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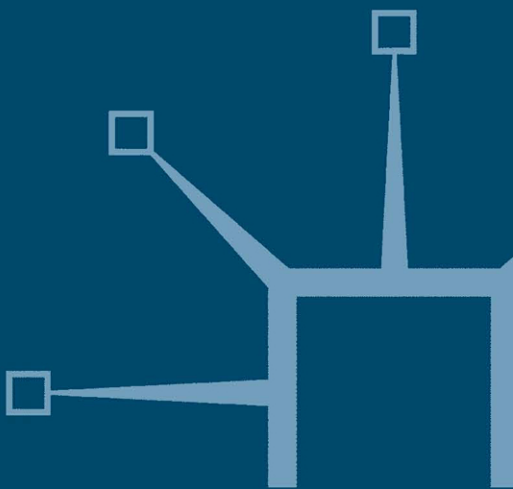
Ernest Hemingway

A Literary Life

Linda Wagner-Martin



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A Literary Life

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Dedicated to all the students and scholars who have made my career as an Americanist so satisfying

Contents

List of Illustrations

Cover photo: Mary and Ernest on safari

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Preface

Of all the varied profiles of Ernest Miller Hemingway that already exist here in the twenty-first century, perhaps none does justice to his unusual capacity for adaptation. When Hemingway was with his male friends—during the Michigan summers, in the Paris cafés, in wartime, on his boat *Pilar*—or with other correspondents during the Greco-Turkish War, the Spanish Civil War, or World Wars I and II, he showed a carefully constructed masculinity. When he was with a woman he loved, he reflected at least a part of her empathetic sensuousness. When he felt the floodlight of media scrutiny upon him, he intentionally misbehaved—or at least his behavior fed his celebrity status: he was likely to be, at best, unpredictable. In a lifetime of only 62 years, Ernest Hemingway—whether healthy or ill—seemed proud of his ability to be a chameleon.

Yet, of his important fiction it is frequently said that the principal male character resembles Ernest Hemingway. The judgment is not intended as a joke. The irony of a man who was so often a shape shifter being described as a stable persona in readings of his art has gone largely unremarked. Perhaps one of Ernest Hemingway's most successful creations was himself, as both living person and fictional character.

This biography gets to tackle such an irony. It is the aim of this study to emphasize the fluidity of the author's self as it developed through his relationships with the women he married, and a few of those he did not. Married young, Hemingway was adapting to the influences of particularly his first and second wives, Hadley Richardson and Pauline Pfeiffer. But at the start of his life stood his mother Grace Hall Hemingway, surrounded by his four sisters—and the father Hemingway came later to see as less effectual than he would have desired. While his mother might today be seen as using some "tough love" behaviors with her older son, in Ernest's imagination Grace worked actively to thwart his career. Supportive as his sisters Ursula, Sunny, and others were, aided by such Parisian women mentors as Gertrude Stein and Sylvia Beach, and carefully provided for by particularly his first wife, Hadley, the boyish naïf Hemingway was for years feeding all his energies into becoming the writer he had long dreamed of being. This study pays close attention to Hemingway's progress toward his writerly goals, because it was as writer that Hemingway consistently defined himself.

After his divorce from Pauline and his marriages to both Martha Gellhorn and Mary Welsh, Ernest Hemingway developed an often unpredictable personality. His self as it had been shaped earlier underwent changes that even the most loving partner could neither anticipate nor prevent. The second part of Hemingway's life is, consequently, given a briefer treatment in this biography. The greatness of the man as writer remains the truest biography of Ernest Hemingway.

Acknowledgments

My scholarly life has been full of amazingly wonderful Hemingway scholars and students: there seems to be no end to the work which is possible and, as the decades pass, necessary for younger readers to understand the complex writer and stylist that Ernest Hemingway was. There is little question that Hemingway will be read and loved even into the twenty-second century.

My thanks to the staff at the Bogliasco Foundation for a secluded atmosphere in the beautiful Italian Riviera, and to James Thompson, chair of the English Department at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, for the released time that made the sojourn in Italy possible. I am also grateful to the John F. Kennedy Library for permission to use the photographs in this book.

