

THE LOST EVENING

*DRINKING THE NIGHT AWAY
WITH HEMINGWAY AND BAILEY*

BY MATTHEW BUDMAN

AUTHOR ILLUSTRATIONS BY EDWARD HEMINGWAY

It was a warm summer night and we walked into the bar and started looking for the men we were supposed to meet and one of them saw us and walked over.

"Matthew?" he said. "Mark Bailey."

He looked a little tight already even though no one had started drinking yet and we followed him to a table where his partner sat and the partner stood up and put out his hand.

"Eddie Hemingway," he said.

Okay, enough of that. God knows there's enough bad faux Ernest Hemingway in the world without dreaming up more just to set a scene. Here's the setup: There's a forthcoming book about writers and their favorite cocktails, and I've met the genial creators, writer Bailey and illustrator Hemingway—grandson of you know who—for an evening of drinking at classic New York literary haunts. Mark and Eddie have set the itinerary, and we've met at the center of American literary life during and just after Prohibition: the fabled "21" Club.

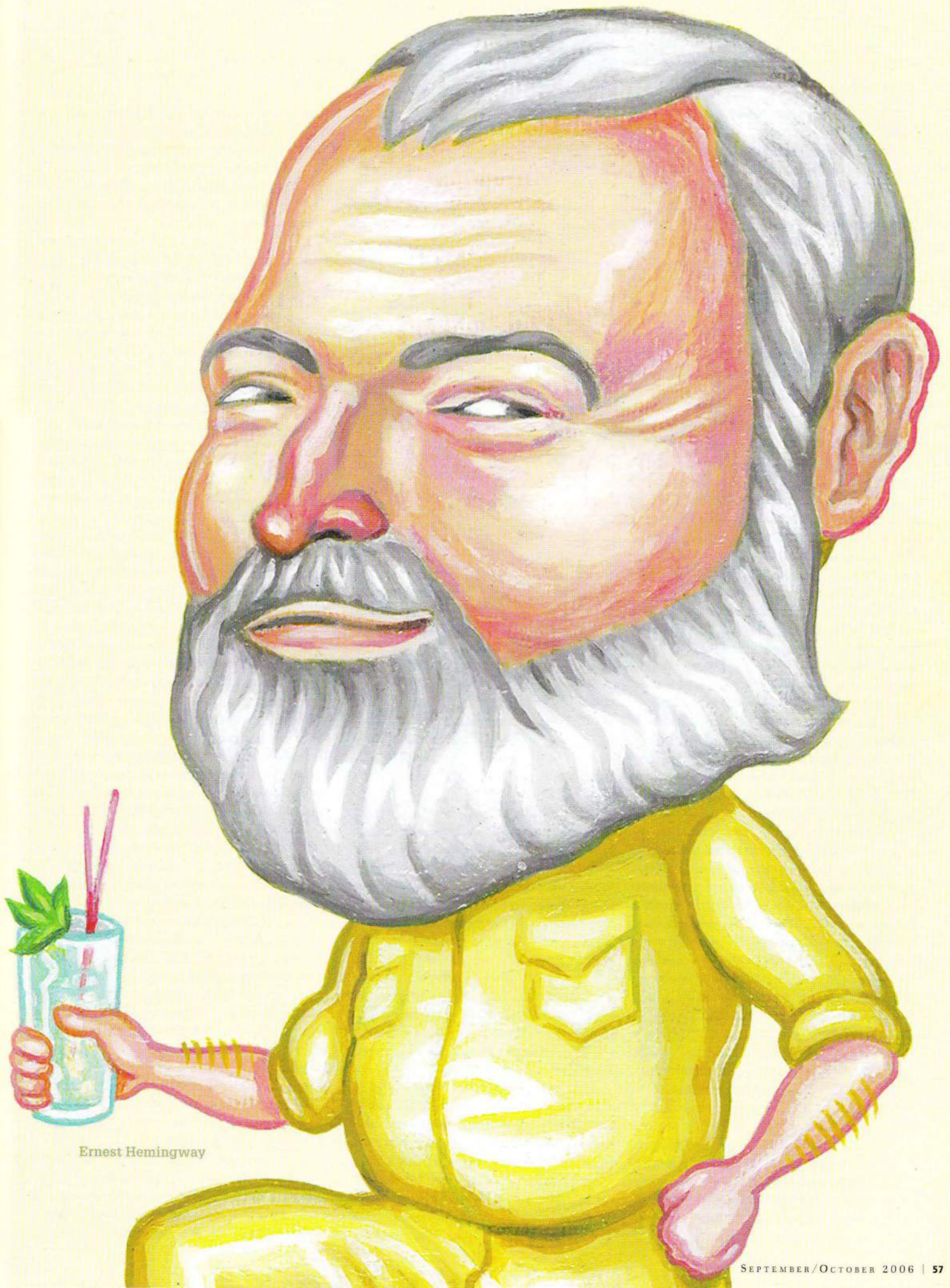
Though comparatively well read, I'm a lightweight when it comes to alcohol and therefore am not the ideal barhopping companion except perhaps as a designated driver, a role superfluous in New York City. So I'm accompanied by my wife, Cristina, a college professor who favors bourbon Manhattans because that was H. L. Mencken's cocktail of choice. The two of us have joined Mark and Eddie in the swanky cocktail lounge. The adjacent tables appear to contain no A-list movie stars, a letdown—the club's name-dropping website practically promises that visitors will be rubbing elbows with George Clooney.

