

Insights into Scholarship: A Q&A with Laura Godfrey and Gary Edward Holcomb

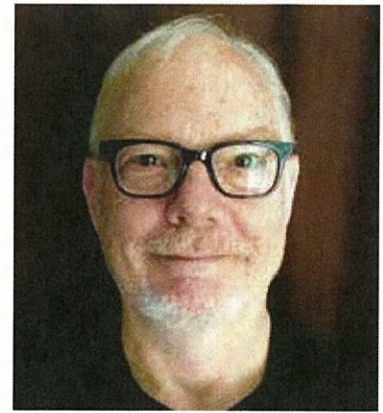
ED. NOTE: *Scholars know the challenge of trying to keep up with the ever-expanding body of Hemingway criticism. Every year dozens of books and hundreds of articles appear, either published by major houses, academic presses, or academic journals. One area of interest we may not appreciate, however, is pedagogy. Yet criticism devoted to how and why we teach Hemingway is both prolific and inspiring. In recent years, Kent State University's Teaching Hemingway series, edited by Mark Ott, has served as the face of this scholarly subset, with volumes on *The Sun Also Rises* (edited by Peter L. Hays), *A Farewell to Arms* (Lisa Tyler), *modernism* (Joseph Fruscione), *war* (Alex Vernon), *gender* (Verna Kale), and *the natural world* (Kevin Maier) offering theoretical and practical explorations of classroom practices. Because of the series' popularity, we decided to interview two editors of forthcoming volumes. Gary Edward Holcomb's *Teaching Hemingway and Race* will be available in October 2018, while Laura Godfrey's *Teaching Hemingway in the Digital Age* is making its way through the production pipeline for 2019. (Full disclosure: Your Correspondent is one of the contributors to Laura's volume—provided the readers' reports don't recommend launching his submission into the void.)*

Q: Gary, what inspired you to tackle race for this entry in the Teaching Hemingway series?

GEH: About five years ago, KSUP Teaching Hemingway series editor Mark Ott proposed I edit a volume on teaching Hemingway apropos race. I believed a teaching community needed to exist for those who teach Hemingway in a multicultural curriculum, and a book on the topic could be useful in helping to create one. I've encountered an inclusive assortment of teachers who welcome pedagogical approaches to Hemingway that address race, and I've encountered a wide cultural range of students who want to talk about Hemingway's writing. I posted a CFP on the Hemingway Society website and organized a panel for the 2014 Venice conference, which led to stimulating proposals.



Laura Godfrey



Gary Edward Holcomb

Q: How about you, Laura? What inspired you to take on "the digital age"? Race is an obvious theme in the texts, but your topic antedates Hemingway's writing and involves more the media through which we experience the work.

LG: The idea first came to me several years back when I team-taught an interdisciplinary capstone class at my college—we called it "Physical and Virtual Environments." My colleague and I created a reading list that, we hoped, would help illuminate for students the ways that our ideas about being in (as well as our perceptions of) physical environments were shifting in the so-called "digital age." One of the literary texts we chose was *The Sun Also Rises*. We framed our discussions of the book around the question of how these characters were trying to live life "all the way up," the way Hemingway's bullfighters did—which characters, we asked, were most engaged with the world around them? Which characters paid closest attention to others and to their environments? And did Hemingway seem to assign value to those people who paid close attention? What could we, as 21st century readers, learn from reading closely the ways in which these characters attempted to live fully in the world? Within this framework, Hemingway's 1926 "lost generation" novel emerged in stark relief as a book about the value—indeed, the necessity—and the beauty of paying close attention. In our 21st century "age of distraction" (this is Matthew Crawford's term) that message resonated especially powerfully with students.

Q: Gary, you co-edited with Charles Scruggs a great collection of essays on Hemingway and the Black Renaissance a few years back. How is that project connected to this current one?

GEH: Thanks! Mark Ott contributed to *Hemingway and the Black Renaissance*, but this project's origins precede the collection. While writing a book on Claude McKay, I realized that *The Sun Also Rises* was unmistakably a model for the Black Lost Generation *Home to Harlem*, and McKay effusively praises Hemingway in his autobiography. I found that, even with Morrison's germinal "Africanist presence" critique, a number of black authors had singled out Hemingway as instrumental, including Hughes, Ellison, Himes, Walcott, and Gayl Jones. I chaired a 2005 Hemingway Society MLA panel on the topic, and a year later organized another for the Ronda conference, where I was, over a bottle of *tinto*, lucky enough to persuade Charlie Scruggs to co-edit.

