

Pressure Under Grace

Review of Kenneth Lynn's biography of Ernest Hemingway

by Frederick C. Crews,
New York Review of Books, August 13, 1987 issue

1.

KENNETH S. LYNN'S *Hemingway* is hardly a book that its subject would have enjoyed reading. If the touchy and pugnacious bruiser were still among us, Lynn would surely want to keep a bodyguard at his side for the next several years. Nevertheless, he has written not only one of the most brilliant and provocative literary biographies in recent memory, but also the study that Hemingway most urgently needs at this point in his critical fortunes.

Though superficial appearances indicate otherwise, Hemingway's literary stature continues to be subject to the downward revision that began on the day in 1961 when, depressed, paranoid, and stupefied by heavy doses of electroshock therapy, he blew out his brains with a shotgun blast. Throughout the Sixties and Seventies, feminists and others took their own shots at the tottering idol, whose cult of macho sporting values and stoic mannerisms began to seem hollow and foolish. So much insistence on correctness of attitude in the face of a melodramatically hostile fate; so much self-flattery in the creation of one autobiographical hero after another, always a god to his adoring woman; so much scorn for the weakling, the pervert, the aesthete, the castrating bitch! Wasn't the whole thing—and Hemingway's famous tight-lipped style along with it—a contemptible sham?

Today, when remoteness in time has begun to confer indulgence toward the writer's personal failings, we hear less of such talk. Instead, we find ourselves in the midst of what looks like a Hemingway boom. The Eighties have witnessed an enormous outpouring of biographies, specialized studies, dissertations, conferences, television specials, and mass-market reissues, along with further posthumous volumes of Hemingway's uncollected or abandoned work, sometimes forced into print with little regard for its quality or even its authenticity.

One may wonder, however, whether this flurry signifies a true reversal of the critical deflation or merely a scholarly and commercial feeding frenzy over the newly accessible Hemingwayana in collections at the John F. Kennedy Library, the University of Texas, and elsewhere. In large measure, what has been restored to us is Hemingway the celebrity—the figure that he himself, the supreme self-publicist of modern letters, created in the Thirties and shrewdly marketed through articles and interviews depicting

a life of action, courage, and connoisseurship. It says something about our own shallow decade that so many of us are happy to revert to that trivial conception of our most influential novelist. In the long run, however, the resuscitation of the Hemingway legend will be seen to have merely postponed an inevitable reckoning. Quite simply, the legend is false, and its certain demise will leave Hemingway once again exposed to his most adamant detractors.

What Hemingway requires is an ideal reader who can discard everything that is meretricious in our image of him but then do justice to the literary art that remains. Put this way, the task sounds straightforward enough. The trouble is, however, that the reality behind the legend is so unpleasant in several respects that biographical debunkers have had no stomach for the work of critical reconstruction. From the former idolator Carlos Baker's reluctantly revelatory *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* to Bernice Kert's *The Hemingway Women* and Jeffrey Meyers's *Hemingway: A Biography*, those who have had the most eye-opening things to say about Hemingway the man have not cared even to attempt critical reformulations.

After Kenneth Lynn's contribution, however, nothing will be the same in any branch of Hemingway studies. Though his ambitious inquiry builds (with acknowledgment) on the work of other biographers, Lynn carries the process of demythification even farther than did Jeffrey Meyers, whose coolly objective and well-researched book has been treated in some quarters as a breach of decorum. We will see that no aspect of Hemingway's conduct, however intimate or embarrassing, escapes Lynn's clinical eye. Yet his intelligence is fully balanced by his humanity. Instead of merely refuting Hemingway's boasts, Lynn offers us our first cogent and sustained explanation of the psychological, familial, and environmental pressures that helped to make the willful yet deeply cautious author what he was. The result is an admirable combination of justice and compassion—but that is not all. In showing that Hemingway secretly entertained broader sympathies than his manly code implied, Lynn is able to return to the fiction with fresh appreciation.

To be sure, the Hemingway who emerges is a troubled and diminished figure in comparison with the mythic presence that once dominated our literary scene. But he is not the exposed fraud we have grown accustomed to meeting in ideological diatribes of recent decades. Rather, he is the Hemingway who once wrote to Scott Fitzgerald, 'We are all bitched from the start and you especially have to be hurt like hell before you can write seriously. But when you get the damned hurt use it—don't cheat with it. Be as faithful to it as a scientist.'

2.

To arrive at that vulnerable and exacting artist, we must first learn to forgo the Hemingway legend. But the task is not as easy as it looks. The legend, it is important to grasp, comes in two versions—in effect, one for the credulous mass public and one for

relatively wary critics. If the simple version is clearly doomed, its more sophisticated counterpart still has plenty of eloquent defenders.

