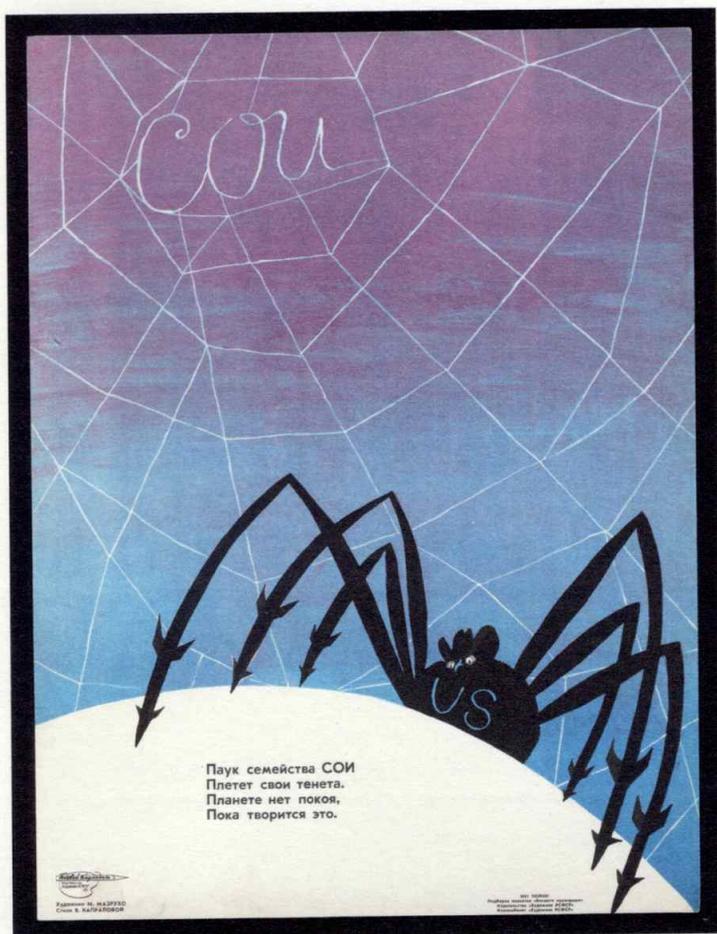


# PRINCETON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY CHRONICLE

VOLUME LXXXI · NO. 1 · WINTER—SPRING 2025



# A Coded Message from Ernest Hemingway

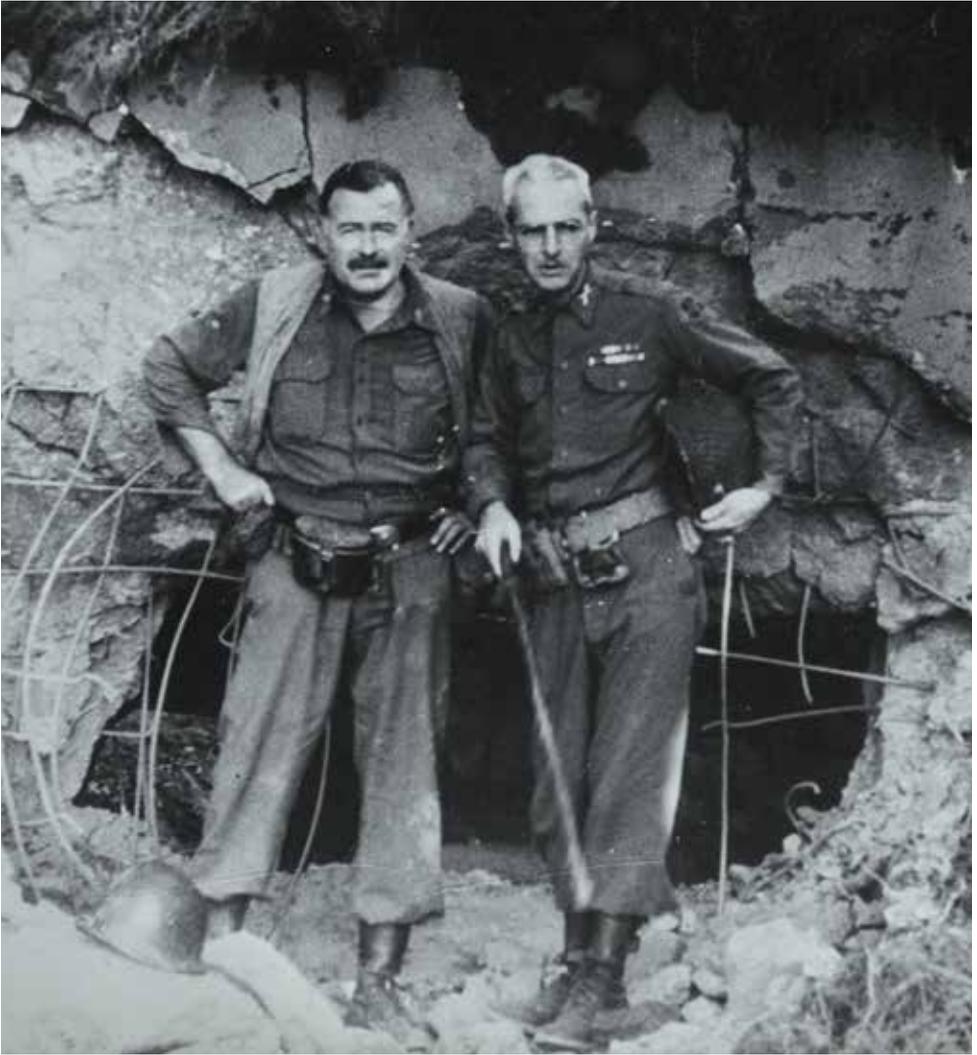
EILEEN MARTIN AND GREER RISING

**F**EW RESEARCHERS would recognize a furled-up print inside an archival box among an American general's papers at Princeton University as an artifact signed by the writer Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961). The illustration of a walled city presented by Hemingway to his friend Major General Charles T. “Buck” Lanham (1902–1978) contains a coded message with an enigmatic signature.<sup>1</sup> The meaning of the print is unraveled through a story involving Hemingway's time as a journalist on World War II battlefields, his friendship with a key U.S. Army commander fighting the Germans, a French town where the commander fought, an epic poem by Voltaire from 1723, and the sophisticated banter shared between two friends.

Princeton's collection of letters and memorabilia from Lanham's bequest contains a wealth of treasures documenting significant aspects of twentieth-century history. Lanham was not a Princeton alumnus, having graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1924. But Lanham had a close friend among the Princeton faculty in Carlos Baker, a Woodrow Wilson Professor of Literature and Hemingway's official biographer. Baker relied on Lanham's accounts of his time with Hemingway to document the World War II and other sections of his 1969 book, which remains an authoritative record of Hemingway's life.<sup>2</sup>

