A Self-Justifying Son: A Moveable Feast

Mary Hemingway’s *How It Was* and the “Sources and Notes” to Carlos Baker’s *Life Story* make it clear that Mary Hemingway kept accurate, regular entries in her diary. So there is little reason to doubt her report of the December 1957 exchange between her and her husband after she had read a group of the Paris sketches that were later incorporated in *A Moveable Feast*:

“It’s not much about you,” I once objected. “I thought it was going to be autobiography.”

“It’s biography by remate,” Ernest said.¹

Baker explains that though Hemingway used the jai alai term *remate*, he probably “meant to say *rebote*, the back wall or a rebound off it. . . . The evidence that he was writing autobiography by showing himself rebounding from the personalities of others is everywhere in the book.”² I grant that Hemingway worked on the sketches for at least four years, and during that time he may have changed his intention.³ But there is no reason to gloss his term. *Remate* means a “kill-shot.” A jai alai player makes such a shot by hurling the ball so low and hard against the playing wall that his opponent cannot return it—as any handball or racketball player also knows. The malice and vindictiveness in *Feast*, then, is intentionally lethal. Outliving most of his victims, Hemingway serves kill-shots they are literally unable to return.

The success of Hemingway’s verbal assassinations partly depends on whether we share his values. If the discovery of Miss Stein’s lesbianism deeply shocks us, then she is among the first casualties of Hemingway’s siege of Paris. If we find opium addicts offensive, then Ralph Cheever Dunning lies on the battleground too, near the three milk bottles and one cracked cold cream jar of
opium he had thrown at Hemingway. If foppish pride annoys us, then the “cut” that Ford Madox Ford gives Hillaire Belloc gets, in turn, Hemingway’s more effective parries, and he too expires.

Hemingway’s success as assassin also depends on our limited knowledge of his victims. A profligate adolescent unmanned by a predatory wife, F. Scott Fitzgerald would be as dead as he is to Georges, bar chief of the Ritz, were it not for Fitzgerald’s elsewhere-documented generosity to an aspiring young Hemingway; and so he limps with some honor from the field. And the unmasking of Ernest Walsh, a literary poseur, would be fatal were it not offset by his early death from consumption in October 1926, his publishing in This Quarter both “Big Two-Hearted River” and “The Undefeated,” his poem about Hemingway, and his favorable review of Hemingway’s writing. Even John Dos Passos, gaffed as a treacherous “pilot fish,” squirms free if we see him used as a scapegoat.

Successful or not, Hemingway is a skillful, though rarely aggressive, assassin. At his most aggressive in “New School,” he insults the intruding Hal and justifies himself with military dictation, saying that it was not good to let someone drive him out of the Closerie des Lilas, that he would have to “make a stand or move” (92). But he usually slays his victims by letting them die of self-exposure. Hemingway ironically writes that it is as “soothing as the noise of a plank being violated in the sawmill” to hear the Robert Cohn/Harold Loeb–like complaints of this same, self-pitying, sentimental Hal, who accuses him of thoughtlessness toward other people and their problems, of disregard for life and other people’s sufferings, of cruelty to fellow human beings (93–94). Gertrude Stein’s dogmatic lectures on a sujet inaccrochable, homosexuality, and on une génération perdue allow her the same verbal rope to hang herself with that Fitzgerald’s anxiety about the size of his penis allows him. Even the proprietor of the bookstall along the quai condemns herself by declaring that a book’s pictures and binding determine its value. On occasion a snapshot is as lethal as these “tape recordings.” The ad hominem cameo of Wyndham Lewis, frog-faced, with the eyes of an “unsuccessful rapist,” intends him as much harm as the one of Zelda Fitzgerald, whose hawk’s eyes sum up her predatory nature. Sometimes insinuation is Hemingway’s weapon. In the mininemoir of T. S. Eliot, Hemingway’s reference to horses that race while influenced by stimulants (112) insinuates the comparison to poets whose poems are spiked with other writers’ “juice”—as a
favorite Hemingway metaphor would call it. And the small Greek temple in Miss Natalie Barney's garden? A fit place to entomb Eliot, Hemingway implies.