Q: Laura, can you give us some sense of the range of digital resources contributors are employing in the classroom? What are some of the benefits of employing these resources?

LG: There is a fascinating range of digital resources referenced within the collection—from the use of memes as teaching tools (I had no idea how many hundreds of Hemingway memes were out there), to the use of popular tools like YouTube clips, Google Earth, and The Hemingway App to provide more historical, geographical, and cultural context for students, to the incorporation of materials from the Hemingway digital archive (the digitized photographs, scrapbooks, etc.) into the classroom, to lesser known—yet still easily adaptable—digital tools like GIS mapping applications which can allow students to virtually experience various Hemingway environments. One author discusses his work with digital humanities optical character recognition (OCR) software; he had students use an OCR

tool to digitize, and analyze, Hemingway's entire body of work. These tools all offer creative, innovative ways to broaden the dimensions in which our 21st century students encounter and understand Hemingway's life and writing. Plus, a lot of them are really playful and fun to experiment with; I think the resources described in the book could help any instructor balance out traditional literature pedagogy with newer, multi-media approaches.

Q: Gary, one of the interesting things when we talk teaching literature is that discussions tend to split into distinct camps, some more pedagogical/theoretical in advocating for innovative approaches and others devoted to "practical" applications. Did you find this split in the essays contributors submitted? If so, how did you bridge the gap between theory and practice?

GEH: This book is my first attempt at a pedagogical rather than strictly critical publication, which meant something of a shift in my thinking about how to approach it. Fortunately, the Teaching Hemingway series model provides that each chapter present theoretical issues and then follow with student assignments—practical, classroom applications of the theoretical content. My contributors understood that the book is meant for teaching Hemingway and race, not producing scholarship in the routine sense. Cam Cobb and Michael Potter's chapter, for example, models learning outcomes for teaching "The Doctor's and the Doctor's Wife" though the application of Bloom's taxonomy.

Q: Laura, although modernism obviously arose out of an era of immense technological change—with some artists

avidly incorporating technological influences in their style and thematically celebrating them, while others protested by retreating into nostalgia—Hemingway is not necessarily the first writer we would associate with the topic. In what ways have you been surprised by contributors' takes on the topic?

LG: As the essays came in, I found myself consistently surprised at how many parallels kept surfacing between our time and the modernist era. And there are two essays in the collection in particular that focus on the similarities: yours and Nicole Camastra's. Nicole wrote a really moving, lovely piece in which she proposes that there are powerful connections to be made between our 21st-century fragmented "digital selves" and the characters within Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* who similarly struggle with consuming large amounts of information and not fully understanding any of it. And your piece on memes illustrates the cultural connections between these eras as well, since memes emerge as a way to help teach students about the modernist ethos of experimentation through reinvention.

Q: Gary, I think many Hemingway advocates struggle with teaching race in his work because frankly he was not on the cusp of progressivism in this particular area. Do the essays in the collection challenge this perception? What's our greatest takeaway if we teach racial issues in his work?

