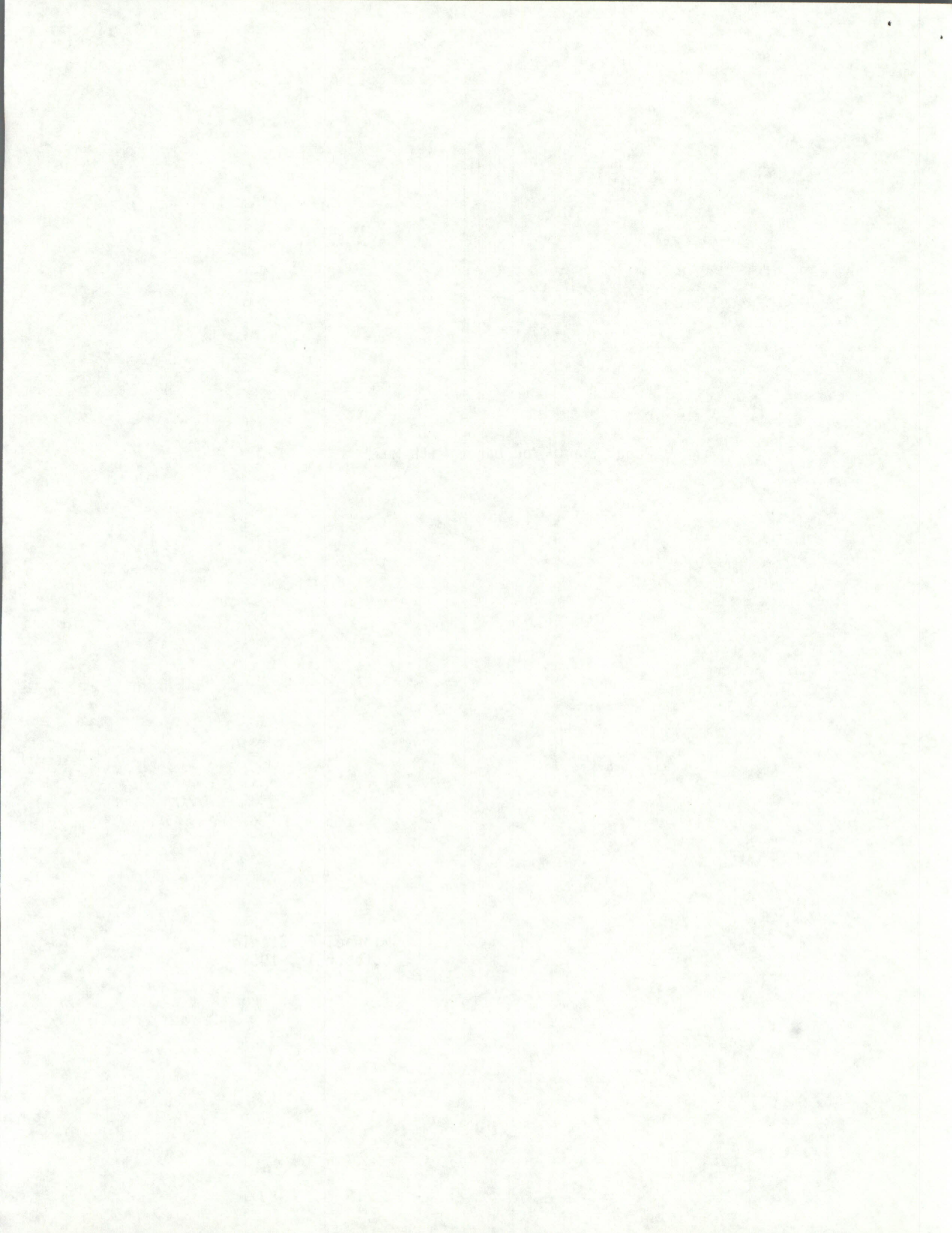


"Papa, Won't You Dance With Me?"

Michael C. Scanlon
October 17, 1989



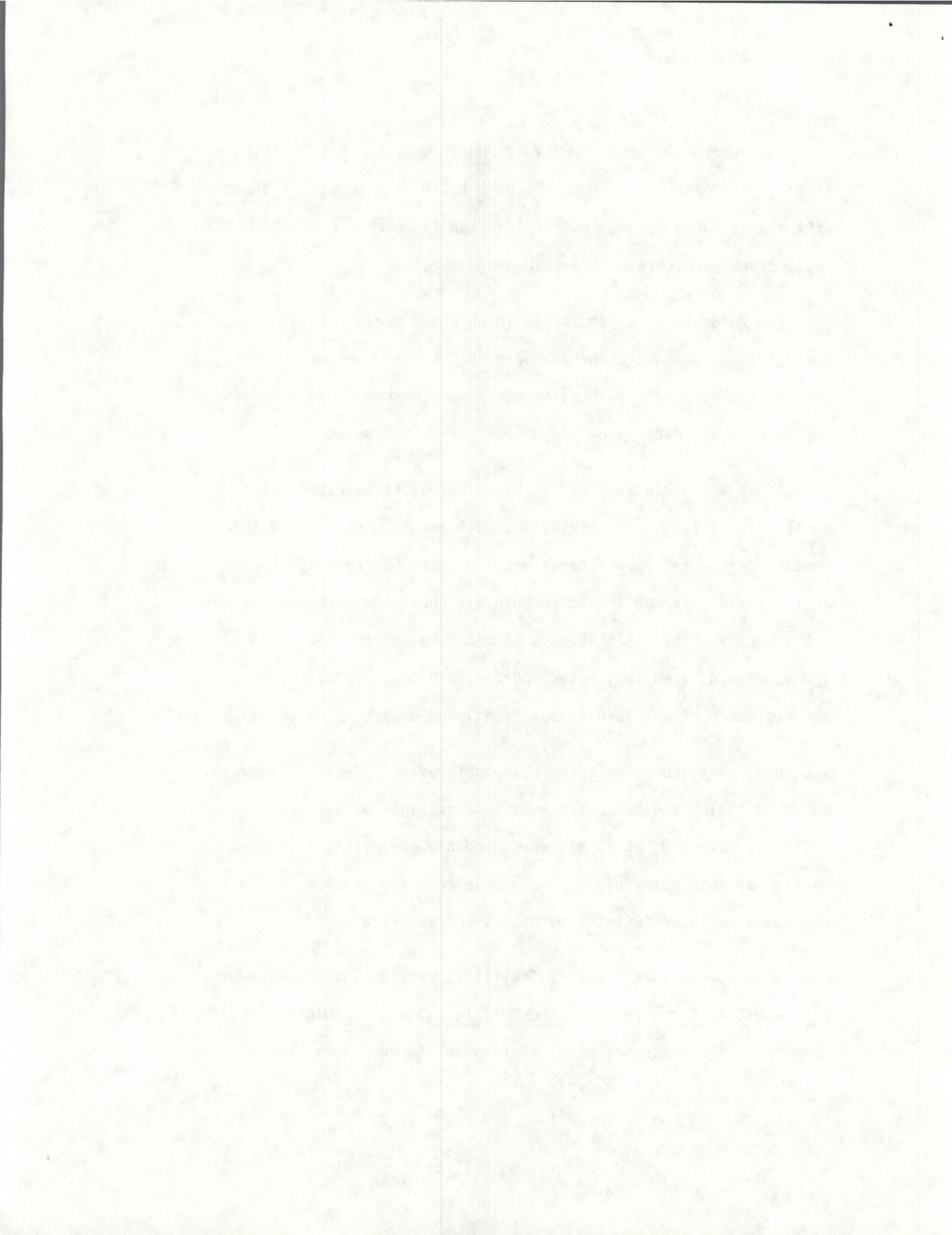
"And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee." For whom the bell tolls is a memorable phrase of the poet, John Donne. But it is often associated with the man who borrowed the phrase, Ernest Hemingway.