But it's easy to conjure the ghosts of novelists past, huddled around the tables or sprawled in club chairs in the corners. There's real history here. John Steinbeck, Robert Benchley, Dorothy Parker, and Ernest Hemingway each had a regular dining-room table at "21," and any number of anecdotes remain in circulation. Mark quotes the opening line of Dashiell Hammett's *The Thin Man*: "I was leaning against the bar in a speakeasy on Fifty-second Street, waiting for Nora to finish her Christmas shopping..."

For *Hemingway & Bailey's Bartending Guide to Great American Writers*, the two—each 37 and hailing from Brooklyn—profile forty-three hard-drinking novelists, playwrights, and poets who wrote about the hard stuff. Each writer is assigned his own cocktail, from James Agee's whiskey sour to Thomas Wolfe's Rob Roy.



Edward Hemingway and Mark Bailey



Ernest Hemingway

"Hammett is our Martini," Eddie notes.

To kick things off, Mark and Eddie each order a "21" Perfect Manhattan, made with Sazerac rye, both sweet and dry vermouth, and a dash of bitters, on the rocks. (In the *Bartending Guide*, the Manhattan is short-story master Ring Lardner's drink.)

I ask for a Tom Collins, with Beefeater gin, soda, sugar, and lemon, and am pleased to learn that African-American noir novelist Chester Himes—really, as cool a writer as one could hope for—was Mark and Eddie's choice for that summery cocktail.

Cristina peruses the "21" cocktail menu and orders a tall concoction with bourbon, muddled lime, and a couple of other things. It's not in the book.

Mark waves an arm to take in the room. "John O'Hara was famous for coming here," he says, "and getting into fistfights. One time he got into a fistfight here with a dwarf—really! In the book, we tell a story about O'Hara and Sinclair Lewis, who had never met, bumping into each other in the restroom of '21.' O'Hara had an old grudge against Lewis because he had written something negative about *Appointment in Samarra*. They're both standing at the urinal, and O'Hara recognizes Lewis and launches into a tirade, and Lewis zips up and scampers out before it escalates. I love the idea of America's first literary Nobel Prize-winner zipping up and running out of the men's room before he gets clobbered."

Mark researched the book's anecdotes and wrote the text, and he's the one who recounts most of the stories. The process isn't much of a stretch for him—he's been researching and writing for years, mostly for documentary films in partnership with his wife, Rory Kennedy, the youngest daughter of the late Robert F. Kennedy.

Most of these stories involve a level of inebriation that's a little startling in this era of AA and MADD. "A lot of these folks got into drinking during Prohibition," he explains, "and the drinking life was part and parcel of the writing life. You were expected to drink and to drink a lot and, for the most part, to be able to handle it.

