

Remembering Madrid: 1984



View of Madrid (Spain) from Círculo de Bellas Artes' flat roof (downtown). Foreground: Metropolis Building and Gran Vía (avenue). Photo by Felipe Gabaldon.



The bridge in the Guadarramas at issue in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

ED. NOTE: *This is the fourth in our series looking back to Hemingway Society conferences of yore. In 2014 we remembered Paris 1994, in 2015 Schruns 1988, and last year we went back to Lignano 1986. For this installment we decided to stay in the 1980s and wrap up the decade by exploring the earliest years of Society meetings, beginning with two foundational gatherings in 1980 and 1982 and leading up to the first international conference in 1984.*

James Nagel

Prologue: The First Two Hemingway Conferences

The tradition of literary conferences has been extremely important for the author societies in American Literature, especially in the case of the organization in honor of Ernest Hemingway. In fact, the association was founded in the middle of such a meeting, one on Thompson Island in Boston Harbor in 1980. This event was especially notable because it was sponsored by the John F. Kennedy Library on the occasion of the opening of the Hemingway Room. Some of the events were in the library, but many took place in an historic building on the island, where we could see the beautiful outline of the library shining in the June sun throughout the discussions. The curator of the collection, Jo August, organized the events, and the proceedings centered on the holdings of the collection, a tour of the library, and a recounting of notable biographical events supported

by documents and memorabilia such as the trunk in the manuscript room and the lion rug on the floor beside it. There were some standard scholarly papers, as I remember it, but the emphasis was on the new collection and descriptions of the invaluable manuscripts that were now open to the public.

Several speakers offered reminiscences of their relationship with the author, among them Charles Scribner, Jr., who was representing the firm, and Patrick Hemingway, whose precise observations and incisive intelligence very much impressed the audience. For the opening dinner, Jacqueline Kennedy came on the arm of George Plimpton, and the two of them were clearly the stars of the evening. Mrs. Kennedy was exceedingly generous in personally greeting everyone at the dinner, and she spoke to me about the Finca Vigía, the awkward situation in Cuba, and President Kennedy's admiration of Hemingway's work. She could not have been more gracious.

Perhaps the most important event at the 1980 conference came at a picnic



James Nagel and Gianfranco Ivancich. Gianfranco had flown to Madrid from Venice to invite the Hemingway Society to Lignano for the 1986 conference. Here he shows the medal they have created in honor of Hemingway.

lunch on the lawn when Paul Smith initiated the idea of forming a society devoted to the study of the life and works of Ernest Hemingway. He cited the F. Scott Fitzgerald Society as an example of what we might do, and all eighty of the people in attendance agreed that it would be a great idea. We also applauded the idea that we should attempt to have a conference every two years. Paul Smith was appropriately elected president, and the society was on its way with enormous enthusiasm by the members. There was a great deal of personal cohesiveness among the founding members on that occasion, a sense that here was a group of really good people and scholars, and many life-long friendships were formed on that island.

Mr. Scribner sat next to me at lunch and for much of the conference, and we seemed to get on quite well, so easily, in fact, that I drove him to the airport at the end of the meetings. He invited me to meet with him at his office whenever I was in New York, which I did several times over the following decade, and on one occasion he gave me a bust of Hemingway done at Princeton, which I donated to the Kennedy Library. Paul Smith came by water from Connecticut to Boston on his personal sailboat, and at the end of the celebration he invited Jo August and my wife and me to join him for an afternoon cruise around the harbor. It was a great finish to a lively few days, and there was much to celebrate. On a serious note, we talked about the numerous requests from the members for a meeting in 1982, but Jo said she was not

sanguine that the library would be willing to host another conference quite so soon. Paul asked me if it might be possible that I could direct the conference and hold it at Northeastern University. People could then come to the library on the subway and use the collection before, during, and after the formal meetings, and Jo was certain that she could host a reception in the Hemingway Room. It sounded great, and I said I would shake the university piggy bank and see if there was any money in it.