The words he used, the style in which he presented them, and the critical controversy he caused made Hemingway one of the most popular and acclaimed authors of our time. He commanded a large and responsive readership through all levels of society.

A man who had a zest for life and adventure as big as his genius drew attention to himself as well as his work. "From the moment he embarked upon a career as a writer, he presented himself to the world as a man's man; in both his published work and his very public behavior he established a heroic image of himself as an athlete and sportsman, a worldly-wise reporter, a battle-scarred soldier, an aficionado of the Spanish bullfight, and a hard-drinking bon vivant". (1)

Hemingway debunkers took the opposite view. Zelda Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, and Max Eastman put charges into print. Love the writer or hate him, it is his words and his style that hold my particular interest tonight. Many have read and enjoyed his work. His style has been imitated by others for many years.

Some novels that are very familiar to us are The Sun Also Rises, A Farewell to Arms, For Whom the Bell Tolls, and The Old Man and the Sea. Many favor the Hemingway short stories as his best work.



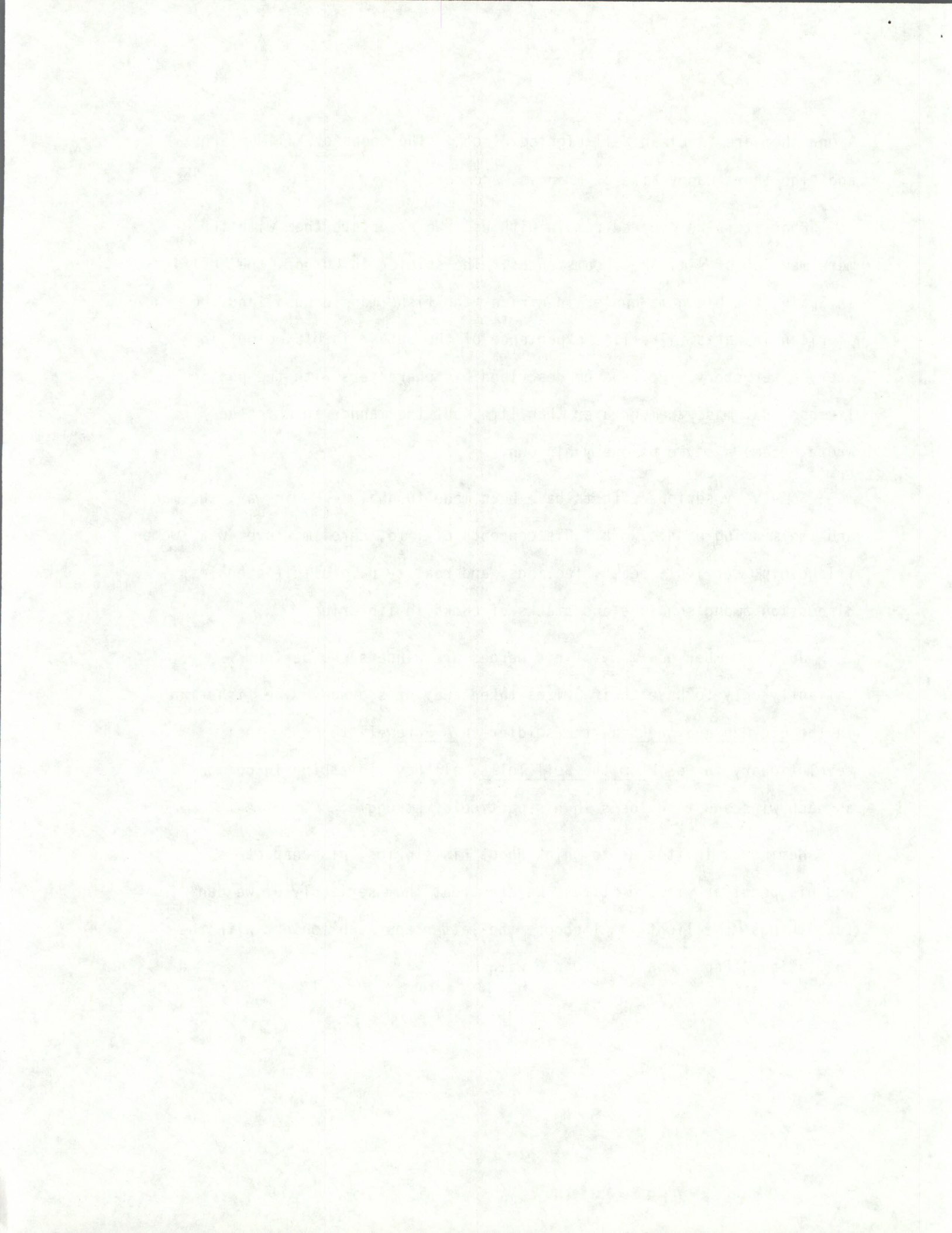
Among them are "A Clean Well-Lighted Place", "The Snows of Kilimanjaro", and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber."