"There wasn't really a sense of alcoholism as a disease. A number of these guys—Raymond Carver, John Cheever—were in AA and stopped drinking. But people like Faulkner and Fitzgerald would go on binges and then be sent to a sanitar-



ium. You would go and dry out, and then you would come back.

"It was different for everyone. Hemingway never drank while he wrote; he was very disciplined about separating the two. People like Fitzgerald and Jack London started out that way, but the drinking worked its way into their writing day. And Faulkner drank while he wrote his entire career. The quote we use in our book is something like, 'I do my writing at night, and I always keep my whiskey within reach.' And look at what an amazing body of work he left behind."

Second round: another "21" Perfect Manhattan for Mark and Eddie, another bourbon something-or-other for Cristina. No second round for me—I told you I was a lightweight. Plus I'm supposed to be taking legible notes. Anyway, Eddie and Mark are talking about how the pair selected writers and cocktails.

"For most of these writers," Mark explains, "the cocktail we use genuinely was their drink. Jean Stafford liked Cuba Libres. Hemingway liked mojitos. Faulkner liked mint juleps. Fitzgerald liked gin rickeys."

"Some were obvious choices," Eddie says, "due to the drink being the author's favorite, like Truman Capote's screwdriver. Some were drinks that the author is associated with, like Benchley's orange blossom—the first drink he ever tasted. And James Baldwin features the shandygaff in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*."

But inevitably, there was ambiguity and duplication, and the book's conceit required each author to have his own drink. So sometimes they were assigned different cocktails from the same booze family.

Were any cocktails too singular and distasteful to include? "The only drink that comes to mind that was too unappetizing to feature in the book," Eddie says, "was a hangover remedy that Lillian Hellman swore by. She wrote about it in the story 'Maybe.' It requires one raw egg, a double sherry, and two teaspoons Worcestershire sauce. If properly made, it induces vomiting, and then in a few hours you're good to drink a couple of beers and then commence the serious drinking of the evening.

"We gave her the daiquiri instead, which she definitely drank, too."

Mark recalls another one. "Carson McCullers"—Eddie makes a face, knowing what's coming—"would fill a thermos with hot tea and put sherry in it, and drink it throughout the day. She called it the Sonnie Boy. We decided to give her the Long Island iced tea instead. It's a completely different drink, but I'm sure she would be happy to drink a Long Island iced tea if we were to put one in front of her. If you're drinking hot tea and sherry, I don't think you're going to be a snob! Plus, we wanted to have at least one ridiculous, get-bombed cocktail in the book. Except for that one, the drinks themselves are classic drinks; this is what people drank back then."

Our bartender has been listening in, offering bits of "21" history and commentary, and eventually suggests a tour of the wine cellar. A staffer takes us through the main dining room and kitchen, down a flight of stairs, and opens the false wall that, in speakeasy days, hid the club's stash. There's a bank of dusty wine bottles labeled with famous names. "People leave bottles," the tour guide says, "and they can come in whenever they want and drink them; when they pass away, the bottles go to their families. We have bottles here from Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Nixon, Sammy Davis Jr., Ivan Boesky, Burgess Meredith . . ." No writers, though. Not anymore.

"Well, one thing that's very different today is the cost," Mark says, as the \$119 bar tab arrives. "A lot of people are priced out of '21' now. Back then it really wasn't that kind of place—writers could come

here and eat and drink and talk and drink and talk. Now people make a dinner reservation at '21' and go and have dinner.

"Plus, writers back then seemed to have a level of celebrity that they don't now. Literature had a different place in our culture."

We've moved a few blocks east, to P. J. Clarke's, a landmark Irish pub where you're supposed to get burgers, and we've each ordered one. The joint is full of rowdy thirty-somethings. "This is the bar that's in *The Lost Weekend*," Mark says, leaning over and shouting a bit.

"They shot the exteriors in New York, but they built an exact replica of P. J. Clarke's on set in Hollywood for all the interiors. They called it Nat's, right?"

Cristina and I saw the film—about an alcoholic novelist with writer's block—a few days earlier without realizing that it was supposed to represent P. J. Clarke's. The Charles Jackson novel describes a "bar and grill" at Fifty-fifth Street and Second Avenue; this place is one block west of that location.

