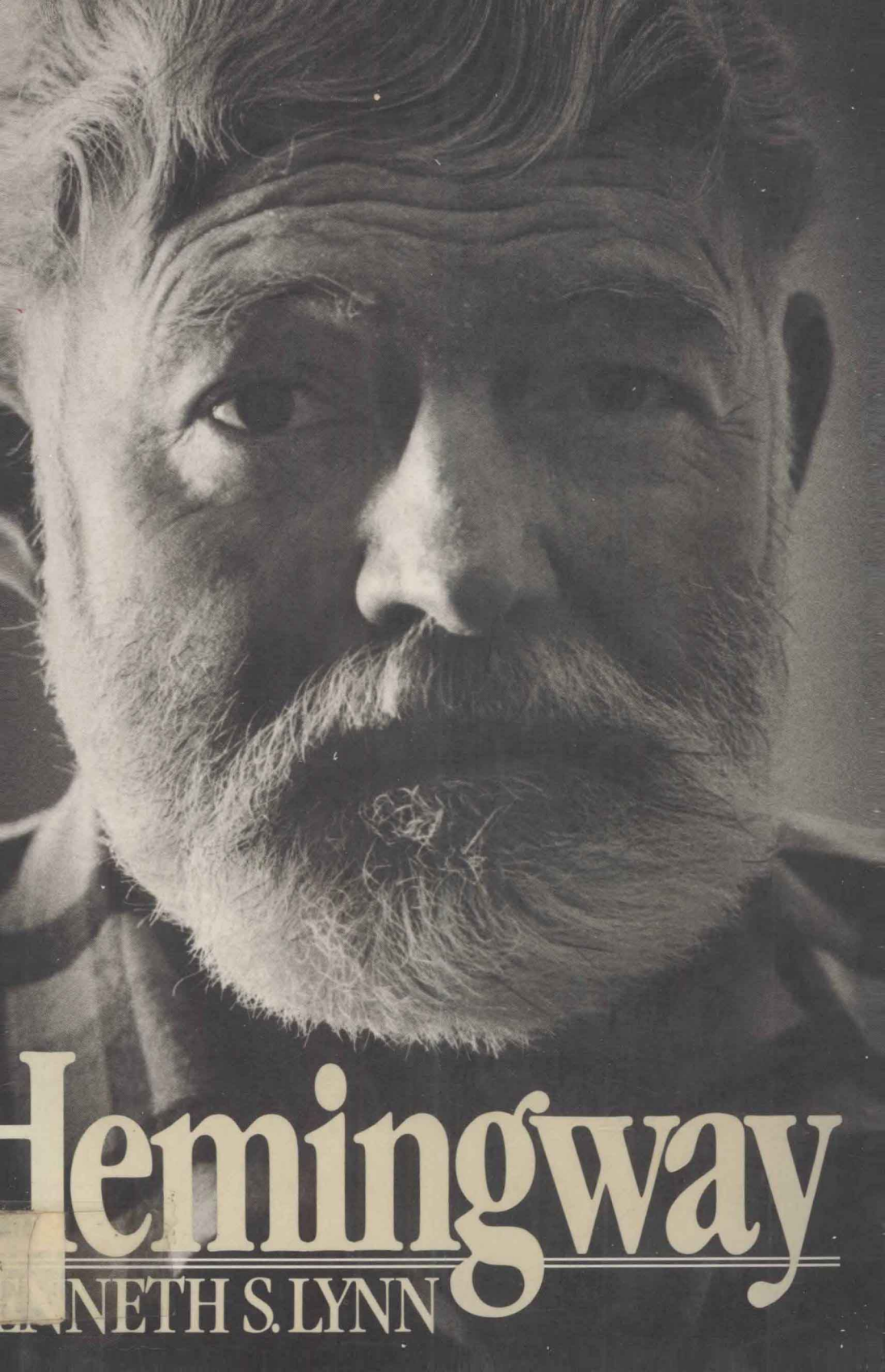

Hemingway

KENNETH S. LYNN

BOOKS BY KENNETH S. LYNN

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Visions of America
A Divided People
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HEMINGWAY

