given a fact sheet, and an older tour guide gives them a tour. They are not required to read any Hemingway."[12] Such comments are a little dangerous, for they risk perpetuating the perception that literary classics are best left to trained specialists and that general audiences should stick to the gift shop, buying (or selling) postcards and T-shirts and petting the six-toed cats.

That said, it is hard to make a serious argument that watching *Midnight in Paris*, the HBO film *Hemingway and Gellhorn* (2012) starring Clive Owen and Nicole Kidman, or the forthcoming adaptation of *Across the River and Into the Trees,* the last Hemingway novel to be made into a major motion picture, will drive the uninitiated to rush out to gobble down his books. (Anyone who has sat through the miserable 2010 adaptation of *The Garden of Eden* may, in fact, run the opposite direction.) Hemingway understood that general audiences prefer "star gazing" to critical thinking.

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In 1935 he wrote a takeoff of his celebrity for *Esquire* in which he satirized tourists who showed up at his house at 907 Whitehead Street knowing his name but confusing details in *A Farewell to Arms* with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[13] Despite his self-awareness (a quality for which he is not often given credit), his fame strikes some observers as so self-perpetuating that it raises questions about whether the writing justifies the hype. "Why the Hell Are We Still Reading Ernest Hemingway?" barks a 2018 headline from Daily Beast contributor Allen Barra. "He never goes out of print," grouses the subhead. "He's still taught in schools. But most of his novels look more ponderous and posturing (silly, even) with each passing year." Fortunately, Barra ends with an answer that, for the moment, settles his doubts ("Ah, but those stories").[14] Other critics do not, and their protests against the time and attention Hemingway receives in the popular culture fuel the isolated but vocal perception that even posthumously he earns it simply by being the loudest, most obnoxious chest-beater in the pantheon.

But then come moments when Hemingway's stylistic power to capture a mood or an emotion bursts into view with a cultural significance that transcends any biographical clichés about serial marriages, fisticuffs and feuds, or suicide by shotgun. In the weeks after terrorists murdered 130 people in Paris on November 13, 2015, in a series of coordinated attacks, *A Moveable Feast* shot to the top of the French bestseller lists. Bookseller stock was quickly depleted, and distributors could not keep up with the demand. Mourners were leaving copies of the memoir at the impromptu memorials that sprung up at the sites of the bloodshed, including the Bataclan music hall where ninety alone were killed. Along with flowers and handmade signs, the book served as a token of both grief and resilience. As commentators noted, the city seized upon it in part because of its French title, *Paris Est Une Fête*, or *Paris is a Celebration*, which provided a rallying cry of defiance against the violence. Yet as *The Atlantic* also recognized, Hemingway's nostalgic, late-in-life return to the metropolis where he learned his craft and discovered his voice pays homage to the *ville lumière* as an embodiment of the values of democratic humanism that the fringe, anti-West Islamic State extremists sought to slaughter: "It's the life of the café culture and Paris as locus for the exchange of ideas that are particularly worth celebrating as the city rebounds from attacks on its restaurants and nightlife. This is what Hemingway observes in *A Moveable Feast*; it's not war or bullfighting in Spain or hunting in Africa or swordfishing or boxing, but glamor of the quotidian in the City of Light."[15]

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The unexpected relevance of a Hemingway text amid a violent tragedy is a powerful reminder that literature's meaningfulness extends far beyond the radius of its creator's shadow. A core premise of this essay collection is that Hemingway's works have been equally illuminating to a whole host of other issues that are, thankfully, far less horrific than terrorism, although frequently just as geopolitically significant. The title *The New Hemingway Studies* comes from the fact that this book belongs to a series of similarly named volumes dedicated to elucidating the ways that emerging interpretive approaches have transformed the critical reaction to significant literary figures throughout the past twenty years. We take on the word "new" admitting that it is something of an albatross. As the New Coke learned the hard way, the world is not always calling out for reinventions or reboots; often the world is perfectly content with the "old." In this regard, calling a book *The New* . . . can be a bit presumptuous, for it implies a dramatic break from the past, which is not our intent. Rather than a paradigm shift, we are interested in the ways that conceptions of Hemingway have changed over the past two decades by growing out from the fertile soil of earlier ones. In essence, we explore how the historical context of the new millennium has kept the writer "contemporary" just as crosscurrents particular to the 1950s or the 1980s might have made him seem timely in those decades.

