



With the publication of *Hemingway in Comics*, pop-culture scholar Robert K. Elder (above) captures the surprising legacy of Ernest Hemingway in a form where readers might not expect him.

Papa In-panelled: With *Hemingway in Comics*, Robert K. Elder and a Stellar Supporting Cast of Hemingway Scholars Explore the Author's Deep Presence in an Unexpected Form

ED. NOTE: Attendees at the 2016 Oak Park conference likely remember Robert K. Elder's highly entertaining (and illuminating!) presentation documenting Hemingway's appearances in various comics around the globe. After similar presentations in Key West, Sheridan, Boston, and other Hemingway locales, word went out about Elder's discoveries in a genre seemingly so unrelated to prose fiction, and Kent State University Press soon came calling. The result is among the most unique scholarly collections in recent years—and one that would no doubt make Dr. Fredric Wertham of Seduction of the Innocent (1954) fame flip his id. We spoke to Elder about the project.

Q: Hemingway fans who've seen you present on his depiction in comics in Oak Park and Key West know you've been collecting his cameos in the form for a while. How did the book itself come about?

A: Sometimes you choose the project, sometimes the project chooses you. *Hemingway in Comics* was the latter. It all started when I was doing articles in support of my book *Hidden Hemingway*, co-authored with Mark Cirino and Aaron Vetch.

While I was on tour for that book, I spotted an odd comic book page framed on the wall of Hemingway's home in Key West. It featured Donald Duck with a Disney-fied Hemingway outside Sloppy Joe's Bar. The panels appeared to be in German, but none of the docents knew its title.

Thus began this strange journey to find out the origin of this comic book, and I started cataloging other Hemingway appearances in comics. That evolved into a series of articles for the *Comics Journal* and the *Hemingway Review* blog, which turned into a presentation at the International Hemingway Society conference in Oak Park, Illinois.

John Sutton saw that talk and asked me to come out to Sheridan College in Wyoming and expand on it. And then Jace Gatzemeyer asked me to speak at the American Literature Association. When I told my editor, Will Underwood at the Kent State University Press, he encouraged me to synthesize all the material into a book.

All through this time, I kept getting asked to speak about Hemingway in comics and host art gallery showings, since I'd collected so many pieces from my research. After the pandemic, I'm planning on an extended tour of gallery exhibits and talks across the US, which will be exciting.

Q: What is your own interest in comics? How did you become a scholar of the form?

A: My first real job was doing inventory for my hometown comic book store, Wizard's Workshop in Billings, Montana. I started there when I was in junior high and it opened a whole world of friendships and literary connections. I was paid in comic books, and even then I ran a large deficit.

But I've always loved comics—a truly original American art form, like jazz and baseball. And, as I began my journalism



Not surprisingly, Hemingway the warrior is one of the most popular images of the author in comics.

career, comics started to become a mainstream cultural force, so I found myself writing about them for the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Wizard* magazine and other outlets. Affection became expertise after a few years.

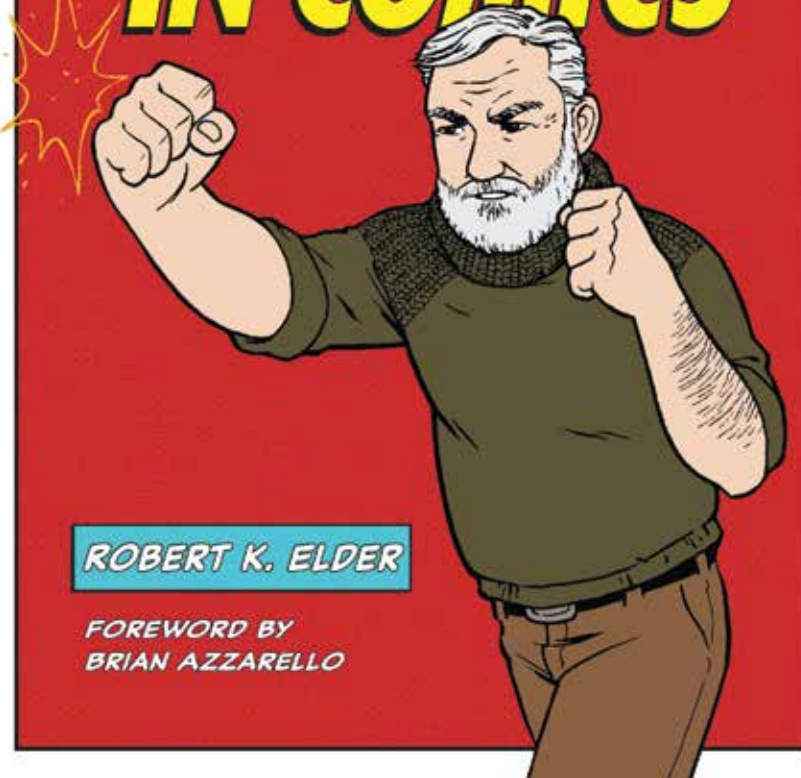
The "hidden history" of comics also appealed to me. When I first started collecting, comics were the farthest thing from cool, or important. Now, that's changed and we've seen the maturing of an industry and an art form, even as it's co-oped by other media (see: TV and movies). But the roots of the industry—the back stories, politics, personalities, artistry and inspirations—remain fertile ground for scholars and pop culture enthusiasts.