1
"'Fraid a Nothing"

From the start, Ernest Miller Hemingway liked to lisp that he was "'fraid a nothing."[1] As both his fiction and his autobiography show, however, one of America's greatest twentieth-century writers was a complicated blend of bravado and fear, conscious always of the way he was appearing to others, fretful that he could not find, even for himself, the heart of his real character.

It was probably less the fact that he was the first son, the second child, born to Grace Hall Hemingway and Dr. Clarence (Ed) Hemingway; birth order should not have troubled his development. It was no doubt that he was so intuitive about his parents' moods, and their relationship, that he could see unsettled lives everywhere he looked. His mother, with her fine contralto voice and early feminist sensibility, was resentful that she was not singing on stage in New York. His father, unsure of his abilities even in his medical practice, found little satisfaction in ministering to his patients and preferred the supplemental work he did giving insurance examinations for extra money. What Dr. Clarence really preferred was being out of doors and running the Agassiz study group for the young boys of Oak Park, Illinois, his young daughter Marcelline and son Ernest among them.[2]

Much has been made of the fact that his mother occasionally dressed Marcelline, the first born, and Ernest, the second, as twins. Sometimes they were both boys, garbed in overalls and heavy shoes; at other times, they appeared as girls, in ruffles.[3] In the turn-into-the-century late 1890s, gender roles may have been less self-consciously described. It may not have mattered to either Marcelline or Ernest that they swapped identities at their mother's whim—although the pretense of their being twins extended to the children's first grade, where (because Marcelline had stayed at home a year longer) they entered school as twins. It probably

mattered more as the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth of the Hemingway children were born—and as more and more of their mother's time was given to instruction in music and her pupils' lavish recitals—that the Hemingway household sometimes seemed rudderless. After the death of Grandfather Ernest Hall, with whom the family had lived while the first three children were small, the sense of randomness—of small bodies rushing to practice their music, do their homework, find a quiet place to read, take a bath—increased. Just as there was more and more pressure for Dr. Clarence to bring in money, so there was for Grace (who in some years made much more than her spouse) to increase her income.

Oak Park, Illinois, was a visibly middle and upper middle-class community. People had things. They wanted to have more and more things, and to have reasons to be in near-by Chicago frequently—for concerts, museum openings, visits to art galleries, lectures. What Oak Park neighbors saw a family doing increased that family's worth, and the respectable

1. The young family on Walloon Lake: Ernest in his mother's arms, Grace Hemingway dressed fashionably, Clarence Hemingway, and Marcelline.

capitalism of this prestigious town marked its residents' behaviors. Oak Park was used to fame of all sorts: Frank Lloyd Wright's scandalous departure, like his scandalous (if interesting) architecture, was the kind of prominence Oak Park admired. Ernest Hall's accumulation of his fortune, like the teaching his daughter did, was the kind of serious success the community venerated—and all success was charted in the type of house the family built, and that house's address. The Hemingway family, for instance, lived in the large, turreted Hall home until they could afford to build a suitably large and imposing house of their own. (Grace Hall Hemingway used her father's bequest, and the proceeds from the sale of his house, to build the house which she had designed, the construction of which she had overseen. The Hemingway house on Kenilworth and Iowa avenues had a large high-ceilinged music room area with wonderful acoustics, an office for the physician's practice, and ample space for the children.) The families were closer than most because, as Marcelline Hemingway pointed out in her family memoir, Grandfather Hall's house (at #439 North Oak Park Avenue) was "directly across the street" from Grandfather Hemingway's smaller home, which was #444.[4]

Another marker of financial success was having a place on a Michigan lake in which to go to escape the city's summer heat. Born on July 21, 1899, Ernest was taken when less than a year old to Walloon Lake, where the family built a modest frame cottage, which his mother called Windemere. The house was surrounded by pine trees, in one group of which was hidden the outhouse. Scarcely populated at that time, Horton Bay on Walloon Lake became Ernest's favorite haunt for the next 20 summers: out of the sight and hearing of his mother, he played on the shore, fished, swam, trapped animals, rowed across the small lake whenever he wanted to go to town (and always for the mail), played adventure games with his sisters, some of the Michigan Indians, and the neighbor boys, and generally just fooled around. The Hemingways traveled without their cook, because even though Grace did not like spending time in the kitchen, Clarence did. Life was orderly in Michigan, but there were few neighbors, and no one paid much attention to the oldest son—provided he did his chores, showed up for meals, and had clean hands.