Hemingway is no messy killer. He usually executes his victim in a single episode. It takes one scene to slay the pompous, petty Ford; one car trip from Lyon to strip the feckless Fitzgerald of dignity; one whispered secret from Zelda about Al Jolson's superiority to Jesus (186) to show her lunacy or Machiavellianism or both. On the same day that Hemingway walks through the little Luxembourg garden, sees wood pigeons perching in the trees and hears others that he cannot see, he also hears at Miss Stein's voices of women he can not see either. One of them, proof to Hemingway of lesbianism, pleads, "'Don't, pussy. Don't. Don't, please don't' " (118). A tally of Hemingway's victims might find him as effective as the Arlberg avalanche that buried a party of thirteen imprudent German skiers, nine of whom died (204).

The apparent reason for Hemingway's vindictiveness is that against each of his victims he has some long-standing grudge. Whether the grudges are just is a matter for literary historians and friends of his victims to decide. But just or not, Hemingway gives ample scope to destructive impulses that, overtly, are noticeably subdued in most of the work of his last decade. By setting aside the topical interest of the actual or imagined wrongs his victims had done him, and by turning instead to his victims' common wrong, I find a major motive for these murderous memoirs. Hemingway believes his victims are, quite simply, irresponsible—every last one.

In his gallery the most irresponsible are Stein and Fitzgerald. At the end of a day with either, Hemingway feels contaminated by their wastefulness and self-indulgence. Walking home from 27 rue de Fleurus, where Miss Stein has just instructed him about sex, he writes that he would need to work hard the next day: "Work could cure almost anything, I believed then, and I believe now" (21). Near the end of the car trip with Fitzgerald he misses not working and feels "the death loneliness that comes at the end of every day that is wasted in your life" (165–66). In Hemingway's eyes Miss Stein answers for little. She bandies about "dirty, easy labels" that show her "mental laziness." To her court she welcomes only notables, disciples, claquers, and flunkies who will type her manuscripts and read her proof. The responsibilities common to all writers, the labor of revision and the duty to make writing coherent (17), are beneath her. And Hemingway implies that her ad-
vice, that he expunge from his writing inaccrochable matter, is a reprehensible instance of artistic compromise, for she ignores whether such matter is essential to his artistic vision.

Fitzgerald flunks his accountability test too. Confessing that he changed good stories, knowing precisely the "twists" to convert them into "salable magazine stories" (155), he too lacks artistic integrity. The Lyon episode italicizes his fecklessness, Hemingway declaring that until then he had never known a grown man who missed a train (157). And he shares, unlike Fitzgerald, the Lyon garage owner's feelings that owning a vehicle imposes an obligation upon oneself (162). In Hemingway's eyes, then, Fitzgerald pays no heed to his low tolerance of alcohol, he ignorantly assumes he has congestion of the lungs, he is blind to the obvious fact that his mate is a vampire, and he stupidly worries about the size of his penis. These all reflect an intellectual negligence that Hemingway spots even in his diction. Had Hemingway's father, Fitzgerald tells him, been a doctor in New York rather than in Chicago, he would have learned a "different gamut of diseases. He used the word gamut" (163)! Even the eloquent epigraph to the three Fitzgerald sketches actually faults him for having abused a talent that others, were they lucky, might never acquire, even after considerable labor.8

Hemingway's memoirs, then, become a literary morgue. On its slabs he lays his irresponsible acquaintances: a "pilot fish" who enters and exits from others' lives without being caught himself but leaving them to be "caught and killed" (207-8); a well-read tutor who has never read Russian writers (134); a poet who relies upon friends or benefactresses to free him from working; a magazine editor who deceives a writer with the lure of a writing award, only to leave him with the task of seeing his magazine through printers who read no English (128); a thwarted writer who interrupts the habits of a working writer; and a wheezing, mustache-stained has-been who makes someone else drink a brandy he denies having ordered.9 If not fit for a morgue, such acquaintances can be sent to the Café des Amateurs, the opening setting of Feast. All who have abandoned responsibility and purpose drain into it—a "cesspool."