At the primary level, the legend says that Hemingway was a great sportsman, aficionado, and stoic, religiously devoted to maintaining poise in the face of mortal danger. This is the image cultivated by the surviving Hemingway clan for the sake of its business ventures, including Hemingway Ltd., a corporation formed to market the label 'Hemingway' for use on tastefully chosen fishing rods, safari clothes, and (surely the ultimate triumph of greed over taste) shotguns. In contrast, the critics' version of the legend is a limited exercise in damage control. It allows that the hero may have been morbid and fear-ridden but asserts that even his debilities were acquired in a noble, portentous manner—namely, in the traumatizing experience of being hit by shrapnel in World War I. Thanks to the wounding, Hemingway is awarded a red badge of tragic historical consciousness.

Although Lynn provides the most decisive refutation of both accounts, his conclusions about Hemingway the alleged sportsman were already implicit in other biographies. Scholars have known for some time that Hemingway—clumsy, weak-eyed, slow-footed, accident-prone, and, in the words of his third wife, Martha Gellhorn, 'the biggest liar since Munchausen'—always talked a better game than he played. To hear him tell it, no subtlety of sport or combat had eluded his skills or analytic acumen. True specialists, however, were often unimpressed not only by his prowess but also by his claims to expertise.

More important, Hemingway's sense of fair competition was stunted by irrational needs. As a recreational boxer, he became notorious for administering low blows and knees to the groin, mercilessly pounding smaller and weaker friends, sucker-punching one man who was still lacing his gloves, and doing the same to another—indeed, smashing his newly donned glasses—while the latter was unlacing a glove. After his eye-hand coordination had been sacrificed to alcoholism, he disgusted his hunting companions by claiming some of their kills as his own. And in recalling deep-sea fishing trips with the later Hemingway—who was fond of shooting at sharks with a machine gun or pistol, and who once wounded his own legs in the process—Arnold Gingrich characterized his overbearing friend as a 'meat fisherman' who 'cared more about the quantity than about the quality,' disdained the true angler's concern for proper methods, and was all in all 'a very poor sport.' In his zeal to throw more punches, ski more recklessly, catch more fish, and slaughter more animals than anyone else, Hemingway was not a sportsman but a man possessed.

If the writer's compulsive side is inescapable, however, its origins are still a theme of lively controversy. Under the influence of Malcolm Cowley, Philip Young, and Hemingway himself—who grudgingly came to find a certain utility in this line of argument—most commentators from the Forties until now have traced his psychic problems to the Austrian mortar shell which had allegedly shattered both his equanimity and his belief in public causes. As articulated in the backup legend, the famous incident at Fossalta di Piave at once attests to the hero's preternatural valor, imparts an agreeably

leftward spin to his grandest themes (the emptiness of politicians' abstractions, the need for a separate peace), and provides a concrete external basis for the not-so-grand ones (night fears, loss of nerve, castration, impotence, nihilism).

Thanks to careful research by Lynn and, before him, Michael Reynolds, this story now stands exposed as a fiction. Hemingway, it seems, grossly misrepresented the immediate aftermath of his wounding, when, with over 200 shell fragments lodged in his lower body, he allegedly carried a fellow victim 150 yards through machine-gun fire to safety, absorbing several direct hits but somehow picking himself back up and completing the herculean ordeal. The truth appears to be that young Ernest received many flesh wounds from shrapnel, that he showed solicitude for others while waiting to be evacuated, but that during his recovery he embroidered the story to compel maximum awe from parents, friends, and reporters, some of whom were even left with the impression that he had been a member of the Italian equivalent of the Green Berets rather than a Red Cross volunteer dispensing cigarettes and candy from a bicycle.

The most significant distortion, however, was not Hemingway's doing but that of critics enamored of the overworked 'postwar disillusionment' or 'wasteland' thesis. This banality has served to lend a darker, more mature tinge to the fiction of the Jazz Age, which at its best (*The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*) is thought to constitute a wise commentary on the moral collapse of the West. Since the books in question reflect scant historical analysis and are patently jejune in some respects, the critics' job has been to catch deeper echoes between the lines. In Fitzgerald's case this has been a losing cause; the carnage had ended before the would-be knight could sail for France in his custom-tailored Brooks Brothers uniform, much less get properly shot, and his novels of the Twenties exude an undisguisable combination of naive, wistful romanticism and sociopolitical indifference. Fossalta, in contrast, has provided the critics with copious servings of Hemingway helper.

Did Hemingway lose his boyish innocence in 1918, acquiring in short order a fissured psyche and a bitter sense of historical disillusionment? Lynn proposes that we need only consult surviving letters and photographs to see that, on the contrary, the teen-age adventurer was more elated than shattered by his brush with death. (One of the reproduced pictures, taken shortly after the explosion, discloses a buoyant, handsome youth, not quite nineteen, beaming triumphantly at the camera from his hospital bed in Milan.) 'It does give you an awfully satisfactory feeling to be wounded,' he wrote home. It was, he said in another letter, 'the next best thing to getting killed and reading your own obituary'—a line that could have been spoken by Tom Sawyer. Obviously, Hemingway was trying to calm his parents' fears. Even so, the adeptness of his sprightly rhetoric sits poorly with the conventional idea of his thoroughly unnerved, shell-shocked condition.