Q: What is the first comic you remember buying/collecting?

A: Adults had always given my brother, sister, and me comics, and I remember a copy of *Green Lantern* #168 (with a great cover by Gil Kane) floating around.

But the first comic book I remember buying with my own money was *Web of Spider-Man* #17, which I bought when I was ten years old at my corner drugstore, the Kwik Way. That started a lifelong love of comics. I still remember the cover line: "THIS IS IT! THE END OF THE RED SUIT! ... DON'T DARE SKIP TO THE LAST PAGE!"

HEMINGWAY IN COMICS



It was a crossover story by David Michelinie called “Missing in Action,” in which Spider-Man disappears in Virginia after a fight with a (rather disposable) villain named Magma. The rest of the series focused on how Peter Parker/Spider-Man’s circle of friends reacted to his disappearance, which was great storytelling. There weren’t a lot of fight scenes—just a real-world exploration of how your friends and adversaries might react if you went missing. That story led me to other comics, notably Peter David’s excellent run on *Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man*. My cousin Mark also turned me on to Chris Claremont’s *Uncanny X-Men*, and I was hooked.

Later, when I worked at Wizard’s Workshop, I discovered more mature titles such as Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman*, Alan Moore’s *The Watchmen* and Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, all of which remain powerful pieces of storytelling. I even had a letter published in *The Sandman* #27,

which was a huge thrill for a fifteen-year-old.

Q: What is the first Hemingway appearance in a comic you remember discovering?

A: When I was actively collecting comics as a teenager I remember Hemingway appearing in a three-issue arc of Wolverine’s first solo series, issues #35-37, from 1991. It’s a time travel story in which Hemingway and Wolverine battle fascists in Spain.

Part of the pleasure of getting to write *Hemingway in Comics* was that I got to interview Larry Hama, who wrote that story arc. Hama is a legend, who informed a ton of my pop-culture influences. Hama wrote “Silent Interlude,” a G. I. Joe comic book story with no dialogue, which is still an extraordinary story. Not only did Hama write a ton of great comics, but he also was an actor who appeared on *M*A*S*H** and wrote the character origin “file cards”

for G.I. Joe figures from the 1980s. They appeared on the back of every action figure package. So getting to ask Larry questions was a particular honor.

Q: You have a great group of contributors backing you up on this collection, from Jace Gatzemeyer and Sharon Hamilton to Sean C. Hadley. What do you see as their roles in the collection?

A: They brought a really eclectic collection of heavyweight scholarship to the book. Each of them contributed a unique perspective and take on *Hemingway in Comics*. They also help prove what a fertile ground this is for scholarship and were amazing collaborators. I might add that a lot of this book’s existence is due to Jace’s enthusiasm and getting all of us together at the ALA conference in Boston a few years ago. I owe him and John Sutton at Sheridan College a tremendous debt for the existence of this book.

Q: This will sound like a dumb question, but for the uninitiated, what is the difference between a comic and a graphic novel?

A: A “comic” usually refers to a single issue of a series, while modern collections of those individual issues into books are often called “graphic novels.”

More traditional graphic novels are longer form comics like Will Eisner’s *A Contract with God* and Raina Telgemeier’s *Smile*.

There are also web or internet comics, as well as single-panel comics and newspaper comics, which I also included in the book. There’s even an interview with Garry Trudeau, who references Hemingway in his *Dooniesbury* series a few times. Hemingway’s name even shows up in Charles Schulz’s *Peanuts*.