But Feast is also a shrine. The antithesis to such irresponsible people is one self-disciplined, diligent apprentice whose commitment to exacting standards of artistic excellence—read responsibility, please—enables him to become a major writer. No raven-
haired beauty lures him from his duty of writing “Three-Day Blow” in the Good Café. Of his trips as correspondent, Miss Stein is interested only in “amusing details,” “funny parts,” “gallows-humor stories,” “the gay part of how the world was going,” “strange and comic things that happened in the worst time.” Not Hemingway. For him “the real, . . . the bad” were more worth knowing (25). To travel writers the men who fished the Seine were supposedly crazy and caught nothing; but Hemingway knows better and reports that “it was serious and productive fishing” (44). Only to him will Pound entrust Dunning’s jar of opium. Only to him will Walsh entrust the publication of an issue of This Quarter. Only to him will Stein entrust the typing and proofreading of the early serialized sections of The Making of Americans. Hemingway can even rise above his antipathy to several of Ezra Pound’s friends. Magnanimous, he campaigns actively for Bel Esprit and Eliot. He tries liking and befriending Wyndham Lewis (110). And he tries remembering that he must never be rude to Ford, that only when very tired did Ford lie, that Ford was a fine writer who had just come through “very bad domestic troubles” (85–86). Jean, a waiter at the Closerie des Lilas, serves Evan Shipman and Hemingway large, brimful glasses of whiskey on ten-franc saucers to protest the new management’s orders that he shave off the dragoon’s mustache he has worn all his life. Evan rejoices in Jean’s defiant act. But Hemingway, concerned that Jean will lose his job, pleads with him not to do it, not to risk being fired (139).

Hemingway even makes his apparent self-indulgences in food and sport read like responsible behavior. He will dine only to compensate for being conned, to satisfy an appetite from rigorous exercise in the Vorarlberg, or to celebrate either winning at the track at Enghien or getting six hundred francs for his published writing. He temporarily succumbs to the allure of gambling on horses. But alert to the need to show his responsible profile, he justifies it. It gave him the material for “My Old Man.” And, emphasizing the terms he uses unstintingly for all his activities, to gamble profitably, as he knew he must, was a “full-time job,” “took full-time work,” was “hard work” (61–62). He also justifies his later addiction to bicycle racing. He carefully enumerates different kinds of racing (65) and pledges that he “will get”—in fiction, presumably—the bike racing at the Velodrome d’Hiver and “the magic of the demi-fond” (64). Lest the Vorarlberg winters of reading and winter sport be thought a lark, Hemingway early indicates that he
found it “necessary” to follow a day of writing with reading and exercise (25). Besides, for the great glacier skiing at the end of the winters he needed to build the strength to climb the slopes and carry the heavy rucksacks, refusing the self-indulgence of buying a ride to the top. To have that strength was “the end we worked for all winter and all the winter built to make it possible” (207; italics added).

Hemingway also differs significantly from most of his Paris contemporaries by being a family man. He refuses to appreciate Miss Stein and her friend’s condescending forgiveness for his being in love and married (14). He prides himself on his and Hadley’s democratic household. They make joint decisions whether they go to the races, bet on the horses, or select a restaurant. The considerate husband, Hemingway offers his spouse an economical trip south for the winter when the bad weather comes to Paris. And after Bumby’s birth he accepts his parental role. He sees that Paris winters are too cold for Bumby and so defers to the duty of taking his family to Schruns in the Vorarlberg from Thanksgiving until Easter (200). Hemingway does not forget to mention that in the spring mornings he would rise early to work while Hadley slept (49). Impliedly that it was quite normal, he also admits that he rose early every morning, fixed and fed Bumby his bottle of milk, and proceeded to work at the dining room table before Hadley awoke (96). Testimony that Hemingway is no chauvinist is reflected in Hadley’s statement that Chink and he included her in conversation: “‘It wasn’t like being a wife at Miss Stein’s’” (54). Nor, until the invasion by the rich, was he unfaithful to his légitime, as his refusal of Pascin’s generous offer “to bang” the dark sister” intends to prove.10

Hemingway’s responsible image might have been shown to even better advantage had the published text been faithful to his own ordering of the sketches.11 Had the last chapter on Schruns been placed, as he intended, between the Dunning sketch and the Lyon episode with Fitzgerald, then the coda of Feast, “A Matter of Measurements,” would underscore Hemingway’s role as protective father to the prodigal Fitzgerald. This sequence would also nicely telescope Paris into the near present, and Feast would end in the fifties with Hemingway and Georges conversing at the Ritz bar. Moreover, Feast would end with a tentative answer to the question that the book invokes time and again: Why did Hemingway write it? For “A Matter of Measurements” gives Heming-
way's motives. *Feast* fulfills his long-standing promise to himself to "write about the early days in Paris" (193), and it honors Georges's immediate request to be told something about Fitzgerald so that he can include him in his memoirs (192).