What Ernest remembered most about those early summers, when he was only five or six or seven, was the time he got to spend with his father. The best wing shot in Michigan, Clarence Hemingway taught his son at an early age to handle guns, and to handle them safely. Rigid enough gender lines existed that the Hemingway sisters—except

Marcelline—were not interested in most of these outdoor sports, so what Ernest remembered as precious was the private time he had with Clarence.[5] His son was clearly his favorite child. By the time Ernest was ten, however, his father seldom summered in Michigan. Bothered with depression (which no one in Oak Park was to know about), the doctor sometimes took rest cures elsewhere (described as studying abroad); sometimes he visited New Orleans, again surreptitiously; sometimes he just stayed home and continued working while the ever-growing family was gone. Whereas Hemingway seldom wrote about his relationship with his father, who was a stern and even brutal disciplinarian, in his 1932 story "Fathers and Sons," he described the best parts of the strangely conflicted man ("a great hunter and fisherman and he had wonderful eyes"[6]); the dialogue is past tense, spoken between the protagonist and his young son, and it is written only a few years after Clarence's suicide by gunshot.

Scott Donaldson and other of Hemingway's earlier biographers have told the story of Clarence's severe depression, which occurred in 1909, when Ernest would have been ten. Just a year after Clarence had closed his practice for six weeks—taking a course in New York that lasted for four, and then spending the two extra weeks in New Orleans—he sent to Grace in Michigan instructions that she was to follow about claiming his insurance pay-offs, if he were to die of blood poisoning. At this time, Clarence was 50 years old. He had taken out policies from 11 different insurance agencies, for varying amounts, and so there would be $50,000 the family could claim, if Grace carefully told the same story to each. Clarence also supplied the names of two doctors who would support his story.[7]

Despite the fact that Clarence and Grace were to have two more children, the family was aware in 1909 that their parents were at odds over Grace's building herself a new, separate cottage on Lake Walloon (rather, across the lake, since one had to row to its location). Part of Clarence's anger over the project stemmed from his suspicion that Grace was planning to live there with her young protégé, Ruth Arnold, a voice pupil only a bit older than Marcelline who had earlier moved into the Hemingway home in Oak Park to help care for the children.[8] Part came from the fact that Grace was spending what remained of her inheritance on the house—and in a family whose coffers were never full enough, even modest expenditures called for unanimity. To watch his wife perform the same machinations with what to him seemed to be an unnecessary Michigan house as she had in building their Oak Park home made Clarence even more anxious. Although years later Ernest was to say that

he could not go to college because his mother had spent so much money on the Michigan house, that was only a self-pitying excuse: Marcelline, after all, went to Oberlin, and the family had planned for all their children to be college educated.

The Hemingway children were good in school. Educated in the public schools of Oak Park, considered some of the best in the Chicago area, they were conscientious and, at times, even eager students. Ernest took great pride in his careful drawings for science classes, and some of the papers which his mother saved are those of science experiments, printed in pencil but clearly legible. As the Hemingway family archives at both the Lilly Library at Indiana University and at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at University of Texas, Austin, show, Grace and Clarence saved a number of school papers of all their children. For students with such interests early in the twentieth century, university educations would have been likely, if not mandatory. (Many of Ernest's Oak Park friends went on to college, some to the University of Michigan.)

The Hemingway children were also good at music, and one of their mother's coercive practices was teaching each of them a musical instrument—so that the family could be seen as one of talent, acting out their mother's gifts and ambition. For Ernest, being a cello-playing part of the family ensemble was a mixed blessed; while he later complained that he had had little talent, he had learned much about music, written scores, harmony, precision, tone, and tempo. His playing in the high school orchestra supplemented the home instruction. In later years, in the company of the musical Ezra Pound (and his mistress, the superb violinist Olga Rudge), the talented pianist Alice B. Toklas, and most importantly his talented pianist wife Hadley, Hemingway felt he was an informed part of their lives. Musical education early in the twentieth century had become a marker for the middle and upper middle classes in the States: having a piano in the drawing room was an important manifestation of education and of culture.