"Ray Milland told the story," Mark recounts, "of how every day for a week, on the Paramount lot, this man would come in around five o'clock, walking up to the bar, asking for a straight bourbon, drinking it and chatting a little bit about the weather, leaving fifty cents, and walking out. Apparently it was Robert Benchley, homesick for New York. I like that: You're stranded in L.A., and then all of a sudden, on your movie set, there's this New York bar."

At P. J. Clarke's, everyone has switched over to beer. Cristina and Eddie have glasses of Stella Artois; Mark takes a Spaten.

Mark discusses the portraits in *Hemingway & Bailey's Bartending Guide* and sings his partner's praises. "I don't know these forty-three people—I never saw them. But Eddie can capture *anybody*."

Eddie spreads his hands. "It's easier when you get a little distance from the person—that way, you don't just copy what you see." He finds it tougher to paint people he knows, those with personal associations.

"Eddie has, now, forty-three original paintings of these writers."

"Actually, we had forty-five, but we cut a couple of people."

"Nathanael West got cut," Mark explains, "because we couldn't really

establish that he was as hard a drinker as other folks. And we had Herman Mankiewicz, who co-wrote *Citizen Kane* and produced several Marx Brothers films. There's a story about Mankiewicz going to a fancy dinner party at Arthur



Hornblow's, a producer, and he excuses himself to go to the bathroom, right off of the dining room, and everyone can hear him throwing up, and he comes back and says, "Don't worry, Arthur, the white wine came up with the fish."

"Which," Eddie says, "completely validates the entire thing."

"But I don't think we had a good enough excerpt about drinking for him."

"No, he didn't quite work," Eddie agrees. "Too bad—he was a really great portrait."

Eddie talks a bit about his paintings. "I searched for varied and sundry photos, and I read—or reread—excerpts from and in some cases entire works of each writer," he says. "I wanted to get a feel for each voice, in the hope that it would inform the portraits. And I culled biographies to get a sense of each author's temperament and attitude."

A second round of tall, amber glasses arrives, though everyone reaches for them a little more slowly this time. We talk about P. J. Clarke's—a favorite haunt of James Jones—and other restaurants with literary links. I mention a recent visit to Los Angeles and the landmark Musso & Frank Grill. "They say Raymond Chandler wrote *The Big Sleep* there," Mark says.

Cristina notes that reading Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* inspired her to order her first gimlet at Musso & Frank's, and Mark quotes from the novel: "It beats Martinis hollow." Cristina says she adds fresh lime juice to gimlets she makes; Mark says that *Hemingway & Bailey's Bartending Guide* follows Chandler's recipe: "A real Gimlet is half gin and half Rose's Lime Juice and nothing else.

"Here's the Chandler story I love," he continues, settling in. "He had gotten under contract with Paramount and started writing *The Blue Dahlia*, and they loved the story and rushed it into pre-production, because Alan Ladd was going off to war. But Chandler hadn't written a script yet, and he was under incredible pressure. He's writing and writing, and they're two weeks into shooting, and he doesn't have an ending that works. And he comes in to see John Houseman, the producer, and says to him, 'You know, I've been an alcoholic, and I don't drink, but the only way I can finish this script is if I relapse. And I'm willing to do that, but here's what I need.' And so he gives Houseman a list, and they go to lunch, at which Chandler orders three double martinis before lunch and three double stingers after lunch. All those drinks are booze-on-booze. And his mood seems much improved. He spends two weeks at home writing. They have around-the-clock nurses, limos waiting to run pages over to the studio, a doctor to give him glucose shots—because he forgets to eat when he drinks—and he writes and drinks and passes out for the whole time. So he produces the script, and his self-sacrifice becomes the stuff of Hollywood legend."

"Immortalized forever," Eddie says, "in *Hemingway and Bailey's*."

Mark sips. "But there's an alternative history—which we don't fully go into in the book—that Chandler had already slipped, which is why he couldn't finish the script. He could barely get himself to the Paramount lot, and then he walks in and cons John Houseman into letting him write at home."



