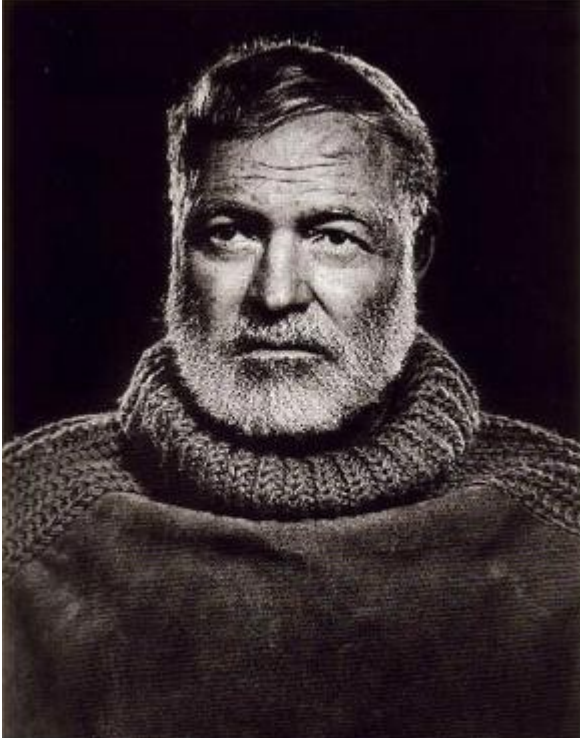


St. Ernest?

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [May 2, 2012](#) issue



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I've been reading a lot about Ernest Hemingway lately, and my interest extends to the other expatriate writers living in Paris the 1920s, such as Gertrude Stein and F. Scott Fitzgerald. I've long believed that Hemingway's late novel *The Old Man and the Sea* should be required reading for anyone who presumes to speak publicly because of its economy of prose—crisp, lean sentences that use no unnecessary words. So I thoroughly enjoyed Woody Allen's film *Midnight in Paris*, which is about a modern would-be writer who travels in time back to Paris in the 1920s. Actor Corey Stoll nicely captures Hemingway's belligerent, confrontational manner and displays his literary style: "The bread is good and strong and true!"

I recently read Paul Hendrickson's *Hemingway's Boat: Everything He Loved in Life, and Lost, 1934-1961*, which focuses on Hemingway's love of the ocean and of boating, fishing and entertaining in Key West, Bimini and Havana before the Castro revolution. Hendrickson describes the boat, *Pilar*, as well as the company that designed and built it, the caliber of its engines and the quality of its amenities,

giving those of us who aren't sailors more information than we need.

He also mentions several of Hemingway's friends who are not covered extensively in other biographies and shares his far-reaching interviews with Hemingway's sons. The man who emerges is a study in contrasts. He was an impossible boor. He drank too much. He alienated friends, humiliated people who wanted to be near him and emotionally and verbally abused his wives. But he was also capable of graciousness and generosity, as in his relationship with his youngest son, Gigi, a physician who was a cross-dresser for most of his life and died in a Miami jail for women. He once wrote to friends grieving for the loss of their 15-year-old son: "We must live it, now, a day at a time and be very careful not to hurt each other."

Author Reynolds Price proposed that Hemingway yearned for "sanctity." I'm not sure what to make of that unusual comment, but Hemingway's persistent yearning is clear. In his novel *Across the River and into the Trees*, a character seems to be speaking for Hemingway when he says: "Why am I always a bastard? . . . [Why can I not] be a kind and good man? . . . God help me not to be bad."

After spending years immersed in Hemingway's work and life, Hendrickson appears to agree with Price. He offers this poignant conclusion: "I have come to believe deeply that Ernest Hemingway, however unpostmodern it may sound, was on a lifelong quest for sainthood, and not just literary sainthood, and that at nearly every turn, he defeated himself."