

The End of Something by Jeffrey Meyers

Hemingway: The American Homecoming
by Michael Reynolds
Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell;
264 pp., \$24.95

Hemingway: A Life Without Consequences
by James R. Mellow
Boston: Houghton Mifflin;
704 pp., \$30.00



Hemingway continues to fascinate. The legendary life and heroic exploits of the man who was so admired, honored, and imitated are now well-known: fisherman in the Michigan woods, reporter in Kansas City, wounded war hero, foreign correspondent from Constantinople to Córdoba, Left Bank drinker, bullfight *aficionado*, innovative stylist, African lion hunter, reporter in war-torn Spain, expatriate in Cuba, witness of D-Day and the liberation of Paris, victim of the FBI, survivor of two plane crashes and of two series of shock treatments, husband of four wives, father of three sons, creator of some of the best fiction of the century, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize—and brain-blasted suicide.

Yet books about his life continue to roll off the presses. Since my biography appeared in 1985, publishers have brought out seven others by Fernanda Pivano, Kenneth Lynn, Peter Griffin (2), Michael Reynolds (2), and James Mellow; five memoirs—by Jack Hemingway, Denis Brian, Henry Villard, Slim Keith, and Peter Viertel; as well as a second book on Hadley Hemingway and an autobiographical novel by his granddaughter Lorian Hemingway. It seems there is nothing more to say. But viewing familiar material from an original point of view (as Mellow does), instead of presenting a mass of trivial facts (the way Reynolds does), reveals that it is still possible to write a valuable biography.

Reynolds, though he tries to establish his *macho* credentials by mentioning

visits to the track and brandies at the bar, and by feebly imitating Hemingway's style, actually belongs to the Carlos Baker school of heavy-handed academic biography. Like Baker, he combines "lyrical" passages that strain for (but do not achieve) "poetic" effects by amassing trivial facts, irrelevant details, tedious *clichés* and by exhibiting unconscionable repetition. If you want to know about Gus Pfeiffer's chess sets or Leicester Hemingway's bird house, this is the book for you. Instead of a continuous narrative, the book is chopped up into short sections, like news reports of separate events, and interspersed with fictionalized versions of real people's thoughts and stale accounts of the major stories.

Reynolds has unfortunately got hold of the lending-library cards of Sylvia Beach's bookshop Shakespeare and Company (which he spells incorrectly) and repeatedly mentions which books Hemingway and his circle borrowed. He has spent weeks reading through the *Paris Herald Tribune* and, to justify his sterile labors, reprints every familiar and pointless reference to Hemingway. Reynolds spends considerable time on Hemingway's daily writing and revision, but says very little about the *meaning* of his works. He does not, for example, connect the title and the content of Hemingway's "Necrothomist Poem." When discussing two stories in the context of Hemingway's divorce and second marriage, Reynolds fails to relate the officer's advice in "In Another Country"—"A man must not marry"—to the orderly's advice in "Now I Lay Me"—"A man ought to be married."

Clutching his Paris guidebooks and fumbling with street maps, Reynolds (innocent of diacritical marks) stumbles through Hemingway's Europe misspelling a dozen names and getting the facts all wrong. "Honoraria" for "Honoria" and "*mairie*" (town hall) for "*maire*" (mayor) are typical howlers. The elegant and fashionable *rue de la Paix* could never be described as "glitzy." And Aigues-Mortes, which Reynolds calls "uninteresting," is in fact a fascinating fortified medieval Crusaders' town. The chronology of the book is also confusing. In Reynolds' version, Hemingway moves into Gerald Murphy's studio *after* he is already living there. Hemingway's

wound from a skylight accident is described 25 pages *before* the accident is mentioned. And Hemingway writes a thank-you note for a weekend with Fitzgerald at Ellerslie *before* he arrives there.

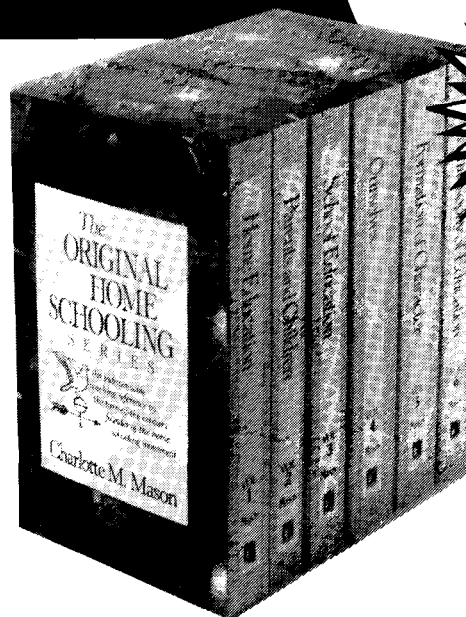
Reynolds doggedly focuses on the trivial and ignores the significant aspects of Hemingway's life. Many of the important points he mentions desperately need, but do not have, clarification. What exactly was Hemingway's "dark attraction" to lesbians? What did Pound mean by Hemingway's superior "manipulation of the external world"? Why did Hemingway's mother say most marriages ought to go "on the rocks" while his father insisted she was "heart-broken" about her son's divorce? There is no explanation of why in 1927 Hemingway's sister Madelaine said she could not come to Pamplona because her parents "have a horror for Fiestas and Spain in general—ever since your books," yet in 1928 his sister Marcelline was "vacationing in Spain." And Hemingway's false statement that he did not commit adultery with Pauline Pfeiffer is quoted, without comment, as if it were true.