Dashiell Hammett

We end up in a quick Chandler-versus-Hammett debate, the one that's been going on for the last sixty years. After a couple of rounds, no decision. Eddie notes the connection between Hammett and Lillian Hellman, whose profiles in the *Bartending Guide* abut due to their names. "The portraits are interesting," he says. "I chose to do her quite old, because she had such character in her face when she was older. And I did him young, in his mid-to-late 30s. But when they were together, he was much older than she was. I don't know whether people will notice that."

Mark leans forward. "Our Hammett anecdote is him and Lillian drunk and raging at each other. She looks over and he's taking a burning cigarette..."

"Oh, this is brutal."

"...and he's grinding it out on his cheek, and she says, 'What are you doing?' and he says, 'Keeping myself from doing it to you.'"

"It's that kind of thing," Eddie quips, "that kept them together."

The mood is still buoyant and the tone lighthearted—everyone's had a few, and Eddie and Mark are talking about a book that's intended to be an amusing gift for casual drinkers—but there's a serious undertone. A lot of these stories are dark, and the endings, even if we don't get to them, aren't necessarily happy ones.

In an age in which most new books about drinking are confessional memoirs about hitting bottom, Mark is a little sen-

sitive at the suggestion that his *Bartender's Guide* glamorizes alcoholism. "I don't feel like our book is naïve or a thoughtless celebration," he says. "A lot of the anecdotes are cautionary tales."

"It's very tough to assess how drinking affected these writers' lives. Certainly a lot of their lives were tragic, and alcohol played a huge role in that. There's no way to deny that. On the other hand, it's part of them and their work."

With plenty of time for a nightcap, we set out for the Algonquin Hotel, a mile or so southwest through the streets of midtown. A little uncomfortably, Eddie talks about the role of alcohol in the lives of his family members: his mother, Valerie, Ernest Hemingway's personal assistant for the last two years of his life and author of the 2004 memoir *Running With the Bulls*; his father, Gregory, the estranged son who wrote the best-selling 1976 memoir *Papa*; and his grandfather, who died seven years before Eddie was born.

"My mother's an Irishwoman," he says, "and she can drink anybody under the table—though she's always in control of her drinking. My father wasn't a big drinker as far as I know. Alcohol wasn't a big part of our lives growing up."

"I've heard from all different sources that my grandfather was an alcoholic—my half-sister lectures about alcoholism—but I'm not informed enough to comment on that. I know he was depressed. My mother would say that he wasn't depressed because of alcohol but because of writer's block. When she knew him in 1960 in Cuba, he just couldn't write. He definitely drank a lot, but I don't know how that played into his demise. Depression is something that's in my family, but it's not necessarily related to alcohol."

"My grandfather was a great writer and a great drinker, and I think that both those things can come with a price. The best things in life aren't free."

The Algonquin is quiet, and we sink into chairs and a sofa in the lobby rather than head for one of the lounges. The hotel is lovely but doesn't feel nearly as vital as it must have once, when it was a center of the literary and theatrical worlds. This is where visiting writers stayed when in New York—Faulkner drafted his 1950 Nobel acceptance speech here—and

of course, there's the Oak Room, where the likes of Dorothy Parker and Robert Benchley traded quips and drinks at the Round Table.

Eddie orders a mojito, his grandfather's signature drink. Mark looks at the specialty-cocktails menu and selects the Algonquin, with rye, dry vermouth, and pineapple juice—"basically a Manhattan, um, with pineapple juice." Cristina orders a Kir Royale, with crème de cassis and champagne. Anne Sexton's favorite.