1. The print is located in the Charles T. Lanham Papers (MC081), series 5, box 18, folder 23, Public Policy Papers, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library (hereafter Lanham Papers). The major portion of the papers was donated to Princeton by Lanham's widow, Jane Lanham, in 1982. The donation included materials concerning Hemingway, which are divided among two collections in Princeton's Manuscripts Division: Ernest Hemingway Letters to Charles T. Lanham, 1944–1961 (C0067), hereafter Hemingway Letters to Lanham, and C. T. Lanham Papers on Ernest Hemingway, 1945–1978 (C0305), hereafter Lanham Papers on Hemingway.

2. Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969).



1. Ernest Hemingway and Colonel Charles T. Lanham at the Siegfried Line, September 18, 1944. Ernest Hemingway to General Charles Truman "Buck" Lanham, Ernest Hemingway Letters to Charles T. Lanham (c0067), box 1, folder 25, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

During World War II, Lanham was a U.S. Army colonel commanding the 22nd Infantry Regiment in Europe, and in July 1944 war correspondent Hemingway befriended Lanham and his men, spending several months with the regiment during some of its most intense battles (fig. 1). Hemingway was able to observe a commander on the front lines, and he incorporated his experiences into his work. The protagonist of his 1950 novel *Across the River and Into the Trees*, Infantry Colonel Richard Cantwell, is modeled on Lanham's life and career. The writer and the soldier admired and respected each other and would enjoy a friendship sealed under fire for the seventeen remaining years of Hemingway's life.