Characters he created remain with us. We associate them with the mere mention of similar circumstances. The soldier in Europe, the bullfighter in Spain, the big game hunter in Africa, the fisherman in Cuba, and the American in Paris. The life experience of the author is played out in story after story. Perhaps he described his characters with the poetic license that made them greater than life, but the manner in which he wrote became a style uniquely his own.

Some very serious efforts have been made to analyze Hemingway, the man, and the meaning of his work. His concepts of life, heroism, love, war, women, friendship, survival, death, feelings, and reality have elicited endless discussion among scholars and stacks of books in libraries.

Just remember how many of his heroes are winners who perform valiantly only to have their prizes taken away or scorned. The fisherman in The Old Man and the Sea, the soldier in A Farewell to Arms, the revolutionary in For Whom the Bell Tolls, all have something in common as each wins and then loses in his particular struggle.

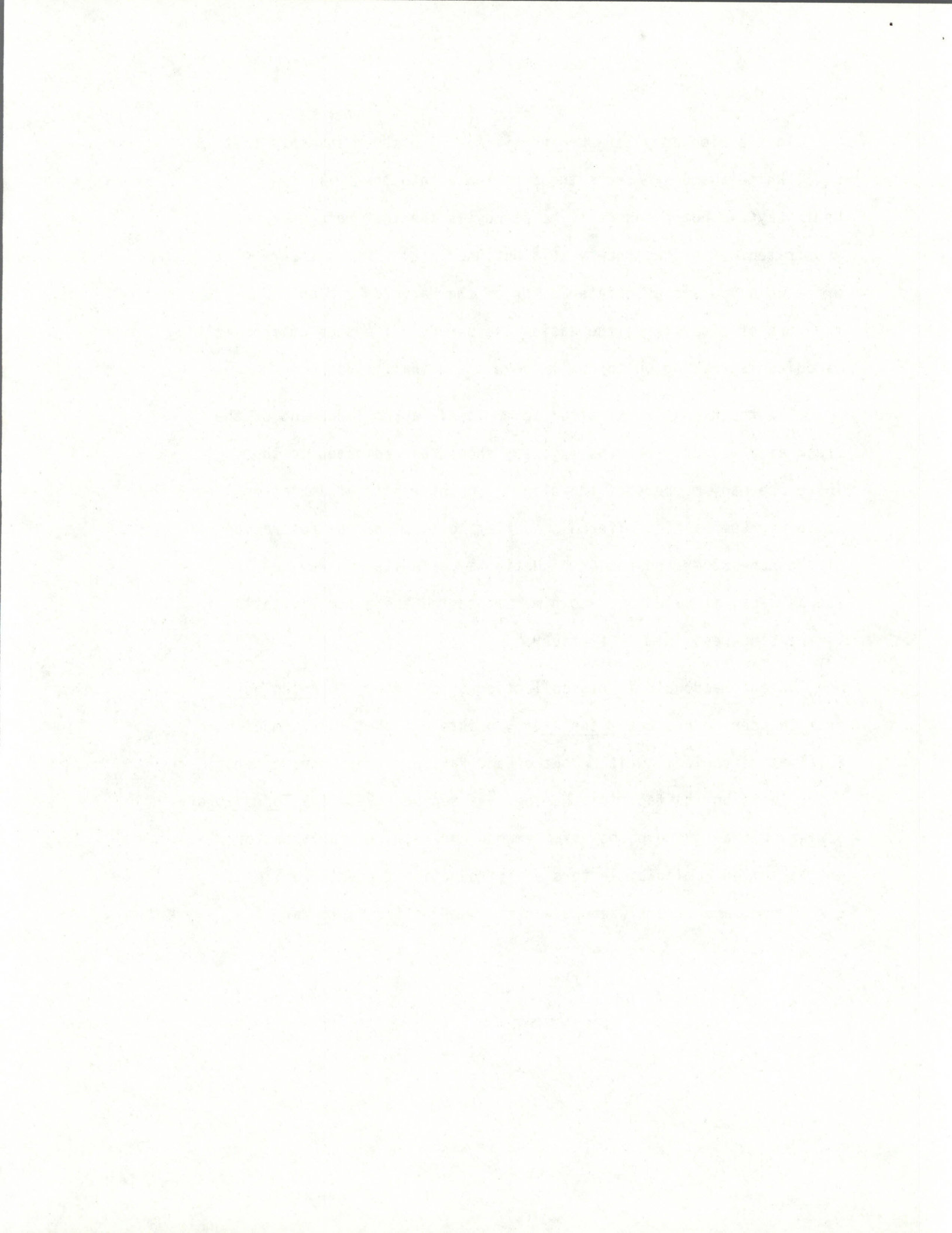
Hemingway invites us to think about his stories, his characters, and his peculiar views of life. We can treat them seriously or we can take things more lightly. I choose the latter approach tonight with the invitation, "Papa, Won't you Dance with Me?"



In his biography Papa Hemingway, A. E. Hotchner comments that in E. B. White's spoof "Across the Street and into the Grill" Hemingway was not pleased. "The parody is the last refuge of the frustrated writer," Hemingway told Hotchner. (2) "Parodies are what you write when you are associate editor of the Harvard Lampoon. The greater the work of literature, the easier the parody. The step up from writing parodies is writing on the wall above the urinal." (3)

The truth that seems clear to me is his acknowledgement of the frustrated writer. Perhaps my essay should be dedicated to them. There are many members of the clan. The International Imitation Hemingway Competition offered an outlet to this shared frustration of the non-author and reader of Hemingway. In its own way, as it poked fun at Papa, it paid honor to him. It tested the axiom "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery."