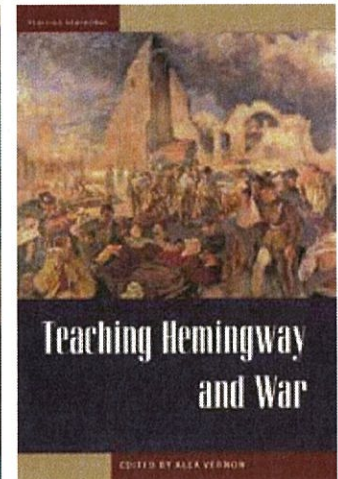
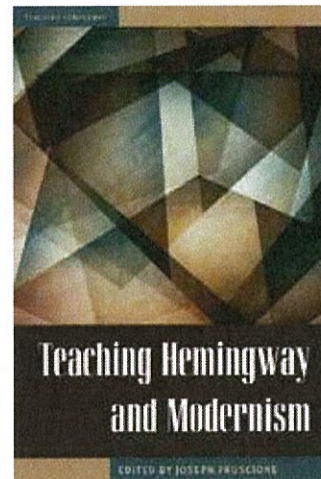
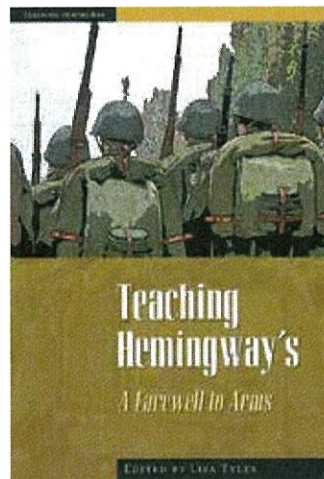
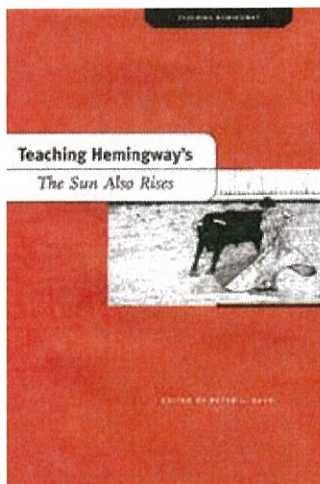
GEH: The question of how to teach Hemingway within the multicultural curriculum and in a culturally diverse environment is a challenge, as it must be. The collection offers pedagogical approaches that deal honestly with Hemingway's shortcomings, yet, I would

hope, offer alternatives to methodologies which might lead to discussions policed by identity politics. Marc Dudley models ways to racially unpack the "multiple selves at work" in Hemingway's writing, for example, and Mayuri DeKa discusses how through studying Hemingway students may become "more open to identifying commonalities between the Self and Other."

Q: Laura, one benefit of digital resources is that they can connect students in the classroom rapidly and easily with the various places where Hemingway lived, whether Paris, Pamplona, or Key West. Do any of the essays in your collection address these sites? If so, what sorts of resources are available to enable teachers to bring them alive in the classroom?

LG: Digital maps are some of the most popular teaching tools out there right now to help connect students to different Hemingway geographies. Hemingway was so deeply invested in creating immersive places in his writing that it's not surprising, I suppose, that teachers and scholars are turning to digital mapping applications to help illuminate these places for 21st century students. Several contributors in the "Digital Tools" section of the book discuss the ways that we can make—and then incorporate into the classroom—digital maps for Paris, central Idaho, Italy, and Spain, in particular. And it's actually pretty easy to find, adapt, and use these tools in our own classes.... Far easier than you might imagine!

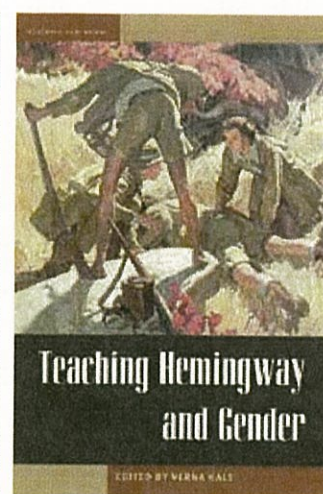
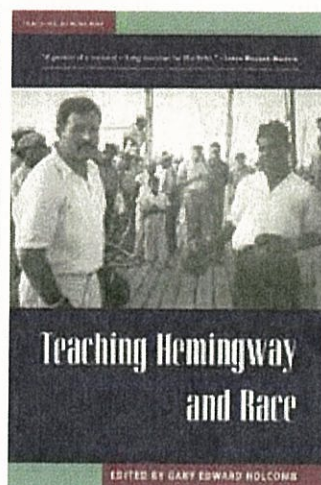
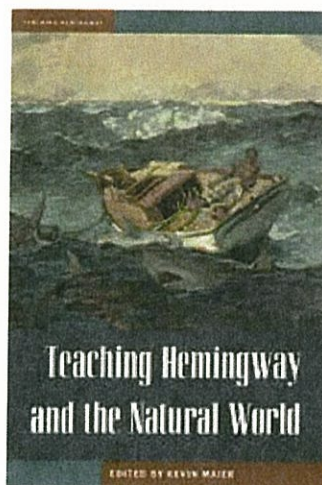
Q: Gary, did you find from submissions that faculty tend to teach one or two particular Hemingway texts? Or is there a range of works making their way onto syllabi?



