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EARNESTLY CELEBRATING HEMINGWAY

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by

Jay B Gaskill

This is the 60th anniversary the completion of the final draft of a small masterpiece by the quintessentially American author, Ernest Hemingway. Papa Hemingway completed “*The Old Man and the Sea*” in February, 1951. [See *Ernest Hemingway*, Harold Bloom, Ed., p 219, note 1, Chelsea House 2005.]

Ernest Hemingway, Two and a Half Men¹ ***Spain, Cuba, Key West, Idaho....***

I can't resist wondering whether in today's politically correct environment, one in which hunters are shunned and males who are not sufficiently “sensitive” are marginalized – would Papa Hemingway be revered or reviled?

This is an important marker of how the culture has changed. For millions of the 21st century's risk-averse, metro-sexual males (with their personal trainers and hair stylists), and for many of their arch feminist companions (some of whom secretly admire “macho” men while settling for less in their relationships “for the greater good” and their own sanity), Hemingway is an alien life-form from the mythical past.

Yet Papa Hemingway is a still secret fascination (at least among the subset who actually pause twittering and texting long enough to read a book), much in the same way that confirmed environmentalists are willing to covertly cuddle in front of that ancient, carbon-emitting technology, the fireplace.

Reading Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) was a formative life experience for me. It is conventional to celebrate Hemingway as a brilliant American stylist, a vivid storyteller

¹ Hemingway was an, authentic adventurer in the grand 19th century tradition and a towering 20th century literary genius; he was also a man who lived with a family legacy of recurring depression episodes. When they reached an intolerable level in 1959-1960, Hemingway was subjected to a devastating series of electroshock treatments at the Mayo Clinic 1960-61. This so impaired his capacity to write, that the ensuing frustration and despair led directly to his famous suicide on July 2, 1961.

who used muscular, terse sentences to tell more than paragraphs. It is less conventional to celebrate him as a writer in whom the modern male predicament was intensified: He was saved from “macho oblivion” (that place where the politically correct feminists consign dead white males) in the lasting image of Papa Hemingway, the lone alpha male. Having been thus saved, Hemingway is acknowledged by the effete elites for his rough poetry, as they might revere a Neanderthal genius... admired, but only from a safe literary distance.

My late Aunt Liz, a beloved mother, a formidable skier and my own mother’s favorite sister, lived in Ketchum Idaho after she served in WWII as a medical transcriptionist. She became acquainted with many of the Hemingway crowd who frequented a certain bar there in the late 40’s. Liz had joined the Navy because, as she put it, all the good men had left town to serve their country. Needless to say, Aunt Liz was not politically correct.

I’m an Idaho lad who ended up in the Bay Area to attend law school, then stayed to defend criminals as public defender. Before that, I attended north-western universities and throughout this period, I read and reread Hemingway. To be fair, I loved Hemingway’s fiction equally with that of Dostoevsky, Heinlein and Asimov, and I was strongly impressed with Ayn Rand’s *Fountainhead*. But Hemingway’s spare, incisive lines evoked a sense of life that I understood, admired and never, ever forgot.

In the decades since I arrived in California to attend law school at UC Berkeley’s Boalt Hall, I’ve speculated: Suppose Earnest Hemingway had been a little bit further to the political right. From inside our excessively protective culture, that so called “PC Nanny cultural bubble”, I get the clear impression that he’d have been dismissed by now as a sort of precocious Rush Limbaugh, a macho savant of the right wing male chauvinists, if you will.

History reveals authenticity and exposes its opposite. It gives us informative distance-measured by the accumulation of insights and data. And from that perspective, Ernest Hemingway was the real deal.

I find a compelling moral compass in Hemingway, a sense of life and engagement without reservation or cynical detachment. Earnest Hemingway was a man without a false face. His best characters chose to engage in a morally ambiguous world, taking sides anyway, and always committing to act with integrity. These men were Ernest Hemingway.

From the National archives, we learn a great deal more about Hemingway’s grit than from any of the literary accounts. For example in WWII:

“Hemingway accompanied American troops as they stormed to shore on Omaha Beach—though as a civilian correspondent he was not allowed to land himself. Weeks later he returned to Normandy, attaching himself to the 22nd Regiment commanded by Col. Charles “Buck” Lanham Col. as it drove toward Paris (whose liberation he would later witness and write about). Before doing so,

Hemingway led a controversial effort to gather military intelligence in the village of Rambouillet and, with military authorization, took up arms himself with his small band of irregulars.

“According to World War II historian Paul Fussell, ‘Hemingway got into considerable trouble playing infantry captain to a group of Resistance people that he gathered because a correspondent is not supposed to lead troops, *even if he does it well.*’” [My emphasis]

Hemingway was awarded a Bronze Star for his service as a war correspondent, having circulated “freely under fire in combat situations in order to obtain an accurate picture of conditions.”