So was active membership in a church community. The Hemingways were members of the First Congregational Church in Oak Park, where for many years Clarence taught Sunday school classes. Married there in 1896, Grace and Clarence attended every sort of class; their children were baptized there; and Grandfather Hall was buried from there in 1905. Whereas Hall had led morning and evening prayers, and Grace had assumed the Hall family was about as upstanding as a Christian family could be, the zeal of the Halls was nothing compared to that of Clarence Hemingway. Living life by Biblical principles, Clarence also believed

that sparing the rod made little sense, and he gave quick punishment for any infraction—washing out the mouths of the smallest Hemingways for saying bad words or sassing their parents, giving a kind of silent treatment to the older children, who sometimes waited days for their father's forgiveness (or, if not forgiveness, acceptance once again). Leicester Hemingway described Clarence's methods of disciplining his children as a kind of coventry, physical and psychological banishment (methods the younger brother thought affected Ernest for the rest of his life).[9] In the twenty-first century, Clarence's punishments might be called manipulative, because they certainly gave him clear authority, and they certainly taught his family exacting behavior. There was no challenging his law. Grace Hall Hemingway may have found ways around that law while her father was still alive, often joining forces with him against her husband; after Abba Hall died, however, she had little choice but to support Clarence's treatment of the children—even if she would probably not have punished them in the ways he did (if at all). Judging from the scrapbooks Grace kept for each child, she tended to find their misbehaviors amusing.[10]

Sundays in Oak Park, however, were spent within the church and the house: no friends could come to play, no one wasted time or indulged in games, everything was sober and self-improving—and everyone went to prayers and church services. It was also true that Oak Park was a largely protestant community; there was only one Catholic church, and it was more near to Chicago than Oak Park. There was no parochial school. Everything about Oak Park was conservative, protestant, middle class, white, and several generations away from residents' initial immigration. All these considerations were important: the village did not want to be plagued by differences from the main religion, history (many Oak Park women belonged to the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), and the DAR was powerful in its social action programs), and heterosexual behaviors.

Everything about the Hemingway children's lives in Oak Park was regulated. They were taught behavior and religion by Dr. Clarence; they were taught music, literature, and the arts by Grace. They were trained to be a well-behaved troop of Oak Park First Congregationalists, middle-class advocates of honor, truth, belief in higher powers, and modesty. Dr. Clarence's forming and teaching the Agassiz nature study group was one manifestation of what he wanted his own children to learn; his teaching Sunday school classes was another. Grace Hall Hemingway's being seen as an expert (and expensive) music teacher, and a person who contributed to all the town's charitable events, was yet another. Learning

was what one did: education was somber and serious. In Beegel's essay about Ernest's diligence in preparing his science reports, and charting his science experiments, she noted the high seriousness with which he was preparing himself to become a hunter-naturalist.[11]

The appeal of authority ran through both the Hall and Hemingway lines: successful people, proud of what they contributed to the suitably graceful tenor of Oak Park, Clarence and Grace saw their children as reflections of their own competence. That Grace kept extensive scrapbooks for each child showed how satisfying each was to her sense of success as a mother. There are women who are happy mothers because they watch their children develop into people in their own right; there are others, and Grace Hall Hemingway was more comfortable in this group, who see their children as mirror images of their parents—and then any misbehavior on the child's part is read as a rejection of those parental values. As Ernest began making more and more of his own choices, which often were not the choices his parents would have made, both Clarence and Grace found his behavior inexplicable—and threatening.