Q: You’ve gathered an amazing array of big names to blurb this project, from Hemingway biographer Mary V. Dearborn to Gilbert Hernandez, co-creator of *Love and Rockets*. What was their reaction when you approached them? Were they somewhat disbelieving that this material existed? Along the same lines, do you hope to reach a non-Hemingway audience from this project? What do you hope they learn from it?

A: One of the joys of this project was getting to talk to my childhood heroes—and even asking a few of them for blurbs.

One of the reasons that I asked both comic-book creators and Hemingway scholars to provide blurbs is to highlight the crossover potential of the project. My hope is that both lovers of Hemingway and comic book fans discover something new, and pop-culture fans get their minds blown a little bit.

Since so much of the book includes full pages of comics—and a few full stories—I’ve fooled myself into believing that I’ve written a comic book.

J. M. DeMatteis, who wrote *Moonshadow*, wrote me a really flattering blurb: “There’s the Marvel Universe, the DC Universe, and now we have the Hemingway Universe. Robert K. Elder takes us on an entertaining, enlightening deep dive into a surprising corner of comic book history.”

It’s also worth noting that Hemingway informed DeMatteis’ *Kraven’s Last Hunt*, which is one of the best Spider-Man stories ever.

Spoiler alert here, but DeMatteis told me, “Kraven’s suicide at the end of *Kraven’s Last Hunt* was partially inspired by Hemingway’s death. I remember being a kid and hearing about how Hemingway died and that image of the ‘great white hunter’ shoving a rifle in his mouth haunted me for years.”

Of course, he told me this after the book was finished and I can’t believe I never made the connecting during my initial research. But now I include images from *Kraven’s Last Hunt* in my presentations.

Q: Is there a particular image of Hemingway—a visual representation of him—that seems to dominate? That is, do artists tend to go from the post-1950 Hemingway or the young Ernest?

A: Without a doubt, it’s Hemingway’s 1957 portrait by Yousef Karsh. That image of Hemingway in the bulky Dior sweater is probably the most famous author photo in history, and artists have recycled it and used it as a visual shorthand ever since.

I wrote this in the book, but it’s almost like Hemingway’s uniform, his unique iconography. For Superman, it’s the giant “S” on his chest. For John Lennon, it’s that famous New York City T-shirt. For Hemingway, it’s a cable-knit sweater.

No matter how old Hemingway is in any given story, artists tend to portray him as the bearded Papa from that photo. It was even used as the basis of the 1989 US postage stamp. Marilyn Monroe and

Elvis Presley get to be eternally young, but Hemingway is forever fifty-seven.

That photo is so enigmatic, but initially Karsh didn’t know what to anticipate from the photo shoot at Hemingway’s home in Cuba. “I expected to meet in the author a composite of the heroes of his novels,” Karsh said later. “Instead ... I found a man of peculiar gentleness, the shyest man I ever photographed—a man cruelly battered by life, but seemingly invincible.”

Dr. Andrew Farah, in his 2017 book *Hemingway’s Brain*, saw something else: “The clues to [Hemingway’s] demise are evident: the famous scar on his left forehead is still visible, there is a heaviness above his eyelids, and his eyes peer out at slightly different angles, indicating a degree of neurological damage.”

Id never noticed the mismatched eyes before, which makes me see the photo differently now.

Q: One thing your collection dramatizes is how global a form comics are—Americans tend to think of them as a “native” art form. What do international perspectives tell us about Hemingway’s reputation in the world?

A: That the legend grows beyond our borders, for sure. It seems the farther you go, the bigger the legend grows and gets distorted. In researching the book, I found comics from eighteen countries from Hungary to France—and even as far away as Latvia—that featured Hemingway.

I have a whole section of the book dedicated to *Topolino*, which is Mickey Mouse’s name in Italian, and his namesake magazine in Italy. In the late 1990s, the creative team behind *Topolino* did a series of stories inspired by Hemingway (and one of them even featured Hemingway as a Disney character). I was an exchange student in Italy in 1992 and I bought copies of *Topolino*, so it was fun to hunt down some of these artists and writers to hear how Hemingway impacted their lives.

For many of them, Hemingway’s service in World War I in Italy was a point of pride, but many of these creators thought that Hemingway was a soldier, rather than a volunteer ambulance driver for the American Red Cross. For them, it mattered that he fought on Italian soil, even though it wasn’t true. This is only one example, but there are many examples in the book of when the myth of Hemingway overtakes his biography and even overshadows his work.