GEH: Most chapters deal with a single Hemingway text, though the range is wide. Joshua Murray pairs Hughes's "Home" with "Soldier's Home," and Matthew Teutsch considers Hemingway in conversation with Toomer and Gaines. But not all address *race* in black and white. Considering Hemingway's interaction with the Ojibwe tribe, Margaret Wright-Cleveland models Women's and American Studies approaches to *In Our Time*, and Sarah Driscoll presents a historicized methodology for teaching Latinos in "The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio." The book also considers non-fiction. Candice Pipes maps teaching *In Our Time* vis-à-vis Locke's *The New Negro*, while Ross Tangedal charts teaching *Death in the Afternoon* and *Green Hills of Africa* through a racial lens.

Q: Laura, what kinds of pedagogies do contributors encourage for bringing Hemingway into the digital age? Do we seem to revert to formalist analysis, or are we employing contextual approaches?

LG: Interestingly enough, formalism (I'll define it as studying the text with deliberate attention to language or structure or "unity" above other interests) appears only within one piece: Brian Croxall's essay "How Not to Read Hemingway." That's a piece about students who, ironically, have *not* read much Hemingway: instead, Brian's classes use optical character recognition (OCR) software to locate notable patterns and repetitions throughout Hemingway's entire body of writing. But contextual approaches appear far more often in the collection, since the contributors are all essentially finding creative ways to connect 21st century students to Hemingway's time, life, and writing. Context becomes the way into successful literary analysis, and in many cases, contextual studies are necessitated by students' lack of general knowledge about the places, people, or histories of the Hemingway works in question. Mark Ebel's essay on teaching *Across the River and into the Trees* actually discusses the ways that our students are so often increasingly detached from the physical activities that Hemingway enjoyed that they require a new kind of basic training in interpreting material objects—duck



hunting decoys and military insignia may be as mysterious to our students today as are the most difficult examples of literary terminology.

Q: Gary, one challenge that Hemingway criticism faces is the need to diversify, whether in its scholarship, in attendance at conferences, and even in our membership rolls. How can talking about teaching race in Hemingway provide a vehicle for doing this?

GEH: I think we can agree that, like gender and sexuality, the question of race in Hemingway is not ancillary—it saturates his work. The inspiration for my own chapter, on teaching *Home to Harlem* and Gwendolyn Bennett's wonderful, little-known story "Wedding Day" in dialogue with *The Sun Also Rises*, materialized directly from my teaching. It's a good time to explore Hemingway—indeed, modernist literature writ large—through race, and teachers need rigorous pedagogical approaches. I hope that our book offers a crucial starting point for a conversation about teaching Hemingway and race.

Q: Laura, what's been your biggest surprise in editing the collection?

LG: Probably the fact that there are relatively few teachers and scholars out there right now who are interested in or who are already producing "digital Hemingway" scholarship. Each piece, in its own way, addresses important questions about keeping 21st students engaged with Hemingway's life and writing. *Why* does Hemingway have such an active digital presence, especially compared with other authors? What is it about him that makes him so incredibly "memeable" and quote-worthy? How can we use digital maps, augmented reality, and even virtual reality

to connect students to Hemingway places around the globe? And how can we steer our students, who probably conduct all of their preliminary research exclusively online, away from the many questionable and outright incorrect versions of Hemingway's life that exist online? I think this collection is just the beginning, really. There is so much room for new studies on a number of branches of the "digital Hemingway" field.

Q: One final question for you, Laura: what Hemingway texts are faculty teaching these days? Do you find that the digital resources available today encourage us to focus on one or two specific works, or certain genres of his work, or do the resources support a broad range of his writing?

In the volume we have discussions of short stories like "Big Two-Hearted River," "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," and "A Very Short Story," along with *The Sun Also Rises*, *Across the River and into the Trees*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *A Moveable Feast*. *The Sun Also Rises*, perhaps not surprisingly, shows up most often; there are so many similarities between the stereotypes surrounding the Lost Generation and the stereotypes that surround 21st-century "I-Gen" students. I think that the digital resources being discussed in the essays, especially the use of the digital archive materials and the creation of digital maps, are more broadly applicable to Hemingway's body of work rather than useful only for certain pieces.

For information on these and other volumes in the Teaching Hemingway series, go to http://www.kentstateuniversitypress.com/category/series/teach_heming/. For inquiries about future entries, email Mark Ott at mott@deerfield.edu. ■