There was, thanks to our new Dean of Liberal Arts at Northeastern, Richard Astro, who, as chair of the Department of English at Oregon State University, had directed a Hemingway conference in 1973 that featured many scholars whose names had quickly become familiar: Philip Young, Joseph De Falco, Gerry Brenner, Peter Hayes, and Robert W. Lewis among them. For me, the only problem was money. In a heartfelt conversation, Paul made it clear that the society had no funding at all, and he had to plead with Trinity to covering mailing costs and other minor expenses. Rich Astro, always inventive about financial matters, suggested a way to fund the conference out of the grant money in his foundation budget: I would edit a book from the meeting and devote the royalties to repaying his office all the money I had spent on the meeting. In effect, his budget would provide an advance against royalties. I agreed, and indeed it worked out that way when the University of Wisconsin Press published

Ernest Hemingway: The Writer in Context, which sold very well.

To make sure a book would be of interest to the world, I needed to do something of special appeal to Hemingway fans. I was not absolutely certain who would qualify as a “notable” person, but since I now knew Charles Scribner, Jr. I started with him, and he came and talked about Hemingway’s relationship to the firm, how gracious, and loyal, and reassuring he had been when Charles Scribner Senior passed away. Patrick Hemingway was also generous about coming back to Boston, and he presented a very important paper on the summer of 1942, when a German submarine surfaced near the *Pilar* and Hemingway got the bright idea that he could destroy one of them by throwing a fire extinguisher filled with explosives down the hatch. Looking for submarines also allowed Hemingway to get more gasoline for his boat so he could fish for marlins. Since he brought his three sons with him on these trips, he probably was not expecting to actually engage an enemy submarine, which would have been suicidal. Perhaps the most surprising speaker for many people was the British playwright Tom Stoppard, whom I knew slightly from another connection. On that occasion, he had told me Hemingway was a great influence on his work, and I thought everyone would be interested in hearing about the details. He gave a very close and insightful examination of several of the early stories with an emphasis on narrative technique.

As the organizing proceeded, there were logistical problems. I had promised to cover Patrick’s airfare, but I was stunned when he informed me that he had rented an entire airplane so that his daughter, Mina, could fly to Boston and satisfy some requirements for her pilot’s license. I had no idea what renting an entire plane might cost, and throughout a sleepless night I envisioned an embarrassing meeting in the dean’s office explaining some outrageous expense. As it turned out, it was no more expensive than three airline tickets would have been since his wife, Carol, was also coming. She was a delight for the entire meeting, and Mina turned out to be a lovely person, smart, sensitive, and a gracious presence throughout the conference. Tom Stoppard was most generous with his time and participation (he came to everything), and he instructed me to ignore his agent’s continuous requests for additional compensation.

Stoppard brought in the media on a level we had not expected, and I had to schedule a press conference every day and arrange interviews for all the major papers.

The scholarly side of the conference featured many of the usual suspects, among them Michael Reynolds, Millicent Bell, Paul Smith, Peter Hays, Adeline Tintner, Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin, and Jim Brasch, who talked about the book he was doing with Joseph Sigman on Hemingway's library in Cuba. We had a strong audience throughout the conference, and it was covered in all the major newspapers in the Boston area. The Northeastern administration was pleased at the favorable notices, especially the news that *Ernest Hemingway: The Writer in Context* earned back all the money spent for the conference. The Hemingway Society had now organized two successful meetings that established it as an important group in American literature, and we had set the stage for even more significant events in the years to come.

Onward to Spain....

The conference held in Madrid in 1984 marked a monumental moment in the life of the Hemingway Society in that it was the first time a meeting had been held outside the United States. Directed by James Brasch, it was held in Spain from June 24 through June 29, the timing dictated by the desire to get hotel rooms for no more than \$20 a night for each person. By the time I became president in 1983, Paul Smith and Jim Brasch had worked out the basic outline of the conference and we were well into evaluating papers for presentation and planning special events. I was enthusiastic because I saw this meeting as a major advance in the stature of the society and an opportunity to absorb international scholars into the activities we were already anticipating for the future. My major worry, which proved unwarranted, was that our hosts in Spain were part of the Fascist government Hemingway had opposed during the Spanish Civil War. Although I knew the country had welcomed him back in the 1950s, when he covered the bullfights for a summer, I felt there might be vestiges of animosity for a writer who so vociferously opposed the government that was still in power. I was wrong. All of the officials we encountered, from the Mayor of Madrid, to the university administration, to the American Ambassador, could not have been more