The gift from Hemingway to his comrade in arms is held in the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library along with other mementos that Lanham had framed and prominently displayed in his home (fig. 2). The Lanham holdings demonstrate that his legacy extended far beyond his friendship with Hemingway. The collection consists of dozens of boxes of letters, photographs, scrapbooks, awards, recordings, and other keepsakes and memorabilia documenting the general's published poetry and his thirty-year career in the Army, including his decorated service in World War II and his postwar duty in senior positions, such as press spokesman for General Dwight D. Eisenhower at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe. Lanham's repository has post-liberation photographs from Germany and some perhaps unexpected shots of the general filming in Hollywood and holding an Oscar statuette in his hand (fig. 3). One of Lanham's positions prior to the war involved producing military training films, which took him to Hollywood. His team's 1946 documentary *Seeds of Destiny*, about the plight of child refugees after the war, received an Academy Award.

In Firestone Library, the C. T. Lanham Papers on Ernest Hemingway, 1945–1978, contain copies of years of correspondence between Lanham and Hemingway, with many of the letters marked personal, private, and/or confidential, as well as several photographs of Lanham and Hemingway together, taken both during the war and afterward. While the print is not difficult to spot among Lanham's large-size memorabilia, trickier to unearth among the hundreds of pages of correspondence between Hemingway and Lanham is evidence that Hemingway acquired the work for his friend. But voilà: Hemingway writes Lanham from Locanda Cipriani, on Torcello Island near



2. In November 1948, Hemingway sent this print with a cryptic inscription to Lanham. Charles T. Lanham Papers (MC081), series 5, box 18, folder 23, Public Policy Papers, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Venice, on November 5, 1948, telling his friend he found an old print of a French town (fig. 4). Hemingway has inscribed and dispatched it, and hopes it arrives safely. The envelope, postmarked the next day, is addressed to Lanham and shows Hemingway's name typed above the return address on Gritti Palace-Hotel stationery (fig. 5).<sup>3</sup> The pieces from different sections of Princeton's Special Collections snap into place.

The print, featuring a handwritten note partly in French and signed by a certain "Crillon," tells an important story about the

3. Hemingway to Lanham, November 5, 1948, Hemingway Letters to Lanham, box 1, folder 5.



friendship between Hemingway and Lanham and the literary erudition they shared. Measuring approximately  $2\frac{1}{8} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$  inches, it shows the town of Landrecies in northern France near the Belgian border. It is titled *Landrecy en Heynault* (using the old name for Landrecies) and was inscribed in Venice, in Hemingway's hand. This print matches a description of a work by French printmaker and landscape draftsman Gabriel Pérelle, originally produced in 1635 on ivory laid paper. An original Pérelle print of Landrecy is held by the Art Institute of Chicago, and reprints were available beginning in the 1930s.

The inscription reads: "Dear Buck: Voila la ville que tu as pris. I was very sorry to be late. Mais la route eté barré entre Wassigny et Le Cateau. Avec tous mes excuse et mes meilleures compliments. Ton devoué Crillon. Fait a Venize 4 novembre 1948." Here is Hemingway apologizing in imperfect French to Lanham for being late to the action when Lanham's unit took control of the village of

Landrecies, explaining that the route between Wassigny and Le Cateau was blocked (by German forces), and sending regrets and the highest compliments from Lanham's devoted Crillon, penned in Venice. Why Hemingway was late and why he as a noncombatant journalist was expected to be on the scene of fighting between Allied and German troops may be understood in the context of the singular wartime camaraderie that developed between Lanham and Hemingway. And why Hemingway signed himself as Crillon is explained through a literary quip in a message Lanham sent to Hemingway, mocking him for missing an important battle.

Lanham was a published poet beginning in the early 1920s, with three of his poems selected for the 1925 edition of the prestigious *Braithwaite's Anthology of Magazine Verse*, and other pieces appearing in national magazines such as *Good Housekeeping*. Hemingway recognized an intellectual equal when he attached himself to Lanham's regiment, the two men trading life stories late into the night inside Lanham's tiny mobile command trailer, while outside enemy fire popped in the distance. The fighter and the writer shared a clever, sardonic sense of humor encoded in literary and military references that was their own private language. Hemingway's inscription memorializes his time with Lanham with wry chagrin.