As Meyers had already perceived, Hemingway's escape without so much as a broken bone 'made him feel invincible,...made him want to challenge fate.' Nothing in his subsequent conduct suggests that he returned from Italy with a subdued temper, much less a revulsion against killing or a grasp of the issues and ironies behind the war. No doubt the wounding did render him more 'existential,' heightening both his bravado

and his morbidity. What it assuredly did not do, however, was to equip him with the insight and compassion that his friendliest commentators have wished to lend him. On the contrary, it appears to have launched him on a career of braggadocio and hedonistic thrill seeking (financed by other people's money) that would put him gravely out of touch with the social and political consciousness of later times.

For Hemingway's most compliant critics, however, thoughts of war and death are wonderfully ennobling. Consider, for example, their response to 'Big Two-Hearted River,' certainly an admirable work, but not necessarily one that reverberates with world-historical import. Especially since Malcolm Cowley's influential introduction to the Portable Hemingway in 1944, this story of a solitary trout-fishing expedition has been thought to depict its hero's struggle against an underlying panic stemming from the shell shock that figures in other Nick Adams stories written some years later. Hemingway himself belatedly claimed to have adopted this poignant way of reading his tale. 'In the first war, I now see,' he wrote to Cowley in 1948, 'I was hurt very badly; in the body, mind and spirit; and also morally.... Big Two-Hearted River is a story about a man who is home from the war.... I was still hurt very badly in that story' (italics added).

In 1981, however, Kenneth Lynn had the temerity to point out that the published text of 'Big Two-Hearted River' neither mentions the Great War nor alludes to it in any definite way, and that in this tale Nick Adams neither moves about nor thinks like a man who has recently undergone a physically and spiritually crippling trauma. His escape, through the satisfactions of expert camping and fishing, from an unstated preoccupation is all but complete. As for Cowley's thesis, Hemingway apparently saw in it an opportunity to put his anxieties into the past tense and assign them a public cause. Which reading requires fewer extraneous assumptions? Surely it makes sense, as Lynn urges, to be guided by the story itself rather than by the retrospective gloss that Cowley successfully urged upon the rarely veracious Hemingway.

Nevertheless, Lynn's challenge to the 'wound' reading has been received as a virtual sacrilege. Two years ago, writing in *The New Republic*, R.W.B. Lewis sounded the alarm: 'Lynn's critical attitude [toward 'Big Two-Hearted River'], however absurd, was only incidental to a larger intention: to insist that American literature in general is and has been sundrenched and happy, and wholly free of the dark Russian morbidity attributed to it by Cowley and his fellows.' This gratuitous claim can serve as a gauge of the passions that get involved not just with Hemingway criticism in general but specifically with the Fossalta question. For Lewis, Lynn's failure to be adequately pious about the crushing effects of the war constitutes nothing less than a 'nativist' and reactionary program to break the links between the Continent and modern American literature in general.

Hemingway's 'postwar disillusionment,' such as it was, proved to be a belated and derivative manifestation. *A Farewell to Arms* was published in 1929, long after the acclaimed antiwar novels by Dos Passos and Cummings and in the same year that Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* appeared in English. By then, a bitter view of the slogans of 1914 had become virtually obligatory as a token of tough-mindedness.

Moreover, Lynn emphasizes that Lieutenant Frederic Henry's famous embarrassment over 'the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice' is represented not as a wartime revulsion but as a preexisting bias; that is the way he has 'always' felt. Lynn's analysis concurs with a brilliant reading by Millicent Bell, which reveals the seeming pacifism of *A Farewell to Arms* to be a curiously private and psychologically regressive affair.

Similarly, Lynn reminds us that some of Hemingway's stories about the prewar Nick Adams already hint at the depressive anxiety with which the wounded Nick will have to contend. Far from maintaining that Hemingway's writings are 'wholly free of...dark Russian morbidity,' Lynn finds them typically saturated in a mood of indefinite resentment, pessimism, and urgency about maintaining control. Indeed, he takes that mood far more seriously than do critics who try to derive it from Hemingway's alleged awareness of failings in modern capitalist civilization. The writer's politics, Lynn repeatedly shows, were suggestible and riddled with inconsistencies. His psychic makeup, on the other hand, was invariable—and deeply strange.

3.