Dwight Macdonald in his collection of parodies, An Anthology from Chaucer to Beerbohm- and After, points out that the form of parody is almost invariably written out of admiration rather than contempt. He reflects on the fact that Hemingway's second novel, The Torrents of Spring, was a savage parody of Sherwood Anderson, an early mentor who had given Hemingway letters of introduction to Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and others when he went to Paris after World War I.



Macdonald poses the theory that Hemingway, who admired Anderson and acknowledged his debt, "had to kill the Freudian father in order to make his own place in the world of letters." (4)

A more commonly held theory is that Hemingway dashed off the parody in seven days in order to cancel contractual obligations with his publisher and move on to another.

The point is that Hemingway himself resorted to parody and he did it to poke fun at another author. This would seem to absolve any participant in the Hemingway Competition from charges of being disrespectful to the master.

Touche', Papa, Touche'.

James Thurber, Ohio's most famous writer, used the Hemingway style in a parody, "A Visit from Saint Nicholas",

"What was it?" asked mamma, "Saint Nicholas?"

She smiled. "Yeah," I said.

She sighed and turned in the bed.

"I saw him," I said.

"Sure."

"I did see him."

"Sure you saw him." She turned further toward the wall.

"There you go" mamma said. "You and your flying reindeer."

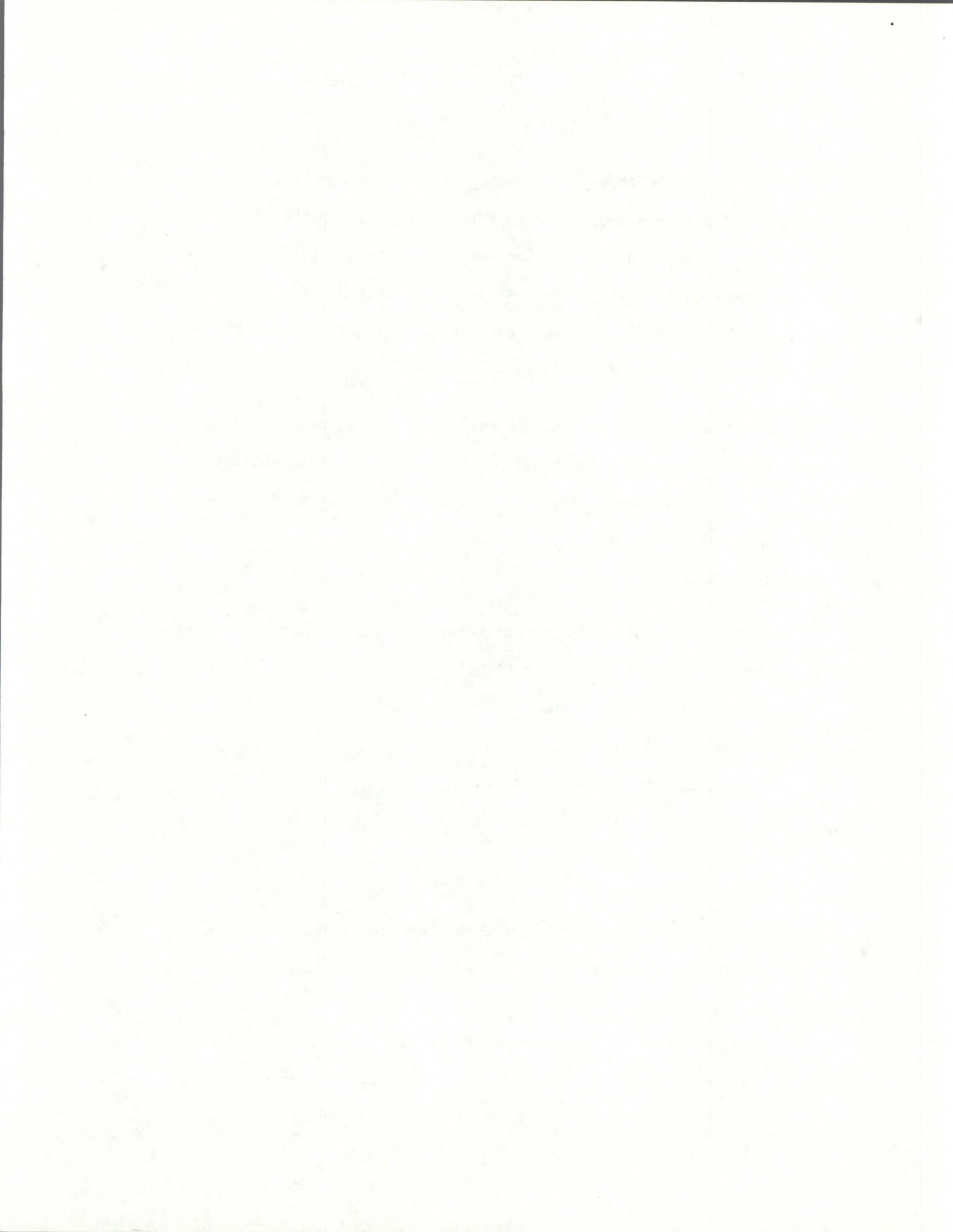
"Go to sleep," I said.

"Can we see Saint Nicholas when he comes?" the children asked.

"You go to sleep," I said. "You got to be asleep when he comes."

You can't see him unless you're unconscious."

"Father knows," mamma said. (5)



Mike Harden has written several articles in the style of Hemingway in his column in the Columbus Dispatch. One entitled, "Merry Christmas, Papa" started out:

"It is winter now and the night comes early. The snow comes hard, but it is not as it always has been, for there is a snow blower where before there had been only a shovel. It is a good blower, colorful and bright like the smocks worn by the counter help at the place where they serve the patty which is all beef and must be eaten with two hands.

