



## Hemingway: A Biography

By Jeffrey Meyers

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

There was a cartoon famous some 35 years ago that depicted an editor returning a manuscript to a crestfallen author: "But you have a wonderful style; Hemingway's, isn't it?" In this critical biography, Meyers, a professor at the University of Colorado and author of some 20 books, charts the life of the man who created that "wonderful," innovative style imitated by so many over the decades. It was virtually a new language, seemingly simplistic but carefully forged and intensely suggestive. Hemingway himself was flamboyant and hugely personable, and, in his prime, had the good looks of a movie star. The understated tone of his writing was identified with his image and an attitude toward life and loss that he seemed to exemplify. It is amazing that this Midwesterner, with only a high-school education, should, in his mid-20s, have been crony of the likes of Joyce, Pound and Gertrude Stein, as well as other literary notables who colored expatriate Paris after the Great War. Hemingway became not only the best known of the lot, but quite simply one of the most famous people in the world. He assiduously courted that fame and it was among the things that eventually undid him. Among the telling details in the life of this man, who created himself as the personification of maleness, is that his mother dressed him as twin to his sister until he was three. By five he was a "soldier" who, when asked what he was afraid of, would shout, "fraid of nothin." Norman Mailer, whom Meyers terms "the hip pocket Hemingway of our time," wrote sympathetically that Hemingway's life had been heroic, that he had struggled with cowardice always and that "his inner landscape was a nightmare. . . . It is possible that he carried a weight of anxiety with him that would have suffocated any man smaller than himself." Meyers's biography in no way replaces Carlos Baker's massive 1969 achievement, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*, but it is marvelously rich in new, revealing anecdote and it deservedly stands beside Baker's as a saltier and less discreet companion volume. Photos not seen by PW. 20,000 first printing. October 23

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From Library Journal

Hemingway always insisted that he had the obligation to withhold his work from public view till it satisfied his standards. In a slender volume that traces Hemingway from boyhood through World War I and his first marriage, Griffin ignores those standards, printing for the first time five inept, occasionally silly pieces of post-adolescent fiction, only one of which ("Cross roads: an anthology") even hints at Hemingway's mature genius. Griffin's other contribution is biographical. He establishes that Hemingway indeed had affairs with his wartime nurse, Agnes; and, while engaged to his first wife, with their mutual friend, Katy Smith. Otherwise, Griffin adds little of critical, interpretative, or biographical merit and does so without stylistic grace. Meyers's style is also pedestrian, but more serviceable. What he lacks in grace he makes up for with scrupulous honesty. Where Carlos Baker withheld information or veiled its implications, Meyers details fully. The portrait is not flattering but it is always believable and often pitiable. "A man is essentially what he hides," Meyers writes, arguing that beneath the mask resided a reflective man of innate sensitivity." Many will agree; at its best, Hemingway's prose supports that view. To prove his thesis, Meyers proceeds chronologically, interpolating special analyses ranging from literary battles to influences; from ethnic and sexual prejudices to religious beliefs; from parental relationships to the complex involvement with wives and mistresses. Occasionally, Meyers enthralls, as when he records the FBI's "pursuit" of Hemingway. Too often, however, we learn too little that is new or insightful. Within its limits, Meyers's bulky volume nevertheless deserves attention and respect. Arthur Waldhorn, English Dept., City Coll., CUNY  
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About the Author

**Jeffrey Meyers**

## **Users Review**

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