<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/spring/hemingway.html>

Hemingway’s greatest novels, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) and *Farewell to Arms* (1929), involve acts of moral engagement in the messy, ambiguous setting of war. In the “Bell Tolls”, Frederick Henry is an American who engages as an explosive expert against Franco in the Spanish Civil War, a conflict that the real Hemingway came to see as less than clear cut. In the “Farewell”, his character is an American who serves as an ambulance driver in WW I, Italy – a storyline loosely based in the author’s life.

It is worth noting that Hollywood cast Gary Cooper to play Frederick Henry in *Farewell to Arms* and Howard Roark in the *Fountainhead*. Ms. Rand’s characters are optimistic-heroic, while Hemingway’s are realistic heroic. But the common thread is moral engagement and deep integrity. Gary Cooper was spot on casting.

By contrast, lesser writers have attempted to fit the Hemingway mold. For example, Norman Mailer’s macho pose was a bit overdone. After graduating in 1943, Mailer was drafted serving in World War II in the Philippines with the 112th Cavalry completing his service as a cook.

IDAHO and SPAIN



A Hemingway statue in Pamplona

When Hemingway came home in his later years, it was to Idaho. I believe I know why. Not long ago, my wife and I walked a good stretch of the Camino de Santiago, that 750 kilometer, two thousand year old footpath from the Spanish-French border to the Cathedral at Santiago, Spain. The trail crosses the Spanish North Country, dipping into Pamplona (where there is at least one Hemingway Street).

Then to the end of the trail the cathedral outside of which, if you listen closely, you can hear Celtic bagpipes up the street. [The Celts were well installed in Northern Spain long before the Romans arrived on scene.]

There is a latitude swath that captures most of that trail across northern Spain, and if you allow it to run along the entire globe, it passes through Hemingway's Idaho, *almost* perfectly: Both the town Roncesvalles (at the beginning of the Spanish trail) and that of Sun Valley, Idaho (a few miles from the Hemingway house) are at latitude 43, give or take.

What struck me as we walked the Camino, however, was how much the look and feel of the Hemingway's Spain and Idaho were the same.



I remember emailing my Idaho-dwelling brother, Jack, a Camino trail picture or two (see above), and he thought for sure he'd actually camped there...until he noticed that castle in the distance.



déjà vu, in Idaho....

Celebrating Ernest in Idaho

Hemingway's remains are buried in the Ketchum, Idaho cemetery. The actual grave is modest. A more impressive memorial overlooks Trail Creek, north of town.



It contains a eulogy that Hemingway wrote for a friend-

Best of all he loved the fall
The leaves yellow on the cottonwoods
Leaves floating on the trout streams
And above the hills

The high blue windless skies
Now he will be a part of them forever

Ernest Hemingway - Idaho - 1939

Links: <http://www.ernesthemingwaycollection.com/About-Hemingway/Ernest-Hemingway-in-Idaho.aspx>

Hemingway's love for Idaho, Spain, Key West and the frontier was legendary.

His home in Warm Springs, Idaho (near Ketchum) is maintained by the Nature Conservancy, visits by special arrangement only. His Key West residence is a bit of a tourist trap. His Havana, Cuba, home is preserved intact, but Hemingway's huge personal library there is deteriorating because of the humidity and the unwillingness of the regime to provide dehumidification. This is a particular tragedy because, as an Idaho Hemingway scholar explained, Ernest was a prolific reader, leaving margin notes in every volume from Proust to Poe.

“When I stopped writing I did not want to leave the river where I could see the trout in the pool, its surface pushing and swelling smooth against the resistance of the log-driven piles of the bridge. The story was about coming back from the war but there was no war in it. But in the morning the river would be there and I must make it and the country and all that would happen....” [Ernest Hemingway in Paris, sometime in the 1920's]

From *Hunger was a good discipline* in “*The Moveable Feast*”, written 1957-1960 in Cuba, Spain and Ketchum, Idaho, and first Published posthumously by Charles Scribner & Sons.

JBG

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The other photos and the lines from Hemingway's Idaho memorial belong to him or someone else....

IUK Website: <http://www.ernesthemingway.org.uk/>

Jay B Gaskill is a California attorney. His short story collection, *Lost Souls Coffee Shop* is available as an e-book from Amazon and other publishers.

http://www.amazon.com/Lost-Souls-Coffee-Shop-ebook/dp/B0035LCA8Q/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&m=AG56TWVU5XWC2&s=digital-text&qid=1298065009&sr=1-1