It was probably during the second or third year of high school that Ernest found the power of his writing voice. He wrote for the school paper—largely sports stories and humor columns in the vein of Ring Lardner, the Chicago writer. According to Leicester, he brought his irony to bear on many of the school's foibles, and sometimes included his competitive sister Marcelline, whom he saw as "the embodiment of the sanctimonious social belle."[12] He published short stories in the school's literary magazine. To this time, fiction meant unrealistic, if imaginative, plot lines and stereotyped characters. But Ernest was sure he had found what would be his life's calling. Such a commitment was easy to make: thanks to Grace's practice of taking one or another of the children to every Chicago event she wanted to attend herself, Ernest had been to his share of performances, concerts, lectures, operas, and plays—far beyond the experience of most high school students. He knew what an orchestra did during a musical; he knew how to behave as an actor (and he had one of the lead roles in Clyde Fitch's *Beau Brummel*, the senior play—as he had in other plays, beginning with the seventh-grade *Robin Hood*).

Here in the early twentieth century, under the influence of the remarkable Theodore Roosevelt and other fitness gurus, the well-rounded person was also a sports enthusiast: Ernest worked his way up from the junior varsity football team to become a second string varsity tackle; he joined the swimming team and played water basketball; he boxed and taught his friends to box. Under Grace's coercion, and after much argument with Clarence, who did not believe in social dancing, card playing,

or drinking, he went to dance class and occasionally took Marcelline, if she didn't have a date, to school dances (he didn't go on his own because he seldom had extra money, and he remained self-conscious about the size and clumsiness of his feet). He kept his paper route, although Clarence drove him for the deliveries when the weather was bad.

He seemed to be a student teachers liked. Not only did he do well in science, Latin, English, mathematics, biology, history, and music, he was the school delegate to the Older Boys Conference in Galesburg, Illinois; and he spoke when he joined the Boys' Club of the First Congregational Church spring of his senior year. When he and Marcelline graduated in May of 1917, Ernest was named Class Prophet, a role that was a tribute to his acknowledged writing talent, while his sister gave a speech about the "new girlhood."

Hemingway's social life to this time in Oak Park had been buried under a daily calendar that kept him running from school to activities to paper delivery to band practice to sports practices. Whether because he was in the same class as Marcelline, or because he was shy, he had his first date when he was a junior in high school.[13] In Michigan, however, his time was more his own, and he spent long hours doing adolescent boy things with Jim Dilworth, whose home in Horton Bay became a kind of refuge for him. Then, the summer before his junior year in high school, he met the brother and sister who were to become some of his best friends—Bill and Katy Smith. Staying with their aunt, Mrs. Joseph Charles, in Horton Bay on Lake Charlevoix, Bill at 21 and Katy at 25 were sophisticated, well educated, witty, and used to having fun in their home town of St. Louis. Just two miles away from the Hemingway cottage, the Smiths liked to do things with the handsome young—and sometimes charmingly naïve—Hemingway. Katy treated him with a mixture of flirtatiousness and motherliness; she was an avid reader and brought new books to both the boys. Bill was a congenial buddy.

Ernest's willingness to return to Windemere for summers late in his high school years, even for the summer following his graduation, stemmed from his friendship with the Smiths, and the almost nightly swims at Horton Bay. He also kept up friendships with some of the itinerant Cherokee Indians who lived near the far edge of Walloon Lake. While his relationship with Prudy Boulton, the beautiful Indian girl from "Ten Indians" and other stories, was never confirmed, the possibility of a flirtation with the exotic girl—and his understanding that any close relationship with an Indian would have him banished from his Oak Park family—made Ernest consider such a relationship desirable. Already aware that he would need to leave his coercive family if he were

to escape Oak Park—and its stolid conventions—Ernest took his time in making key decisions.

One of those decisions was his conviction that he was not going to college. Instead he wanted to get a job on a major U.S. newspaper and learn to be a real journalist. Because the United States had entered World War I, both Hemingway parents were happy that Ernest was not inclined to volunteer—although they hoped his weak eyes would keep him out of war even if he had tried to enlist. So after his summer in Michigan in 1917, during which he and Clarence with some hired hands made the recently purchased land across the lake into the start of a working farm, in October, Ernest went to Kansas City. First he lived with Uncle Tyler Hemingway who had helped him get an internship on the *Star*. Eventually, when he was hired on at the newspaper, he roomed for $2.50 a week with the man who had been courting Katy Smith. From October, 1917, to early spring of 1918, Ernest absorbed everything there was to know about journalism—some nights he slept in the city room on a couch. He pushed for more and more assignments, and he took seriously the paper's style sheet—use simple sentences and short first paragraphs; use no unnecessary words. The phrases were prescient of the principles of Imagist poetry which he was to hear again in Paris from the American poet Ezra Pound.