In 1944 France, Lanham's objective was to seize ground controlled by the Germans and ultimately break through their heavily defended Western bulwark, the Siegfried Line. Hemingway had press credentials from *Collier's* magazine that allowed him to transit among many Allied units fighting the war, but often he found himself spending time with Lanham's 22nd Infantry Regiment. Lanham and his men enjoyed having Hemingway with them, the writer's easygoing manner and innate battle sense providing a boost to their morale, as Hemingway soaked up experiences that he would channel into his writing. Both Hemingway and Lanham were proficient in French, and their deep regard for classical literature was a shared passion that underpinned their friendship.

The men took evident delight in displaying their sophisticated wit to each other and enjoyed using foreign words and historical citations in their correspondence. Both men knew their literature so well that they could paraphrase hallowed texts they seemed to know by heart to fit their circumstances, knowing the other would both recognize the original quote and appreciate its clever use in the adaptation.



3. Lanham holding an Oscar for the film *Seeds of Destiny*, a Defense Department documentary about the plight of child refugees. It won the 1947 Academy Award for Best Documentary (Short Subject). Photo of Officers including Lanham, Lanham Papers, box 20.

4. Excerpt from a letter in which Hemingway tells Lanham he has sent him a print. Hemingway Letters to Lanham, box 1, folder 5.

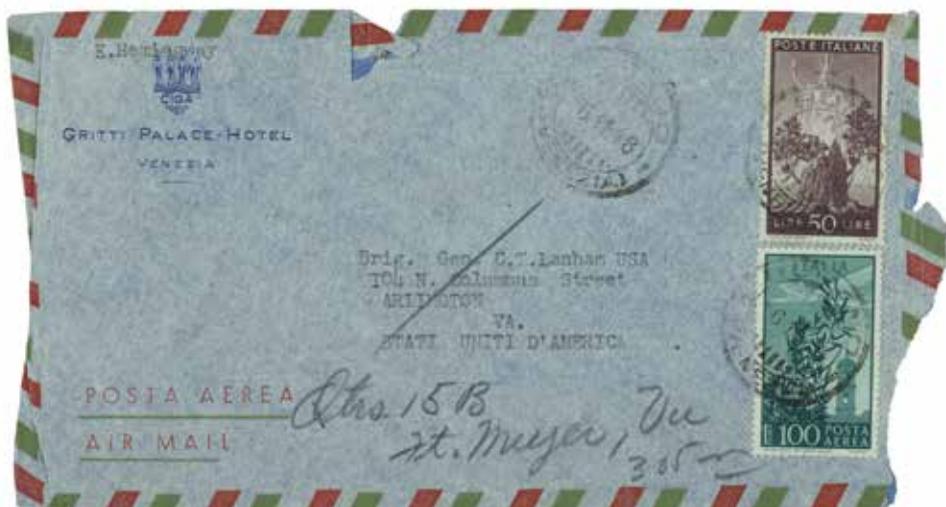
5. Envelope from Hemingway's letter to Lanham referring to the Landrecies print. Hemingway Letters to Lanham, box 1, folder 5.

Lucaiano Cipriani  
F. Torcello  
Prov. Venezia  
Nov. 5. 1948

Dear Buck:

Found an old print of Landrecies Landrecy (old spelling) and have despatched suitably insured. Hope it reaches you o.k.

How are you? I hope not over-worked and over-worried and wasting your



Lanham parlayed the famous words of the French king Henry IV to the duke of Crillon in 1589, quoted and misquoted over the centuries and attributed to the French philosopher Voltaire, into a provocative battle cry to Hemingway when the writer had traveled to Paris and missed some fighting in the countryside: *Pends-toi, brave Crillon, nous avons combattu à Arques et tu n'y étais pas!* (Hang yourself, brave Crillon, we fought at Arques and you were not there).

In Lanham's version, the message sent to Hemingway at the Ritz in Paris read: "Go hang yourself, brave Hemingstein. We have fought at Landrecies and you were not there."<sup>4</sup> This gibe is a rich example of the interactive Hemingway–Lanham badinage, and shows that Lanham missed Hemingway's reassuring presence on the ground. In addition to their intellectual kinship, Lanham valued Hemingway as a confidant outside of his chain of command.