Neither of these reasons, of course, satisfactorily answers the question of why Hemingway wrote *Feast*. Nor does the notion that his irresponsible victims deserved flailing adequately answer it. Because exaggerated behavior reveals repressed wishes and anxieties, as I have argued previously, Hemingway's reason for writing this exaggerated portrait of himself as the responsible artist must have been to conceal irresponsibilities he was deeply anxious about. Surely he would have little need to show so aggressively how responsible he had been, unless he felt vulnerable to the charge that he had not. So onto his rebuked fellow artists he defensively heaps his own irresponsibility. And the questions in *Feast*, then, are, What irresponsibility is he reluctant to own up to, and Who did he feel he had to justify himself to when he wrote *Feast*?

The obvious answer to both questions points to the first Mrs. Ernest Hemingway, Hadley, the betrayed wife. A good part of his guilty debt to her seems well repaid in *Feast*'s memorialization of her as an ideal wife, her desires and pleasures harmonizing well with her husband's. Had she any fault that contributed to his abandoning her, it was a defect of her virtue: unsuspecting innocence. But his apology to her hedges. She too is irresponsible. Her neglect had, after all, cost him a suitcase full of early work, an event he will not strike from the record. The trauma of that loss was so severe that thirty-five years later he still cannot divulge the horrible things he did when he found that all of his work was lost. He will only write cryptically, "I remember what I did in the night after I let myself into the flat and found it was true" (74). Hemingway's insidious hostility toward Hadley also comes through in his neglect to write much about what she did while he worked. He commends her acceptance of the lack of domestic amenities and her not complaining about there being no heat where she went "to work at the piano" (197). But he gives the impression that he and "Marie, the femme de ménage," took care of the majority of the domestic chores. And Hadley’s conversation is banal, full of trite phases and naive sentiments. So although Hemingway may write *Feast* to confess his wrong to her, the day-to-day tally minimizes his guilt. And the book's closing pages ingenuously plead that he and she were innocent victims, further minimizing his betrayal.
A more immediate reason for writing *Feast* would have been to deny any irresponsibility to his sons. Since his relationship with all three of them was not ideal, he could deflect the implied accusation that he was guilty of child neglect with his self-portrait as the most responsible artist-father in Paris. An omitted sketch that might have borne this out is an eight-page holograph beginning, “My first son, Bumby,” which Hemingway planned to follow chapter 17, the car trip with Fitzgerald. A tribute to his oldest son, its references to “the Rohrbacks, Marie and Ton-Ton, who had often taken care of the child while his parents were traveling,” would show that despite frequent absences, Hemingway made sure that Bumby had been well cared for. Coming before the chapter “Hawks Never Share,” the tribute would also contrast Hemingway’s responsible fatherhood to Fitzgerald’s frivolous ways, providing his daughter, for example, with “an English nanny” so that when she grew up she would talk “like Lady Diana Manners” (180).

An instance of Hemingway’s pride in his sons might suggest that he felt no obligation to justify himself to them. Baker notes that in the fall of 1955 “he said that he was luckier in fatherhood than James Joyce, citing the undistinguished career of Joyce’s son Giorgio as proof.” Yet scarcely a year earlier in “The Christmas Gift,” though grateful for Patrick’s hasty monetary help after the two African airplane crashes, Hemingway added a disparaging parenthetical remark: “This is the first time any son of mine has ever arrived without being broke or, if you did not hear from him, asking you to either get him back into the Army or get him out of jail” (*By-Line*, 455). Even making allowance for the bravado in this essay, I cannot ignore Hemingway’s feeling, justified or not, that his sons were not as responsible as they should have been. Some of the aggression in *Feast*, then, displaces hostility he feels toward them and defensively argues his responsibility.

Rejecting Hadley and his sons, I must conclude that Hemingway wrote *Feast* to deny that he was irresponsible to his father, to justify himself to Dr. Hemingway. Dr. Hemingway, however disguised, hovers over *Feast*. His presence explains some of Hemingway’s more puzzling attacks. What precipitates Hemingway’s hostility toward Hal in “New School,” for example, is the paternal rebuke of Hal, who questions what Hemingway can be doing by trying to work at a cafe table (91). To a father, a cafe is an improper place for a young man to work. Dr. Hemingway’s censure is also in Hal’s rebuke that Hemingway thinks about nobody else or about the problems that oth-
ers may have (93). Similarly, in his encounter with Ford, Hemingway’s hostility aims less at Ford’s personal than at his parental shortcomings. A repressive, egocentric father, he repeats things he has told Hemingway earlier, he disregards Hemingway’s insistence about already knowing where the Bal Musette is, he reproaches him for drinking brandy, and, most, he refuses to regard him as a gentleman.