BY

KENNETH S. LYNN

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AGAIN, FOR VALERIE

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PREFACE

ACROSS MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY, the life and work of Ernest Hemingway have been at the center of a critical controversy. For that, Hemingway himself was largely responsible. From the moment he embarked upon his career as a writer, he presented himself to the world as a man's man, and 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. As his fame grew, his self-dramatizations hardened into myth, for he had tapped into the twentieth century's enormous nostalgia for the manly virtues of earlier times, as defined in America by the pathfinders of Fenimore Cooper, the foretopmen of Herman Melville and the cowboys extolled by Theodore Roosevelt, Owen Wister, and Frederic Remington. So powerful did the Hemingway myth become that his many admiring reviewers were beguiled into the belief that his work could not be understood other than in terms of a correspondence to a supremely masculine life.

Hemingway's debunkers took precisely the opposite view. In the midtwenties a scornful Zelda Fitzgerald informed her husband that his manly friend Ernest was a phony. A decade later, Gertrude Stein and Max Eastman put similar charges into print, and in the wake of these much-talked-about assaults, other critics were emboldened to ridicule what they regarded as his masculine pretensions and to use them as a weapon with which to bludgeon his art. His work was

shallow and without genuine feeling. He had no sympathy for women, they said, portraying them either as manhood-destroying bitches or as mere objects of sexual domination, while exalting stoicism and bravery in his heroes in an attempt to prove something about himself that was not true.

In the years since his suicide in 1961, the disagreement over the significance of his life has continued with remarkably little change. Thus, the keepers of the cult of his masculinity have mostly argued that the decision to kill himself was an act of courage, given the irredeemable breakdown in his capacity to write. For the cruelest of his debunkers, by contrast, it constituted the ultimate proof that he had always lived a lie. Such extreme perceptions diminished the stature of his achievement, even in the eyes of some of his idolators. Yet few readers thought to look beyond their prejudices in search of truths that might transcend the controversy.

That search became all the more urgent with the publication, in the spring of 1986, of an abbreviated version of a manuscript on which Hemingway had worked for many years but had never finished. For the transsexual fantasies that inform *The Garden of Eden* have compelled reluctant recognition of the possibility that he was not the writer, or the man, he was thought to be, and that he has been misread and misinterpreted by enthusiasts and detractors alike. Cautious reviewers suggested that the book exposed a new sensibility in the author. In fact, that sensibility had been there all along. From the very first, his best work was infused by more sensitive and complicated feelings about himself and the world than the stereotypes of Hemingway criticism have ever allowed.

In a letter to Scott Fitzgerald in 1934 in which he appeared to be counseling a troubled friend but was actually talking of himself as well, he wrote, "We are all bitched from the start and you especially have to be hurt like hell before you can write seriously. But when you get the damned hurt use it—don't cheat with it. Be as faithful to it as a scientist." Hemingway's hurt began in childhood and expanded until his death like ripples from a hand trailed in a sylvan lake. Uncertain to the point of fear about himself, he was compelled to write stories in which he endeavored to cope with the disorder of his inner world by creating fictional equivalents for it. Perhaps to an extent greater than any of his contemporaries save Thomas Wolfe, he habitually re-created his life through his art, not in unrestrained confessional floods, as Wolfe did, but in the unique stylistic shorthand of his own invention and in the guarded manner of one who, in spite of limited self-understanding, sought to explore, to express, and to find some measure of resolution of agonizing personal con-

flicts. As he himself said, he wanted to make people feel more than they understood—and yet he also knew that the day would come when his cunningly wrought fiction would be read quite differently than it had been in his lifetime. "Things may not be immediately discernible in what a man writes," he informed the Swedish Academy in 1954 after learning that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, "and in this sometimes he is fortunate; but eventually they are quite clear and by these and the degree of alchemy that he possesses he will endure or be forgotten."