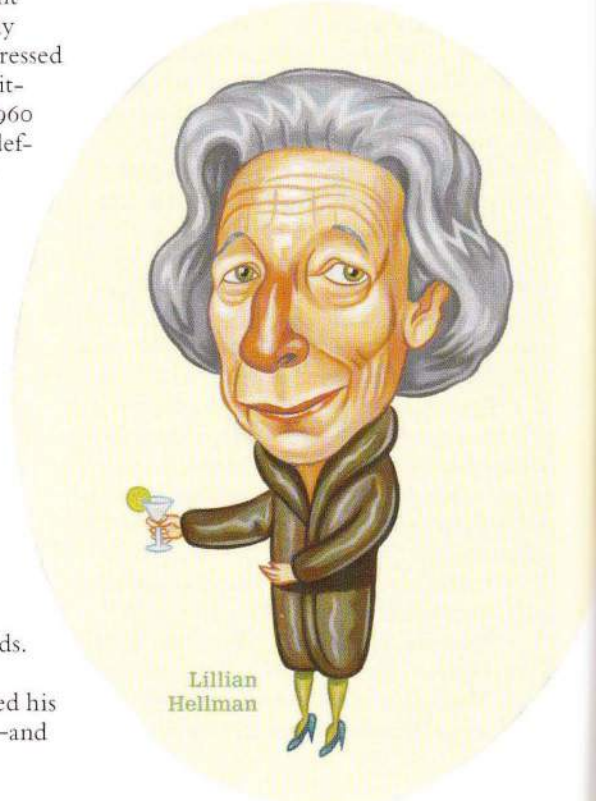
The mention of champagne brings up Parker, a fan of the bubbly. "I think she started drinking Tom Collins," Mark says, "then gin made her sick, and then she moved to scotch and water, and then she fell in love with champagne, and she composed a little poem: 'Three be the things I shall never attain: envy, content, and sufficient champagne.' So we gave her the champagne cocktail."

The Round Table crowd have always seemed the quintessential social drinkers, congregating for alcohol and company in equal measure; the two are inseparable. The question is raised: How many of Eddie and Mark's forty-three writers qualify as social drinkers?

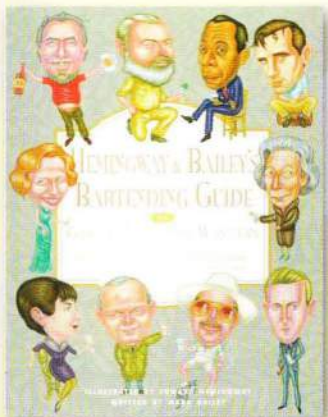
"Drinking has always been a very communal thing for writers," Mark says.

"What would people write about," Eddie asks, "if not other people?"

"And it wasn't just New York in the twenties and thirties—there were all these little circles of writers all over," Mark



Lillian Hellman



Hemingway & Bailey's Bartending Guide to Great American Writers by Edward Hemingway and Mark Bailey. Coming in October from Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.

continues. "McCullers hung out with Tennessee Williams. Fitzgerald hung out with Ring Lardner. And there were places like the Iowa Writers' Group and Yaddo, where people friggin' went nuts." At least nine writers in the *Bartending Guide* were guests at the renowned Yaddo artists' colony. "We have a quote from Dawn Powell: 'Learn to be very, very stingy and drink alone in the dark.' At Yaddo you had to keep your booze to yourself because other people would take it."

But then there are the writers who would drink alone in the dark no matter where they were, and who didn't separate their dipsomania and work. There's Faulkner. As with so much of American literature, it keeps coming back to Faulkner.

Mark, having encountered any number of Faulkner anecdotes in the course of his research, shakes his head. "Faulkner had an amazing tolerance; he met few people who could outdrink him. There's an incident of him passing out on the heater in the bathroom here and burning himself."

Eddie drains his mojito and sets the empty glass on the table, perhaps in the same spot where his grandfather once set down *his* empty glass. There's magic in literature, and sometimes we try to get a step or two closer to the source of that magic—buy first editions, read critical biographies, collect autographs, and even enjoy an author's favorite cocktail in the very bar where that author once sat and drank one himself. Another drink, anyone? ☑

→ **Matthew Budman** collects contemporary signed books (10,000 at last count), is the managing editor of a business magazine, and is the author of *Instant Expert: Collecting Books* (House of Collectibles, 2004).



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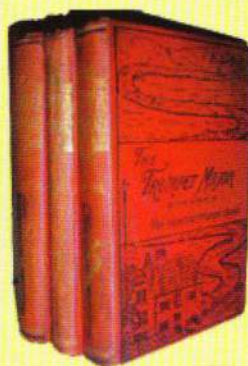
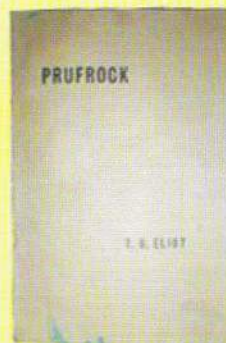
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Prufrock and Other Observations

T. S. Eliot

London: The Egoist Press, 1917

First edition of Eliot's first book, one of 500 copies.
Signed and from the library of Mary Hutchinson
(1889-1977), of the Bloomsbury group.