Dr. Hemingway even lurks behind one of the oddest passages in *Feast*. Criticizing Pound for liking his friends’ work, in this instance Wyndham Lewis’s paintings, Hemingway says it “is beautiful as loyalty but can be disastrous as judgment” (107). He might have credited Pound for an act of fatherly benevolence, from which he frequently benefited too. Instead Hemingway erupts with a bitter comparison:

> If a man liked his friends’ painting or writing, I thought it was probably like those people who like their families, and it was not polite to criticize them. Sometimes you can go quite a long time before you criticize families, your own or those by marriage, but it is easier with bad painters because they do not do terrible things and make intimate harm as families can do. With bad painters all you need to do is not look at them. But even when you have learned not to look at families nor listen to them and have learned not to answer letters, families have many ways of being dangerous. [107–8]

This cuts a wide swath. It indicts former wives who stood up to him, Pauline Pfeiffer and Martha Gellhorn; a rebellious son, Gregory; a censorious sister-in-law, Jinny Pfeiffer; a domineering mother and stern father; and the older sister who was “a bitch complete with handles,” Marcelline. But it is particularly odd that the diatribe occurs in this chapter. It would be more appropriate in the Stein or Fitzgerald material. For family harms would show to best advantage among the tyrannizing and castrating ways of Stein and Zelda Fitzgerald, women who embody the two qualities Hemingway disliked in his own mother. That the passage occurs in the chapter on Pound indicates Hemingway’s need to fault his father’s irresponsibilities and treacheries.

Family problems, abundant in *Feast*, hark back to Oak Park. To Miss Stein’s Grace Hemingway, Ezra Pound plays Dr. Hemingway. The clash between the two American artists recalls Marcelline’s comment, “surely no two young people could have been more opposite than my father and mother.” And Hemingway’s remark, “The studio where [Pound] lived . . . was as poor as Gertrude Stein’s was rich” (107), recalls the economic disparity between his parents. Not only had it existed before their marriage,
but after Grace Hall and Clarence Hemingway were wed, her fifty-
odd voice pupils were earning her “as much as a thousand dollars
a month” while his income “was sometimes as little as fifty dol-
lars a month.” Even the alleged cause of the rift between Pound
and Stein sounds like the result of a marital spat: Pound cracked
or broke a fragile chair by sitting down too quickly on it (28).

Hemingway’s relationship to Pound is distinctly son to father.
He will not argue with Pound over things he does not like (107), he
tries making him look good while boxing in front of Lewis (108), he
tries to be friendly to almost all of Ezra’s friends (110), and he
dutifully defers to Pound’s advice: “Keep to the French. . . .
You’ve plenty to learn there” (135). Together with his defense of
Pound against Stein, Hemingway’s attitudes here express a son’s
submissive reverence. But Hemingway also satirizes Pound, for
his noisy bassoon and inability to learn how “to throw a left hook”
(108), for his eccentric taste in Japanese art and bizarre efforts on
Eliot’s behalf. Even Hemingway’s account of the faux pas that
lost Pound Miss Stein’s regard makes Pound look like a vaudeville
character taking a pratfall.

Hemingway’s alternation of filial deference and satiric rebel-
liation reflects a son’s normal ambivalence toward his father, actual
or substitute. And it appears in Hemingway’s early, quixotic trib-
ute, “Homage to Ezra.” Hemingway’s catalogue suggests that Ez-
ra’s indefatigable efforts on others’ behalf are laudatory and
laughable:

So far we have Pound the major poet devoting, say, one fifth of his
time to poetry. With the rest of his time he tries to advance the fortunes,
both material and artistic, of his friends. He defends them when they
are attacked, he gets them into magazines and out of jail. He loans
them money. He sells their pictures. He arranges concerts for them. He
writes articles about them. He introduces them to wealthy women. He
gets publishers to take their books. He sits up all night with them when
they claim to be dying and he witnesses their wills. He advances them
hospital expenses and dissuades them from suicide.