Senora Puché, Mrs. Oldsey, Gwen Nagel, James Nagel, José Luis Castillo Puché, and Bernard Oldsey.

hospitable or more gracious. Much of that was the result of the personal preparations for our arrival made by Jim Brasch and his wife, both of whom had made precisely the right impression upon our various hosts.

What bothered me during the advance planning and even once the conference had started was the Spanish attitude about details, and although we knew when meetings would take place, we seldom had any idea where they would be held until perhaps an hour before they were to begin. People were constantly asking me where to go, when, and how to get there. Somehow, the events seem to come off without a hitch. The conference began with an evening reception at the Hotel Florida Norte, where most people stayed, and the formal opening of the meeting was held the next morning at the *Institute de Cooperation Iberoamericana*. I had been told that I should say a few brief words of gratitude to our hosts and explain the nature of the Hemingway Society. When I met our Spanish hosts just before the opening, it became clear that they expected me to make a rather major address of a half hour or more, one that would be covered by the press. I went into extemporaneous mode, outlining a few topics I might touch, and I found the last paragraph of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* essay on Hemingway I had published the year before. I thought if my brain totally failed, I could read that, smile nicely, and sit down.

Meanwhile, there was great consternation behind the scenes. The Spanish apparently take very seriously the business of the seating order at the head table, who was in the center, who toward the edge, and there was serious concern about who might be offended.

I assured everyone that Americans are not particularly officious about such matters, and I would be happy to sit at the end if that resolved things. It seemed to. But when we walked out on the stage, my name tag was in the middle, next to that of Antonio Ordóñez, the son of the matador Cayetano Ordóñez who, in the 1920s, had fought under the name of Niño de la Palma. I had been warned that his English was a bit uncertain, and I was not sure on what level I should engage him. I asked him why Hemingway was so respected in bullfight circles, and he replied, in almost exactly these words, that the author had an instinctive appreciation of the subtleties of language and tone used to describe the passion of the *corrida*. He reminisced about his relationship with Hemingway, and that of his father, and his great admiration for the American author. Other members of the institute offered cordial greetings, and the conference was off and running.

On the scholarly side, there were panels that have become standard in Society events, opening with biographical papers. Among other speakers, Michael Reynolds focused on Hemingway's fascination for Theodore Roosevelt's muscular Christianity and James Brasch explored the relationship with José Luis Herrera. On the short story panel, Linda Wagner addressed "Obsessive Grievs: Hemingway on Lost Fathers" while Bernard Oldsey covered "The Capital of the World," an appropriate topic for a meeting in Madrid.

The panel on *The Sun Also Rises* produced the most dramatically unusual response from the audience. Following some rather standard papers by James Steinke and Fredrik Christian Brøgger

(Tromsø, Norway), James Hinkle delivered a paper entitled “What’s Wrong with Bill Gorton” that began with a long discussion of variations in the appearance of people, how some are beautiful, many average looking, and a few unfortunate souls rather unappealing. The audience laughed throughout this introduction, thinking it to be a parody of a scholarly paper delivered in the mode of deadpan comedy. Then he turned to the characters of *Rises* stressing Brett’s beauty, Jake’s rather handsome stature, and the looks of many of the other characters. When he got to Bill Gorton he reasoned that Hemingway’s major characters all have an important wound, or a problem, and since Bill seems normal in every other way, the only explanation must be that he is ugly. He argued that Bill has a long upper lip. The audience roared in laughter for five minutes. It turned out that Jim had not meant it to be humorous at all, and he seemed proud of a new insight. I was sitting next to Linda Miller, and her face was wet with tears from laughing, the widespread reaction to the unintended comedy of the paper.

