

ANALYSIS

PUBLIC IMAGE AND CHARACTER OF HEMINGWAY

Ernest Hemingway

(1899-1961)

"Partly the charm was owed to his physical presence: He was tall, handsome, broad-shouldered, with heavy biceps, yet carried himself with a curiously diffident and reassuring air; meeting him was like being led into the box stall of a huge, spirited, but surprisingly gentle stallion. More of the charm depended, though, on his habit of paying undivided attention to each of several persons in turn. He looked in one's eyes, then he turned his head to listen carefully: 'Most people never listen,' he used to say. Very old men and women, some of them later his enemies, remember with nostalgia his early times in Paris. His first wife [Hadley]...said of him forty years after their divorce, 'He was the kind of man to whom men, women, children, and dogs are attracted. It was something.'

About Hemingway's public image a great deal has been written--rhapsodically by journalists and disapprovingly by men of letters beginning with Edmund Wilson--but it has never been studied with any seriousness....One phase was that of the young writer living in exile and speaking for the postwar generation with absolute integrity. Another was that of the sportsman, traveler, and discriminating drinker, often photographed with a glass in his hand beside the carcasses of enormous fish and mammals. Still other phases were those of the committed man defending the Spanish Republic, of the war correspondent ranging through France with a private army, and, in the final years, of the square-faced, grizzly bearded veteran watching paternally over his flock of young admirers: Mr. Papa.

The image in all its phases--after the first suburban episode of the war hero dazzling his neighbors in Oak Park--played its part on an international stage. Always it was rendered more persuasive by Hemingway's zest for living, by his energy, his passionate desire to be first, and his inborn gift for projecting himself. In one phase, that of the sportsman and bon vivant, the image had a discernible effect on a number of commercial enterprises. Years ago when I was gathering material for a profile, I talked with Jackie Key, a charter-boat captain in Key West. 'If you want to say something bad about Hemingway,' he told me, 'don't talk to me. Hemingway made this charter-boat business--he brought the fishermen down.' Yes, he brought the fishermen to Key West and Bimini, and bands of hunters to the high African plains, and American college students by hundreds, then by thousands, to the festival at Pamplona. Ski resorts in Tyrol and Idaho, bullfights all over Spain, restaurants in Venice, Milan, Paris, Havana: he had good times at all of them, he told with gusto what they had to offer, and the crowds came streaming after....

Of course the real importance of the Hemingway image has been its effect on literary history. It appeared at exactly the right time: in the early 1920s, when a new generation of American writers was coming forward. Although those writers were of almost the same age and strongly shared a feeling of being different from older persons, as late as 1925 they still lacked a collective name, a set of beliefs jointly held, and a code of literary conduct. It should be noted once again that Hemingway gave them the name, after seizing upon a remark of Gertrude Stein's: 'You are all a lost generation,' she had told him. The younger men adopted the name--which Hemingway himself soon disowned--but they were looking at other things that would make them a generation in spirit as well as in biological fact. They especially needed a sort of older brother on whom they could model themselves as a step for each of them toward achieving a separate identity. Hemingway gave them the older brother too, in heroes like Nick Adams and Jake Barnes--who quickly became confused with his personal image--and the stories gave them a code of conduct. Like Hemingway the other new writers would project themselves as being simple, unaffected, tough-spoken, versed in the language of boxing and the bullring--and brave in an outsiders--especially of those who wrote for money--and brave in an uncomplaining way while suffering from a secret wound....

His strongest immediate influence was on writers beginning with Steinbeck who were too young to have served even briefly in the Great War. The influence continued to spread, and it is all pervasive in the hard-

boiled novelists of the 1930s. When still younger novelists wrote about their adventures in the Second War, they produced Hemingway dialogue and Hemingway scenes of action. Often their heroes seemed to be reflections of Robert Jordan among the Spanish guerillas or of Frederic Henry caught up in the retreat from Caporetto. The Hemingway image was more vivid for them than their own adventures in a different war. I must be remembered that the image is an essential part of the truth about Hemingway. Not only did he project an idealized picture of himself, but he usually succeeded in living up to it.

He had aspirations toward goodness, toward something close to saintliness. When he fell short of his ideal in a fit of professional jealousy or one of his black rages, he blamed himself and sometimes offered contrite apologies. He was truly a leader of men, foresighted in laying plans for them, incisive in judgment, resourceful and cool-headed in a crisis. He was an outstanding sportsman, that is, an accomplished fisherman, a fair boxer, a good marksman in spite of his impaired vision, and a superb wing shot. He was truly generous to others with his time, and later in life with his money. Beside or beneath these qualities, however, were others that Hemingway tried to expunge from the picture. They were his shadow side, to use Jung's term again, and this included sudden rages, hypochondria, fears of death that became a longing for death, and fits of depression that he called 'black-assed melancholy.' Often he was boastful, truculent, quick to take offense, and he nursed his grudges for a long time. He could no more tolerate rivals--literary rivals in particular--than could an old lion....