The blower was a gift from the woman. She had put a ribbon on it as some women will do, but I ripped it off, for the Italian who lives nearby in the house of stucco would have laughed at the ribbon and it would have gone badly." (6)

In another column entitled "The Bread Also Rises", he wrote:

"Today will be a good day, he told himself. Today I will cook the bird, which is large and which bastes itself. The in-laws will come, and it will be as it has always been. He looked at the figure of his wife beneath the covers. She was large, like the bird, but not self-basting." (7)

The first Hemingway Competition took place in 1978. It was sponsored by Harry's Bar & American Grill in Los Angeles. Paul Keye, an advertising man, saw the promotional value of using the Hemingway name for his client, the L.A. Harry's Bar.



Harry's Bar in Venice was mentioned in "Across the River and into the Trees."

The waiter made the call while the Colonel was in the bathroom.

"The contessa is not at home, my Colonel," he said.

"They believe you might find her at Harry's."

"You find everything on earth at Harry's."

"Yes, my Colonel. Except, perhaps, happiness."

"I'll damn well find happiness too," the Colonel answered him.

"Happiness, as you know, is a moveable feast." (8)

So the competition began. In the original advertising copy it was noted the contestants would have to face "The White Bull That Is Paper With No Work On It." The only stipulation was that Harry's Bar had to be mentioned and not disparagingly. The application blanks asked for "a really good page of really bad Hemingway."

The winner and a guest would be flown to Florence for dinner at Harry's Bar. Once there, the winners were to seek their own accommodations. The one ad that was run annually in the New Yorker stated: "We feed you..... and send you back. Okay?" Apparently it was okay because in eleven years of the competition more than twenty-five thousand Hemingway parodies were received.



So with very little respect to the author, I intend to present you with a five course removeable feast of parodies on Ernest Hemingway. The following words are from selected entries through the years from The International Imitation Hemingway Competition.

I. Only More So

It was a dark wet night. Gerty Stein would have called it a dark dark wet night night. But I'm not Gerty. I'm Nick.

I entered Harry's Bar. It was dark and wet. In my last story it was clean and well-lit. I never repeat myself.

I ordered a banana daiquiri. "Make it a double; I'm depressed," said Nick.

"A minute ago you were in first person," said the bartender.

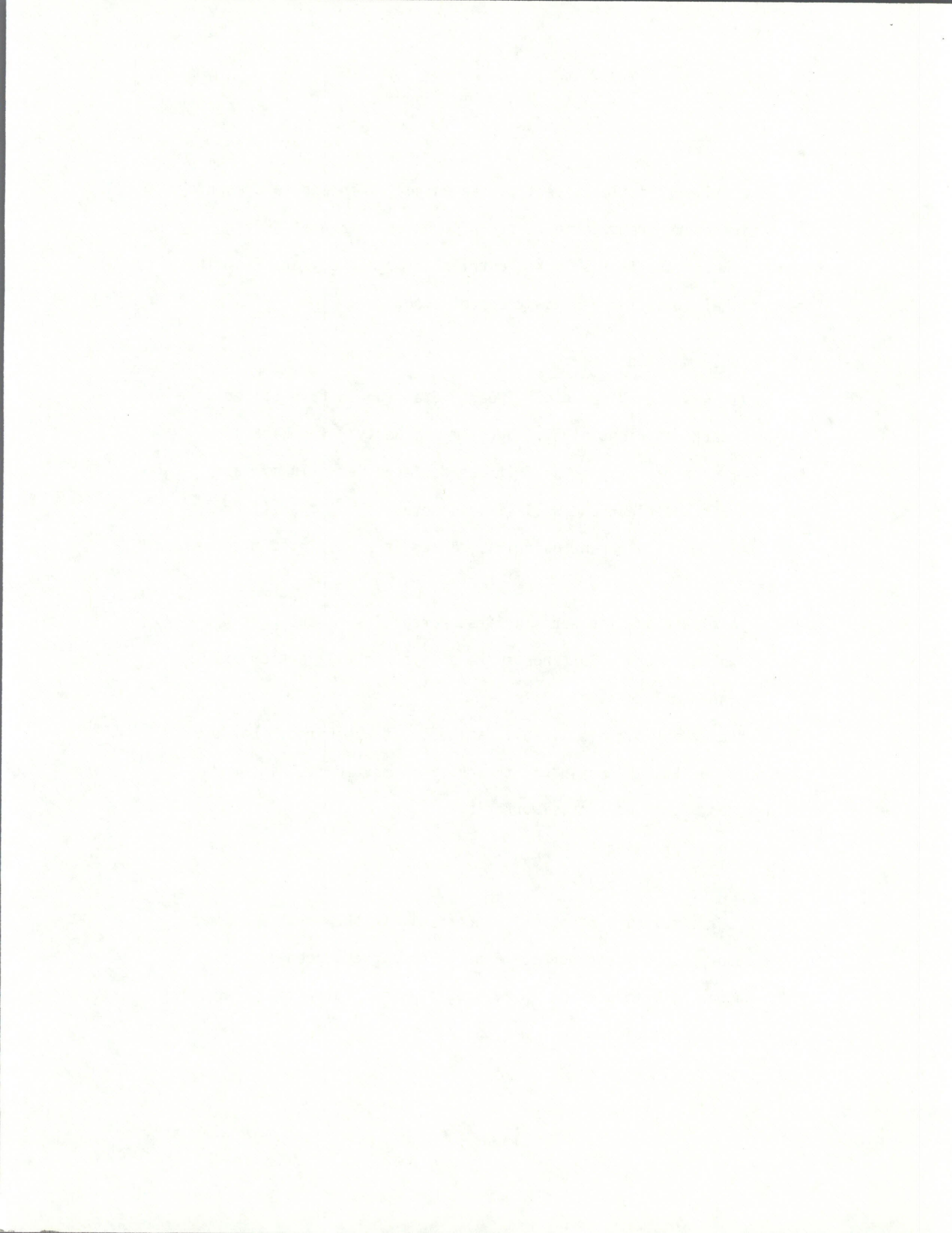
He was right. Bartenders are always right. Particularly Spanish bartenders.