The prime article of faith for Hemingway's cultists is of course his thoroughgoing maleness. Already in his lifetime, however, that was a topic of considerable speculation. James Joyce saw the brash American as 'the sensitive type' trying to pass for tough. A colleague on the *Toronto Star* who knew him at age twenty remarked, 'A more weird combination of quivering sensitiveness and preoccupation with violence never walked this earth.' 'What a book,' hissed the novelist's former confidante Gertrude Stein, 'would be the real story of Hemingway, not those he writes but the confessions of the real Ernest Hemingway. It would be for another audience than the audience Hemingway now has but it would be very wonderful.' And Zelda Fitzgerald, never one for nuances, went much farther, calling Hemingway's he-man posture 'phony as a rubber check,' characterizing him as 'a pansy with hair on his chest,' and even voicing a suspicion that he and Scott had been sexually intimate. The idea lacks credibility, but Zelda was prescient in divining that Hemingway's masculine identity was far from secure.

One of Hemingway's most constant traits was his compulsion to demean the sexual credentials of others—usually people who had wounded his literary or erotic vanity. In stories, novels, and poems he skewered friends and enemies alike, taking pains to make them easily recognizable and portraying them as impotent or homosexual. Four years after Max Eastman had publicly drawn the obvious conclusion from such sniping—that 'Hemingway lacks the serene confidence that he is a full-sized man'—the wounded lion cornered Eastman in Maxwell Perkins's office, yelled, 'What do you mean accusing me of impotence?' and physically assailed him.

But there is evidence that Hemingway did suffer from recurrent impotence in his four marriages, and his pre- and extramarital amours either quickly fizzled or never progressed beyond hand holding. As soon as he and Pauline had become spouses, he confessed to A.E. Hotchner, 'I could no more make love than Jake Barnes.' 'I wish to hell

it were true,' said Mary when asked if her husband had been a magnificent lover. Throughout his adulthood Hemingway's relations with women were characterized not by the libidinal freedom of which he bragged but by a babyish, demanding dependency punctuated by sulks, tantrums, and flights to the next would-be protectress.

To say this much about Hemingway's sexual misery is to bring the story up to Kenneth Lynn's point of departure. As Lynn insists, more needs to be established about Hemingway's sexuality if we are to account for the peculiar tremulousness of his fiction. Ever since news of the Garden of Eden manuscripts began spreading a decade ago, it has been widely suspected that his secret theme was androgyny—and this has now become the leading motif of Lynn's Hemingway.

Androgyny is named just once in Hemingway's published work, in a startlingly sympathetic discussion of El Greco in *Death in the Afternoon*. The painter, Hemingway wrote, 'could go as far into his other world as he wanted and, consciously or unconsciously, paint...the androgynous faces and forms that filled his imagination.' Now, thanks to Lynn's carefully reasoned analysis, Hemingway's own 'other world' has become sufficiently distinct to be beyond conjecture.

Exhibit A, of course, is the posthumous *Garden of Eden*, a work whose dissociated effect can be explained in part, but only in part, by the collage-like job of editing that was required to make it look like a consecutive story. But even this composite text, screened by Hemingway's second son, Patrick, for any hints of the unsavory, is manifestly about androgyny.

What made *The Garden of Eden* printable from the family's standpoint was no doubt the fact that two female characters, not the Hemingwayesque writer-hero, instigate the story's kinky games. All the bisexual impulses that are overtly represented belong to David Bourne's maniacal bride Catherine and their mutual friend Marita, a lesbian whom Catherine praises as 'a girl and boy both.' Superficially, it is not David's (or Hemingway's) fault that he and Catherine are taken for brother and sister, or that Catherine keeps cutting her hair like a boy's or that she gets him to dye his own hair—thus turning him into her same-sex twin—or that her ultimate fantasy in bed is to trade roles with him. And of course David is just obeying instructions from Catherine—though with telltale alacrity!—when he has sex with the boy-girl Marita, who has recently come from a lesbian encounter with Catherine.

A gullible reader could overlook the motiveless, masturbatory quality of this transformational daisy chain and imagine that Hemingway was merely venting some of his usual misogyny. But as Lynn makes us aware, the same theme of sex-crossing and even some of the same language can be found in other fictions dating back to the Twenties. In that nominal war novel *A Farewell to Arms*, another and more celebrated Catherine proposes that she and her man get identical haircuts:

'Then we'd both be alike. Oh darling, I want you so much I want to be you too.'

'You are. We're the same one.'

In *For Whom the Bell Tolls* it is the Hemingway stand-in, Robert Jordan, who takes enough of a recess from preparing to kill fascists to suggest that he and Maria 'go

together to the coiffeur's' and be rendered indistinguishable. While cuddling they tell each other, 'I am thee and thou art me.' And in *Islands in the Stream* it is once again the woman (does it really matter?) who leads:

'Should I be you or you be me?'

'You have first choice.'

'I'll be you.'

'I can't be you. But I can try.'

Such passages make it difficult to doubt that an imagined switching of sex roles constituted the heart of Hemingway's erotic ideal. And, as Lynn goes on to show, the nonfictional record is entirely consistent with the fictional one.