Along these lines, "new" also has a generational connotation that needs qualifying. This collection is not a "revolt of youth" cri de cœur. At least three of our contributors published their first articles in the 1980s; for others the ink is still drying on their doctoral degrees. Some of us remember attending Hemingway Society conferences before the advent of email and websites; others have never not known the speedy joy of downloading one's latest publication from ProjectMUSE instead of waiting at the mailbox for a stamp-laden packet of offprints. Some of us are painfully aware we are old enough to be each other's parents. If any chronological consanguinity binds us, it is that: (1) we are all "second-generation" Hemingway scholars, meaning that none of us were charter members of the Hemingway Society, which first met in 1980 on Thompson Island, a short throw from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum where Hemingway's papers formally opened to the public that same year; and (2) we were fortunate enough to be mentored by many of the scholars who were there and who shaped Hemingway studies for the decades leading up to the millennium, including many who have passed on (Philip Young, Paul Smith, Michael S. Reynolds) and many others who remain so active we may forget they have retired from the classroom,

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directing dissertations, or helming literary journals (Linda Wagner-Martin, J. Gerald Kennedy, Susan F. Beegel, Scott Donaldson).

One final issue a reader may question: why focus specifically on the past twenty years? Is that number not arbitrary? Why not Hemingway's entire critical history? Or why not the past forty years, especially since this collection is published on the anniversary of the Hemingway Collection's opening at the Kennedy Library and the Hemingway Society's founding?

The easiest explanation is that the series to which this book belongs stipulates that our charge is the "new millennium." Were we to look to the entire breadth of commentary on our subject, we would merely repeat the already comprehensive work done by Laurence W. Mazzeno in *The Critics and Hemingway, 1924–2014: Shaping an American Literary Icon* (2015), which summarizes the critical strands of each decade since Hemingway debuted. We also feel strongly that bracketing off criticism from the 1980s and 1990s is organically appropriate rather than a simple convenience. Without a doubt, the final two decades of the twentieth century marked the most whirlwind, transformative era in Hemingway studies. The opening of the Hemingway Collection sparked a resurgence bent on challenging the 1960s and 1970s perception that his writing was hopelessly passé, a "monument to something people don't believe in any longer," as Pauline Kael wrote in 1977.[16] Seven short years later, the *New York Times* could report that Hemingway was "enjoying a comeback of the sort so often celebrated in his novels and short stories" thanks to the Hemingway Society's concerted efforts, including its launch of the *Hemingway Review* in 1981, the same year that Carlos Baker's *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters 1917–1961*, the first collection of the writer's correspondence, hit bookshelves.[17] Whereas in the preceding decade there once seemed little left to say that Baker had not rendered gospel truth in his bestselling 1969 authorized biography, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*, nearly a dozen new takes on the author appeared between 1978 and 1992, all with vastly different portraits of the man.

Then in 1986 came the landmark publication of *The Garden of Eden*, a revisionary tale of expatriation and sexual intrigue that Hemingway labored over for the last fifteen years of his life. Although only a small portion of the unwieldy, unfinished manuscript was made public, the effect was revolutionary. Never again could one view Hemingway as the one-dimensional Tarzan of American letters, a brute standard-bearer of "grace under pressure" machismo and *cojones*. Instead, both the writer and his work were fraught with psychosexual conflicts that made his aversions and repressions intriguing rather than risible. All of this rejuvenated

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energy, it should be noted, took place against the culture wars of the era, when boisterous factions of nonadmirers eager to upend the canon in favor of repressed voices viewed him as a symbol of everything they hoped to overthrow. As Mary V. Dearborn writes of the period, "Hemingway and his place in the Western literary tradition came under full-on attack, as [some] urgently questioned what 'dead white males' like Hemingway have to say to us in a multicultural era that no longer accords them automatic priority."[18] It was an exciting time to enter the profession: the stakes felt real.