Worst of all, for someone who has published half a dozen books on Hemingway, are the numerous factual errors. Calling a bull "virile" is absurd. A woman's confinement takes place *before*, not after, the birth of her child. The Hotel Brevoort is near Washington Square, not in midtown Manhattan. France does not celebrate the American Memorial Day. St. James never visited and was certainly not buried in Santiago de Compostela. Ezra Pound was not the father of his wife's son. The events in the Murphys' social life were not "unexpected," but always carefully planned. Gerald Murphy (who never wore a bowler) was not a "first-rate painter," but gave up painting (he said) because he was second-rate. Reynolds says Hemingway disliked "pre-winter weather." But the plaque under his statue in Ketchum reads: "Best of all, he liked the fall." Hemingway was not forced to "sign away his son and wife," but abandoned them for another woman. Pauline Pfeiffer did not give up her soul to marry Hemingway. She persuaded him to convert to Catholicism and hurt their marriage by refusing to practice birth control. Dos Passos, whom Reyn-

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olds says "never wanted to take sides," was passionately loyal to Sacco and Vanzetti and became violently opposed to the communists in Spain after they had killed his friend José Robles. And Jake Barnes' wound did not leave "his desire for Brett forever unsatisfied." In chapter VII of *The Sun Also Rises* she gives him some sexual satisfaction ("Do you feel better, darling? It's better.").

Reynolds, like Griffin, has been dragging out Hemingway's life—as if he were Leon Edel writing the life of Henry James—in numerous short volumes so that the total cost for the complete biography (with tiny print and unevenly inked pages) will be about \$150. James Mellow's handsome volume, by contrast, covers the years described in Reynolds' book (March 1926 to April 1929) in 65 pages of text and notes, saying infinitely more about this period—in which Hemingway divorced, remarried, had a second son, suffered his father's suicide, published *The Sun Also Rises*, and wrote *A Farewell to Arms*—than Reynolds does in four times as many pages.

Mellow has not conducted any interviews, his subtitle (from "Soldier's Home") is confusing, and he is far too positive about A.E. Hotchner, who was

loathed by everyone I spoke to. Like Kenneth Lynn, Mellow seems to dislike and lose interest in the older Hemingway and rushes through the last half of his adult life in only 80 pages. But these are minor flaws.

This thoroughly researched biography is long, but not too long; it cracks ahead at a lively pace and is consistently interesting. Though there is nothing much new in the book (it is virtually impossible to find new material at this stage of Hemingway studies), Mellow provides a valuable synthesis of all that is known about Hemingway. As Reynolds rightly observes, Hemingway believed that "whatever troubles a male friend might have, they were caused by his wife." Mellow emphasizes, in an original way, Hemingway's male friendships, his reliance on male intimacy in the face of danger, and his fear of the taint of homosexuality.

Mellow's judgments are consistently sound. He notes that the Hemingways, though comfortably well off, were not part of the Oak Park Country Club set. He believes that the temporary blindness of Hemingway's mother was psychosomatic, that Grace Hemingway was devoted to her son, and that the young Hemingway (contrary to Lynn's thesis) suffered no bad effects from cross-dressing. It is significant that Hemingway sometimes called his mother "Mrs. Stein" and described Gertrude Stein exactly as if she were his mother: "I stuck by that old bitch until she threw me out of the house when she lost her judgment with the menopause."

Mellow shows that the Indian girl Prudy Boulton was based more on fantasy than on reality, he illuminates Hemingway's ambivalence about his father, and he rightly suggests that Hemingway's wartime friend Jim Gamble might have been in love with him. Mellow shows that Hemingway's baptism was extremely dubious, though later convenient; that he suffered no permanent injuries from his war wounds, which gave him a sense of immortality; and that his wartime nurse Agnes von Kurowsky actually encouraged his courtship. He mentions the rivers running through Hemingway's works, as well as his use of secondhand sources to provide a realistic basis for his fiction, and rightly remarks that in *The Sun Also Rises*, "Hemingway followed Stein's advice rather than her example." In general, Mellow proves that there is always room

for another intelligent, perceptive, and elegantly written biography.

Jeffrey Meyers, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, has published *Hemingway: The Critical Heritage* and *Hemingway: A Biography*. His life of Poe appeared last year, and he is now writing a biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald for HarperCollins.

Frontier Fantasies

by Gregory McNamee

Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer

by John Mack Faragher
New York: Henry Holt; 429 pp., \$27.50



Folklore is not history, and myth-makers hate complications. Finally we have a reliable life of Boone through the considerable efforts of John Mack Faragher, a professor of history at Mount Holyoke College whose earlier book *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (1979) won the American Historical Association's prestigious Frederick Jackson Turner Award. *Daniel Boone* should earn him even greater accolades, for as a work of accessible history it has few contemporary peers.

A straightforward chronological narrative, *Daniel Boone* opens with the birth on October 22, 1734, of the son of a Quaker frontiersman, Squire Boone, who had emigrated to America from England 21 years earlier. As a boy in the upper Schuylkill valley of Pennsylvania, Daniel Boone learned the necessary country skills, so excelling in marksmanship that his neighbors hired him to do their hunting for them. He may have done his job too well, for as a young man Daniel found the hillsides already devoid of game. Coincidentally, Squire Boone was excommunicated from the Society of Friends in 1750 after Daniel's brother Israel married a "worldling," and the family no longer had reason to remain in the Quaker homeland. They relocated to a farmstead on the Yadkin River not far from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, from which Daniel began to operate a profes-

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