The days were filled with substantive presentations, José Mariá Castellet on Hemingway’s early years in Spain, Joseph Sigman’s showing of a newly discovered film of the author fishing aboard the *Anita* in 1932, and José Luis Castillo Puché, one of Spain’s leading writers, on Goya’s influence on Hemingway. Later that evening I had dinner at Botin’s with Bernie Oldsey and Puché. He argued that Bill has a long upper lip, and he regaled us with riveting accounts of the Spanish Civil War. On other panels, Frederic Svobodal, George Monteiro, and Susan Beegel all read excellent papers based on research into the Hemingway manuscripts, including deleted passages previously unknown to scholars. Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin discussed Hemingway’s Paris, a city she knew well, and Allen Josephs gave a memorable analysis of Hemingway’s poor use of Spanish in his works.

Among other presentations, Millicent Bell did an assessment of Hemingway’s Realism. Since I had recently published *Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism*, my own paper was on that movement and *In Our Time* with an emphasis not

only on sensory imagery but on the use of implication rather than direct statement to make important thematic points. Kenneth Rosen analyzed the verbal violence of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and Erik Nakjavani explored the aesthetics of Cezanne as an important influence. Ramon Buckley chaired a popular discussion of a documentary film on the Spanish Civil War. The conference closed with a formal address by the Mayor of Madrid, D. Enrique Tierno Galvan, who explained to me before we got started that political terms such as *Socialism*, *Fascism*, and *Republicanism* in Spain have nothing to do with the meanings Americans give those concepts in their home country. The conversation throughout the conference would seem to underscore that assessment.



Rod Davis, Alan Margolies, Linda Miller, Donald Junkins, Dick Davidson, Randall Miller

Beyond the scholarly papers, there were many other kinds of events, including several discussion sessions, slide lectures, and a walking tour of Madrid. My personal favorite was listening to Donald Junkins read Hemingway’s poems about bullfighting, a riveting presentation. One day we all took a trip to El Escorial, which proved to be fascinating. Many people spent the next day at the bullfights, and others toured the shopping section of the Gran Via in Madrid. Perhaps the most memorable special event was a tour of the area covered in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, including a visit to the Sierra de Guadarrama Mountains and the bridge that Robert Jordan is sent to destroy to prevent enemy reinforcements easy movement. It was a surprise to all of us to discover that Hemingway had fictionalized it since it is solid stone, much too massive to be blown up by the amount of explosive

that could be carried in a backpack. Also remarkable was a luncheon in Segovia at Candida’s Restaurant, famous for its roast suckling pig, so tender that it can be carved with a plate. To prove the point, just before it was served several tables were brought in followed by the chef, dressed all in white, holding a plate high over his head. He waved the plate to everyone, turned to the tables, and in a series of quick chops, carved all of the pigs ready for serving. Then he turned to the crowd, held the plate back over his head, and threw it in the air, letting it crash to pieces on the stone floor. It was dramatic, and we all applauded uproariously. Later in the week, American Ambassador Enders had a reception for the entire conference at the embassy, a decidedly formal occasion.

I missed a day trip to Toledo because Gianfranco Ivancich had called me from Italy to say he was coming to Madrid on a most important matter. I found him to be a most cordial companion who normally used three different languages in each sentence. He extended to the society an invitation to hold our 1986 conference in Lignano, just north of Venice, a location that Hemingway frequented many times for duck hunting and for the recovery of injuries in the 1954 African plane crash. The mayor was set to dedicate a park in honor of Hemingway, one complete with a statue, and Gianfranco was ready to mount a photographic show drawn from the many years he lived with the author in Cuba. But to make even preliminary arrangements, he wanted me to go to Italy personally and meet with the mayor and his staff, inspect the hotel, and approve the meeting space they had selected for the conference. It turned out that I took that trip with Jack Hemingway, and we had a great week on the Adriatic, playing tennis every morning and hanging out every day. He went with me to all the locations, and he agreed to make a keynote address at the meeting. As it turned out, he withdrew two weeks before the conference, but Hilary Hemingway agreed joined us to provide a representative of the family.

The Hemingway Society was about to have another great adventure, one that no one who was there would ever forget. ■