This is not to say that the strident homophobe Hemingway was disposed toward literally bisexual activities. Whatever he wanted from eros, he sought it from women alone. Lynn shows, however, that the sexual inclinations of women themselves were of more than ordinary interest to him. Hemingway found himself libidinally drawn to lesbians—even to the butch and burly Gertrude Stein, who told her rapt apprentice about women's ways with women and taught him how to crop the hair of his first wife, Hadley. His second wife, Pauline, took female lovers (including Elizabeth Bishop) after Hemingway abandoned her, and in happier days he gloried in her boyishness, just as he had done with his sporting chum Hadley. With all four wives he exhibited the same fetishism of hair length and color, seeking twinlike effects with himself, and in 1947 he startled his Cuban hangers-on by giving his own locks a henna rinse—a practice which, in *Death in the Afternoon*, he had explicitly and contemptuously associated with homosexuality.

As for his most intimate preferences, Hemingway evidently fancied an unclimactic fondling that evoked both infantile passivity and gender confusion. As Hadley once asked in a letter, 'Remember how we both tried to be the little, small, petted one the last night on the roof?' At some later point in Hemingway's impotence-ridden erotic life, the petting seems to have evolved into what psychiatrists used to label a perversion—that is, a primary replacement for genital intercourse. In a diary entry of 1953, the writer asserted that Mary 'has always wanted to be a boy' and that she 'loves me to be her girls [sic], which I love to be.' She had recently initiated him into an embrace that he characterized as 'quite new and outside all tribal law.'

Hemingway was working on *The Garden of Eden* during that period, and, as Lynn proposes, we can turn to the published text for more enlightenment. After Catherine gets her first cropping ('I'm a girl. But now I'm a boy too and I can do anything and anything and anything'), David lies beneath her and helps to guide her hand lower and lower until he feels only 'the weight and the strangeness inside,' whereupon she announces, 'You're my girl Catherine. Will you change and be my girl and let me take you?' Lynn doesn't spell out the nature of this 'taking,' but we can find the answer in a mock interview (first singled out for attention by Jeffrey Meyers) that Hemingway improvised for Mary's amusement in 1953:

Reporter: 'Mr. Hemingway, is it true that your wife is a lesbian?'

Papa: 'Of course not. Mrs. Hemingway is a boy.'

Reporter: 'What are your favorite sports, sir?'

Papa: 'Shooting, fishing, reading and sodomy.'

Reporter: 'Does Mrs. Hemingway participate in these sports?'

Papa: 'She participates in all of them.'

The manually sodomized partner, we can infer, was Hemingway himself.

4.

If Ernest Hemingway felt himself to be in essence 'a girl and boy both,' how did he get that way? And what prompted him to encase his androgynous core in a suit of hypermasculine armor? Though any answers must be speculative, Lynn shows us some remarkable and touching correlations between what was done to the writer in his earliest years and the volatile and unhappy man that he became.

Lynn has realized more fully than anyone thus far that the place to begin looking for explanatory clues about Hemingway's values and predilections is not Fossalta or Paris or Pamplona but Oak Park, Illinois, where he grew up. We now know that he felt himself continually judged against the local standards of sobriety, chastity, decorum, refined culture, and Protestant altruism—standards that had been impressed upon the dutiful cello student and choirboy by both his puritanical and capriciously punitive father and his ambitious, domineering mother. Like Oak Park's other world-class maverick, Frank Lloyd Wright, the mature Hemingway dramatically flouted those standards. In doing so, however, he remained caught in an anxious, resentful quarrel with them.

If Frederic Henry has 'always' gagged on words like sacrifice and glory, that may be because they were instruments of intimidation in his creator's early years; and they remained so as both parents continued to express dismay over their famous son's freedom of language and theme. ('What is the matter?' wrote Grace Hemingway upon first looking into *The Sun Also Rises*. 'Have you ceased to be interested in loyalty, nobility, honor and fineness of life?') Once out of Illinois, Hemingway took pains to reverse every feature of Oak Park respectability, even to the extent of encouraging his son Gregory to get repeatedly drunk on hard liquor at age ten and of renting a Cuban prostitute to relieve his other son Jack of his hypothetical (but long departed) virginity at age nineteen. Yet no parent could have been less forgiving than Hemingway's own conscience in damning him for trading on his charm, wasting his time and talent, surrounding himself with flatterers, and marinating his brain in Scotch. Wherever he fled, Oak Park waited in ambush for him.

When Hemingway wrote about scenes from boyhood, they were set not in that priggish Anglophile suburb but in the woods and remote towns of northern Michigan where he had passed his relatively unconstrained summers. The rural outdoors was his father's masculine territory—the only area where Dr. Clarence ('Ed') Hemingway, in his

teen-age son's view, had found even a partial refuge from their mutual nemesis, Grace. The author-to-be saw his 'Papa' as the cowed and castrated husband par excellence, broken in spirit by a woman who arrogated male authority and who squandered the family's resources on lavish, ego-preening projects. In some of his Nick Adams stories Hemingway alluded to Ed Hemingway's weakness, implicitly put the blame on Grace, and represented his own impressionable self in terms that suggested an already desperate wish to escape a comparable fate.