"Catch any big fish lately, amigo?" It was Lardo. Lardo fought bulls. His skin was the color of meatloaf. His hands were as supple as a steelworker's.

"No," I replied.

"I see," said Lardo.

Lardo saw. I did not. I punched him in the mouth. It was a good punch. A big punch. A punch as big and good as the haunches of a female elk in rutting season. Lardo fell. He fell well. All Spaniards fall well.



"Why did you do that, amigo?" he said.

"I don't know."

It was good I don't know. I sat down at the bar like any other man, only more so, and chugged my daiquiri.

"Oh hell," I muttered and threw the straw away.

Lardo got up from the floor.

"Amigo?" he said.

"Yes?" I replied.

"I am a man."

"Yes, Lardo, I know you are a man."

"Then you know what I must do."

"Yes, I know."

With that, he struck my unshaven writer's chin with his supple bullfighter's fist. As he did, I could hear a bell toll in the distance. My body hit the floor hard. I wondered who the bell was tolling for.

"Whom," said the bartender. (9)

--Steven Spivak

II. In The Late Summer Of That Year We Lived In A Condo

In the late summer of that year we lived in a condo in North Dallas that looked across the tollway to the discos and honky-tonks of the rue St. Bubba. We were young and our happiness dazzled us with its strength. But there was also a terrible betrayal that lay within me like a Merle Haggard song at a French Restaurant.

"The Great Landry says the Cowboys will be back," said the girl.



"Then it must be so," I said though I knew it was a lie.

"When football season comes, then it will be cold. Like Switzerland. But not now. The cold will be back later."

"Pass the Doritos," I said and her eyes shone like the stars over Amarillo.

I could not tell the girl about the woman of the tollway, of her milk-white BMW and her Jordache smile.

I did not think of the girl who sat beside me. I thought of the woman of the tollway, and I could feel my heart pounding in the heat of the summer night.

"Stop the car," the girl said.

There was a look of great and terrible sadness in her eyes. She knew about the woman of the tollway. I knew not how. I started to speak, but she raised an arm and spoke with a quiet and peace I will never forget.

"I do not ask for whom's the tollway belle," she said.

"The tollway belle's for thee." (10)

--Peter Applebome

III. It Was Now Morning And He Was In The Bathroom Shaving

It was now morning and he was in the bathroom shaving, shaving for the first time that day but not the last, no, never the last; the hairs kept coming, tiny hairs and black and there was nothing for it, nothing for it at all but shaving, razor bright-edged clean on skin and cutting through the hairs and the soap and the dead dried cells of epidermis in that clean well-lighted place.



There were the hairs and he was shaving because a man shaves.
Main thing a man did. Made him into a man. No bloody hairs.

She came in then, rich and tall and American in that way they have, her face a picture of a face, an American face, and she leaned into Gibbs Adams in that way she had of leaning, and he looked away from her American face in the mirror and down at the sink where she had just dropped the matchbook, the matchbook from Harry's Bar & American Grill.

He had cut himself about two inches up and a little to one side of the base of his chin.

He was bleeding now, the good, rich thin American blood red on his chin, on the razor, cold, gleaming, dripping on the matchbook, the Harry's Bar & American Grill matchbook, and he was afraid.

She turned, lifting her thin American lip over those thin white perfect American teeth in that thin American sneer.

"It's only a nick, Adams," she said. (11)

--Gordon Carlson

IV. In Paris Then You Could Walk Down The Rue De Casserole

In Paris then you could walk down the rue de Casserole to a clean well-lighted cafe that reminded me of Harry's Bar & American Grill where I had eaten the good tortellone di magro. On that morning I found Scott drinking earnestly at the bar.

"You are drinking earnestly," I said.

"No," Scott said, "you drink earnestly. I drink absinthe."

"It is a bad drink," I said. "It will ruin your work."

He grunted like an Indian of my youth. "No," he said, "absinthe makes my art grow sounder."

Later there were ten Indians, and I wrote of them with great dignity.

A tall girl came into the cafe. She had long legs and small feet.

"You are like a racehorse," I said. I was betting that year.

"Yes," she said. "I am a girl of unbridled passion. Also, I am one of a Lost Generation, and I have no illusions."

"No illusions?"

"It is said that at the time of my birth, I neighed bitterly when the doctor slapped me on the fanny."

We left the cafe and went to her room and we felt the earth move.

In the afternoon I went fishing in the Seine. I fished truly and well, with a long pole and a curved hook, but all I caught that day was an unmentionable condition from the girl of unbridled passion.

"Now I understand the sadness," I thought about a month later.

I hobbled in the rain to 61 Boul Yabaise where the old gypsy woman lived.

"It is good to see you again, Papa," she said.

"I am not yet called 'Papa,'" I said, "and if you cannot help me, it is within the realm of possibility that I never will be."

She examined me. "It is nothing for one like you who has the cojones of el toro. But some day you must die, Ingles." (12)

--Charles Lansdown



V. Across The Mall and Into the White House

The President looked at the woman he called Nancy. He knew in his heart that other men had also called her Nancy--it was her name. But he did not wish to think about that now.

They were seated at a table. The table was strong, like wood, but shiny, and not afraid of spilled condiments. Maybe a formica tree was killed for it, the President thought. He looked at it admiringly, for he knew that to kill a formica tree was not an easy thing and required much courage to do the job truly and well. Even with a chainsaw.

"Ron, let's go back to California."