Q: You include a foreword as well from Eisner Award-winning author Brian Azzarello. Why was it important for you to have his voice in the book?

A: When I first met Brian, I was writing a profile of him for the *Chicago Tribune*. As part of the profile, we visited Bill Savage’s Northwestern University class on comics, where Brian was a secret guest. When Brian spoke to that class, he talked about his influences, including William Faulkner, Raymond Chandler and Hemingway. Afterwards, we became friendly and Brian asked me to write the foreword to “The Counterfifth Detective,” the fifth collection from his seminal series *100 Bullets*.

I liked the symmetry of my writing a foreword for him and Brian writing one for me—seventeen years apart. Thank goodness he said yes.

Azzarello’s essay is also so personal and illuminating because he writes about the kinship between comic-book writers and Hemingway, both of whom are invested in the economy of language, for both aesthetic and practical reasons. He writes rather eloquently about the inner life of Hemingway’s characters and how that informed his own writing.

Q: If you could adapt one Hemingway work into a graphic novel, what would it be?

A: I’ve been obsessed with a little-celebrated Hemingway short story called “The Sea Change” from 1931. It’d make a magnificent, spare short comic illustrated by someone like Fiona Staples, Matt Kindt, Adrian Tomine, or Alison Bechdel. Essentially, it’s a single, tense conversation between a man and woman—a couple—about her leaving him for the evening to have an affair with another woman. It’s complex, richly-detailed exchange in which the words “lesbian” or “bisexual” are never mentioned. Hemingway’s facility with language and his gift for dialogue are on full display, as the central themes are talked around and never explicitly expressed. It’s a surprisingly modern story for 1,260 words that are almost ninety years old.

To pre-order Hemingway in Comics, which is due out in September, please visit: <http://www.kentstateuniversitypress.com/2019/hemingway-in-comics/> ■

Contributors to *Hemingway in Comics* Tell Us Which Hemingway Text They Think is Ripe for a Graphic Adaptation



Jace Gatzemeyer (“I Think We Should Steal Some Money’: The Left Bank Gang and Jason’s Hemingway”)

As you’ll see in *Hemingway and Comics*, so many of Hemingway’s works have *already* been adapted to comics form! But I’d love to see a graphic adaptation of “Big Two-Hearted River” that sprinkles traumatic war flashbacks into the surface-level fishing story. Then again, the breathless action of the bridge blowing sequence from *For Whom the Bells Tolls* would be phenomenal in the classic Jack Kirby action-to-action comics style.

ED. NOTE: For the uninitiated (like Your Correspondent), Jack Kirby (1917-1994) was the co-creator of such superhero legends as Captain America, the Fantastic Four, the Incredible Hulk, X-Men, and many others. He is perhaps the second-most famous name in the history of comics after Stan Lee, with whom he had a famously fractious relationship at Marvel Comics.



Sharon Hamilton (“Hemingway’s Superheroes”)

I grew up reading Classic Comic books and I figure that if you can turn *Great Expectations* into a graphic novel you can do it with anything. So I would say that all the Hemingway novels would be good candidates for being turned into drawn stories. Personally, though, the Hemingway work I would most want to see as a graphic novel would be the non-fiction memoir *A Moveable Feast*. The episodic nature of the chapters would suit the graphic novel format, and then you would also have an excuse for a book full of drawings of Paris. Sounds like heaven to me!

ED. NOTE: For the uninitiated (like Your Correspondent), Classic Comics (first run: 1941-1969, with subsequent reincarnations and repackagings afterward) was the brainchild of Albert Kanter (1897-1973), who brought high culture to the form by adapting the great works of literature, including everything from The Three Musketeers to The Last of the Mohicans.



Sean C. Hadley (“Moral Formation and Graphic Adaptations of Hemingway’s Works”)

The Hemingway piece that I would love to see adapted is “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber.” It is a short story ideal to the constraints and strengths of the graphic novel medium. The prose, the action, the emotion would all play out well on the pages of a comic, especially the ambiguity of the ending. Perhaps I ought to send Jim Lee an email?

ED. NOTE: For the uninitiated (like Your Correspondent), Jim Lee (b. 1964) is the publisher and chief creative at DC Comics. His most celebrated work as an illustrator includes several X-Men titles and Justice League. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the debut issue of Lee’s X-Men Vol. 2 (1991) is the bestselling comic of all time with more than eight million copies in circulation. ■