As Bernice Kert has demonstrated in *The Hemingway Women*, Grace Hemingway possessed several constructive traits that her son chose to overlook. She was more tolerant of boyish mischief than her husband was and, unlike him, she was more concerned to reward achievement than to lash out against impropriety and sin. Ernest's literary precocity was not just a gift but a tribute to her encouragement and tutelage. For these very reasons, however, his lifelong, virulent, well-documented hatred of the mother he always called 'that bitch' must be regarded in a symptomatic light. Like his father, and in a pattern that stretched back and ahead through four unlucky generations, Ernest was constitutionally depressive. In laying his nervous melancholy at Grace's door and arming his mind against all Circes everywhere, the writer was attempting to externalize and forestall a doom that may have been imprinted in his genes.

If nature supplies the flawed clay, however, it is nurture that molds the features into a unique image. Here is where Lynn's Hemingway stakes its boldest claim to originality: in showing how pervasively the writer's mind was ruled by his sense of what Grace had done to him. The story is bizarre, and some readers will want to put it down to gratuitous Freudianizing on the biographer's part. But Lynn is not in fact rehearsing Oedipal universals or purporting to trace repressed infantile memories; he is merely reconstructing the inferences that Hemingway himself drew as he coped with his mother's conduct, pored over the scrapbook she had compiled about his childhood, and pondered the rumors about her that were common gossip in Oak Park.

Those rumors said that Grace Hemingway enjoyed a lesbian relationship with her young voice pupil and housekeeper Ruth Arnold, who lived with the family for eleven years until Ed, who took the gossip seriously enough to become alarmed, screwed up his courage for once and ordered Ruth out of the house. (The juggernaut Grace was safely off in Michigan at the time.) Ernest Hemingway was twenty years old and in a sullenly rebellious frame of mind when he witnessed the ensuing parental showdown and took his father's side; but throughout his adolescence he must have known what people were whispering. After Ed's suicide the two women stirred further talk, and further resentment from Ernest, by resuming their joint residence in nearby River Forest.

Lesbian or not, Grace had her own obsession with sexual identity. To be sure, the fact that she dressed and coiffed Ernest as a girl for the first two and a half years of his life does not set her apart from many another turn-of-the-century mother. Perhaps that is why previous biographers have attached no importance to such memorabilia as a photograph of two-year-old Ernest in a gown and bonnet, cutely captioned 'summer girl.' But the biographers should assuredly not have passed lightly by the 1962 memoir

written by Hemingway's sister Marcelline, one and a half years his senior. There Marcelline explained that Grace wanted the children not just to look alike but 'to feel like twins, by having everything alike.' As Lynn recounts, Ernest and Marcelline

slept in the same bedroom in twin white cribs; they had dolls that were just alike; they played with small china tea sets that had the same pattern. Later, the children were encouraged to fish together, hike together and visit friends together, and after Grace deliberately held Marcelline back, they entered grade school together.

And in school, much to Ernest's disgust, Grace once forced the siblings into the same class and did all she could to make them inseparable.

Was Grace Hemingway trying to turn her son into a daughter? Perhaps the answer is both yes and no. Continually experimenting with outfits and hair styles, she created twin 'brothers' as often as 'sisters,' and at times she showed pride in the sporting exploits of her little man. In all likelihood what Grace wanted, beyond an enactment of some private cross-gender scheme, was a boy whose sexual identity would remain forever dependent upon her dictates and whims. If so, she gruesomely got her wish. The apparent effect of all that dolling and doting was not so much to lend Ernest a female identity as to implant in his mind a permanently debilitating confusion, anxiety, and anger.

Naturally, Hemingway despised Marcelline as fiercely as he came to hate the mother who had glutted him with caresses until she abruptly turned her attention to the next sibling, Ursula. And the strong attachment he subsequently developed to Ursula carried an incestuous intensity, as if he had to validate his maleness through this other sister's love. But the idea of incest, in Hemingway's bemused imagination, was just another means of swapping identities. Later, as an adult, he could only entrust himself to a woman—and then only provisionally, before feelings of entrapment set in—if he mentally conscripted her into the game in which he himself had been initiated by Grace. Odi et amo. It is little wonder that Hemingway's writings abound not only in castrating shrews and shattered men but also in sibling-like lovers whose deepest fantasy is to trade sex roles or merge into androgynous oneness.