The downside of that vibrancy and debate is that criticism since the turn of the century can seem deceptively circumspect by comparison. For many reasons, 2000 seemed to mark a shift in Hemingway studies. The year 1999 celebrated the author's centennial, and battles over his legacy – not to mention a few lawsuits between interested parties – appeared to resolve themselves amid the commemorations. Whereas traditionalists and stalwart defenders of manhood might have once resisted the redefinitions of his masculinity that *The Garden of Eden* ignited, by the turn of the millennium even they routinely peppered their conference papers and articles with the word "androgyny." It no longer seemed to matter if a movie like 1996's *In Love and War* flopped or a stellar piece of speculative biographical fiction like Nicholas Delbanco's novella *The Lost Suitcase* (2000) failed to make the splash it deserved: Hemingway was now such an institution that to argue his work was slouching toward irrelevance risked appearing either oblivious or just plain contrarian.[19] The man was not going anywhere. In the larger culture the never-ending labelling of him as a "jerk" has served as a kind of white flag of surrender to this reality: maybe we can't get rid of him, the haters seem to say, but don't think you can make us like him. Meanwhile, his unabashed admirers settled into their conviction that he was misunderstood but expressed little compulsion to win resistors over to the cause. Nowhere in his admiration for *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, for example, did McCain ever feel the need to acknowledge the critical history of the book and redress the artistic flaws that have steadily diminished its reputation since its eve-of-World-War-II publication, making it for many a "stagey and melodramatic" read (Barra). *I love it, and that is enough*, McCain's devotion seemed to signal. *To hell if you don't.*

Among scholarly devotees, being reassured that the threat that Hemingway might be "in danger of losing his place in the canon because he is, after all, the archetypal Dead White Male" was "an entirely unfounded myth," as then–*Hemingway Review* editor Susan F. Beegel wrote in 1998, occasioned unintended consequences.[20] With it came

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a readjustment of expectations, as the palpable anticipation of what new discovery might reconfigure scholarly commonplaces appeared to attenuate. When *True at First Light* was published in 1999 – followed by the complete version of the manuscript it was culled from, *Under Kilimanjaro*, in 2005 – critics treated the event as if it were a closet-cleaning of some long-locked-away heirloom that might as well be allowed to see daylight because – well, why not at this point? Many of us pumping out academic books and essays came to realize that we, too, were part of Hemingway, Ltd., our efforts helping ensure the smooth running of the stature machine. As the realization sank in that we were unlikely to discover anything in the archives as sensational or revolutionary as *The Garden of Eden*, in crept a slight tendency to overlook the innovations of the present while gazing nostalgically at the past, almost as if we paraphrased Virginia Woolf's famous definition of modernism as we measured the state of the field: On or about May 1986 Hemingway studies changed irrevocably . . .

We exaggerate, of course, but we do so to emphasize that the goal of this collection is to challenge that assumption. The central thesis of this project is that Hemingway studies has remained every bit as cutting-edged and dynamic from 2000 to 2020 as in its fabled years. The innovations have merely occurred along multiple fronts instead of clustering around one central axis such as gender/androgyny/sexual difference as they did in the 1980s and 1990s.

To make this point, we have divided the collection into three main sections. Part I, "The Textual Hemingway," explores the various sources (print, archival, digital) through which we access Hemingway. While Kirk Curnutt examines trends in biography since 2000 (Chapter 1), Robert W. Trogdon explores how the 1998 passage of the Sonny Bono Copyright Extension Act has delayed publication of much-needed corrected editions of Hemingway's work, the original versions of which are riddled with a shocking number of transcription and printing errors (Chapter 2). Verna Kale and Sandra Spanier, two guiding forces behind the Hemingway Letters Project, chart how installments of the writer's collected correspondence appearing since 2011 have expanded our knowledge of his daily life and routines (Chapter 3). Krista Quesenberry, meanwhile, discusses via exhibitions the cultural attachment to the objects and keepsakes the notorious packrat Hemingway left behind as well as the abundant material culture represented in his texts (Chapter 4). Laura Godfrey then offers an illuminating overview of how the digital realm has transformed the experience of reading Hemingway as well as the audience's ability to connect with faraway sites associated with him (Chapter 5).

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