Hemingway had been with Lanham and his men on and off since late July 1944. But not during the last days of August and first days of September, when, as Baker writes, Lanham's Double Deucers were on the move in heavy fighting northeast of Paris, destroying and capturing munitions and taking 2,000 Germans prisoner in a region encompassing the French villages of Wassigny, Le Cateau, Landrecies, and Pommereuil.<sup>5</sup> During the fray, Lanham took the time to dash off a radio transmission to be delivered to Hemingway in Paris with an obscure message perhaps only Hemingway would understand. Hemingway registered Lanham's challenge and call to arms, pushing off from Paris and traveling through multiple fight zones controlled by the Germans to catch up several days later with Lanham's unit at Pommereuil.

The two men knew each other and their subject matter so well that Lanham could transpose a sixteenth-century quote from French to English, adjust it to the situation, personalize it, and deliver it to Hemingway, who would capture the meaning across the centuries, recognize the provocation, and rise to action. Both Hemingway and Lanham were aware of the "go hang yourself" taunt and its meaning in a military context. And Lanham knew Hemingway well enough to predict what would happen next: that his brother in arms would rally to his side. Apparently, the tease and response stuck with Heming-

4. Quoted in Baker, *Hemingway*, 420.

5. Baker, *Hemingway*, 420–21.

way, as four years later he memorialized for Lanham the French village and his devoted warrior “Crillon.”

In November 1948, Hemingway was in Venice working on *Across the River and Into the Trees*. The Hemingways stayed at the Gritti Palace-Hotel, featured in the novel, and at the Locando Cipriani on Torcello Island, where Hemingway went duck hunting like Colonel Cantwell in the book. Cantwell’s discursive flashbacks recall battles in both Italy in World War I and France in World War II. Many of the themes, venues, and personalities in the novel are drawn from Hemingway and Lanham’s time together in World War II and from postwar discussions about their experiences. Hemingway had Lanham on his mind when he acquired the Landrecies print and inscribed it to his friend.

Apart from the Landrecies action, Lanham chronicled other instances of calling upon Hemingway to join his regiment in fighting, and documented how he felt when Hemingway was with his troops. In the grisly Hürtgen Forest battles, which took place between September and December 1944, Lanham’s regiment suffered heavy losses and was nearly decimated. Much has been written about the “Death Factory” battles of Hürtgen Forest, waged in cold, dark, muddy, thickly wooded terrain, booby-trapped by German minefields, that cost the Allies more than 100,000 casualties. With his back to the wall after losing his front-line teams, Lanham assembled a second tier of communications officials, clerks, drivers, mechanics, and others he could gather into an improvised reserve, ready for the next wave of German assaults. According to his unpublished “Chronology,” Lanham phoned Hemingway at the division command post and invited him to join the team, and Hemingway said he would be right there and asked Lanham to wait for him. Lanham recalled that he did not know how Hemingway got to him so quickly, coming through a heavy concentration of buried mines, and concluded Hemingway must have been sleeping in his clothes with his weapons at his side.<sup>6</sup> In this instance, the German advance began to falter and then surrendered in mass.

After Hemingway’s death, Lanham told biographer Carlos Baker that he was delighted that Hemingway returned to the 22nd Infantry

6. Charles T. Lanham, “Hemingway-Lanham Chronology 1944–45,” 35, Bernice Kert Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, box 22, folder 4.

unit just before they launched the Hürtgen Forest offensive: “I was always happy as hell to see him, and missed hell out of him when he was away, for I had come to love the big bastard.”<sup>7</sup> Lanham also noted that during the war he had never witnessed Hemingway’s demeanor as anything other than completely cool and calm no matter how rough the situation.<sup>8</sup>

Sandra Spanier, General Editor of the Hemingway Letters Project, which is producing a comprehensive scholarly edition of the author’s some 6,000 letters, said Hemingway used a unique coded language in many of his closest relationships.<sup>9</sup> Nicknames, insider jokes, ironic references, historical terms, and other wordplay were Hemingway’s stock in trade. His siblings and sons all had nicknames, and his wife, Mary, was “Kitten” or “Pickle,” among other terms of endearment. Hemingway coined the term “Lost Leader” or “L.L.” to describe Lanham’s commanding officer and referred to himself as “Ernesto,” “Dr. Hemingstein,” and of course, “Papa.” In addition to decrypting nicknames, the letters between Hemingway and Lanham often must be deciphered with classical literature and combat references at the ready.