The Trumpet-Major

Thomas Hardy

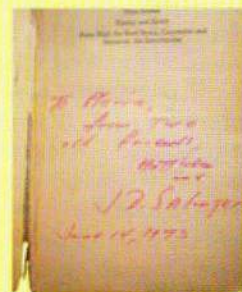
London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1880

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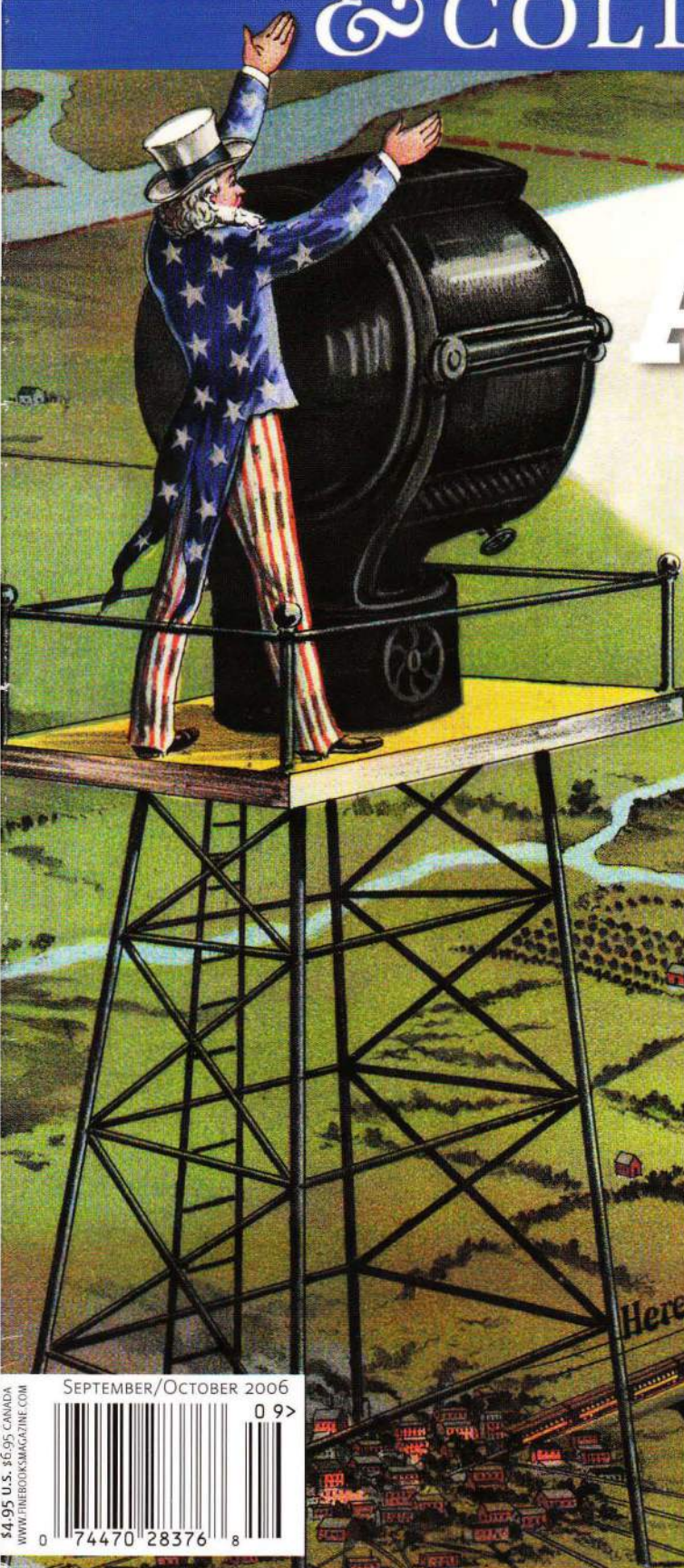
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