However ambivalent Hemingway felt toward Pound, when the
Hemingways returned to Paris after Bumby’s birth, they made
home just up the hill from Ezra and Dorothy Pound, the Heming-
ways at 113, the Pounds at 70, rue Notre-Dame-des-Paris.

That Pound and Dr. Hemingway merged in Hemingway’s mind
seems variously evident. Their Vandyke beards, aquiline noses,
thin-lipped, taut mouths, and penetrating eyes show a pro-
nounced facial resemblance. Hemingway commends Pound for
helping anyone in trouble, whether he valued them or not (110).
Dr. Hemingway was similarly charitable. He taught “nature lore to boys’ clubs,” cared for many patients without charge, gave his services to an Oak Park orphanage, even did free plastic surgery on “several babies born with facial deformities.”24 Pound’s and the doctor’s altruism would make a jealous son resentful that they squandered their attention and abilities upon the less deserving. But that same son would seek them out since both men were broadly knowledgeable and were disciplinarians when it came to applying the techniques and craft of that knowledge. The doctor’s sternness has its analogue in Pound’s insistence upon the Flaubertian mot juste, and the doctor’s moral absoluteness matches Pounds’ esthetic and economic absoluteness. Both were also noteworthy as cooks, and though the doctor neither drank nor smoked at all, Pound was distinctive among expatriates as “an abstemious drinker, bordering on teetotalism, and an infrequent smoker.”25 The poet’s love of energetic activities would surely have endeared him to Hemingway because that was a quality of the doctor too. And Pound’s well-known irascibility would not be strange to Hemingway. His father’s mercurial moodiness was a household institution. Hemingway’s ear might even hear in Pound’s noisy bassoon an echo of the doctor’s cornet. Marcelline’s remark that her father’s “ear was never reliable” is true too of Pound, notwithstanding his composition of an opera and other musical works.26

That Pound was more to Hemingway than a tutor is, of course, confirmed by his long-standing regard for Pound and by his repeated efforts on Pound’s behalf. In 1943 he was corresponding with Archibald MacLeish and Allen Tate, trying to suggest ways to keep Pound from being tried as a traitor for his pro-Fascist speeches.27 He sent money to Dorothy Pound after the poet’s 1946 incarceration in St. Elizabeth’s. He used the Nobel Prize award as an opportunity to announce that “this would be a good year to release poets.” He wrote a tribute to be used for advocating Pound’s release. And when Pound was freed he sent him a check for $1,500, a check Pound framed in plastic as a souvenir of friendship.28

The resemblance between Pound and Dr. Hemingway suggests to me that Hemingway’s disenchantment with Pound in Feast actually displaces Hemingway’s disenchantment with his own father. Pound’s advice about Ford, for example, is meant to help Hemingway be tolerant of him. But like much fatherly advice it curdles. So Hemingway gets imposed upon by a repressive bore.
Worse, he is made to feel like a fool, for his mistaken identification of Aleister Crowley gets a “great friend’s” scornful, “‘Don’t be a silly ass’ ” (88). Hemingway esteems Pound’s learning, but when Pound confesses that he has never read Russian writers, the formula of Hemingway’s lengthy sentence registers the classic shock of recognition that accompanies every young man’s discovery that his father is not all-knowing: “I felt very bad because here was the man I liked and trusted the most . . . , the man who believed in . . . the man who had taught me to . . . ; and I wanted his opinion on . . . ” (134). A son also values his father’s friends and associates—until he sees that their defects highlight his father’s infirmities. And so Hemingway’s apparent attempts to be friends with Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot, Ernest Walsh, and Ralph Cheever Dunning mirror a filial wish to like a father’s friends. But he comes to resent them, partly because they exploit Pound’s generosity as did, in Hemingway’s mind, Dr. Hemingway’s wife and the many recipients of his generosity.

Hemingway’s final reference to Pound in Feast criticizes his unreliability, the last thing a son expects in a good father. In “An Agent of Evil” Pound asks Hemingway to substitute for him by medically assisting Dunning. Since this poet “lived in the same courtyard where Ezra had his studio” (143), proximity should have guaranteed that Pound knew him well. But Dunning turns out to be an ungrateful patient whose retaliatory acts jeopardize Hemingway. However comic the episode, it exposes the trusted father’s unreliability, and it justifies Hemingway’s earlier outburst against Pound’s fatherly benevolence toward his friends’ work: indeed, it “can be disastrous as judgment.”