Another compelling item in Princeton’s Lanham holdings is a photograph of Hemingway, Lanham, and Hemingway’s Cuban friend Mayito Menocal Jr. from Lanham’s visit to Cuba in September 1945 (fig. 6).<sup>10</sup> The photograph is inscribed “To Buck from his best friend, always, and whenever—Ernesto Hemingway.”

In letters to Lanham and others, Hemingway described himself as Lanham’s best friend, and the vivid photograph shows the friends together in one of Hemingway’s haunts. Lanham wrote in his “Chronology” that with Hemingway he was “locked into a species of brotherhood that both of us knew would last as long as we lasted.”<sup>11</sup> When Hemingway prepared to return to Cuba in 1945 as the war was wind-

7. Lanham to Baker, August 23, 1965, Bernice Kert Papers, box 22, folder 4.

8. Lanham, “Hemingway-Lanham Chronology,” 38.

9. Conversation with Hemingway Letters Project General Editor Sandra Spanier, July 2022 and correspondence on August 14, 2023.

10. Hemingway Letters to Lanham, box 1, folder 25.

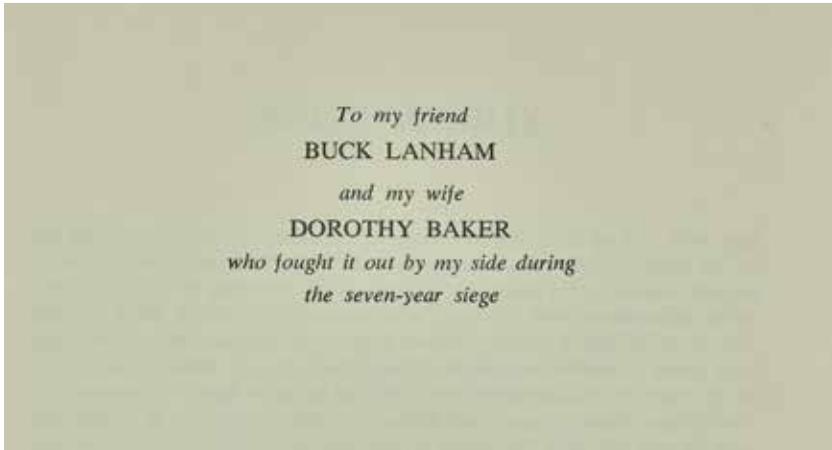
11. Lanham, “Hemingway-Lanham Chronology,” 22.



6. Hemingway and his Cuban friend Mayito Menocal Jr. inscribed this photo to Lanham. Hemingway Letters to Lanham, box 1, folder 25.

ing down, Lanham said he was saddened, for Hemingway had come to mean more to him than any man he had ever known. They talked about all the things they would do together after the war: “fishing, shooting, talking, movie-making, traveling to far places, and all the other escapist talk that comes so naturally and so fervently and so wishfully when a person lives intimately with death.” Like some scholars who have said Hemingway felt most alive when he was at war, Lanham wrote that Hemingway was buoyant with vitality after the dangerous Hürtgen Forest actions.<sup>12</sup>

12. Lanham, “Hemingway-Lanham Chronology,” 42.



7. Princeton Professor Carlos Baker dedicated his Hemingway biography to General Lanham and to Dorothy Baker, the author's wife. *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969). 3778.74.568.4, Rare Book Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University.

Carlos Baker dedicated Hemingway's life story to his friend Lanham and to his wife, Dorothy Baker (fig. 7). Letters between Lanham and Baker, also in Princeton's collections, evince a close friendship developed over their nearly eight-year collaboration on the book. When they began working together, Baker wrote Lanham that it was a good thing for him that Lanham was a "literary man as well as a distinguished soldier."<sup>13</sup> For his part, Lanham told Baker that the private letters he was sharing for the biography would need a great deal of interpretation, and he hoped to live long enough to unpack their meaning for Baker.<sup>14</sup> Lanham said his motive was to do his best to assist Baker in setting down "the precise truth of my friend, the Giant."<sup>15</sup> The rest of the Baker-Lanham story is for another day.

13. Baker to Lanham, December 17, 1961, Lanham Papers on Hemingway, box 2, folder 1.

14. Lanham to Baker, December 14, 1961, Lanham Papers on Hemingway, box 2, folder 1.

15. Lanham to Baker, March 13, 1962, Lanham Papers on Hemingway, box 2, folder 1.