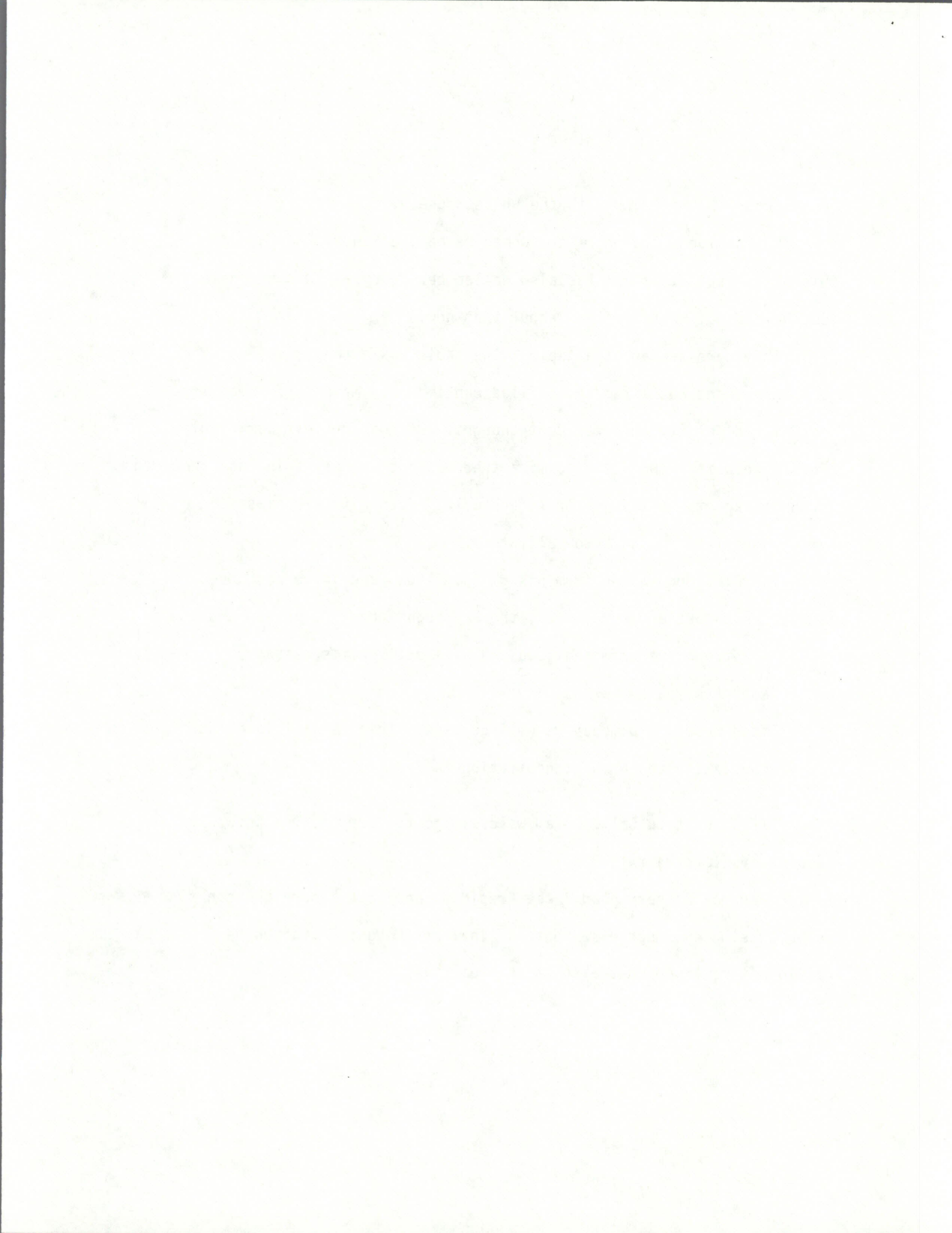
The President drank from his glass. The prune juice was sweet. I have known better prune juice, the President thought, but this prune juice is strong and warm and good and will deliver its message.

"Ron? Are you awake?"

"Yes, beauty. Someday we will go back. Then we will love each other constantly and without hesitation."

"If we went to California, we could go to Harry's, you know. You always love Harry's."

"Harry's is very good," the President agreed. "There one can find happiness." And much else that is fine, he thought, although he could not remember what else at the moment.



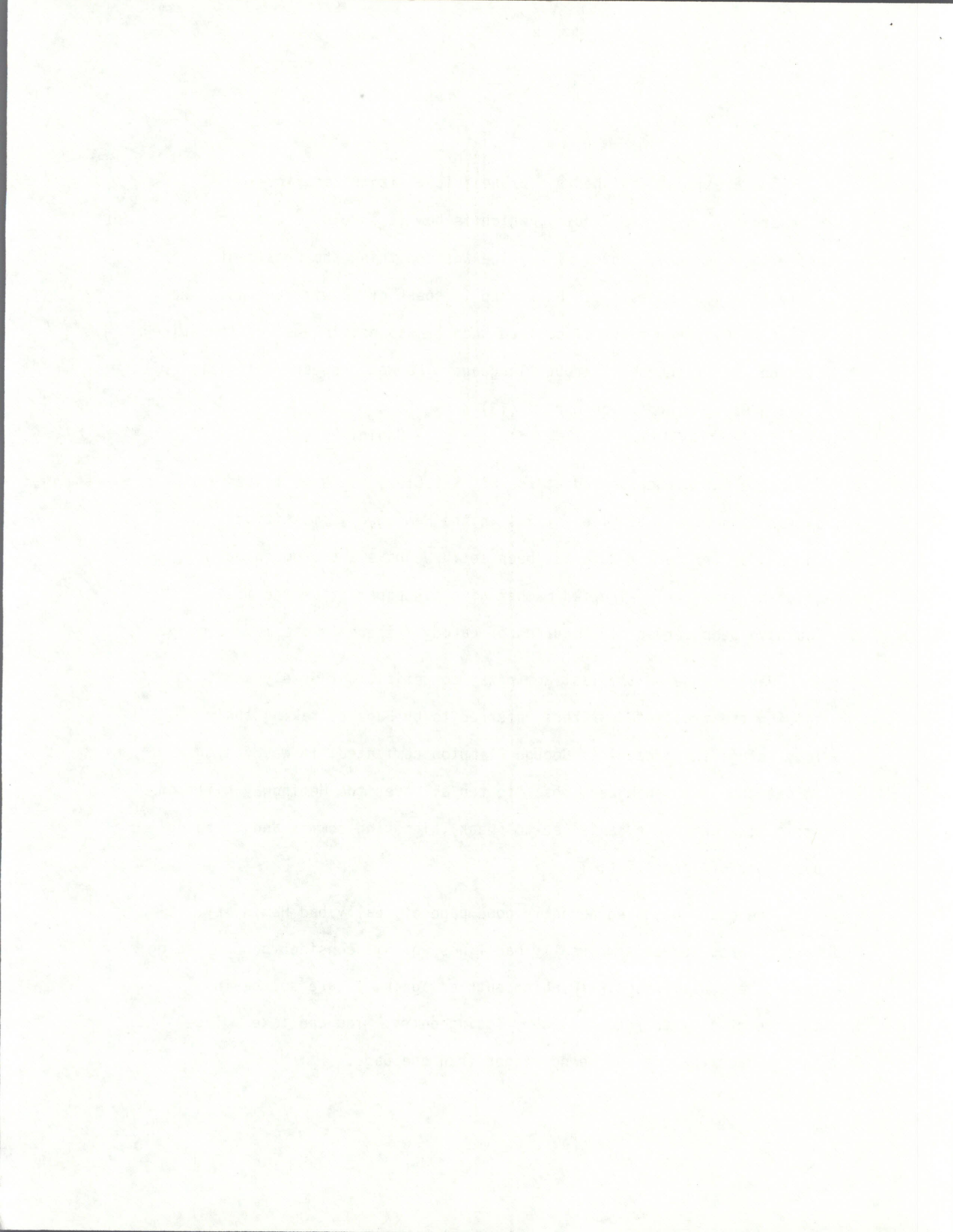
The President finished his prune juice. It tasted fine--- like prunes, only more liquidy, which is how it should be when you are with someone you love. The juice was one thing the President truly knew and understood. He wished to speak of it with the woman he called Nancy, whom he still desired when he was not in need of the juice, but she was frightened of rough language. He would speak of it later with Ed, and George, and maybe Gorby. (13)

