



# Hemingway's Boat: Everything He Loved in Life, and Lost, 1934-1961

*Paul Hendrickson*

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## **Hemingway's Boat: Everything He Loved in Life, and Lost, 1934-1961** Paul Hendrickson

From a National Book Critics Circle Award winner, a brilliantly conceived and illuminating reconsideration of a key period in the life of Ernest Hemingway that will forever change the way he is perceived and understood.

Focusing on the years 1934 to 1961—from Hemingway’s pinnacle as the reigning monarch of American letters until his suicide—Paul Hendrickson traces the writer’s exultations and despair around the one constant in his life during this time: his beloved boat, *Pilar*.

We follow him from Key West to Paris, to New York, Africa, Cuba, and finally Idaho, as he wrestles with his best angels and worst demons. Whenever he could, he returned to his beloved fishing cruiser, to exult in the sea, to fight the biggest fish he could find, to drink, to entertain celebrities and friends and seduce women, to be with his children. But as he began to succumb to the diseases of fame, we see that *Pilar* was also where he cursed his critics, saw marriages and friendships dissolve, and tried, in vain, to escape his increasingly diminished capacities.

Generally thought of as a great writer and an unappealing human being, Hemingway emerges here in a far more benevolent light. Drawing on previously unpublished material, including interviews with Hemingway’s sons, Hendrickson shows that for all the writer’s boorishness, depression, and alcoholism, and despite his choleric anger, he was capable of remarkable generosity—to struggling writers, to lost souls, to the dying son of a friend.

We see most poignantly his relationship with his youngest son, Gigi, a doctor who lived his adult life mostly as a cross-dresser, and died squalidly and alone in a Miami women’s jail. He was the son Hemingway forsook the least, yet the one who disappointed him the most, as Gigi acted out for nearly his whole life so many of the tortured, ambiguous tensions his father felt. Hendrickson’s bold and beautiful book strikingly makes the case that both men were braver than we know, struggling all their lives against the complicated, powerful emotions swirling around them. As Hendrickson writes, “Amid so much ruin, still the beauty.”

*Hemingway’s Boat* is both stunningly original and deeply gripping, an invaluable contribution to our understanding of this great American writer, published fifty years after his death.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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