Hemingway for Gloria

by Ann Bogle

A quotation came my way about neighbors. *Nabo* in Norwegian or *Nabo Sueco* and *Naba* in Spanish. But first, a ramble, as Professor David Mikics told me is the name of that genre in history.

The young man sitting next to me on the plane was reading Italo Calvino. The young man was handsome and athletic. Readers may fault my writing for neglecting people's physical descriptions. This young man, who, in addition, wrote notes to himself in an appealing, could-have-been Moleskine pocket-sized notebook, was culturally attractive and might have been attractive to men or women, but especially to women. I was reading Ernest Hemingway. Neither the young man nor I started a conversation. I was reading a passage in *A Moveable Feast* about a would-be writer who had found Hemingway in the café where he most liked to work, near quarters where he lived with Hadley in Paris. What struck me most was not Hemingway's ghastly rudeness to that writer, nor even his feeling that his rudeness was not violent enough, that only breaking the other writer's face would have sufficed, but not breaking his jaw, or, why not his jaw? Nor even that he wrote about it. His accountability regarding his own temper is documented. What surprised me more is what Hemingway specifically disliked. He disliked intrusion and very specifically innocuous intrusion, nice guys, one might say, who tried to be near him to learn something from him or who admired him but who, as in that passage, came merely to disturb his work. What also surprised me is Hemingway's insistence on working in public without being disturbed.

Hemingway ends a chapter and a passage about Zelda Fitzgerald with the word “insane,” not the last word on wives of writers. I see Zelda as a writer's wife, who, as Hemingway relates it, is more jealous of her husband's writing than of anything else. Her husband's productivity slips as he tries to appease her, and Scott—*Fitzgerald* when Hemingway is put out by him—begins to try to disturb Hemingway's productivity, a grave decision, as when Scott

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comes to visit him poisoned by alcohol. Penis dimension is a related topic then. Tip-of-the-iceberg or glacier breaker. I was surprised at Hemingway's deftness in introducing it by directly quoting Fitzgerald indirectly quoting his wife as a way to trace blame to her, while not redacting this test.

Hadley is a writer's wife as well, but Hadley has more sense as Hemingway portrays her in the chapters. Hadley is better at being a wife, specifically at being a writer's wife because her memory is so keen and her understanding of literature is keen. I particularly like Hemingway's description of Hadley's walking to the public bath on their street without complaint at his sparing the expense of private facilities in their rooms. I like Hadley. I agree with her literary judgment, as Hemingway portrays it, and her indirect assessment that Gertrude Stein presented a social difficulty for women who met her. Stein was rich, with the behavior of the rich, a great not a minor woman, and like a military general, she nixed examination of the other general, James Joyce, in her important house. Stein was a highly original artist not a wife. She disregarded women who visited her, wives, such as Hadley, as well as women writers, such as Katherine Anne Porter, who wrote about it handily in essay. Stein disliked women writers more than Hemingway did. Hemingway liked Karen Blixen—Isak Dinesen—for example, and wrote that her husband, the Baron, felt proud of his wife for writing. The quotation about neighbors is from Italo Calvino:

“The writer is someone who tears himself to pieces in order to liberate his neighbor.”