The virtue of Lynn's account is that it brings into coherence an array of facts—from Hemingway's obsession with lesbianism and hair length through the combination of browbeating and dependency in his love relations—that have hitherto appeared puzzling, though not exactly anomalous. Many commentators have sensed that someone who was not only mesmerized by the castration-defying bravado of the corrida but also compelled to sneer at the squeamishness of the unconvinced had to have been caught up in a quarrel with self-doubts. And with increasing certainty after the shotgun blast in 1961, they have known that the writer whose imagination reverted to goading, maiming, crucifixion, exploded body parts, and agonies of childbirth was by no means a simple realist of the out-of-doors. No one before Lynn, however, has established the specific connections between Hemingway's family situation and his fragile personality.

Take, for example, the writer's locker-room, know-it-all side—his claim to definitive expertise on every male topic from boxing and hunting through battle tactics. Lynn shows that such assertiveness would have fit the psychic needs of a boy growing up in the shadow of an older sister with whom he was constantly paired and compared. Likewise, the man who saw betrayal everywhere succeeded the boy who, appealing to one parent for refuge from the other, invariably found the adult ranks closing against him in sanctimonious solidarity. The man who dubbed himself 'Papa' while still in his mid-twenties and who sought record-sized kills of fish, beasts, and German soldiers was bent not only on outdoing his woodsman father but on magically repairing the unmaning to which he thought that father (along with himself) had been subjected by Grace Hemingway. And topping everything, the mental hermaphrodite had been systematically deprived of a stable male identity. All in all, we cannot be surprised that even in his final years, family grievances remained uppermost in Hemingway's mind. As he put it so bitterly in *A Moveable Feast*, 'With bad painters all you need to do is not look at them. But even when you have learned not to look at families nor listen to them and have learned not to answer letters, families have many ways of being dangerous.'

5.

The critical lessons of Lynn's Hemingway are chiefly two. In the first place, Lynn enables us to realize why the short story and not the novel proved to be Hemingway's suited genre. The amplitude of a realistic novel calls for broad sympathies and a conscious, integrated understanding of characters and conflicts. A writer whose professed values serve as preventatives against self-insight will find it hard to sustain his characters' development over many chapters or to avoid recourse to stereotypes and posturing. Such, on the whole, was Hemingway's predicament as a full-length novelist; he wavered between being 'true to the hurt' and propagandistically disowning it. As Lynn reminds us, even the acclaimed novella *The Old Man and the Sea* seems, on rereading, like a strained and padded effort, bolted together with clunky symbols.

In contrast, Hemingway was temperamentally inclined toward the economy of phrase and gesture required by a ten-page tale, in which, as Lynn puts it, he could 'make a virtue of necessity by packing troubled feelings below the surface...like dynamite beneath a bridge.' Within a short story, Hemingway's characteristic shuttling between mute physical details and irritable, elliptical conversation is hauntingly suggestive. We needn't know, any more than the author himself does, precisely what lurks within the gulf that every sentence barely skirts. (We needn't even know for sure whether 'Big Two-Hearted River' is obliquely 'about' the war. That is our problem, not the story's.) Hemingway's tales at their best are unforgettable because their actions have the cruel finality of fate itself, without the possibility of recourse to values and theories—not even Hemingway's own.

The other benefit that discerning readers of Hemingway can draw from Lynn's study is encouragement to trust their instincts, rather than Hemingway's reassurances,

when they think they have noticed deviations from the writer's macho norm. In particular, they will find that some of Hemingway's most durable works undercut their own impulse to distinguish simplistically between the he-man and the weakling, the compliant kitten and the castrating bitch.

Consider, as a seemingly intractable test case, 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber.' Like 'Big Two-Hearted River,' this powerful story has usually been read in the light of Hemingway's own summary of it, delivered a decade and a half after its composition. 'Francis' wife hates him because he's a coward,' Hemingway said to an interviewer in 1953. 'But when he gets his guts back, she fears him so much she has to kill him—shoots him in the back of the head.' That is Hemingway the famous misogynist speaking. But once again Lynn demonstrates that the tale refutes its forgetful teller. Mrs. Macomber is no murderer; in stating that she 'had shot *at the buffalo* with the 6.5 Mannlicher as it seemed about to gore Macomber' (italics added), the text unambiguously establishes the killing as accidental. As Lynn insists:

It is not wifely malevolence that brings Macomber down, but his own dangerous aspiration to be recognized as intensely masculine. Two contrasting aspects of the author are split down the middle in the story. Brutish Robert Wilson, with his double cot and his big rifle, incarnates the Hemingway of the myth, while the doubt-haunted Macomber represents the Hemingway for whom the dark had always been peopled and always would be. Near the end of the fable, the doubter succeeds in winning the approval of the brute. He becomes, in short, the sort of man he is not, and he pays for it with his life. Just as the wife in 'Kilimanjaro' is finally relieved of blame by her husband for the tragic waste of his talent, so a critically important narrative detail absolves Margot of responsibility for Macomber's tragedy.