Things may also not be immediately discernible in what a man does. If a reconsideration of Hemingway's work can be richly rewarding, so a reconsideration of his life can show that while his faults were terrible he was also a more truly heroic figure than even the gaudiest version of his myth would grant him. "If people bring so much courage to this world," he declared through Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms,* "the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry." A fragment of that passage might serve as the author's own epitaph: "Strong at the broken places." For Ernest Hemingway was a conflicted, haunted man who produced from his torment some of the most memorable fiction of the century.

PART ONE

1899–1919

CHAPTER ONE

"I Had a Wonderful Novel to Write About Oak Park"

SITUATED ONLY NINE MILES WEST OF THE LOOP, suburban Oak Park, Illinois, was connected to the heart of Chicago in the early years of the twentieth century by two public transportation lines, the Chicago and North Western Railroad and the Lake Street elevated. Dr. Clarence Edmonds Hemingway, known to his friends as Ed, was not a man who much cared for cities, but twice a year he liked to take his children to see the Ringling Brothers Circus at the Coliseum, and on weekends he sometimes escorted them to the Field Museum of Natural History, housed in the former Fine Arts building of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Having pushed their way past the templelike building's heavy bronze doors, the children usually paused in awe at the sight of the two elephants in fighting position beneath the dome of the rotunda before scurrying off to examine the exhibits of mastodon bones and other wonders. By the time he was ten, Ernest Hemingway's favorite room was the Hall of African Mammals, with its family groupings in natural settings of cheetahs, lions, warthogs, wildebeests, rhinos, buffaloes, greater kudus, and spotted hyenas. In the soft light of exhibition cases, the animals' glass eyes glistened, making it easy for the young Ernest to imagine—especially when he was wearing a khaki outfit just like the ex-President's—that these creatures were alive and that he was Theodore Roosevelt on safari.

More frequently, the children rode into town with their mother. Over the years, she shepherded all six of them up the grand staircase

of the Art Institute, where she held an annual membership in the family's name, to inspect the notable collection of Dutch masters, El Greco's "Assumption of the Virgin"—acquired in 1906 for a controversially high price—and whatever traveling exhibition the Institute was showing at the moment, although it is doubtful that she herself bestowed more than a passing glance upon Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" and the other precedent-shattering paintings from the New York Armory Show of 1913. On other occasions, she bought them tickets to concerts at Orchestra Hall by Frederick Stock and the Chicago Symphony, or to performances of grand opera at the huge, elliptically arched Auditorium that Louis Sullivan had designed. For high culture in Chicago was undergoing a remarkable expansion in these years, and in the realms of music and art Grace Hall Hemingway (or Hall-Hemingway, as she sometimes signed her name) was determined to keep her brood abreast of it.

Her ambitions for her children were further served by Oak Park. In addition to its excellent public schools, the hometown of the Hemingways boasted an art center, an opera house, two playhouses, a symphony orchestra, a splendid library, and several extraordinarily good church choirs. Grace took pride in all of these institutions, especially in one of the choirs, which for several years she directed. The community's chief claim to cultural distinction, however, derived from a group of architects whose work she disliked almost as much as she did cubist art and the music of Arnold Schönberg.

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THE men and women who settled in the tiny village of Oak Park in the two decades following the devastating Chicago fire of 1871 had favored dwellings of historic European design. Typical of their architecturally familiar houses were two that diagonally faced one another on North Oak Park Avenue, the turreted three-story home of the Hemingway children's maternal grandparents, Ernest and Caroline Hall, and the large white clapboard residence of the children's paternal grandparents, Anson and Adelaide Hemingway. So traditional was Oak Park's appearance in this period that when Frank Lloyd Wright and his eighteen-year-old bride arrived in the village in 1889 even he did not choose to build as unconventional a house for himself as he might have.

Until he fled to Europe twenty years later with a prominent local matron, Mamah Borthwick Cheney, Wright continued to live and work in Oak Park, for reasons he found increasingly compelling.