Hemingway met a variety of people in the quasi-frontier town of Kansas City, people he would have had no way of running into in Oak Park, Illinois. Because he told his parents that he was frantically busy, he wrote home less and less often. The occasional boxes of cookies from Grace, which Hemingway shared with his newspaper friends, did little to bridge the ever-widening gap between Oak Park and Kansas City. Grace's requests for copies of his stories went unanswered. It was time to break out of the kind of writing that could be pasted into the family scrapbook.

And Hemingway did break out. Much of his journalism was marked, perhaps unexpectedly, with insistent descriptions of character—but this time, real character, observed from the real people (whether prostitutes, prize fighters, law men, bankers, clergymen, prison guards, cooks, journalists, politicians, waitresses, housemaids) he was meeting. These figures were linked with the events the *Star* wanted covered. In an age of journalism that was less rigidly codified than it was to become during the 1920s and the 1930s, Hemingway's journalism-as-story was close enough to the standard "take" on happenings to be permissible—and also to add flavor to the newspaper page.

Surrounded as he was with both news and people who recognized its importance, Hemingway was learning a lot about not only journalism

but also about the war. One of the other reporters at the *Star* was Ted Brumback, who had just returned from four months as a volunteer in France with the field service. He was planning to re-enlist: Ernest's weak eyes would not keep him out of such service, even though they might keep him out of the regular military. In January, 1918, just a few months after beginning work for the *Star*, Hemingway applied to the American Red Cross as an ambulance driver; in April, he gave notice at the *Star*. Early in May, after a few weeks at home and in Michigan, he was called to New York for his physical examination.

Oak Park kept track of its patriots. It announced the young Hemingway's imminent departure, and the Hemingway family too became newsworthy. Sent off to France with enthusiastic blessings from particularly his mother (Clarence prayed nightly for his son's safe return and could find little to be excited about in his going to Europe), Hemingway saw his travels—and what he imagined lay ahead—as yet another adventure. He had survived the Kansas City *Star* experience with aplomb, and he knew how much he had learned in a very short time. The likelihood was that another six months or a year in France or Italy would bring immense returns; it was hard to negate the appeal of the attraction of war, the camaraderie and bravery of young men, and—his constant, if unexpressed, theme—the legitimate escape from Oak Park. It could be that the *in our time* vignette about the naïve men aboard ship, concentrating hard on their drinking, represents the attitudes of the young Americans who were too excited to be leaving home to envision themselves in realistic battle. They were protected by their choice of service from having to learn marksmanship so they could see other men on shipboard as possible buddies rather than as fighting companions.

Hemingway saw service for slightly over a month. Sent from Paris to Italy, he drove the bulky Fiat ambulance across terrain that reminded him of hilly Michigan fields; he joked with other ambulance drivers—for a while. But his first work was transporting bodies of dead civilians killed in the explosion of a Milan munitions plant—many of the dead were women, and all their bodies were decaying in the June heat. Transferred next to the military front at Schio in the Dolomites, he saw that there would be little action, at least for a time. Impatient, he traded the ambulance for a bicycle and volunteered to man Red Cross canteen services further east, at Fossalta di Pave. There, at midnight on July 8, crawling in front of the Italian lines to reach a listening post on the Piave River, he was hit by an "ashcan," an exploding trench mortar that resembled a five-gallon can and blew "pieces of junk steel in every direction."[14] He might also have been hit by machine gun fire—either at that time or

while being carried by stretcher to an aid station. At any rate, there were two machine gun bullets among the 227 metal fragments which were eventually removed from his legs.

Surviving his injuries, Hemingway was the first American to live after having been wounded in Italy; he was awarded two Italian medals,[15] and the U.S. papers—including the *Oak Park News*—made him a hero.