This is much more than a crux resolved; it is one sign among many that Hemingway could sometimes identify with a woman's point of view and thus mitigate the tendentiousness of his schematizing.

For a final and more complex example, let us consider Hemingway's best novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, whose 'official' reading was laid out by Carlos Baker in 1963. 'The moral norm of the book,' wrote Baker, 'is a healthy and almost boyish innocence of spirit, and it is carried by Jake Barnes, Bill Gorton, and Pedro Romero. Against this norm...is ranged the sick abnormal 'vanity' of the Ashley-Campbell-Cohn triangle.' In all probability, Hemingway would have endorsed this way of regarding his novel. Yet surely it is much too constraining. Do we in fact experience Brett and Cohn as unredeemably bad? And is the casual anti-Semitism voiced by Bill and Jake somehow 'healthier' than Mike Campbell's bullying version? Unless we can find a way of approaching the book that transcends Hemingway's vulgar code, many of us will remain immune to its narrative power.

In one sense Baker was right: from its opening page, *The Sun Also Rises* makes Robert Cohn its embodiment of every trait that violates the Hemingway outlook. We

know for certain, moreover, that the sneering at Cohn was inspired by Hemingway's petty but permanently injurious vendetta against his friend and benefactor Harold Loeb, whose romance with Duff Twysden, unlike his own, had been sexually consummated. Yet we now also know from Lynn's biography that everything Hemingway wanted to say about Cohn/Loeb's naive romanticism and self-pity applied at least as well to his own.

On closer inspection, as several critics have noticed before Lynn, the resemblances between the two 'steers' Jake and Cohn seem more impressive than the differences. Furthermore, Jake doesn't simply take pleasure in watching Cohn get humiliated in a setting that he, Jake, has largely staged; he also shows flashes of self-detestation for that very baseness. In Jake Barnes the author has given us his most revealing, if still oblique and alibi-ridden, self-portrait. It is a picture of someone who has good reason to feel himself less than a man, who therefore waxes by turns snappish and maudlin, yet who longs for escape from his private hell into the matador's reticent and impersonal 'purity of line.' Precisely because Jake is Hemingway (indeed, his name in the earliest surviving manuscript was 'Hem'), he captures not only his creator's adolescent manifest values but also his mean streak, his fits of remorse, his secret passivity, and his eventually suffocating need to be right about everything. The characterization is far more nuanced than Hemingway could have first intended when he set out to 'get' Harold Loeb and create an autobiographical hero who would be disqualified only by a technicality from being Duff Twysden/Brett Ashley's one true love.

And if Carlos Baker's 'healthy' Jake escapes black-and-white categories, so does his 'abnormal' Brett. According to the Hemingway code, Brett's habit of undermining men's sexual self-respect ought to be unforgivable. In fact, however, her constant yearning to be a 'good chap' and mend her ways makes her one of the more appealing figures in the book—more so, surely, than the wooden Pedro Romero, who is novelistically inert precisely because he embodies Hemingway's ideal and nothing else. As Lynn points out, Brett's penitent side was drawn from life—not Duff Twysden's life or Zelda Fitzgerald's, but Hemingway's own. Thanks to his capacity for unorthodox identifications, he gave us in Brett what most of his fiction would sorely lack: an independent woman who is not automatically an object of scorn.

There is no need to go overboard here and decide that *The Sun Also Rises* is a wise and compassionate book. As Lynn shows, Hemingway couldn't afford to decide what he finally thought of the sportsman-eunuch-bigot-pimp Jake Barnes, and his novel is not just irresolute but seriously muddled. Readers who think they have found consistently humane ironies in the text—indications, for example, that the author is not crudely anti-Semitic or that his vision of excellence transcends the image of Pedro Romero in his tight green pants—are deceiving themselves. And so, I would add, are those who take this cattiest of romans à clef as a reliable guide to masculine values.

Yet Lynn has revealed that *The Sun Also Rises* is swept by countercurrents of feeling that neither the idolators nor the iconoclasts among Hemingway critics have been prepared to recognize. If it had been a more thoroughgoing 'Hemingway novel' in Baker's sense, the final image of Jake and Brett in the taxi—together but forever apart—

would have meant nothing to us. Instead, of course, it is a crystalline moment—the nearest approach Hemingway would ever make to the pathos of authentic tragedy.

In replacing the comforts of myth with acute psychological, social, and literary analysis, Kenneth Lynn has not only laid bare that ‘real Ernest Hemingway’ whom Gertrude Stein once fathomed; he has also provided a model of the way biographically informed criticism can catch the pulse of works about which everything appeared to have been said. In short, he has made Hemingway interesting again. For many readers, of course—the potential clientele of Hemingway Ltd.—that contribution will appear superfluous and offensive. In view of the now exposed hollowness of the official cult, however, no one has done more timely justice to what Alfred Kazin once called Hemingway’s ‘brilliant half-vision of life.’