Hemingway’s disenchantment with Pound as Dr. Hemingway’s proxy is defensive. It tries to conceal Hemingway’s sense that he had been irresponsible to his father. One proof of this is in Hemingway’s use of the standard defense mechanism of reaction formation. The exaggeration and compulsiveness of his portrayals of others’ irresponsibilities unwittingly expose his anxiety over his own irresponsibility. Another proof of this is in the repressive quality of these memoirs. That is, Hemingway halts them at the point of his impending breakup with Hadley. Perennially desirous of his father’s approval, as my afterwords have argued, and aware that his divorce from Hadley and marriage to Pauline Pfeiffer had severely strained his relationship with his father, Hemingway is reluctant to let his memoirs carry on into
the events of the "murderous summer" of 1926. Unwilling to face the figure who would judge his conduct most harshly, he tries to acquit himself of moral irresponsibility by stressing how responsible he had been during the Paris years before his infidelity and by disingenuously claiming that the rich had victimized him and Hadley.

Another proof of Hemingway's wish to conceal his filial irresponsibility is in the regressive quality of the memoirs. Hemingway uses here a two-column bookkeeping system. One column is for Responsible Ernest and one is for Irresponsible Others. Childishly oversimplified, this glaringly resembles the system young Ernest used in the account book that he had to present each week to his father. Marcelline tells that "we had to keep track of how we spent our allowances and show our account books to Daddy once a week. I remember overhearing Father say to Uncle Tyley: 'B.T., Ernest's system is unique. He puts down five cents for Sunday School and all the rest under Miscellaneous.'"

The irresponsibility Hemingway resists owning up to is, as I have mentioned before, his betrayal of his father. Unless he can show his long-dead but long-internalized father that he was responsible, then he is susceptible to the charge and guilt of filial abandonment. And his feeling of the justness of that charge makes his abandonment loom larger and larger as a contributing cause of his father's suicide in 1928. Admittedly, a series of depressing facts preceded the doctor's suicide. His own father died in the fall of 1926; he discovered in 1927 that he was diabetic, later that he had angina pectoris; and in 1928 he found that his heavy investments in Florida real estate were failing. But he also suffered because of his estrangement from his expatriated son, evidenced in what Marcelline saw as his "almost possessive love for his youngest child, my brother Leicester. Daddy clung to Les even more than he had before. Les had meant almost everything to Daddy ever since Ernest left home."

Of course Hemingway strongly reacted to his father's suicide. Part of his reaction concealed his pleasure in having his unconscious parricidal wish realized. But the larger part of his reaction registered pain, for his father had abandoned him most unforgivably. He tried to ignore it, dismissing it from his mind so that he could finish revising A Farewell to Arms, then parading his affected indifference to it in Death in the Afternoon. Discussing there violent death as one of "certain simple things," he offhandedly regrets never having "been able to study them as a man
might, for instance, study the death of his father” (Afternoon, 3). But he obsessively returned to his father’s suicide, as my after­
words to the two preceding phases have explained. His fixation on it in this phase helps to explain why his preoccupation with father-son relationships is so pronounced.

As Hemingway’s own sons came of age he would construe their departures as a rejection, an abandonment, of him and his affilia­
tive needs. Awakening his earliest acquired anxiety, separation anxiety, their abandonment, in turn, would likely stir up the trauma of the earlier abandonment he had suffered because of his father’s suicide. But he would now feel that it might have been his abandonment of his father that triggered the suicide. And since suicides act out upon themselves the hostilities they feel toward others, it is also likely that Hemingway would feel that much of the doctor’s hostility was directed at him.

To demonstrate, then, that his father had little reason for such filicidal hostility partly accounts for Hemingway’s creation of the exemplary fathers in the work of his last decade. Projections of himself, they even fault his father by comparison. And to deny Dr. Hemingway reason for filicidal feelings against his son ultimately explains Hemingway’s exaggerated self-image in Feast. The Paris years would prove, he hoped, that he was not an irre­
sponsible son who deserved that strongest of paternal reproaches, the filicidal wish. During his last months, Clarence Hemingway “lived almost as though he defied anyone to get close to him, or understand or help him.”33 Had he called upon his son, Feast im­
plies, Ernest Hemingway would not have failed him.