In Jung's catalogue of types, Hemingway as a public figure--though not in private--was clearly an extraverted man of sensation....Would [Jung] have advised Hemingway to cultivate some repressed side of his personality, for example, the side on which he was clearly an introverted intellectual....All sorts of Jungian terms seem to apply: not only persona and shadow side, but anima, archetype, and collective unconscious....According to Jung, 'A man cannot get rid of himself in favor of an artificial personality without punishment. Even the attempt to do so brings on, in all ordinary cases, unconscious reactions in the form of bad moods, affects, phobias, compulsive ideas, back-slidings, vices, etc.'...Writing well had always been [Hemingway's] central ambition, and now he was, as I said, the most famous writer in the world; the statement would be confirmed by a count of the columns and inches that the press devoted to his exploits and remarks. After the two plane crashes in East Africa, he was granted the almost unique privilege of reading his own obituaries, which compared in length with the later tributes to Winston Churchill. That same year, 1954, his position was so to speak sanctified by the award to him of the Nobel Prize, yet most of the time he was feeling...moody and depressed....

After the disaster in East Africa, it was too late in any case for simple therapeutic measures. It was even too late for a return to the Catholic Church, a step Jung might have advised him to take as a means of surmounting his inner problems. Hemingway had lived too hard and it would seem that he was older physiologically than by the calendar. He had suffered too many internal injuries, he had been battered on the head as often as an old boxer, and he no longer had enough resilience to go back to an old faith or adopt a new style of life or undertake a new approach to writing. Besides all that, he was committed to his public image. He was also tired of it, perhaps...Handicapped as the old lion was by injuries and admirers, tormented by demons from the subconscious, he continued almost to the end a double life, playing the great man in public--even at the Mayo Clinic, where he played the part superbly for the doctors--then standing alone at his writing table, humble and persistent, while he tried to summon back his early powers. In the spring before his death he was planning to revise *A Moveable Feast*, but found that he had been too deeply wounded to write even a single line."

Malcolm Cowley

"Hemingway: The Old Lion"

A Second Flowering: Works and Days of the Lost Generation
(1974; Penguin 1980) 225-32

"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....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....

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...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....

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 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 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 Stein cartoon in *Vanity Fair* depicted him with a rose in his hairy, tattooed fist....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 straightforward language and frank depiction of a love affair out of wedlock did he begin to generate *New Yorker* articles and other public explorations of his personality....Working in collaboration with the mass media, Hemingway shaped his own public image, largely in his nonfiction of the 1930s, which included *Death in the Afternoon*, *Green Hills of Africa*, a series of articles for *Esquire* on sports, politics, and art, and correspondence from Spain during the Spanish civil war....

[Hemingway's] complicated personality, as Raeburn analyzes it, consisted of no fewer than nine roles: the sportsman, the "tough and virile" manly man, the exposé of sham, the arbiter of taste, the world traveler, the bon vivant, the insider, the stoic veteran, and finally and most important, the heroic artist (39-43). But the image that stuck could be reduced to that of the tough guy who also happened, incredibly, to be a literary genius, the man of action eager to test his courage against great beasts and the weapons of war oddly merged with a literary artist who shaped a new prose style for the century. By the end of World War II, during which he served as war correspondent for *Collier's* and uncommissioned leader of his own band of irregulars in France, that persona had taken a strong hold on the American consciousness....

[Philip] Young's hypothesis [*Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration*, 1952] suggests that the public Hemingway, the macho figure who repeatedly sought occasions to demonstrate his grace under pressure, did so not because he wanted to cultivate such an image but because he couldn't help it. Young's book made him out to be "crazy," Hemingway complained (Raeburn 139-41)....Hemingway's presentation of himself may have owed something to altruism, but he may also have adopted his image to gain approval and attention, to prevent raids on his psyche, to prove himself against the most demanding tests, or for all

these reasons. He was, as Baker and all subsequent biographers have concluded, an extremely complex man whose actions could not conveniently be ascribed to single causes....

Why did Hemingway kill himself?...How was he supposed to surpass the wonderful stories of the Paris years, and such novels as *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*? But his celebrity exacerbated the difficulty, as the general public concentrated its gaze on the exploits of his private life and could only occasionally be roused to acknowledge--as by an entire issue of *Life* containing *The Old Man and the Sea* or by the granting of a Nobel Prize in Sweden--that the Papa Hemingway they knew was an artist as well....As Braudy points out...Hemingway was far more famous [than other literary suicides], and hence far more subject to 'a fragmentation of self and public image' than the others (28)." [This overlooks his brain damage, loss of ability to write at all, feeling like a burden to wife Mary, and so on.]

Scott Donaldson
"Introduction: Hemingway and Fame"
The Cambridge Companion to Ernest Hemingway
ed. Donaldson
(Cambridge U 1996) 1, 6, 9-12, 14-15

Michael Hollister (2015)