--Daniel R. White

Like the dinner served at the Kit Kat Club, you have tasted different portions of five entries in the Hemingway Competition. The proper irreverent tone has been set. We have a custom in our group to have the designated member give his paper after the meal. You have been served five courses of parody. There is one more coming.

Having entered the last Hemingway competition, I freely admit joining the frustrated writers referred to by Papa as taking their last refuge in parody. As George Plimpton commented, it was fun to set the true sentences loose "to run all over the Hemingway hills of prose like white elephants (so to speak), ignoring commas and tripping over lots of 'ands'." (14)

The quest has been a really good page of really bad Hemingway. I have offered to you some really bad lines which I consider good. Seeing that others will read the winning entries again, I take solace in the opportunity to read to you my losing entry. You can take solace in the fact that it can be no longer than one page.



The old man called him Manny but Manolete was his name. He wore the MBA degree like the cape of a matador. Espontaneo maybe. No matador.

The years brought creases and wrinkles, too much exposure to sun and rain, scars from scrapes of the past, a certain stiffness that comes with age, a sweaty sheen from moisture, but God, the old man loved those shoes. No Gucci loafers or Brooks wing-tips for him. He set sail to meet Manny in his trusted plain-toed slip-ons that fit well and took a shine. They brought him luck and it had not been good of late.

The old man saw the Yuppies as bright little fish. They furnished the bait needed to attract the big ones. He did not waste any time when the two men met at Harry's Bar. The subject was money.

"Judas took his thirty pieces of silver. Your price is gold. The sum also rises."

These precious metal tipped words slammed into the eager young man. They found his greed button. He freely spilled out the information and it was fresh and inside and illegal and useful.

When Manny left the old man began to drink. Serious drinking. Not the laugh and talk kind. The old man picked up another strip of sushi, chewed, and waited. He thought of deals and money and women and deals.

The bulls were running in the Street. This was not a narrow and winding street in Pamplona. But a different street with bonds from junk, mail that is green, computers that trade, and laundries for money. The old man preferred the Tigers from Detroit. Two different games. But baseball stays the same. The street changes. He liked baseball and the rules both sides played by. What would the great DiMaggio think of all these things?

When the big one entered the bar a good-looking woman was clinging to his arm. She had been a hostess on his airline. Wings clipped, she was now a caged bird. Her eyes gave the look of a sparrow, tamed, soulful, tired. The mouth had forced one too many smiles. Her well-formed body was his prized possession. He glanced at her with a certain lusty pride. "Woman, we have business." The old man thought, "This time I will enjoy putting the gaff in clean and hard."

The prize was big. A big beautiful company with shiny new 747s whose blue tail fins and sleek silver bodies cut swiftly through the air. The old man had other uses for them. Assets. Sweet assets.

The bait was dangled before the big one. A few Swiss francs were added to hide the hook. It seemed only right that he would choose to leave an airline by parachute. A golden one. Now the old man waited for him to jump.

The telephone line stretched taut across the country. His right hand rested at the end of it. The big one was tiring at the other end. It had been a good fight. Bloody and good.

"I should have brought the buoy," he said aloud. "Sunk it right in the middle of the bar. That is where he took the hook."

Greed flows in the Street like blood in the water. Now the sharks raced to the scent. The arbs, the traders, the bankers had attacked. The most feared and vicious of all circled slowly. The lawyers had arrived with their clocks running and jaws open wide with their razor-sharp advice.

Torn pieces of a once proud company. The prize dismembered. There only remained the old man and the S.E.C.



NOTES

1. Hemingway by Kenneth S. Lynn
Simon & Schuster NY 1987, pg. 9
2. Papa Hemingway by A.E. Hotchner
Random House NY 1966
3. IBID.
4. Parodies: An Anthology from Chaucer to Beerbohm-and after
by Dwight Macdonald
New York, Modern Library, 1965
5. Collecting Himself edited by Michael J. Rosen
Harper & Row, NY 1989 pg. 110
6. "Merry Christmas, Papa,"
Mike Harden, Columbus Dispatch
7. "The Bread Also Rises,"
Mike Harden, Columbus Dispatch
8. "Across the River and into the Trees",
Ernest Hemingway
Scribner, NY 1950
9. The Best of Bad Hemingway,
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Orlando, 1989 pg. 88
10. Ibid, pg. 10
11. Ibid, pg. 25
12. Ibid, pg. 101
13. Ibid, pg. 109
14. Ibid, George Plimpton
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